

# Postcolonial Directions in Education

Volume 7 Issue 2, 2018

SPECIAL ISSUE:

EDUCATION RESISTANCE: ACTIVIST MEDIA IN  
STRUGGLES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION.

GUEST EDITOR: Nisha Thapliyal

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## **Postcolonial Directions in Education**

### **Focus and Scope**

Postcolonial Directions in Education is a peer reviewed open access journal produced twice a year. It is a scholarly journal intended to foster further understanding, advancement and reshaping of the field of postcolonial education. We welcome articles that contribute to advancing the field. As indicated in the Editorial for the inaugural issue, the purview of this journal is broad enough to encompass a variety of disciplinary approaches, including but not confined to the following: sociological, anthropological, historical and social psychological approaches. The areas embraced include anti-racist education, decolonizing education, critical multiculturalism, critical racism theory, direct colonial experiences in education and their legacies for present day educational structures and practice, educational experiences reflecting the culture and 'imagination' of empire, the impact of neoliberalism/globalisation/structural adjustment programmes on education, colonial curricula and subaltern alternatives, education and liberation movements, challenging hegemonic languages, the promotion of local literacies and linguistic diversity, neo-colonial education and identity construction, colonialism and the construction of patriarchy, canon and canonicity, Indigenous knowledges, supranational bodies and their educational frameworks, north-south and east-west relations in education, the politics of representation, unlearning colonial stereotypes, internal colonialism and education, cultural hybridity and learning in postcolonial contexts, education and the politics of dislocation, biographies / autobiographies reflecting the above themes, deconstruction of colonial narratives of civilization within educational contexts. Once again, the field cannot be exhausted.

### **Peer Review Process**

Papers submitted to *Postcolonial Directions in Education* are examined by at least two reviewers for originality and timeliness in the context of related research. Reviews generally are completed in 30-60 days, with publication in the next available issue.

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**POSTCOLONIAL DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION**  
**Volume 7 Issue 2, 2018**

SPECIAL ISSUE  
**EDUCATION RESISTANCE: ACTIVIST MEDIA IN  
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## INTRODUCTION

### **#EDUCATION/RESISTANCE: ACTIVIST MEDIA IN STRUGGLES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION**

**Nisha Thapliyal**

*University of Newcastle, Australia*

Radio Plantón (Oaxaca teachers strike, Mexico)<sup>1</sup>.  
CUTV (Quebec student strikes, Canada)<sup>2</sup>.  
Don't Cut Off our Tongues (Yolngu peoples, Australia)<sup>3</sup>.  
#TellPearson (transnational campaign)<sup>4</sup>.

Whether print, oral, visual or, digital, information and communication technologies have always been a part of social mobilizations (Downing, 2010). Historically, activist media practices have played a role in a range of internal and external communications functions. The more visible external functions include public protest, popular education, fundraising and monitoring the public obligations of the state and other actors. Internal communications are needed to build and sustain collective identity and shared vision as well as for decision-making, coordination and networking. However, activist education media remains an under-researched area in both education and social movement studies (Thapliyal, 2018).

A more extensive academic literature can be found on the significant influence of corporate media on education politics and policymaking (see e.g. Baroutsis, Riddle, Thomson, 2018). While most of this scholarship is situated in wealthy Anglophone countries such as the USA, UK and Australia, emerging scholarship documents similar trends in other countries such as China (Suspitsyna, 2014), India (Sarangapani & Vidya, 2011),

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1 Denham (2008).

2 Thorburn (2013).

3 McCallum, Waller & Meadows (2012).

4 Hogan (2018).

Japan (Takayama, 2008), Portugal (Viseu & Carvalho, 2018) and Sweden (Reimers, 2014). Critical, feminist, and cultural studies researchers have highlighted the deep and complex relationships between the media, the state, and the market, which has distorted and silenced the demands of subaltern groups and smoothed the passage of deeply anti-people and anti-public social policies, including public education (Giroux, 2011). This literature has also deepened our understandings of neoliberalism as a form of ‘public pedagogy’ which operates to construct and reproduce the citizen-as-consumer -- not just through schools but through all state apparatus and public institutions including diverse forms of news and entertainment media (Giroux, 2011). In comparison, we know far less about how education activists have used media to counter the cultural, economic and political discourse that normalise neoliberal education reform. However, we do know that activist media practice – as with any other form of social practice – is contested terrain. It involves cultural work – the work of knowledge production and exchange and is intrinsically concerned with the legitimation or delegitimation of values and worldviews (de Sousa Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007).

The use of information and communications technologies in struggles for social change, however emancipatory in intent, always contains the possibility to reproduce domination and create new forms of inequality (Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014). In fact, as we have learned from the scholarship on cyber-, networked and internet-based activism, new digital networked technologies cannot be automatically conflated with wider participation and deeper democratic deliberation (Couldry, 2010; Juris, 2012). Hence, the proliferation of terms such as hashtag activism, clicktivism and slacktivism in relation to the use of social networking media to respond to contemporary social problems.

On Twitter, the hashtag symbol is used as a label to find and contribute to discussion on a specific topic (e.g. #postcolonial, #Trump and so forth). It is created by adding the # symbol in front of the word, or in front of a phrase shown without spaces (#educationresistance). Internet-based activists across the political spectrum have used hashtags to frame slogans to amplify silenced voices, raise awareness and build online communities across physical barriers of time and space around



issues of inequality and social justice (well-known progressive examples include #OccupyWallStreet, #BlackLivesMatter, #Indignados, and #MeToo). Twitter is also now a part of education policy discourse with hashtags such as #NAPLAN and #IGiveaGonski (Australia), #CommonCore, #EvaluateThat and #ParentTrigger (USA) and #TellPearson (transnational). Twitter has provided a powerful platform for collective struggles for recognition – for excluded and misrepresented social groups to build transnational communities which resist and contest dominant political and media discourse and even set mainstream media news agendas. It has also provided a free and virtually unaccountable platform for the propagation of populist and fascist discourse. Emerging research suggests that the discourse produced in these virtual spaces tends to contribute to polarization rather than democratic deliberation (see analyses of #BlackLivesMatter by Carney, 2016, and #TeachforAmerica by Brewer & Wallis, 2015).

Undoubtedly, the emergence of the Internet has contributed to a reconfiguring of politics and culture, in particular a refocusing of politics on everyday life (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). In particular, Web 2.0 networked technologies have enabled new spaces for dissent and participation by particular demographic groups in particular contexts e.g. those who are already interested in politics and have the requisite media skills and resources. However, they are not without structural constraints produced by the digital divide, state surveillance, and the unrelenting capitalist drive towards commodification and consumerism through digital platforms. The use of the hashtag (#) in the title of this Special Issue simultaneously acknowledges and problematizes the incorporation of new media into the strategic repertoires of education activists.

### **Insurgent media**

This Special Issue of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* highlights research and writing on the role of insurgent media in defending and expanding public education. It brings together interdisciplinary and comparative scholarship on a diverse range of media practice and technologies utilised by education activists.

Contributors to this issue have explored the following questions:

- What do education activists actually do with different kinds of media or information and communication technologies?
- How does activist media practice represent and/or 'reframe' current and historical issues in public education? and
- How do education activists navigate in hegemonic media and policy spaces and practices constituted by dominant financial and political powers?

*The Alto al Simce (Stop Standardised Testing) campaign, Chile*

Public education policy is currently dominated by economic, technical, and managerial rationalities (Apple, 2006) which emphasize competition, choice, and economic efficiency. These rationalities justify and enable different kinds of educational privatization. In this context, Fine, Ayaala and Zaal (2012) identify three characteristics of standardized testing that further educational privatization. First, the outsourcing of testing to commercial providers facilitates the explicit outflow of public dollars to for-profit corporations, such as Pearson Education, that design and administer tests for curricula in many countries. Next, local, state and global educational policymaking is increasingly influenced by policy advisors who work for market-oriented philanthropies and corporations. Last but not least, they argue that the use of testing technologies has contributed to the systematic and structural realignment of educational opportunities "to bolster schools for children of the elites and a few deserving 'Others'" (p.685) at the cost of schools which predominantly serve poor and working-class children.

The article by Loreto Montero, Cristian Cabalin, and Lionel Brossi documents a longrunning campaign in Chile to end highstakes standardised testing called *Alto al Simce*. The campaign was supported by a diverse coalition of education activists who deployed a range of media to challenge dominant discourse on standardised testing. Drawing on the scholarship about cyberactivism, the authors show how the campaign connected and amplified voices of dissent to share their

stories – particularly those directly affected by the negative consequences of testing. Through a creative and collaborative use of different media technologies, the campaign spoke through multiple voices – namely traditional experts such as university academics as well as school students, parents and teachers – to diverse audiences including the news media, policymakers and the public. Activists collaborated to produce digital as well as virtual spaces for collective protest and resistance.

### ***Indigenous Education Media, Australia***

The relationship between media and indigenous social movements has been extensively documented by scholars of Indigenous media (Carlson and Dreher, 2018; Kozolanka, Mazepa and Skinner, 2012; Wortham, 2013). However, collective struggles for indigenous issues in the domain of public education remain underdocumented particularly in Australia (Petray, 2011; Waller, 2012)

In this Special Issue, Lisa Waller, Kerry McCallum, and Scott Gorringer map the Indigenous media landscape in Australia in relation to highly mediatized policy debates about how to improve education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples. The authors use an Indigenous strengths-based educational and research methods framework called Engoori to discuss how Indigenous media outlets resist and replace deficit discourse, specifically about school attendance and truancy, in the corporate news media,. They articulate the role of diverse media including community radio, television, digital and print news in co-constituting and sustaining a rich, alternative discourse on ATSI education. This discourse draws on reclaimed histories and knowledges to support the construction of positive identities, community and belonging for ATSI students, parents, teachers and communities.

### ***Activist documentary films***

A significant component of the intellectual work that occurs in social movements is concerned with combatting the historical amnesia and organized forgetting facilitated by hegemonic cultural institutions including education and the media (Choudry, 2015). Revealing and promoting histories from below is intrinsic to the construction and legitimation of oppositional identities and the resulting forms of collective action, as we see in the struggles of women, youth, cultural minorities, peasants, people with disabilities and Indigenous peoples.

In this Special Issue, Nisha Thapliyal compares two documentaries made by education activists in the USA and India. Both films seek to counter dominant, a-historical media representations of public education as a system in crisis and relatedly, market-influenced school reforms. In both countries, wealthy market reformers have harnessed the power of media – particularly the genre of documentary film – to influence political and public discourse about educational reform (Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Scott, 2013). Made by grassroots activists working on shoestring budgets, the two films seek to counter the rhetoric of educational privatization in situated ways. The U.S. film *An Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman* draws on the voices of students, parents and teachers to document decades of education inequalities and exclusions reproduced by the market-driven reform of charter schools. The Indian film *We shall Fight, We shall Win* resists privatization through revealing and voicing a narrative of a two centuries long historical struggle for public education. Both films interrogate the capacity of educational privatization to ensure promote equity and diversity in education. In doing so, they highlight how struggles for public education are intrinsically connected to historical struggles for economic, cultural and political justice.

### ***Teachers Union Media***

In the last decade, public school teachers have claimed the Internet as a space in which to voice their individual and collective resistance to market-informed, punitive performance- and accountability-based reforms to their working conditions (Shiller, 2015). These voices speak back to overwhelmingly negative representations of public school teachers in mainstream media over the last two decades (most recently see e.g. Dumas, 2013; Baroutsis, 2017). Social networking media has played a significant role in grassroots initiatives to resuscitate local (Brickner 2016; Meiners and Quinn, 2016; Weiner, 2013 ) and transnational social justice unionism (Hogan, 2016).

This Special Issue provides two contemporary accounts, by Leon Salter and Cameron Malcher respectively, of media practices situated in teachers' unions in New Zealand and Australia respectively. Leon Salter's article analyses recent campaigns produced by the New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) to show how activist media can contribute to the articulation of a shared ethical culture and vision for the defense

of public education. As previously discussed, mainstream media plays a key role in the reproduction and legitimization of a global market-oriented reform movement. NZEI set out to counter dominant discourse centered on competition and accountability with values of collaboration, social justice, democracy and professionalism. Salter argues that this kind of historically situated education activism can democratically ground a Leftist populist movement anchored on an ethics of care and community.

Cameron Malcher reports on the strengths and limitations of digital and Internet-based communications in current education campaigns of the New South Wales Teachers Federation. This chronological account traces how the development of union communications accompanied shifts in the ways in which the union engaged with a changing membership and policy and political environment.

This Special Issue concludes with reports. There is a conference report from Doris Gödl which connects with a number of themes explored in the research articles including colonial cinema as a key site of meaning-making and identity production for citizen and nation. Gödl's report also highlights how the transgressive capacity of media is always shaped and circumscribed by the socio-historical locations and contexts in which this media is produced. There is also a report on a summer school penned by Giulia Montefiore. It deals with power/knowledge from a global south perspective.

### **Possibilities and challenges**

The advent of Web 2.0 technologies has certainly augmented the media power of media savvy activists. In particular, social networking media has facilitated multi-directional communication at low cost and high speed. The scholarly literature has also highlighted the affordances of digital and Internet-based media to sustain and increase the volume and visibility of counterpublics. This interdisciplinary Special Issue provides insights into the complex and situated nature of activist communication processes particularly as they relate to education.

The activists featured in this issue have used old and new technologies to disseminate movement frames independent

of mainstream media, challenge specific ideological enemies, preserve movement artefacts, as well as recruit, network, organise and coordinate virtual protest and direct actions (Cammaerts, 2015). At the same time, activists rarely rely on a single form of communications media. Furthermore, new technologies have not supplanted traditional media practices involving print, radio, television or traditional modes of organising and mobilisation.

These complex and situated accounts of activist media practice caution against simplistic conflation between activist media and social action. They underline the importance of contextualized analyses of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms of ‘media power’.

First, each of the contributions in this Special Issue highlight the challenges of producing and disseminating activist media in a hostile mediascape where market and business perspectives are amplified at the expense of progressive voices and grassroots activists. The authors show that mediatisation, as conceptualized by Shaun Rawolle (2010), can be seen in the influence of media on education policymaking processes (e.g. standardized testing in Chile); representations of policy issues (e.g. the crisis in public education in India and the USA); government policy priorities (e.g. market-oriented school reform in New Zealand); and, the “effects” of particular policies (e.g. truancy policies for ATSI students). Relatedly, the articles from Chile, Australia and New Zealand underline the congruence between dominant media institutions and activist narratives about public education.

Second, this scholarship reminds us of the influence of historical mobilisations for public education on current sites of struggle. The use of media by activists to reclaim histories ‘from below’ in order to sustain the struggles of the present is a defining characteristic of grassroots struggles as evident in the accounts from India and Australia. However, all four sites of activism explicitly acknowledge the legacy of historical mobilisations for public education ranging from anticolonial and antineocolonial movements in India and Australia respectively to the U.S. Civil Rights movement and contemporary Chilean student movement.

Third and relatedly, activist media practice is shaped sociohistorical locations as mediated by factors including education levels, race/ethnicity/indigeneity, class, gender, language (see e.g. Allen, Bailey, Carpentier et al., 2014; Korn & Kneese, 2015). These locations shape particular beliefs and decisions about the use of media in relation to decisions about how and when to engage the broader public, as well as hegemonic institutions such as the news media and state apparatus. In this Special Issue, only the Chilean campaign worked with the explicit goal of influencing news media in order to shift federal government policy on testing. The remaining articles focus on other functions of activist media such as the expression of dissent and alternatives to dominant education discourse.

This kind of complex and contextualized analysis explored by the contributors to this Special Issue reveals both the possibilities and limitations of activist media production in mobilizations for public education. It also underlines the need for further inquiry into the pedagogical processes that shape activist media. First, in this age of information warfare, who listens to whom? This question has been more elegantly posed in the scholarship on the politics of listening when the subaltern speaks (see e.g. O'Donnell, Lloyd & Dreher, 2009). Neither cyberspace nor cyberactivism are intrinsically egalitarian and democratic (e.g. as demonstrated by Paulo Gerbaudo's work on purportedly 'leaderless' movements in the Arab Spring).

Second and relatedly, Arturo Escobar (2014) cautions against the reproductive functions of unreflexive activist media practice, which does not engage with power dynamics, and the political economy of emerging technologies (Escobar, 2014). Very little is known about the extent to which education activist media enable more collaborative and nonhierarchical forms of being, in which people learn and act together within activist communities.

The struggle for public education is a struggle to reclaim and, in some instances, reconstruct a social imaginary where education is not for the privileged few and valuable knowledge is not reduced to a binary of productive or disposable (Bauman, 2003). It is hoped that the insurgent media documented in this Special Issue contribute further to our understanding of how we imagine, think about and enact a politics of resistance and transformation.

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**RESISTING THE TRUANCY TRAP: INDIGENOUS  
MEDIA AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN 'REMOTE'  
AUSTRALIA**

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**ABSTRACT** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are mobilizing a range of media forms to reveal, resist and shift what we term 'the truancy trap' – a simplistic, pervasive and powerful discourse of deficit about school attendance in 'remote' Indigenous communities that is perpetuated by mainstream media and Australian government policy. In this article, we draw upon Engoori®, an Indigenous educational intervention and research method, which provides a framework for moving institutions, organizations, communities and individuals out of deficit and into strength-based approaches. The Engoori process is activated here to surface and challenge the deficit assumptions that set the 'truancy trap', and as a lens for conceptualizing Indigenous media discussion, innovation and action on school attendance. The qualitative media analysis presented here reveals how a diversity of Indigenous media has been used in different ways to build a culture of inclusivity, belonging and connection; give Indigenous people a voice and reaffirm strengths in communities. The article contributes to international scholarship on Indigenous media as tools of resilience, resistance and education.

**Keywords**

Engoori; deficit discourse; Indigenous education; media and school attendance; Indigenous media; strength-based.

## **Introduction**

Deficit discourses in education are counter-productive, circular and persistent:

Panics, crises and 'failures' of individuals, groups, schools and states are produced by the very same discourses that constitute and blame certain groups in society as lacking and responsible for their lack. (Comber and Kamler, 2004 p. 293)

Recent work shows that deficit discourse surrounding Aboriginality is intricately entwined across different sites of representation, including the mainstream news media and Indigenous education policy (see Bamblett, 2011, 2013; Fforde et al., 2013; Fogarty et al., 2017; Gorringer et al., 2011; McCallum and Waller, 2017; Simpson et al., 2009; Vass, 2013). Mithakaman, educator and researcher Scott Gorringer (2015) argues that 'when all the thinking, all the conversations and all the approaches are framed in a discourse that sees Aboriginality as a problem, very little positive movement is possible'.

This article draws on a qualitative analysis of Indigenous media about Aboriginal education. Our project investigates the prevalence of deficit discourse in mainstream media as well as the ways in which Indigenous media attempts to shift this discourse to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. A major component is an intervention called Engoori® (Gorringer and Spillman, 2008), which is being mobilised as part of the research at selected Australian schools. The Engoori process involves school communities in deep conversation that reveals and questions the assumptions that underpin deficit and moves them into strength-based conversations (Murrimatters.com). An emergent finding of our research is 'that once people begin challenging the [deficit discourse] it changes the conversation about what is possible in Indigenous education and policy' (Fogarty and Wilson, 2016).

This article extends Engoori® as an epistemological framework for examining how Indigenous people are using their own media forms to reveal and resist what we term 'the truancy trap': a simplistic and powerful discourse of deficit that saturates mainstream media and government policy

relating to ‘remote’<sup>1</sup> Indigenous education. It is a discourse that suppresses the historical, institutional, spatial and cultural contexts and complexities that have influenced contemporary challenges facing Aboriginal education in Australia (Gorringe, 2011; Guenther et al., 2014; Prout, 2009). For example, pervasive cultural and institutional racism meant there was no state education provided for Aboriginal students in the Northern Territory of Australia until the 1950s. The legacy of these policies can be seen in the large gaps in the provision of education services in remote Australia today.

The research approach taken here focuses on Indigenous media as tools of resilience, resistance and education used by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve their self-determined aims (Waller et al., 2015). In the sections that follow Engoori® is extended as a framework for revealing and critically engaging with the deficit assumptions that power the ‘truancy trap’ and analysing a range of Indigenous media interventions. The research provides evidence of how Indigenous people are using media to resist the narrow, negative truancy discourse in dominant media and policy, and to improve school attendance in culturally appropriate and effective ways.

### **A context for Indigenous education**

The education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a fundamental tenet of the ongoing colonial project in Australia. Since the British invasion in 1788, Indigenous people have experienced an education that reinforces the idea that Aboriginal beliefs and values are inferior to Western values. Furthermore, before the 1960s Indigenous people were denied access to the same educational opportunities afforded to non-Indigenous Australians (Burridge et al., 2012). This educational history, based largely on the ideology of Social Darwinism, has resulted in discrimination, marginalization and limited access and opportunity for Indigenous people (Beresford, 2003).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, racism remains embedded in dominant Western teaching spaces through the promotion of Western educational values above all others (Vass, 2014). The ‘hidden curriculum’, or ‘white privilege’, that disadvantages Indigenous

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1 ‘Remote’ appears in scare quotes throughout the article to problematize this term that assumes a non-Indigenous centre and Indigenous periphery.

students who have not had exposure to the norms of Western culture is also well documented (see Andersen, 2011; Rahman, 2013). At a societal level, there has been a tendency to label, or just assume, Aboriginal students will be under-achievers at school (Fogarty et al., 2017). Public literature and perception about education in 'remote' and 'very remote' communities<sup>2</sup> is 'replete with the word "failure"' (Guenther and Bat, 2013, p. 145).

The way news media reports on 'remote' Indigenous education is intimately entwined with shifting policy emphases and direction (McCallum and Waller, 2017). In recent times, both have focused primarily on how the nation can 'close the gap' between 'remote' Indigenous and non-Indigenous education outcomes, using standardised tests in English language and school attendance records to measure 'progress' (Simpson et al., 2009; Guenther, 2013; Guenther et al., 2014). Recent research indicates that mainstream media representation was strongly implicated in the construction and representation of the 'bush school crisis' in 2013-2014<sup>3</sup> (McCallum and Waller, in press). This mediated discourse contributed to the rise of the term 'truancy trap' which positions Indigenous children in a frame of societal risk. Relatedly, this framing blames parents and communities for 'poor performance' by these children due to non-attendance of school (Fogarty et al., 2017).

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2 The concept of remoteness is an important dimension of policy development in Australia. 'Remote' and 'very remote' are technical terms used to describe geographic areas based on their distance from a range of population centres, as well as population characteristics. These categories are important as they are used to assess health, education and workforce needs and resources. More than half a million (540,286) people live in either remote or very remote areas of Australia. At 30 June 2011, 7% of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in Remote Australia (51,300 people) and 13.7% lived in Very Remote Australia (91,600 people). (<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>)

3 'Bush school crisis' was the term used by the mainstream news media in 2013-14 to describe the profound problems identified in a report on education in remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities by the education consultant Bruce Wilson. See for example, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-07/indigenous-children-school-education-report-nt-release/5245126>

### ***Truancy discourse in news media***

School truancy is generally defined in policy discourse as the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age and it has long been deployed as a trope to mark deviancy in the education context. Gray (2000; Gray and Beresford, 2001; Gray and Partington, 2012) has documented the changing nature of attendance narratives in Indigenous education. She identified ‘truancy’ as a socially constructed discourse, with a focus on ‘correction and protection’, whereby truancy is framed as a stepping stone to anti-social behaviour, delinquency and crime and can become a justification for harsh intervention (Gray, 2000).

The issue of Aboriginal school attendance has been considered a problem since the mid 1980s and a focus of research, policy development and media interest ever since (Gray and Beresford, 2008). During the Reconciliation era (1990-2000) ‘truancy’ was replaced in policy discourse with the term ‘attendance’ as a way to frame the topic more positively and to shift from its punitive associations (Collins, 1999). However, under the umbrella of the Closing the Gap policy framework, it has re-emerged in policy and media discourse as a key indicator of Indigenous educational achievement, punitive measures have resurfaced and ‘truancy talk’ is alive, especially among mainstream journalists.

Authorised through the 2008 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform agenda, the policy framework is based on assumptions about the relationship between increased attendance and increased student performance on standardised tests in English language (Australian Government, 2017; Ladwig and Luke, 2014). The policy is complicated by the controversial Federal Government ‘Intervention’, introduced in 2007 and later modified by subsequent administrations, that involved withholding welfare payments from those Indigenous parents whose children were reportedly missing school.

‘Truancy’ emerged as an issue of prominence in news media reporting during the conservative government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott (2013-15). It came on the back of a decade of strident and alarmist news media reporting of ‘remote’ communities and an increasingly neoliberal, deficit-driven Indigenous policy agenda. The fusing of the ‘deviance’ of truancy and the



‘correction’ of improving Indigenous educational outcomes in policy discourse provided mainstream journalists with a rich source of news.

During 2013 Indigenous school attendance was high on the national news agenda, reporting low levels of attendance, linking it with failure in high-stakes educational testing, and highlighting the failure of government policy and Indigenous communities to shift attendance rates (see for example, Everingham, 2014; Hamlyn, 2015). An independent review of education in the Northern Territory by education specialist Bruce Wilson (2013) provided a key news subsidy. Reporting on Wilson’s conclusion that: ‘incalculable resources devoted to ensuring children in remote communities turn up to school ... had been ‘effectively wasted’ (Ferrari, 2013), *The Australian* newspaper campaigned on government failure to increase school attendance with headlines such as ‘Universal failure’ of remote region schools – EXCLUSIVE’ (Ferrari, 2013). Australia’s public broadcaster, the ABC, also adopted ‘truancy talk’ with headlines such as:

Bigger smacks for poor NT student attendance (ABC, 2013)

Education experts say tougher truancy measures might be needed (Smail, 2013)

Truancy rates worries SA schools, as prosecutions of parents considered (Royal, 2015)

This news media discourse reflected a concerted effort from the Prime Minister and his Indigenous Affairs minister to address the constructed ‘truancy crisis’. At its height in 2014, official government websites pledged to ‘Get Kids to School’. Bessant (1995) has argued that in a media saturated policy environment the portrayed solution can become an entirely logical policy option. In this example, the repeated media representation of the truancy/social failure nexus validates the option of tying family welfare payments to school attendance.

The focus was intensified with the Remote School Attendance Strategy (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016), which was introduced for two years from

2014. In 2015 the Federal Government announced it was extending the \$28.4 million program for another three years to target schools with attendance rates below 70 per cent from 1998-2014. At the time of writing it operated in 77 schools across 74 'remote' Indigenous communities in five Australian states. RSAS has funded a range of initiatives, including the employment of local people as school attendance supervisors, and was outsourced to the privately owned National Employment Services Association.

These framings have shaped public understanding and race-based government policy that punishes parents for children's absences from school (Billings, 2009). In 2016, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.4 per cent, compared with 93.1 per cent for non-Indigenous students. In 2016, the Indigenous attendance rate in very remote areas was 66.4 per cent ([www.closingthegap.pmc.gov.au](http://www.closingthegap.pmc.gov.au)). The most recent Closing the Gap report indicated there had been no real change in school attendance, with NT rates falling by 1.6 per cent (Australian Government, 2017). School attendance for Indigenous students decreases with remoteness. This highlights that the problem is more complicated than governments are currently acknowledging and suggests the need for a different approach. As we will show, some Indigenous communities are resisting the 'truancy trap' by shifting the discourse into strength-based conversations in and through their own media.

### **Engoori**

Engoori® is one of a range of strategies and programs developed in recent times to counteract the prevalence of deficit mentality in the education system and classroom (see Sarra 2011; Fogarty and Schwab, 2012; Lester et al., 2013). For example, Pearson (2009) has refuted discourses that use structural disadvantage or 'victimhood' as an excuse for poor Indigenous education outcomes. The Engoori story belongs to Koorithulla Tjimpa (Black Hawk) of the Mithaka people of far south-west Queensland and was traditionally used in the Wurthumpa ceremony as a method of diplomacy between conflicting ideologies and groups ([Murrimatters.com](http://Murrimatters.com)). In 2006 Gorringer and Spillman (2008) gained permission from Gorringer's old people to reinterpret the Mithaka ceremony (Gorringer et al., 2011).

They extended the concept and its related processes as a strength-based facilitation process for organizations, school leadership and in the classroom as a way of enabling and encouraging a shift away from a deficit mindset. It achieves this through recognition that people possess a range of strengths and by focusing on what keeps them strong. Engoori offers a guide to facilitating conversations that can reaffirm strengths in communities. It creates safe spaces to challenge assumptions people bring to deficit conversations and turn them into strength conversations to address complex challenges (Gorringer, 2011).

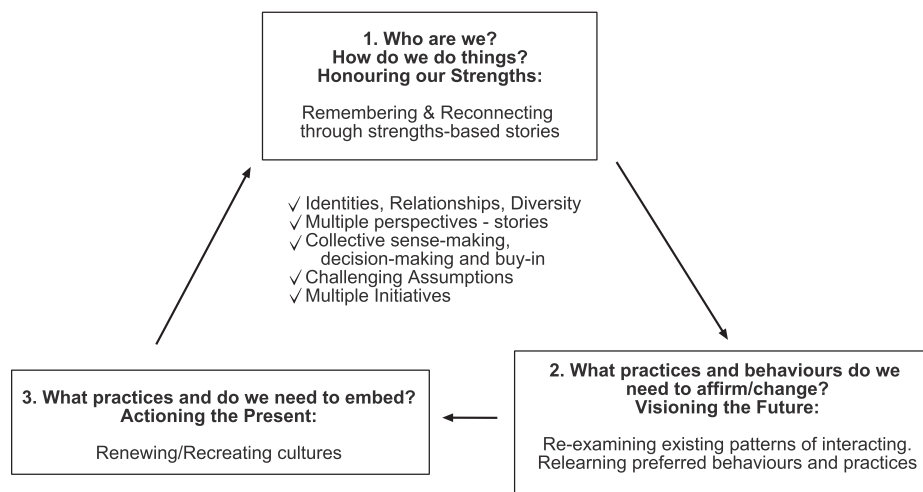


Figure 1: The Engoori® process has three stages comprised of explicit actions. Source: Murrimatters.com

Prosser et al. (2015, p. 22) argue that through such a framework, Indigenous people can ensure all voices are heard; discuss historical perspectives and ‘value add’ to assets identified in the community. As such, Engoori provides both a methodological and analytical framework through which to examine contemporary Indigenous education discourses.

In the tradition of other Australian Indigenous methodologies, especially Dadirri (Ungunmerr-Bauman, 2002; West et al., 2012) and ‘Red Dirt Thinking’ (Lester et al., 2013; Guenther et

al., 2014)<sup>4</sup>, we connect Engoori with elements of critical theory, specifically Freire's (1990 [1970]) transformative education process. From the outset Indigenist research has been closely entwined with the traditions of critical theory, which is guided by the goal of liberating people from domination, powerlessness, and oppression (Rigney, 1999 in West et al., 2012, p. 1585). Freire (1970) advocated that the knowledge and experience of the oppressed holds the solutions to the issues affecting their lives. For Freire (1970), and in Engoori® (Gorringer et al., 2011), deep conversation with structure, purpose and process provides the foundation of communication for positive change and takes place through an equal relationship among people. Engoori is a practice of deep conversation and co-creating transformative pathways. In the context of research, it is a method that enables working with Indigenous people and allowing their voices to be heard (Waller, 2018). Like Freire's transformational framework, Engoori provides a process for working through the challenges of how to create a space for what can be, and then co-creating it. As Freire explained: 'Thematic investigation becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and self, thus making it a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character' (Freire, 1990 [1970], p. 79).

## **Methods**

Our aim was to understand how Aboriginal people are using their own media forms to reveal and resist the deficit discourse about remote school attendance. We identified and categorised media items relating to Indigenous education from 2000-2017 in the *Deficit Discourse in Indigenous Education* database. The

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<sup>4</sup> In the context of research, Dadirri, which is the language of the Ngangikurungkurr people of Daly River in Australia's Northern Territory as well as an epistemology, has been described as 'a process of listening, reflecting, observing the feelings and actions, reflecting and learning, and in the cyclic process, re-listening at deeper and deeper levels of understanding and knowledge building' (Atkinson, 2002, p. 19). The concept of a 'Red Dirt' curriculum was developed and in Central Australia. It brings together communities, teachers, and schools to incorporate and amplify local Aboriginal knowledge and priorities within the mainstream curriculum. Its proponents argue it assist students to learn both Indigenous and western knowledge, skills and social norms. Scaffolding from one knowledge system to the other and back again is an important pedagogical innovation (see Lester et al (2013).

Factiva and TVNews databases were used to find news items originating from online, print media and television news and current affairs, with search engines used for news web and social media pages. The search terms were 'Indigenous education', 'Aboriginal education', 'attendance', 'truancy', 'NAPLAN', 'Indigenous students', 'remote schools' and 'Northern Territory education'. Mainstream news sources included *ABC*, *SBS*, *The Australian*, *The Guardian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Canberra Times*, *NT News*, *The Courier-Mail*, and the *West Australian*. Indigenous and alternative news sources included *NITV*, *First Nations Telegraph*, *The Conversation*, *The Koori Mail*, *Crikey*, *New Matilda*, *Australian Teacher*, plus Facebook pages from Indigenous education activist groups. We also collected items from Indigenous community radio and television via the Indigenous Remote Communication Association (IRCA) website, as well as Indigitube and YouTube. Addressing privacy and ethical concerns about the 'extractive' nature of much social media research (Dreher et al., 2018), no social media accounts belonging to individuals were included in the participatory media analysis. We have only examined public pages that belong to Indigenous organizations<sup>5</sup>.

For this article, we focused on a subset of 357 items from Indigenous media related to school education from 2012-2017. The five-year time period was chosen to capture the lead-up to the announcement of the Remote School Attendance Strategy in 2014 and its aftermath. Media items were collected, recorded, and coded across a range of factors, including source, genre, topic and key spokesperson. Following the preliminary mapping and coding exercise, we conducted a close reading of each media item in concert with existing academic literature. Acknowledging the co-production of news and media between actors in the policy domain, we paid particular attention to the sponsors of different frames, dominant voices, overall tone, and

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<sup>5</sup> This research has approval from the human ethics committees of the Australian National University, Deakin University and University of Canberra and is part of an Indigenous led Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous project (IN150100007) *Deficit Discourse and Indigenous Education* that conforms to the guidelines for ethical research in Australian Indigenous Studies. See <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies>

key message indicated in the headline. This enabled valuable insights about how news and media items are produced and circulate in public discourse to present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and school communities in terms of deficit. The analysis presented here is confined to items from the dataset that relate specifically to school attendance.

Engoori® guided all phases of the research, beginning with a question about how as Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers working together we could contribute to affirming community strengths and relationships around 'remote' Indigenous school attendance. It has provided the framework for a thematic investigation of relevant Indigenous media texts related to 'remote' school attendance during the period when the issue was in the policy and media spotlight (2012-2017). In the next section, we share key observations from our analysis of news, television, radio, and digital Indigenous media.

### **The Koori Mail**

*The Koori Mail* is a 100 per cent owned Aboriginal commercial operation, published in hard copy weekly and online, and has a readership of more than 100,000 (Parker, 2011). The nationally distributed 25-year old newspaper prides itself on adhering to traditional journalism values, including objectivity (Parker, 2011).

Analysis of 185 education-focused articles published in *The Koori Mail* (2012-16) found remote school attendance was a regular topic, receiving the most coverage in 2014 at the height of the 'bush school crisis'. Some uncritical reports of government policy announcements were included and the *Mail* provided a platform on several occasions for the federal minister and others to write supportive commentary. However, its coverage was mainly concerned with presenting Indigenous community perspectives on school attendance. These ranged from criticism of the policy under headlines including 'Big stick is questioned' (Koori Mail 27 August, 2014); to examination of underlying reasons for non-attendance such as racism and its impacts: 'Educators hear of racism cost' (Koori Mail 13 August 2014) and showcasing innovative local policy responses and attitudes: 'School = pool for kids at Mutijulu' (Koori Mail, 22 October 2014).

A 2015 article discussed findings from research conducted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Economic Participation into what people living in ‘remote’ Australia expect of their education system. In contrast to the Prime Minister’s ranking of school attendance as the No. 1 Closing the Gap priority (Harrison, 2014), attendance was ranked fourth priority by Indigenous research participants. ‘Parental involvement and providing of role models in children’s education’, ‘basic competence in reading, writing and numeracy’ and ‘community engagement with schools’ were the top three. (Koori Mail, 2015).

While we have not conducted a comprehensive comparison, we note that some reports shifted the spotlight away from Indigenous responsibility for education outcomes to focus on education department obligations. For example, a 2014 report highlights a quote from education consultant Bruce Wilson’s review of Indigenous education in the NT (Wilson, 2013) that: ‘... paints a deeply concerning picture about the system’s inability to provide the best quality education to our children’ (Koori Mail, 2014a). In another 2014 report, The Central Desert Regional Council discusses its own attendance policy designed to ‘create an environment where it was easier for families to get their kids ready for school’ (Koori Mail, 2014b). This is an example of strength-based conversations about attendance and Indigenous conceptions of success in schools that emerged as a strong theme in our analysis of Indigenous media.

### **National Indigenous Television (NITV)**

NITV is a national, state-sponsored free-to-air television service that makes Indigenous voices and stories from across the country – and the world – readily accessible. Our analysis of fifteen NITV television and website reports revealed that the discussion about school attendance was framed in relation to cultural contexts and celebration of Indigenous education achievement. For example, the NITV website report ‘A graduation ceremony like no other’ (NITV, 2017) highlighted how Gunbalanya School in North-East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory blends Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage through the partnership of two co-principals, one non-Indigenous and one from the local community. It acknowledged attendance had been an issue during ceremony time, but took a strength-based approach to highlight that the school found a solution by adapting the semester dates around cultural obligations.

There were also stories that were critical of the Remote School Attendance Strategy. For example, in a television interview for 'Indigenous school attendance rates spark push for truancy officers' (McCarthy, 2013) a leading proponent of strength-based approaches in Indigenous education, Professor Chris Sarra, stated that introducing truancy officers was a 'deficit based approach'<sup>6</sup>. Another expert who was quoted in the story, Professor Peter Buckskin, said the most pressing issue was to challenge state and territory governments about their seriousness in tackling the issue and making Australian classrooms more culturally safe – including making changes to the national curriculum to reflect Indigenous perspectives. Such initiatives are advocated by proponents of strength-based approaches that encourage students to have a positive sense of cultural identity (see for example, Lester, et al., 2013).

To sum up, these two national Indigenous media outlets covered the issue of school attendance for large Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences using professional journalism practices and routines. Their access and commitment to presenting a wider range of Indigenous sources than their mainstream counterparts ensured their reports presented multiple Indigenous perspectives and more diverse education stories on government education policy agendas. This media reframed official announcements and mainstream news for Aboriginal audiences and emphasized 'good news' stories about Indigenous achievement particularly those that highlighted local, ground-up stories and solutions based in individual schools and communities. These media practices can be understood to have interrupted dominant discourse about whose knowledge and whose reality counts (Thapliyal, 2017, 243).

### **Community radio and television**

The first Indigenous-produced community radio programs in Australia went to air in 1972. Since then this vibrant and

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<sup>6</sup> Professor Chris Sarra is a Goreng Goreng man who in the late 1990s became the first Aboriginal principal of Cherbourg State School in Queensland where he fostered the 'strong and smart' approach to education that embraces a positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in contemporary Australia. In 2005, he founded and became chairman the Stronger Smarter Institute, which delivers leadership programs for school staff and communities throughout Australia. (see [www.strongersmarter.com.au](http://www.strongersmarter.com.au))



expanding community broadcasting sector has been seen as crucial for the promotion of Aboriginal culture and languages and the communication needs of Aboriginal communities. It has grown to include television and more than 130 community radio stations, establishing its own unique position in the Australian communication sphere (Sheppard, 2016). Our analysis of 16 community broadcast items demonstrates how Indigenous-led media is adept at working cooperatively within government policy agendas and discourses to adapt and reframe them to present a community perspective.

In 2015, the Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA) collaborated with remote communities and schools to produce radio content in support of school attendance. The project was funded by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to promote the goals of the RSAS and involved seven Remote Indigenous Media Organizations (RIMOs) based across Australia's top end<sup>7</sup>. Each media outlet produced positive messages and news about school attendance designed by and for the communities they serve. The 2016 remote Indigenous Media and Communications Survey highlights the importance and value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander radio to local communities with 80 per cent of remote community members identifying as regular listeners to the radio services provided through remote Indigenous media organizations and remote Indigenous broadcasting services (IRCA, 2017).

Radio content included 'getting to school on time' messages in language, 'shout outs' to schools, jingles, schools shows and outdoor broadcasts. It featured the voices of community members, school staff and students, as well as parents. More than 120 items were produced, with live content aired as well. They varied in length from a just a few seconds to 10 minutes duration. Remote radio stations such as NG Media and PY Media recorded interviews with role models, principals and community leaders all giving the same message: 'It's important to go to school'. Radio was also used to send practical reminders in local languages, as well

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<sup>7</sup> The Remote Indigenous Media Organizations involved in the activity were CAAMA, NG Media, PAKAM, PAW Media, PY Media, QRAM and TEABBA. (see <https://irca.net.au/projects/remote-schools-attendance-radio-project> for further details.)

as English, about school term starting dates, bell times and things to do to help kids be active and alert at school. Children's voices featured prominently. They spoke about what they liked about school, read stories on air and performed songs. In a bid to recognize schools in their own areas and their importance to the community, participating media services often did 'shout outs', which are short messages by well-known locals that invite action. Most were done in live radio shows, but some were also recorded. In one show produced by CAAMA in Central Australia, an elder begins the 26 second message: 'Hey you kids, time to get ready, it's school time' before naming all of the schools in the region and finishing with the message: 'Give yourself the best chance to learn at school' (IRCA. 2015).

IRCA operates a digital streaming service called Indigitube that collects remote community media content and makes it accessible on the web for free. The School Attendance project material was made available via Indigitube as well as radio. Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) also received federal government funding to produce and broadcast videos on school attendance in the 2014-15 period. Analysis of the ICTV sponsored videos demonstrates diverse and local interpretations of the attendance issue. Our sample includes nine short videos that show diversity across language and geographic areas, and also in the range of perspectives on school attendance presented.

Desert Feet Media Artists, an incorporated association that uses music and the arts to create educational opportunities in remote communities, was commissioned to produce a 30 second advertisement called 'Olive Knight says Stay in School' (Short and Sweet, 2014). The creator, producer and star of the video is Kankawa Ngarra (Olive Knight), a respected Walmatjarri elder from the community of Wankatkjunka in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. She speaks directly to the camera, explaining the benefits of education and telling the audience that learning poetry in school inspired and helped her to write the lyrics for her songs.

Children are the stars in 'Pukatja get to school challenge' (Short and Sweet, 2015b). In this 1.42-minute video, three students from the Central Desert in South Australia, Nason,

Mykiah and Sadie, compete to see who can get to school on time. They are shown waking up, washing, dressing, eating a healthy breakfast and running to school as the narrator explains why each step is important to educational success. Nason sleeps in, but catches up with his sisters at the school gate, with the narrator declaring them all school attendance champions. The video ends with the voices of children from Pukatja singing the catchy jingle: 'I'm going to school'.

Encouraging deep community conversation is a key aim in some of the ICTV videos. *Dubbo stuff by Last Chance Crew* (Desert Pea Media Artists, 2013) was written, recorded and filmed in four days by students from Mian School in Dubbo, western NSW and has been viewed via Indigtube more than 36,000 times. Many Aboriginal students and school community members are involved in the performance of a powerful rap that says students have to 'learn the proper way' and 'education is our birthright'. It sought to create a deep conversation and student-led decision making about the complex challenge of attendance in one community, asking where does it come from? How can it change? Whose choice is it? And finally asks the audience what they are going to do to address the issue.

These examples show how resilient Indigenous communities use media to innovate and construct messages in their own voices for local communities. Through an Engoori lens, Indigenous community media can be understood to have provided a range of tools for affirming the identities of participating communities and supporting the network of remote schools subjected to the RSAS through positive actions. Furthermore, its strategy of utilizing multiple initiatives, including a range of languages, voices and formats demonstrates how diverse approaches can be combined to tackle complex challenges. In short, Indigenous community radio, television and digital media played a direct role in challenging the deficit discourse at the local level and amplified Indigenous representations of positive school attendance strategies for national and global audiences.

### **Indigenous participation in social media**

In recent years, social media platforms have provided important forums for Indigenous people to discuss and organize around

issues of concern, including education (Carlson and Fraser, 2016). During the study period, Twitter provided a platform for the dissemination of news and opinion about school attendance while Facebook groups offered valuable spaces for sharing and networking of alternative viewpoints and experiences. Although not discussed in detail here, we found that blogs also provided an inexpensive platform for news production and were often widely disseminated through Indigenous social media networks, occasionally making their way into mainstream media forums, such as *The Guardian* (Waller et al., 2015).

We found a variety of examples of Indigenous people using digital and social media to debate and discuss government policies on school attendance. We also found instances of sharing strength-based resources through social media to develop different approaches to the challenge. Social media offered Indigenous perspectives, contexts and acknowledged complexity on the question of school attendance. One example comes from a widely circulated post from the *Aboriginal News Australia* Facebook page:

I'm afraid the problems are too deep for well-meaning truancy officers to address. The parents will often not be around to 'persuade'. In many cases, hugely overburdened grandmothers who give their hearts and souls to just keeping grandchildren off the drugs, out of detention and fed will be around. These women do not need persuasion. They are trying, magnificently and grandly, to get kids to school. If they can't do it, armed with love and family ties, a truancy officer won't succeed.

This post, by an anonymous contributor, looks beyond attendance figures, government policy and the RSAS to present the historical, social, cultural and emotional contexts that make school attendance difficult in some families and communities. Our research for the wider project found no evidence of mainstream reporters presenting these kinds of stories (McCallum and Waller, in press).

A second example comes from the national peak Aboriginal health body National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health

Organization (NACCHO<sup>8</sup>) (2017) which used its Facebook site to share strength-based materials and resources related to school attendance, including an animated series 'Little J and Big Cuz' aimed at providing a successful transition between preschool and primary school. The program is aimed at 4-6 year olds and tells the story of two children learning about their culture and the great things school has to offer with the help of their grandmother and their teacher Ms Chen. The concept underlying this media was to provide Aboriginal children with a window into the world of school with the aim of successful transition for Indigenous preschool students.

On Twitter, we looked at @IndigenousX founded by Gamilaroi man Luke Pearson in 2012. Each week a different Indigenous host shares their stories, experiences and perspectives on a new topic with more than 28,000 followers. Most importantly, it provides an online meeting place for Indigenous people to discuss issues and promote their agendas (Sweet et al., 2013). ABC journalist Bridget Brennan was a host on the @IndigenousX Twitter account in August 2014. The issue and question she posed for @IndigenousX followers: 'School attendance is a real issue for our kids: What strategies have you seen to genuinely engage kids in learning and increase attendance?' attracted comments and suggestions including: 'Giving them a voice through a restorative way of being and learning'; 'the voices of our young ppl (sic) are key to ensuring education is enjoyed not enforced'; and 'voice is really important ... but voice and influence is what really counts hey'.

From an Engoori perspective, social media content provides evidence of Indigenous people using digital platforms as a tool for allowing and encouraging all voices to be heard, enabling discussions about historical and social perspectives on school attendance, such as the *Aboriginal News Australia* Facebook page commentary, and valuing assets identified and created in the community, such as the 'Little J and Big Cuz' show.

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<sup>8</sup> Aboriginal communities operate 140 Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) across Australia under the umbrella of NACCHO. In keeping with the philosophy of self-determination, Aboriginal health is not just the physical wellbeing of an individual, but is the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their community. Promoting and supporting education is therefore important to NACCHO.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude, our research approach has been guided by the principles of Engoori® to explore how Indigenous media disrupts hegemonic realities and foregrounds alternative agendas for Aboriginal education. Indigenous media provided tools for affected communities to resist the ‘truancy trap’ in mainstream policy and media discourses and facilitate strength-based conversations about attendance and what constitutes ‘success’ in their schools and communities. There is no suggestion that attendance is not important to Indigenous people, or that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should not go to school. Indeed, our analysis of national, commercial, community and participatory Indigenous media demonstrates that school attendance was an issue of high importance across all the Indigenous media outlets.

We emphasize here that Indigenous people work within the same broader discourses as non-Indigenous policymakers, media and public, but conduct the conversation in ways that are underpinned by cultural and local contexts, priorities and understandings. An emergent finding from the wider research suggests the wealth of Indigenous perspectives expressed via Indigenous media were not picked up or amplified by mainstream outlets (McCallum and Waller, in press). However, the narrow perspectives sponsored by mainstream news outlets were in fact challenged, broadened and reframed in mediated discussion of education in Indigenous-led media. This media analysis underlines how resilient Indigenous communities are pragmatic about government agendas and proactive when opportunities emerge to shape policy on the ground to serve their self-determined aims.

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## **RESISTING EDUCATIONAL PRIVATISATION ON SCREEN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TWO ACTIVIST DOCUMENTARIES FROM INDIA AND THE USA**

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**ABSTRACT** The assault on public education in India and the USA has been facilitated by a powerful assemblage of pro-privatisation corporate media. Representations of education in news and popular culture media tend to harp on two themes – a public education system in crisis, and, relatedly, the private or corporate business sector as the only viable savior. Two recent activist documentary films present a counter-narrative to this discourse – ‘We shall Fight, We shall Win’ (India) and ‘An Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman’ (USA). This paper analyses the situated ways in which education activists use the medium of documentary film to contest dominant media representations of the benefits of educational privatisation. These activist narratives in defense of public education provide insights into how progressive education struggles are essentially cultural struggles.

### **Introduction**

In the last 15 years, there has been an explosion of high-profile documentary films attacking public education in the USA. Critical analysis of these documentaries such as *Two Million Minutes* (Linder, 2011), *The First Year* (Trier, 2014), *Waiting for Superman* (Swalwell and Apple, 2011; Dumas, 2013), and *Won't Back Down* (Mitchell and Lizotte, 2016) have highlighted a consistent message that cuts across these documentaries. The message is that the US public education system is in perpetual crisis and that only market-based reforms are capable of solving the crisis. The production and dissemination of these mediatized messages is enabled through a sophisticated corporate media apparatus funded by a powerful pro-market lobby which includes venture capitalists, philanthrocapitalists, media-savvy conservative thinktanks and corporate media (see e.g. Saltman, 2016)

Similar themes of a public education system in crisis and private education saviours dominate Indian, particularly English-language, news and entertainment media. Although research on the influence of media on education discourse is in its nascent stages, critical scholars have highlighted the symbiotic relationship between corporate media and transnational pro-privatisation advocacy networks and individual policy entrepreneurs (Nambissan and Ball, 2010). Vidya and Sarangapani (2012) analysed the classed nature of English-language print news by showing how national dailies only cover educational topics which reflect the interests and concerns of the middle-class such as private school fees, coaching classes, and college admissions (Vidya and Sarangapani, 2012). Thapliyal (2015) found a similar bias in English-language TV news channel reporting on national education policy noting a distinct private preference for expert commentators located in the pro-market private sector such as principals of elite private schools, representatives from corporate-funded nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and for-profit education entrepreneurs.

On a more hopeful note, critical scholars have begun to document media produced by progressive education activists to challenge, interrupt and transform dominant pro-privatisation education discourse (Thapliyal, 2017). As discussed in the Introduction to this Special Issue, critical, feminist, anti-racist and Indigenous scholars have documented diverse forms of activist media located in and produced by sites of collective struggle such as teachers and teachers unions (e.g. Oaxaca, Michigan and Chicago teacher strikes), school and university students (e.g. Black, Latino and immigrant student mobilisations in the USA, Quebec, United Kingdom, South Africa), parents (e.g. New York Coalition for Education Justice), indigenous peoples (e.g. the Zapatistas) and landless workers (Landless Workers Movement Brazil).

Advances in digital information and communication technologies have recently allowed education activists to expand their communications strategic repertoire to produce and disseminate their own films. However, the genre of activist documentary films about education remains largely unexplored in the social movement media literature. In part, this is because of historical blindspots in the scholarship about education mobilisations (other than campus-based activism); and in part

due to a preference for particular kinds of activist media (e.g. social media)(MacSheoin, 2010). The aim of this article is to address this gap in the literature by making a critical analysis of two recent activist documentary films about education in India and the USA.

### **Activist Media Theorising and Methods**

The medium of film has long served activist purposes – to raise awareness, inform, and even transform the ways in which people see themselves and respond to their realities. Along with other forms of visual culture, films have been used with great effect for all kinds of mass communication including entertainment, adult education, and propaganda (Giroux, 1994; Bhattacharya, 2012). Documentary films, in particular, are a favored medium for telling stories that would otherwise remain unseen and unheard.

At the same time, critical media literacy scholars have provided us with a wide range of tools to critically analyse and subvert the role of visual cultures in socialization and identity construction. Film and documentary are particularly influential forms of public pedagogy because of their power to construct and reproduce dominant and oppressive cultural narratives and identity representations (Sandlin, O'Malley, Burdick, 2011).

This critical analysis begins with the premise that media, as a form of cultural practice, is neither neutral nor apolitical (Giroux, 1994, 2015). In contrast to positivist notions of objectivity and neutrality, all forms of media are situated in and produced by the knowledge-power struggles that constitute all social relations and structures. From this critical perspective, all media technologies are essentially cultural and therefore essentially pedagogical and political. This means that the ways in which activists make meaning about the policy-, media-and protest-scapes in which they function shape the ways in which they understand and use information and communication technologies (Rodriguez, Ferron and Shamas, 2014). This conceptual framework is helpful to analyzing these two documentary films which were produced by grassroots education activists in India and the USA.

These films were selected because they represent a rare exception to current media trends (in Hollywood and Bollywood)



which produce unidimensional and deficit representations of public education. These two films stand out as activist media because they document situated forms of resistance to the privatisation of schooling. They are also exceptional because these films were produced by activists situated in grassroots mobilisations for social justice which span several decades (see e.g. Orr and Rogers, 2011; Kumar, 2014).

This analysis recognises that these two films are set in two different socio-historical and cultural contexts particularly in relation to the historical development of the nation-state and mass, public education. The postcolonial journey of the United States as a democratic society exceeds that of India by almost two centuries<sup>1</sup>.

The size of the private schooling sector in both countries is not comparable due to the difference in population size<sup>2</sup>, however some comparisons can be made in relation to the influence of private schooling on the segregation and stratification that is seen in the social fabric of both countries. Historically, private schools were established primarily to serve the children of the elite (see e.g. Kumar, 1991; Spring, 1994). Today, the private schooling sector in both countries involves a diverse range of providers including these historically elite fee-charging private schools as well as not-for-profit, religious, and secular educational providers. Since the nineteen eighties, there has been an intensification in the assault on public education in India and the USA with the state acting systematically to advance the interests of those who seek to profit from education. Financial analysts estimate the value of the K-12 education sector in both countries in the billions of dollars.

Educational privatisation has taken multiple forms in both countries with some similarities as well as differences. Similarities include direct forms of privatisation such as establishment of profit-seeking private schools, closures of

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1 Interestingly, the first free and in this sense public and modern schools were introduced in both countries in the 1820s - in Boston, USA and the then princely state of Travancore, India.

2 Approximately 40% of K-12 students in India are enrolled in private school compared to 12 % in the USA. It is also important to note here that millions of Indian children do not complete five years of primary education – private or public.

public schools, and attacks on public school teachers and their unions, and competitive processes for distributing resources between schools. However, privatisation also involves less visible processes of transfer of public resources to the private sector through for example land and monetary grants. In the U.S., the flow of public dollars to education businesses also occurs through the outsourcing of services such as testing, security, and school meals (see e.g. Scott and DiMartino, 2009). Multiple forms of transfer of public funds to the private sector can also be found in India which also includes a significant number of not-for-profit NGOs which provide nonformal education to so-called hard to reach children (see e.g. Kamat, 2002). Recently, education policymaking arenas in both countries have been transformed by the insertion of pro-privatisation policy advisors affiliated with international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Finance Corporation, multinational corporations and corporate philanthropies.

Thus, the cultural politics of private schooling in both nations implicates its key role in reproducing and legitimising educational and social inequality. The cumulative effect of these different kinds of market reforms is not only to commercialise public education but to shrink the public sphere, particularly existing processes for direct citizen participation and democratic policy-making. The objective here is not a direct comparison but to approach these films as complementary sources of grassroots activist knowledge which can deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of educational privatisation and relatedly, social mobilisations to defend public education. As such, both films offer insights for postcolonial educators striving for decolonization of education systems inherited from colonialism.

The analysis in this article focuses primarily on how the films represent and critique the economic, cultural and political dimensions of educational privatisation. Each film draws on situated and multiple forms of activist knowledge to contest dominant media representations of the benefits of educational privatisation. They construct alternative narratives in defense of public education which provide insights into how progressive education struggles are essentially cultural struggles.

I transcribed and viewed both films on multiple occasions. I made notes about the organization of the narrative, the

orientation of the camera, and verbal, visual and audio representational techniques. I analysed each documentary separately in this way and then generated cross-cutting themes concerning representations of private and public schooling for this paper. In addition to the films, this analysis also draws on additional textual resources including organisational websites, interviews with and articles by activists and online and print publications about the films. In the next section, I provide a brief overview of the films, activist filmmakers and the process of making the films.

### **The Films**

#### *An Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman (USA)*

This 67 minute film was released in May 2011 by a New York City coalition of education organizers called Grassroots Education Movement (GEM). It focused on presenting a rebuttal to the commercially successful pro-charter school<sup>3</sup> documentary *Waiting for Superman* which grossed \$6.3 million in U.S. theaters.

The sociohistorical context for the film is the introduction of mayoral control for public education during the administration of billionaire owner of the Bloomberg media empire, Mayor Michael Bloomberg (2002-2012). On assuming office, Bloomberg appointed corporate lawyer Joel Klein to run his Department of Education and oversee the privatisation of NYC public schools. Reforms included the forced closure of so-called failing public schools, rapid expansion of for-profit charter schools, the corporatisation of Department of Education personnel and services, value-added measures for teacher performativity, and of course high stakes standardized testing (see e.g. Scott and DiMartino, 2009; Weiner, 2013).

The film focused on two of these reforms in particular – Bloomberg’s support for for-profit charter schools and relatedly, his attempts to undermine the professional status and legitimacy of public school teachers and teacher unions.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the NY state Charter Act of 1998 a charter school is an education corporation that is exempt from many state and local law, rules, regulations or policies governing public and private schools (AIT, 2011). There are public and private charter schools. The latter are profit-seeking and also known as education management organisations.

More broadly, the film represents advocacy that school reforms based on market-style competition is the only way to improve public schools and close the growing gap between affluent, White and working-class and poor Black, Latino and immigrant students.

GEM activists decided to construct the film narrative around three inconvenient truths that were conveniently omitted from *Waiting for Superman*. The film begins with the truth that corporate reform will not improve education for all children. Second, it focuses on the promotion of charter schools that have been portrayed as the silver bullet solution to the problems faced by public education. The third truth in the film is that teachers and union protections benefit children as well as teachers. The film concludes by advocating for what it calls Real Reforms – policies that have been shown to make public schools more equitable and responsive to the needs of diverse students, particularly those who experience poverty and racism. These reforms include small class size, equity in funding, antiracist education policies, culturally relevant curriculum, more teaching by qualified educators and less testing, parent empowerment and leadership, prekindergarten and early intervention programmes for all children, and democratic and social justice unionism. The film ends with a call to action – for viewers to get involved in the struggle to protect public education.

The filmmaking team decided to challenge market-oriented reforms for public education through the voices and lived experiences of students, parents and teachers. The film is narrated by two teachers with a combined experience of twenty years in the public education system. The inconvenient truths are then delivered by students, parents and teachers affiliated with GEM. These were the perspectives that were systematically ignored or dismissed by the Bloomberg administration which dismissed thirty-two democratically-elected school boards. Under mayoral control, these mechanisms for democratic decision-making were replaced by a Panel for Education Policy (PEP) whose unelected members provided a token stamp of approval for market reforms. Consequently, during Bloomberg's tenure, PEP meetings became a key site for collective protest and voicing demands for democratic consultation – and a valuable source of film footage for the filmmakers (Bruhn, 2014).

The American documentary was made by a core team of six members of the Grassroots Education Movement and funded by approximately US\$21,000 in donations (Bruhn, 2014). The team included three current public school teachers, one retired public school teacher, one public school social worker and one parent activist who formed Real Reform Studios Production (RRSP) (Bruhn, 2014). None of the team members had previous experience with filmmaking and taught themselves to use iMovie – the free filmmaking application that comes with Apple devices. The team were able to draw on several years of archival footage of NYC education organizing by students, parents and teachers to resist Bloomberg policies. The film was made over a period of nine months of intensive work which included multiple screenings for GEM members to provide feedback on early drafts (see also Bruhn, 2014). In order to reach as large an audience as possible, the team also decided to give away the film – through free DVDS and the free online video sharing site Vimeo<sup>4</sup>.

*We shall Fight, We shall Win (India)*

This 56-minute documentary was made by a coalition of progressive education activists known as the All India Forum for the Right to Education (AIFRTE). The AIFRTE<sup>5</sup> was established formally in 2009 to oppose the ongoing commercialisation and commodification of public education. Their campaign for educational equality is centered on the vision of a public - fully-free and state-funded - Common School System based on Constitutional values of democracy, egalitarianism, socialism, and secularism (Thapliyal, 2014).

The film documents the history of popular struggles for public education. The narrative of the film is organised around a chronological and critical history of social mobilisations for universal education. It begins with the contributions of precolonial and colonial social reform movements and ends with the passage of the 2009 Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (hereafter referred to as the RTE Act). The film documents the establishment of universal and free education in various

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4 <https://vimeo.com/41994760>

5 It currently includes 45 member organisations and social movements located in 20 out of 29 states in the country with decades of experience in collective struggles for economic, social and environmental justice (see also Author, 2014).

regions of pre-Independence India. Drawing on national heroes such as Jyotirao and Jyotiba Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh, it places a progressive vision of public education at the heart of the anti-colonial struggle. It then recounts the persistent failure of the leaders of independent India to observe a Constitutional mandate to promote educational and social equality through the expansion of a free, secular and democratic public education system.

In this context, the RTE Act is presented as a severe dilution of both the Constitutional mandate and human rights as understood in the international framework. The weakness of this legislation is attributed to the growing influence of right-wing economic and cultural forces in the country. These include global and local market reformers as well as the ultra-nationalist *Hindutva* movement which claims that India is and should be a Hindu state. This historical movement adopted the saffron colour for their clothing and therefore the *Hindutva* movement is also often referred to as the *saffronisation* movement by critics on the Left of the political spectrum.

The film also documents one of the largest political actions organised by the AIFRTE coalition known as the 2014 National March for the Struggle for Education (*Shiksha Sangarsh Yatra*). During this March, two thousand activists travelled from all over India to meet on December 4 in the central Indian city of Bhopal. The goal of the March was to raise awareness and mobilise communities against the right-wing assault on public education. Bhopal was selected as the destination city to show solidarity with the thirty-year struggle for justice for the victims of the Union Carbide chemical plant gas leak. The March also demonstrated solidarity with civil rights struggles in North-Eastern India.

The film has three main narrators along with AIFRTE activists from socially marginalised groups from all over India. In doing so, it celebrates the linguistic and cultural diversity that is currently being undermined by the *Hindutva* movement. In addition to testimonies of educational discrimination and exclusion, these activist voices showcase a vast multilingual repository of protest poetry, song, and theater known as *jangeet* (people's music).

The Indian documentary was made by a committee comprising three members of the AIFRTE Secretariat and one representative from Avakash Nirmitti, a not-for-profit group of independent documentary film makers. AIFRTE representatives included two university professors (one retired, one current) and a journalist. None of the committee members had prior experience with making a documentary film about education although everyone had extensive experience speaking and writing about educational and social inequality. The footage for the film was drawn from a range of sources including archival pictures of anti-colonial protests, AIFRTE posters and pamphlets, videos taken during the National March to Bhopal, and video footage of cultural performances during the three-day meeting in Bhopal. The film cost AIFRTE Rs. 3 lakh (approximately AUS\$6000) with most of the funds going towards the cost of renting high quality camera equipment and technical services. Dissemination of the film began in early 2016. It is currently available in two versions – English and English with Hindi subtitles and is being circulated through DVDs, community screenings and the AIFRTE Youtube channel<sup>6</sup>. In the next section, I analyse key messages in the films about the local and global actors and processes that promote privatization in India and the USA. In addition, both films argue that privatized schooling perpetuates educational and social inequality and discrimination. I also identify the different kinds of communication strategies and technologies used to construct and convey these messages through film.

### **Activist Media Representations of Privatisation**

#### **All India for the Right to Education, India**

The central narrative in the Indian film centres on the failure of the Indian government to realise its promise to deliver universal, free education. For poor children as well as those from historically excluded social groups (again based on caste, gender, ability etc.), access to quality formal education has remained a distant dream sixty years after Independence.

**Privatisation Actors and Processes:** The film names local and global proponents of privatization who enjoy disproportionate influence with India policymakers. In particular, the film highlights the dominance of the World Bank in national

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOvWr8YflJPAmPR1umak\\_zA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOvWr8YflJPAmPR1umak_zA)

policymaking after the introduction of structural adjustment programmes in the eighties (Sadgopal, 2009; Kumar, 2014). These programmes deployed the rhetoric of economic efficiency and cost savings to justify the decision to systematically slash funding on public education.

For instance, the AIFRTE in Figure 1 likens the adoption of pro-market policies advocated by international financial institutions and corporations to the colonization of India by the first multinational corporation in the modern world – the East India Company. The poster depicts the arrival of World Bank and World Trade Organization officials, accompanied by wealthy foreign investors to a red carpet welcome from Parliamentary politicians. The red carpet as well as the placards list all the economic conditionalities that accompany foreign aid and investment beginning with the downsizing of the public sector. Instead of social welfare, market reforms or liberalization require the state to protect and advance the interests of international capital

FIGURE 1– Welcome Back toWTO-GATS



Figure 1 Welcome back WTO-GATS



This poster highlights the decision of the Indian government to implement WB prescriptions to establish a nationwide low-cost nonformal primary education programme for out-of-school children. Known as *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA, Education for All), it delivered low-quality education through multigrade teaching and parateachers and allowed the government to claim that it had achieved universal primary education. Introduced without public debate, these reforms further neglected struggling government schools and eventually created the ideal conditions for the entry of for-profit education providers who had previously restricted themselves to the big cities (Sadgopal, 2009; Kumar, 2014).

Through this narrative, the film represents the RTE Act as an initiative that has coopted the language of rights to further privatise schooling (see also Thapliyal, 2012). It contravenes the Constitutional mandate to universalize basic education for all children because it excludes children aged between 0 to 6 years and above 14 years. It fails to expand public schooling and instead requires all private schools to maintain 25 per cent reservations in Class One for children living in proximity to the school. These seats are paid for by with public funding and have therefore been likened to voucher reforms in the USA which also facilitated the transfer of public monies to the private sector under the rhetoric of choice and competition (Klees, 2008). Through this narrative, the film highlights the undemocratic processes through which the RTE legislation was influenced by multinational Indian corporations such as the Birlas and the Ambanis who stand to profit from the expansion of private education (see e.g. Sadgopal, 2009; Nambissan and Ball, 2010).

The distorted conception of rights that informs the RTE Act is conveyed through a poster (see Figure 2) entitled - The injustice of the RTE Act. It depicts an unbalanced weighing scale to convey the multiple forms of inequality exacerbated by the RTE Act. The text at the bottom on the poster states - RTE denies equality promised by Constitution!

FIGURE 2 – The Injustice of RTE Act



Figure 2 AIFRTE poster

Educational and social inequality: The lived experience of the neglect of public education and the expansion of privatisation are communicated through the experiences of social groups that have historically faced discrimination and exclusion including students, parents and educators from Adivasi (indigenous), Dalit, and impoverished backgrounds. Through interviews and various forms of political art such as poetry, songs and skits, the film presents testimonies from parents and students who have experienced unequally education. One of the most powerful testimonies in the Indian film comes from Nasribai, an Adivasi activist and mother from the impoverished central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh:

“We have no facilities of health and education at our homes. We do not have money. The government does not care... they are just selling health and education. We have schools but they do not have teachers. When

teachers come, they only come for one hour. Children do not get midday meals. They do not have exams from class one to class eight. They just roam around the jungle. The government is snatching our right to water-forest-land . They build dams on our lands but there is no compensation. They produce electricity from the dams. But we do not get it.”

Multiple voices from university-based student movements across India are also privileged because higher education is a key site of struggle for educational access and equity for groups like Dalits and Adivasis. Unregulated privatisation since the 1980s has ensured that access to tertiary education continues to be determined by caste as well as purchasing power (see e.g. Kamat, 2011). In addition to campus-based struggles for access and equity, many progressive student groups have also supported larger popular struggles for economic, cultural, political and environmental justice. In the last four years particularly, university students have placed themselves at the frontline of the resistance against the Hindutva movement, particularly efforts to *saffronise* Indian education and culture (AICSS, 2017).

### **Grassroots Education Movement, USA**

The American film rejects discourses which promote a business or market-driven approach to education reform. As previously discussed, the film critiques the specific kinds of privatization enacted on NYC public schools by the administration of Mayor Bloomberg including the promotion of charter schools, high stakes standardized testing, and attacks on teachers unions. It documents educational and social inequalities exacerbated by these reforms and highlights the lack of democratic participation in policy-making and governance. These narratives are framed and situated in relation to historical and contemporary social justice struggles including the Civil Rights movement and the activism of the Chicago Teachers Union respectively (see e.g. Gutstein and Lipman, 2013).

Privatisation actors and processes: The film highlights Bloomberg’s close ties to corporate reformers particularly high-profile supporters of charter schools who featured prominently in *Waiting for Superman* such as Success Academy CEO Eva Moskowitz, Harlem Children Zone CEO and founder Geoffrey

Canada, and former Washington D.C. Superintendent Michelle Rhee.

The film narrates how these corporate reformers are part of a powerful and wealthy network backed by corporate philanthropists such as Bill Gates and Eli Broad and hedge fund investors pushing market reforms on urban poor and working class communities across the nation including in Chicago and New Orleans. The film also underlines the ways in which President Obama and his Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have supported the expansion of charter schools and other corporate reforms through federal legislation such as Race to the Top. Through posters with messages such as -- Banks got bailed out, schools got sold out (see Figure 3) viewers are reminded about the government response to the Global Financial Crisis where banks with irresponsible lending practices were rescued by the government despite the tremendous cost to the public exchequer.

FIGURE 3 – Banks got bailed out



Charter schools are presented as particularly undemocratic institutions with parent activists speaking to the absence of transparency and accountability in charter school governance. Twenty minutes into the film, the screen is filled with the following text: “Funded with public tax dollars charter schools are managed by private boards and corporations with minimal oversight”. Parent Nahisa McCoy paints an evocative picture when she states:

“This is supposed to be a democracy. It is not supposed to be some tyrant and his cronies running around dictating what we should teach our kids when the reality is they don’t even visit our communities, or any other communities like us. This is not Staten Island or Bayridge ... and the truth of the matter is that we won’t catch them on a 61 bus coming to see us.”

Educational and social inequality: The narrative about the experience of privatisation is told through the experiences of NYC parents, high school students, and public school teachers. The film emphasizes the multiple forms of inequality perpetuated by the introduction of charter schools. Testimonies from students and teachers reveal the extreme disparities in the facilities and resources afforded to two schools housed in the same building. Known as colocation, this policy forced public schools to give up their space – rentfree - to for-profit charter schools. To underline the impact of this initiative on public schools, the film cites the statistic that 2 out of 3 charter schools in NYC are collocated in public school buildings. A Jamaica High School student speaking at rally states:

“We don’t have music but there is a new piano upstairs. But it doesn’t belong to JH, it belongs to the new school upstairs. Wait a minute, we did get something new - we got metal detectors”.

Other high school students speak about the devastating impact of cutbacks and school closures on their lives and communities. One Robeson High student states that ‘cutting programs puts students back on the streets’; another likens closing schools to ‘taking our life support’. A teacher from PS241 tells the story of how primary school children were compelled to move to makeshift classrooms in the cold basement of their school building to make place for the Harlem Success Academy Charter School. In a street rally, NY Senator Bill Perkins reminds the crows: “colocation is eviction. Remember that ... it doesn’t mean sharing, it means displacement”.

Teachers voices: The film foregrounds the realities of NYC public school teachers whose voices and experiences were omitted from *Waiting for Superman* and more broadly, from dominant education discourse (Weiner, 2013). These teachers

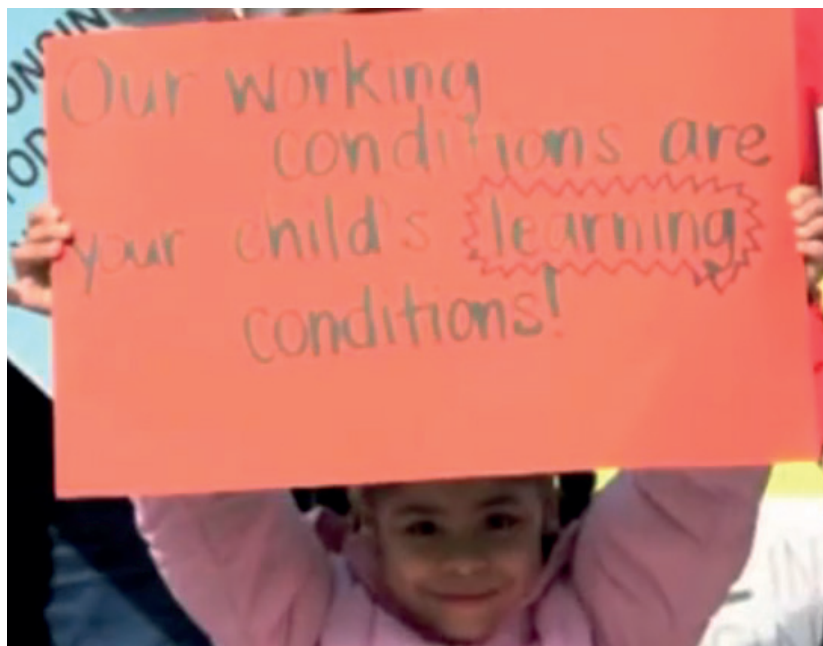
talk about why they defend public education. One of the filmmakers and Brooklyn teacher Mollie Bruhn states:

“Everyone is guaranteed – regardless of race, socioeconomic status, family situation, neighbourhood, everyone is guaranteed a free and quality public education.”

Teachers also critique simplistic comparisons between the USA and Finland which performs well on international standardized tests. Narrator Brian Jones reminds viewers that teachers in Finland enjoy better working conditions because the unions are strong and they work to keep class sizes low and prevent high stakes testing from driving teaching. He also cites statistics which show that Finland has significantly lower levels of child poverty compared the USA. Teacher Sam Coleman explains the detrimental impacts of high stakes standardised testing on children and asks bureaucrats: “Why aren’t your tests responsive to what real educators know is good for our children?”.

These voices are complemented with images of posters used during protests with messages such as - Our working conditions are your learning conditions’ (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4 – Our working conditions



In summary, the Indian film presents a broad critique of educational privatisation while the American film critiques the processes of privatisation related to charter schools. The Indian film draws on historical anti-colonial educational discourses as well as the language of human rights to frame their vision for public education and document the historical betrayal of citizens by their state. The U.S. film warns against silver bullet solutions for public education reform and calls for the democratization of education reform. Teacher and narrator Brian Jones highlights the distance between teachers and policymakers when he likens Bloomberg's policies to bombs –

“The powers that be in education really don't seem to care about the actual experience of teaching – policy making is like launching missiles -they sit far away in some kind of control tower and they make decisions about what will be – it's like they push a button and launch a policy missile.”

An understanding of public education, and more broadly, knowledge as contested domain is clearly manifest in both films. In the next section, I focus on how activists deconstruct a key cultural logic used to justify and legitimise educational privatization, namely the logic of choice. Each film contests the dominant logic that competition between public and private schools benefits parents and students by offering them choice. In recent years, the private school lobby has targeted this message to students and parents from historically excluded groups based on race, caste, indigeneity, as well as class. These films show that in reality access to private schooling for children from these backgrounds is more about chance than choice. At the same time, edubusinesses that seek to profit from these communities have shown a marked lack of responsiveness to these forms of cultural and social difference.

### **Choice, Chance and (Cultural) Difference**

The logic of school choice has been deployed by market reformers to normalize unequal education and perpetuate the narrative that private is always better than public. In the USA, low-income families have been provided with choice through initiatives such as charter schools and vouchers. In India, educational entrepreneurs have invested heavily in the concept of low- fee or budget private schools for the poor.

The logic of competition-choice sacrifices equitable access in favour of market-style competition among schools as the best way to make schools more innovative, equitable and efficient (Klees, 2008). Choice is accompanied and supported by another cultural logic that legitimizes unequal provision of education – merit. The logic of merit helps to make invisible historical and current institutionalized inequalities in educational access and experience shaped by social locations of race/ethnicity/indigeneity, class, gender, ability, and so forth.

From this perspective, the persistent failure of students from these social groups can be explained by limitations or deficits (of talent, work ethic, values and so forth) in these individual students as a consequence of their socio-cultural location (Oakes, Rogers, and Lipton, 2006). These two cultural logics ensure that a third logic underlying capitalism remains unquestioned – scarcity. This logic claims that there are simply not enough resources available to states to support public services, and therefore that the market is better positioned to provide all goods and services including basic services such as education and healthcare (Klees, 2008). As human rights advocates have pointed out, to privilege *access* rather than the *right* to education, reveals that market reformers do not recognize education as a human right (Klees and Thapliyal, 2007).

### **Chance not choice**

Both films reveal that neoliberal logics of choice actually function as logics of chance where access to apparently higher quality private education schools is reduced to a matter of luck or to use language from the films – a matter of lottery. In the American film a Black male adult addressing a community meeting about charter schools raises the following question: “Why do our kids have to win a lottery ticket [to charter schools] to get a bonafide education? We are American citizens.”

In the Indian film, activists sing:  
“How many children will go to ‘big’ schools by lottery?  
How will the rest of the children eat?  
What kind of law divides and discriminates?  
How can you call it a good law?  
Some children will study till Class 8 – how will they go  
to class 9, 10, 11, 12 and college?”



If it puts ‘breaks’ on education, how can you call it a good law?  
Think about it my brother, try to understand my brother.”<sup>7</sup>

The song reminds listeners that the failure on the part of the government to expand free, public secondary education through the 2009 Right to Education Act creates ideal conditions for educational privatisation. Even states with historically strong public education systems have chosen to neglect these schools (Kumar, 2014).

Faced with underresourced public schools, poor parents presented with a choice-less choice between dysfunctional government schools and budget or low-fee private schools for the poor which have mushroomed with little regulation all over rural and semi-urban India (see e.g. the scholarship of Prachi Srivastava). Poor parents also face the difficult choice of determining which child has demonstrated sufficient academic promise to receive the private schooling. In the film, teenage student activists perform a skit to challenge the pervasive cultural belief that private is always better by showing how these schools too fail poor rural children. The skit shows how low-fee private schools exploit the desperation of poor parents to access English language education in the hope that it will raise their family out of poverty. The reality is that these fee-charging schools offer an environment of rote-learning and punitive discipline in which few children succeed.

### **No place for difference**

The logic of choice argues that competition compels schools to become more innovative and responsive to diverse learner needs. The well-documented reality of course is that for-profit education entrepreneurs ‘skim’ for high achieving children and weed out children who cost more to educate because of their learning needs (Klees, 2008). Both films highlight the inability or unwillingness of for-profit education providers to respond to learner and cultural diversity through curricula, pedagogy or school organisation.

In NYC, Black and Latino mothers of children with autism and other forms of special needs share their experiences of

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<sup>7</sup> Unattributed. Translated from Hindi by author, no subtitles provided.

discrimination in charter schools. Black mother Lydia Bellahcene states “children like mine are not welcome ...they are treated like garbage”. Jessica Santos and Jess Smalley had their children directly turned away by high-profile charters such as Harlem Academy (of Geoffrey Canada fame) on the grounds that the schools did not have the facilities to support special needs learners. Leslie Ann Byfield’s son received no support an entire year. Instead he was subject to rigid and humiliating disciplinary procedures such as being told to sit on the floor outside the classroom until he had ‘earned the right to enter the classroom’. These testimonies are supported by findings from a Stanford University evaluation study which shows that charter schools have disproportionately low numbers of special needs students, and English Language Learners (ELL), and learners living below the poverty line.

In the USA, the neoliberal discourse of choice has merged with the neoconservative discourse of returning to a romanticised past to reinforced social hierarchies and exacerbated social disadvantage (Apple, 2004). In India, neoconservative discourse has gone much further in its efforts to saffronise Indian education (see also Bénéï, 2008). As readers may know, the Hindutva movement seeks to promote uppercaste and upperclass Hindu male worldviews and values over all others - through all means available to them, including a sophisticated media apparatus and physical violence. In education, these reforms have included the rewriting of school and higher education curriculum to delete any favourable references to Muslim history and culture, appoint Hindutva ideologues to key administrative positions and severely constrain academic freedom.

These reforms have been put into process with little debate and even less critique from the mainstream news media. The film however refuses to stay silent about these systematic efforts to remake history and national identity. The process of saffronisation is described by former Professor Madhu Prasad in the following terms:

“What they mean by Indianising education is to introduce a process of Sanskritisation which lionises uppercaste thinking – and to develop the idea that all other religions that are part of the history of this subcontinent are somehow foreign and not part of our ... national life”.

In these efforts, the Hindutva movement seeks to undermine the work done by progressive anti-colonial activists to delegitimise modes of oppression around caste, gender, and religion and lay the foundations of a secular and egalitarian nation-state. These discourses of cultural supremacy are also effective in masking elite capture of politics and economy and extreme social inequality (Hasan, 2016).

### **Concluding thoughts**

At the time of writing this article, a disturbing alliance between neoliberals and neoconservatives dominates education politics in both India and the USA. The new Right turn in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in both these countries means that the struggle for public education and indeed the ideal of the public or the commons is only likely to deepen in the near future.

Michael Apple (2009: 240) writes that “Conservative modernisation has radically reshaped the common-sense of society. It has worked in every sphere - the economic, the political, and the cultural - to alter the basic categories we use to evaluate our institutions and our public and private lives... It shows how important cultural struggles are.” The activist documentary films discussed in this article are exemplars of the kinds of cultural struggles that are being waged in defense of the public in all its manifestations. Activists draw on diverse forms of knowledge including experiential or lived experience, academic research, and political art to construct their narratives about private and public education.

These media can be viewed as activist because they present counternarratives to disrupt framings of education problems and solutions which commercialise and commodify education. In particular, the choice to foreground narrators from subaltern social locations represents a powerful way for activists to contest deficit discourses about historically excluded groups and reposition them as legitimate actors in ongoing policy debates about school reform. They counter dominant representations of a public education system in perpetual crisis by documenting the failures of school privatisation. They deconstruct underlying logics of privatisation to show how market-based reform contributes to the construction and reproduction of educational and social inequality in historically unequal societies. Last but not the least, these films offer

alternative discourses of public education centered on values of equity, diversity, and democracy.

To conclude, these films provide insights into the knowledge struggles that underly ongoing debates about the problems and possibilities for public education. To paraphrase Michael Apple (2009), both films compel viewers to reflect on questions such as: why education? Why public education? And whose knowledge counts? These are questions that are intrinsic to decolonising maps of reality and imagining more relational and cooperative (as opposed to individualistic and competitive) forms of democracy and development.

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## **ALTO AL SIMCE: THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST STANDARDIZED TESTING IN CHILE<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article describes the Alto al SIMCE (Stop SIMCE) campaign which aims to end the national standardized tests in Chile. In the context of the mobilizations for education in Chile, this campaign was successful in publicly and massively questioning the most used evaluative instrument in one of the most neoliberal educational systems in the world. The strategy of this action group was characterized by a strong criticism of the negative consequences of the test. It also intensively used digital social networks to break the information siege in the country. Our analysis states that Alto al SIMCE took advantage of contingency and generated alliances with the student movement in order to achieve government and media recognition. In this sense, the campaign made visible the strength of the resistance against the current educational system in the country, where new social media played a fundamental role, re-framing the discussion about the quality of education. However, the lack of human and economic resources prevented the development of Alto al SIMCE into a more active media campaign, capable of ending the SIMCE test.

**RESUMEN** Este artículo describe la campaña Alto al SIMCE, una iniciativa para poner fin en Chile a las pruebas nacionales estandarizadas que afectan a maestros, estudiantes y a la educación pública. En el contexto de las movilizaciones para la educación en Chile, esta campaña fue exitosa en cuestionar públicamente y masivamente el instrumento de evaluación más utilizado en uno de los sistemas educativos más neoliberales del mundo. La estrategia de este grupo de acción se caracterizó por una fuerte crítica de las consecuencias negativas de la prueba, pero también por el uso intensivo de las redes sociales digitales

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para romper el cerco de información en el país. Este movimiento hizo visible la fuerza de la resistencia contra el actual sistema educativo en el país, donde las nuevas redes sociales jugaron un papel fundamental, re-enmarcando la discusión sobre la calidad de la educación. Nuestro análisis afirma que a pesar de que la falta de recursos humanos y económicos impide que se convierta en una campaña mediática más activa, Alto Al SIMCE es capaz de aprovechar la contingencia, generar alianzas con el movimiento estudiantil, y lograr el reconocimiento del gobierno y de los medios de comunicación. En este sentido, la campaña hizo visible la fuerza de la resistencia en contra del actual sistema educativo del país, en donde las nuevas redes sociales jugaron un rol fundamental re-enmarcando la discusión sobre la calidad de la educación.

**KEYWORDS** Measurement, Action, Resistance, Mediatisation, Mobilisation

### **Introduction**

For more than a decade, Chile has been experiencing a series of social mobilizations to address a widespread discontent with the country's educational system and the negative consequences of the neoliberal reforms implemented in the nineteen eighties by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In 2006, secondary students led the well-known Penguin Revolution named after the dark blue and white color of their school uniforms. Five years later, the student movement of 2011 drew millions of people to the streets during seven months of intense popular mobilizations. This movement has influenced the policy agenda for public education and sparked new debates about proposed reforms for teacher training, school and higher education.

The *Alto al SIMCE* (Stop the SIMCE) campaign emerged in this context of increased social concern for public education. The campaign demanded the elimination of the *Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación* [Education Quality Measurement System], that consists of a battery of standardized tests that measure student learning. This test is taken every year by students in grades 4, 8 and 10, and encompasses subjects like mathematics, language and communication, English, social and natural sciences, and history.

SIMCE was created in the late eighties by the Education Minister of Augusto Pinochet, Juan Antonio Guzmán. Standardized testing was introduced to Chile with the neoliberal

rationale that competition promotes education quality for all students. SIMCE was presented as an evaluation tool which would provide information to help parents compare schools – public and private - and choose the best institutions for their children. Thus, it was intended to promote the neoliberal principle of choice or the “freedom to choose” and further undermine a neglected public education system.

In 2013, the government incorporated test results into the existing system to rank and classify schools. In this new system, the results of the SIMCE represented seventy three percent of the total classification score. High-performing schools received recognition and financial rewards. The schools with the lowest rankings, usually public schools, faced the risk of losing the government recognition usually resulting in school closure. However, test results did not take into account one of the biggest differences between public and private schools in Chile. Namely the fact that private schools were highly selective in their admissions procedures while public schools served all students, particularly those from backgrounds of poverty. Pino et al. (2016) highlight the correlation between SIMCE score and family income and the disproportionately adverse effects of closing low performing schools on the poorest students. Instead, consistent with market ideology, consistently poorer results from public schools were attributed to poor administration and decision-making by school staff (Campos-Martínez y Guerrero, 2016).

In 2013, a group of public education activists launched the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign with the argument that this test was pressuring students and educational communities to compete, harming public education. Thus, the campaign became the first attempt to publicly and systematically question this mechanism of pressure on schools (Flórez, 2013). This article focuses on the role of media in campaign initiatives to reframe discussion about public issues in education. The central objective of this article is to document this particular struggle for public education and learn from its strategies of mobilization using new and traditional media. In order to develop this objective, we firstly emphasize the importance of the media in the study of educational policies and the relationship between cyberactivism and social movement. Secondly, we describe in detail the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign as an example of media activism for public

education. Finally, we conclude with several reflections about this experience of struggle for public education.

### **Mediatization of public education**

Scholarship on the power and influence of media in society is concerned with the ability of news media to set the agenda and frame the themes in the public discussion. These agenda setting and framing operations have been extensively studied in political communication (Esser and Strömbäck, 2014), but they have only recently become a subject of analysis in the educational field (Rawolle, 2010).

Media, especially print media, play a fundamental role in the debate, evaluation, and implementation of educational policies. Educational governance is decentralized and various actors, including media, work to promote changes or to keep the status quo (Ball and Exley, 2010). This process is known as the mediatization of education (Couldry, 2012; Lingard and Rawolle, 2004) and is an emerging area of study in Latin America (Robert, 2012; Santa Cruz Grau and Olmedo, 2012). In this discussion, media are a forum that allows the participation of multiple actors, and at the same time, they are involved in the debate as political actors and social institutions.

The 2011 student movement in Chile understood that without media it was very difficult to achieve social adhesion and to push the boundaries of the political discussion about education (Cabalin, 2014). In a country where the neoliberal consensus has become common sense, the success of student mobilizations can be explained in part by re-framing the public debate about education (Santa Cruz G. and Olmedo, 2012). This article approaches social problems as social construction where the dominant framing of a social problem can be attributed to three general causes: claims-maker activities, media practices, and cultural themes or resonances” (Benson and Saguy, 2005, p.235). In the case of *Alto al SIMCE*, we can observe that these three processes occur. The activists used a powerful media strategy with intensive use of information and communication technologies. Traditional media could not ignore this tactic in the context of a political opportunity created by the 2011 movement which had ensured unprecedented attention and support for public education in the country.

In their study of the mediatisation of educational policies, Bob Lingard and Shaun Rawolle used Bourdieu's field theory to explain the interactions between the fields of education and the media. Rawolle and Lingard (2010) explain that the study of mediatisation focuses on "how individuals or groups within specific fields produce practices involving the media as a strategic way of shaping or changing practices in fields beyond the media, such as politics and education policy" (p. 271). In the case of education, these practices involve the development of new strategies, positions, discourses, and concepts in the policy process on local or global scales.

From this perspective, "media reports about these [test] evaluations have encouraged systems to become more cynical and focus on comparative performance rather than substantive improvement" (Lingard and Sellar, 2013, p. 645). Thus, information about the performance of students on standardized tests acts as a catalyst for both mediatic and systemic reactions, conditioning the discourses and practices of the political and educational world (Lingard and Sellar, 2013). In this sense, mediatisation, as a theoretical construction, "can be used in studies in which the practices of different agents in the media are intricately linked in struggles for social power in other social fields, such as politics and in our case, educational policy production" (Rawolle and Lingard, 2010, p. 273).

The study of mediatisation encompasses the appropriation of digital resources in contexts of social mobilization (Peña et al., 2016). Our conceptual approach to the forms of online activism employed by the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign is informed by the scholarship on cyberactivism. Online activist communities defy the imbalance of power and/or may criticize certain ideologies or situations that generate inequities (Castells, 2012). In this sense, any site of collective struggle or social movement are sites for the production of meaning and knowledge as explored in the Introduction to this Special Issue and previous issues of this journal (Thapliyal, 2014).

We also view digital media not only as tools of political tools but also as sites that constitute particular kinds of participation and formation of collective struggle:

Social media [] has not only provided an unlimited global means of communication and debate for burgeoning social movements, but has also shaped the manner in which one participates in activism. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are not outlets for social movements, but have determined the way in which social movements are constructed and disseminated (Chapman, 2016, p. 26).

Thus, participation, behind the screens or on the streets, becomes a key aspect when speaking about cyberactivism, because it implies a certain degree of affiliation, collective identity, and sense of membership (Jenkins, Ito and Boyd, 2016). For a social movement to take place, there has to be at least a sense of community from its participants. Jankowski (2006) approaches this notion of community and its regeneration through mediated<sup>2</sup> forms of communication. Henry Jenkins (2006) uses the term “participatory politics”, defined as the “point where participatory culture meets political and civic participation, where political change is promoted through social and cultural mechanisms rather than through established political institutions”. The power of networked culture is such that “even forms of expression that might had a very limited audience in the past now travel through networks and thus have bigger social consequences” (Jenkins et al 2016:10).

Our analysis will show that the use of media by the campaign played a key role in generating a sense of community and belonging in multiple ways across a diverse community including academics, secondary school students and teachers, university students, prominent public individuals, and others. In addition, we identify and discuss particular forms of digital media-based participatory cultures such as those produced by activist youth (Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd, 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> It refers to the role that media plays in the contemporary world, where most of the people have to resort to media to inform themselves and communicate with other people. This non-direct type of communication implies that we have access to an important portion of reality only through media representations.

## **Methodology**

This article draws on interviews with key informants who participated in the campaign, documents shared by the campaign through its online social networks, and on a previous study about representations of the SIMCE in Chilean news media (insert citation here). The researchers were not members of the campaign. We interviewed current spokespersons of the campaign: two education professors and one primary school teacher referred to as Spokesperson 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The interviews were aimed at understanding the Alto al SIMCE campaign's experience with the media and social networks. The three interviews were semi-structured and each lasted for about an hour.

We also studied the contents of all virtual platforms through which the campaign communicates with its audiences, that is, its web page and social networks accounts. Media articles in which the campaign had been mentioned, the informative contents that had been produced by the campaign, and the messages produced by their followers were all analyzed<sup>3</sup>.

Given the diversity of the news media landscape in Chile, we also found it useful to incorporate findings from a previous quantitative study about media representations of the SIMCE in two influential national print newsmedia – *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* (Florez et al. 2015).

## **The news media landscape in Chile**

The Alto al SIMCE campaign recognized and engaged with the power of both print news media as well as relatively newer digital news media outlets. *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* were referred to as “traditional” news media by campaign spokespersons. These two newspapers have the largest circulation and the largest advertising revenue of all the print news media in Chile (Chilean Association of Media Agencies, 2015). They are owned by two politically conservative families which operate the two largest media conglomerates in the country - El Mercurio S.A. and Copesa Group. In Latin America, Chile stands out for the degree of concentration of ownership of media media (Observacom, 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> This qualitative and quantitative content was recovered from the open and accessible twitter feed with the help of NVivo 11 software.

Digital news media such as *El Mostrador.cl*, *El Desconcierto.cl*, *El Ciudadano.cl* and *El Quinto Poder.cl*, are considered as “non-traditional” due to the novelty of their format. They are also viewed differently because they are not owned by large business corporations. For instance, *El Mostrador* was the first Chilean digital newspaper. It belongs to Plaza S.A. a business group with a majority of shares in the real estate industry, including the chain of shopping centers known in Chile as “Mall Plaza”.

The other three digital news outlets mentioned above have diverse group of owners. *El Desconcierto* was created in 2011 by a group of professionals from the social sciences. It belongs to the independent editorial group called *Ediciones y Publicaciones El Buen Aire S.A.* *El Ciudadano* is a biweekly national circulation newspaper and a digital website created in 2005 by the journalist Bruno Sommer and the Journalistic Society called *El Ciudadano*. *El Quinto Poder* is a news website where users provide the news which means that everyone can register on the system and send opinion columns, photographs or videos. This news website was created by *Democracia y Desarrollo*, a foundation presided by the ex-Chilean president Ricardo Lagos Escobar.

### **Alto al SIMCE: Origins and alliances**

In 2012, various academics and graduate students inside and outside Chile created a virtual network to discuss the restrictions on the right to education. Some of them exchanged emails and messages on virtual social networks for years before meeting in person. In October 2012, a collaborative working group of ten people was formed under the name “Collective for a New Education”. The Collective was established partially in response to the establishment of the Education Quality Agency (ACE, *Agencia de Calidad de la Educación*) to improve educational equity and quality through the use of standardized testing.

The members of the collective were convinced that an informed discussion about educational equity and quality could contribute to the end of high-stakes testing. Thus, they decided to start the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign as a way to demonstrate the negative consequences of testing to students, teachers, and parents. The long-term purpose was to destabilize the common sense that maintains the market-oriented educational system in Chile.

The core team of AS grew to include twenty four education academics located in fields like anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and economy. Since 2012, the group meets once a week. Every January, they have a planning day to define campaign objectives and strategy. All the tasks of the campaign are distributed in an equitable way and according to the needs of the moment. The only formal role is the one of the spokesperson. This role has been filled by four people over the last four years, three of whom remain active in the campaign.

The Collective observed that teachers and students were unhappy about SIMCE but that their discourse was relatively less articulate than discussions taking place in academic and political spheres. They came up with the term “The Bothered” (*Los Molestos*) to describe the unarticulated dissatisfaction that characterized this section of the public. According to Spokesperson 1, “something about the educational system bothered them, although not all of them had a clear discourse to express themselves”. Therefore, the campaign made the strategic decision to first build a relationship with other progressive education activists in order to establish a presence to the mass media.

The first official activity of the campaign took place in August 2013. It brought together a diverse group of educational organizations to talk about the implications of the test for the Chilean educational system. Participants included representatives from student and teacher unions such as *Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile*, CONFECH, [Students Confederation of Chile], the *Coordinadora Nacional de Estudiantes Secundarios*, CONES, [National Coordinator of Secondary Students], the *Asamblea Coordinadora de Estudiantes Secundarios*, ACES, [Coordinator Assembly of Secondary Students<sup>4</sup>], and members of the Teacher Union.

The objective for this meeting was to begin to build a common discourse about the problems associated with the test across

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<sup>4</sup> The ACES emerged in 2000 as a dissident group of the Federation of Secondary Students of Santiago de Chile, FESES, which they criticized for their closeness to political parties. CONES emerged in 2011 with the intention to reestablish the connection between Chile’s high school students and political parties. ACES is open to all secondary students but CONES only works with leaders of organized groups of students.



disconnected political spheres. This common discourse focused on the disadvantages of the test for teachers community and students, specifically in the stress produced by competitiveness among schools. (Pino et al. 2016:343).

The Collective also began to build alliances with key groups and organizations involved in the 2010-2014 student movement to defend public higher education against the neoliberal reforms of the Sebastián Piñera government. Press conferences were organized along with these student organizations, and articles and opinion columns were written by Alto al SIMCE members to increase media impact.

### **Reaching traditional and digital media**

The campaign developed its communication strategies based on the recognition that mainstream news media was largely in favor of SIMCE and relatedly the ideology of competition and school choice. According to Spokesperson 2, news media also encouraged the idea that private schools were better than public schools. Thus, the goal of Alto al SIMCE was to position the test as a topic of debate in the public sphere.

Table 1 provides a quantitative summary of all communication and mobilization actions undertaken by the campaign between 2013 and April 2017. This data was compiled using information provided on the campaign webpage as well as Facebook and Twitter accounts

<b>Communication Actions</b>	<b>N°</b>
Press conferences	6
Forums and open meetings at educational institutions	36
Press Publications about Alto al SIMCE	170
Expert opinion articles by Collective members	37
Declarations, videos, and documents produced by the campaign	29

Campaign members considered three of these events particularly significant which are discussed in depth here.

The first milestone for the campaign was the 2013 publication of the “Manifest for overcoming educational standardization in Chile”. This Manifest analyzed the drawbacks of educational standardization associated with the SIMCE. It was signed by 6 education researchers and published online on the website of the Center for Journalistic Research (CEJR) website<sup>5</sup> on August 29, 2013.

In addition, the campaign sought public support from Chilean academics and public intellectuals in the form of a signature petition called “Open Letter for a New Educational Evaluation System”. They drafted an open letter which sought to communicate the principles that underpinned the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign discussed previously.

The letter was signed by more than 140 academics and researchers. The first signatory to the letter was the prominent educator and newly named 2013 National Education Award winner, Beatrice Avalos. This is significant because of the contributions that Avalos has made to research about pedagogy and teachers professionalization in Chile. Avalos was responsible for the creation of a highly respected Interdisciplinary Research Program on Education at the University of Chile during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The letter received coverage in mainstream news media beginning with the conservative *El Mercurio* (Muñoz, 2013).

The third significant event was the delivery of a letter titled “New School Evaluation Model” to the Ministry of Education on June 3, 2014. The letter asked the Ministry to stop SIMCE as well as the publication of the test results for two years, in order to reconsider the whole educational quality measurement system. This action was planned to draw the attention of the news media and was inspired by the book titled *The Little Prince* written and illustrated by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

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<sup>5</sup> The website called CIPER was created in 2007. It is a non-profit foundation funded by the Copesa Group, the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundation of London. It represents itself as an investigative journalism organization free of political or partisan affiliation. In Chile it is wellknown for its investigations of tax evasion carried out by Chilean businessmen and politicians including current President Sebastián Piñera.

The book tells the story of a boy who wonders about human nature, such as love, meaning of life, friendship and loneliness, while he travels through universe. One of the greatest conclusions that he comes to is that “what is essential is invisible to the eye”. The campaign drew on this message to communicate that the value of education could not only be found through quantification and measurement of learning. It constructed the slogan “The essential is invisible to SIMCE” to communicate that the test was ignoring important values related to education because of its stress on quantitative achievement.

The letter was delivered to the Ministry located in the governmental palace known as *La Moneda* by Chilean television actor, Alonso Quinteros who has a great resemblance to the Little Prince character. The action was also supported by prominent progressive figures including Congress members and former leaders of the 2011 Student Movement. The event received widespread coverage in the news media including left- and right-wing as well as traditional and digital media organizations.

An important feature of the relationship between Alto al SIMCE and the media is the role of experts. At the beginning of the campaign, Spokesperson 1 identified a tendency for the traditional media to undervalue the position of Alto al SIMCE and other critical voices. Spokesperson 1 described the relations as follows: “The first reaction is to infantilize you, to tell you that you are having a tantrum, that you do not want tests and you do not want to be evaluated ever. Then, when they are presented with theoretical arguments they get impressed”.

At the same time, a preference for a certain kind of expert and relatedly, a particular kind of education discourse was also noted by the campaign. Spokesperson 2 described media preferred discourse in the following terms: “The media are eager to hear more technical than political arguments. So, if one is talking about a statistical correlation and they do not understand you very much, it’s fine because ‘it sounds serious’. On the other hand, when you say that the SIMCE is a tool of the education market, they ignore you or change the subject”.

Nevertheless, the campaign used the “expert bias” with the support of both national and international scholars who were

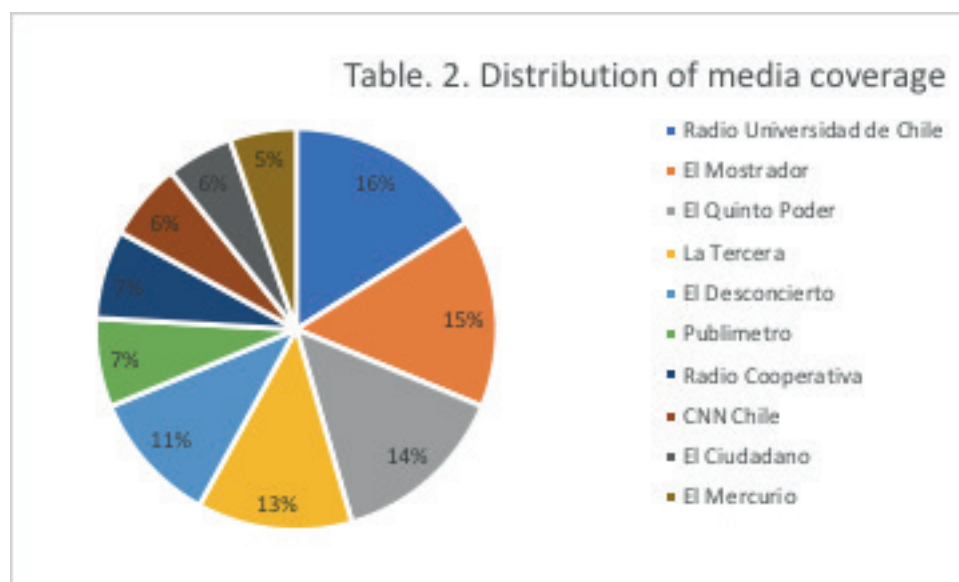
critical of high-stakes standardized testing<sup>6</sup>. National academic experts wrote opinion pieces about the negative impact of the test in education. Specifically, we found 40 opinion columns written by experts from and outside the campaign, that mentioned Alto al SIMCE, and 37 that did not mention the campaign but supported its arguments against the test.

### Cyberactivism

The internet was one of the most important media for the Alto al SIMCE campaign. It provided an opportunity to deliver messages to the public free of corporate news bias.

The campaign received more sympathetic coverage in progressive digital news outlets than in traditional news outlets. Table 2 presents the distribution of news media coverage of campaign events and publications in traditional and digital outlets. The four top media in which the campaign was published - Radio Universidad de Chile, El Mostrador, El Quinto Poder and La Tercera – together the greatest per day at a national level (Del Valle y Garín, 2015).

The campaign came to view the first three of these outlets as as important allies in their struggle.



<sup>6</sup> The campaign has received messages of support from researchers and scholars like Jennifer Greene, Stephen Ball, Michael Apple, and Pauline Lipman, who have a critical perspective about standardized tests.

The internet also allowed the campaign to reach and build networks across diverse sections of the public, particularly between students and academics. In Chile, 70 percent of the population were internet users. Within this group, people between the ages of 15 and 29, are the ones that most frequently use the internet to communicate and inform themselves (Telecommunications Subsecretariat, 2015).

The campaign used Facebook and Twitter to communicate with this population. Since it was created in August 2013, the Alto al SIMCE's Facebook page has gathered more than 17,400 "Likes" and its Twitter account, more than 3,560 followers<sup>7</sup>. Both social media platforms are used to disseminate information of interest in the form of videos, documents, and press articles accompanied by hashtags such as #SIMCE, #altoalSIMCE (Stop SIMCE) and #nodoyelSIMCE (I don't take the SIMCE).

Videos were a key component of online campaign communications and are discussed further here. In 2014, Alto al SIMCE distributed their first educational video titled "El problema del SIMCE"<sup>8</sup> [The SIMCE Problem through their social media accounts and free online videohosting site YouTube. In 2015 the campaign produced more videos with voluntary assistance from a group of young media activists called *Machete Productions*. These short videos combined the experience of researchers, teachers, and students to explain how testing negatively affected learning<sup>9</sup> and contributed to the commercialisation of public<sup>10</sup>. Other videos highlighted the negative effects of competitive testing on discrimination<sup>11</sup>,

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7 Data recovered on April 2017

8 It currently has more than 7,800 views on YouTube. Alto al Simce (2014, September 14). The SIMCE Problem [Video File]. Recovered from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6Sxp58nNe0>

9 Alto al Simce (2015, September 15). How does SIMCE affect learning? [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHyoa449tKU>

10 Alto al Simce (2015, October 1). Why is SIMCE a pillar of the education market? [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KM1w9WURMU>

11 Alto al Simce (2015, August 17). Discriminating is not educating [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVx3QOJXLnY>

bullying<sup>12</sup>, and exclusion<sup>13</sup> in schools. Currently, these videos altogether have reached more than 16,800 views on YouTube.

### **Organizing a test boycott**

By this time, the public had begun to question the relationship between the SIMCE and the quality of education. In response, shortly after starting her second term, President Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) created a Presidential Task Force to review SIMCE. The campaign was invited to make a presentation to the Task Force on August 19, 2014 where it highlighted the negative consequences of the test and advocated that it was time to “to stop, sit down and think about a new system” (Spokesperson 2).

The recommendations of the Task Force were released in January 2015 and focused exclusively on the need to provide students and teachers with more support to deal with the pressures associated with test. It is important to point out here that the test is tied to a series of federal legislations<sup>14</sup> that restrict the possibility of even small modifications. Thus, federal recognition of the campaign appeared to be limited to a willingness to dialogue rather than a willingness to consider fundamental change. Our newspaper analysis revealed that this position of minor modifications to SIMCE also characterized reporting on SIMCE in *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*.

In response, the campaign published a report called *ChangeEverything so that Nothing Changes* which was distributed through its webpage and social media networks. The report highlighted the superficial nature of the Task Force recommendations. After this experience, the group decided to adopt a new strategy and decided to make 2015 “the year of the boycott.” The online videos played a key role in campaign strategy along with more than 30 public forums and events involving AS spokespeople, teachers and students around the

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12 Alto al Simce (2015, August 9). Overwhelming is not to educate [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8Dzo8QXdn4>

13 Alto al Simce (2015, August 3). To exclude is not to educate [Video File]. Recovered from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UW9nyQDBgRo>

14 These include the General Education Act, the Education Quality Assurance Act, the Preferential School Grant Act, and the National Performance Assessment System Act, Sned.

country<sup>15</sup>. Two press conferences were held on October 6th and November 5th, to inform the media and public about the possibilities and consequences of the test boycott.

During this period, Twitter and Facebook platforms allowed the campaign to receive and provide timely information about the mobilizations occurring in schools. Social media facilitated the circulation of messages and images including memes and photos of students, parents and teachers holding posters with the slogan – *Alto al SIMCE* or Stop SIMCE. One of the most liked and shared images on Facebook came from a student in the north of the country in October of 2015. The student posted the following message - “Your standardized test does not reflect my abilities, my dreams, and the work of my teachers. I am not a statistic, nor a number. I am a boy who is wasting his precious childhood on your test”<sup>16</sup>. This post received more than 7,000 Likes and was shared more than 13,300 times.

### **Final remarks**

The *Alto al SIMCE* campaign raised questions about the benefits of the SIMCE test in the corporate news media, educational organizations, and among political authorities. After two years of boycotts, the Michelle Bachelet government eliminated two of the annual tests in 2015. This was achieved through a new media and online campaign in which two main elements operated. First, *Alto al SIMCE* positioned an activist discourse that drew the attention of students, teachers, and parents that were critical of the Chilean educational system. The campaign was particularly effective in articulating multimedia messages which resonated with these audiences and encouraged them to take concrete actions against the test.

Second, the group deployed the extensive knowledge and academic networks of its members (Insunza, 2015) to produce an expert discourse for the corporate news media and education

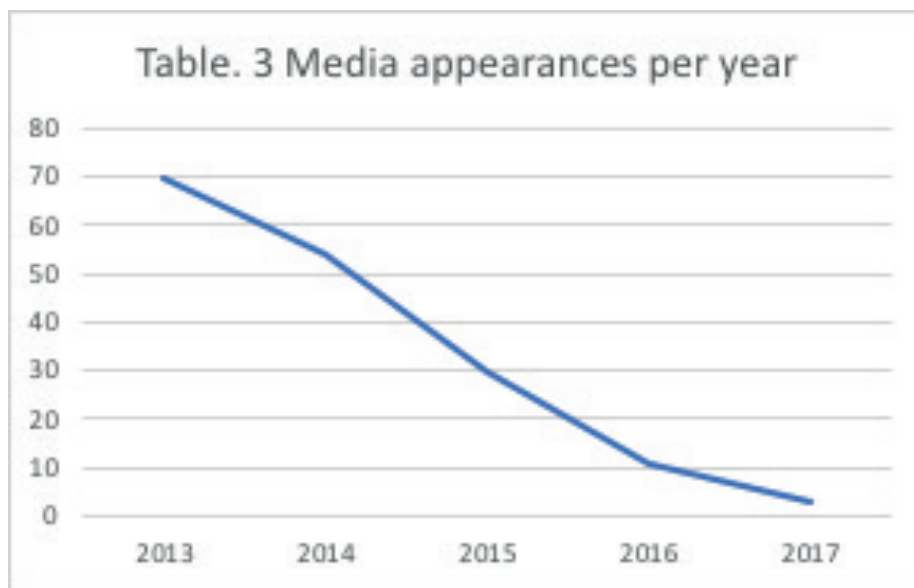
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15 These included the cities of Antofagasta, Valparaíso, Santiago, Rancagua, Concepción, Castro y Ancud, that represents the north, the center and the south of the Chilean territory.

16 Alto al Simce, (2015, October 13). Resistance: We received this photo from Diego de Almagro, in the III Region of Atacama. #AltoalSIMCE #NoDoySIMCE. Facebook status update. Recovered from: <https://www.facebook.com/altoalsimce/photos/a.619290298102539.1073741828.615175885180647/1030689950295903/?type=3&theater>

policy sector. With support from national and international scholars, the campaign produced opinion columns for online and print news media which legitimized core campaign messages.

Despite this, the campaign is far from its main goal, which is the elimination of the test. According to Spokesperson 1, the campaign's authority to critique SIMCE received greatest recognition and legitimacy from traditional news media by 2016 and has declined in 2017 (see Table 3). The shift in the relationship with traditional news media did not allow the campaign to influence how education issues were defined



by news media. The role of the campaign was limited to responding to education discourse constructed by news media. Spokesperson 3 described the relationship as follows: “We do not get to be on the media agenda when we want to, but [only] when they want us to”.

We believe that this is mainly due to two factors. From Pierre Bourdieu's (2005) perspective, the relation between *Alto al SIMCE* and the media can be understood as a tension between two fields where the media and those more powerful impose their rules on the field of media activism. The campaign has been able to adapt to traditional journalistic practices using expert discourse. However, it has also lost momentum due to ever-changing news cycles. Thus the capacity of the campaign



to influence the press and the government depends in part on the historical moment. In this case, the impact of the campaign cannot be analysed in separation from the opportunities presented by digital news media as well as the presence of other education mobilizations working to reposition the public debate around the commodification and standardization of education.

The second factor is that the campaign is strongly associated with a student movement that has declined in strength, unity and public support with the arrival of a more centrist government. According to Spokesperson 1, it was “very easy to fight” the right-wing Piñera-led government “because the message was super clear and dichotomous: them against us”. During the Michelle Bachelet government, however, campaign critiques were quickly absorbed by the official discourse.

From our perspective, therefore the main challenge of the *Alto al SIMCE* campaign, is to re-position the discourse in the current context. This is no small challenge for a campaign team made up of volunteers who must reconcile their time and energy dedicated to activism with their jobs, studies, and personal lives. The issue is quite often a lack of resources: “If I imagine successful media strategies, I think of having people who are able to publish news to position their own discourse and not respond to hegemonic discourses. At the heart, that means leading an agenda of change... And all that requires resources, people, contacts,” declared Spokesperson 2.

Nevertheless, we believe that the campaign fosters a sense of belonging that is deeply connected to a larger and longer social movement in the recent history of Chile: the mobilization for the defense of public education. Although *Alto al SIMCE* has not achieved its main goal as yet, its experience tells us that a modest activist media campaign is capable of disrupting dominant educational discourse about standardized testing.

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## **AN ETHICAL POPULISM IN EDUCATION STRUGGLES: THE MEDIA CAMPAIGNS OF THE NZEI TEACHER UNION**

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**ABSTRACT** While commonly referred to in the pejorative register due to its recent links with the far-right, the work of Ernesto Laclau and his followers has sought to re-claim populism for the progressive left. Rather than necessarily the site of an irrational and reactionary politics, Laclau conceived populism as an ‘articulatory logic’ which can potentially carry any ideology. This paper argues, through a discussion of recent media campaigns of the NZEI teacher union, that populism is a potentially useful strategy for leftist educational activists. Through clearly marking the boundaries between neoliberalism and a progressive educational ethos, the logic brings together teachers, parents and the wider public around shared cultural values. While there are ethical issues associated with a strategy which encourages simplification and the exclusion of an Other, I argue that these concerns can be mitigated against through the grounding of campaigns in widely shared ethical principles and the provision of accessible online spaces. Further, there is no ‘who’ which is excluded, but a ‘what’: a globally hegemonic system which itself has inflicted much social harm.

**KEYWORDS** Teacher unions, New Zealand, Laclau, populism, ethics

### **Introduction**

In 2012 New Zealand’s primary schooling teacher union, the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) launched the double-sided campaign *Stand Up For Kids: Protect Our Schools/Fight the GERM*. Rather than being directed against a specific government policy or issue, *SUFK/GERM* pitted two opposed visions for the future of education against each other (NZEI, 2013). On one side were the defenders of New Zealand’s ‘world class’, ‘quality and equitable public education system’. On the other, the New

Zealand Government sought to ‘create a crisis in education and impose a business model’ (NZEI, 2013, n.p.), informed by the Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM. The term GERM was coined by the Finnish education academic Pasi Sahlberg (2013), who argued that it represents an ‘educational reform orthodoxy’ (n.p.), particularly within Anglophone nations where neoliberal rationalities have become most ingrained. Within this orthodoxy, education is primarily viewed in the narrow terms of enabling economic productivity and competitiveness.

In this paper, I argue for a conceptualisation of populism which emancipates the word from its recent connections with right-wing, reactionary political movements. In doing so it becomes a potentially useful discursive strategy which can be deployed by educational activists in order to unite dispersed demands around education and other linked social justice issues. This article is structured by way of three main sections. Firstly, I locate this study within the current context of teacher union resistance to global neoliberal education reform. After which I provide a conceptual framework for what I refer to as ethical populism. In the empirical section I analyse selected media from NZEI campaigns to show the evolutionary development of an *ethical populism*.

### **Teacher Union Media Activism: A context**

As outlined by Sahlberg (2011, 2013), the GERM prioritises top-down system-change models which draw from the private sector approach to education as a profit-making business. It assumes teachers as individuals motivated only by self-interest, and who therefore need to be rendered more open to competition, standardisation, accountability and consumer choice, in order to prevent them from excluding the interests of students and parents (see Moe, 2011 for a particularly indicative example of this logic). Teachers’ professional ethics and knowledges are marginalised, as the learning process becomes reduced to the instrumental transmission of skills between ‘providers’ and ‘consumers’ (Codd, 2005). Particularly opposed and discounted in this neoliberal reconfiguration of the teacher-student relation are feminist care ethics, which, through their focus on teachers supporting each other, their communities, and the ‘emotional and physical well-being of students’ (Brickner, 2016, p. 18), are inherently anti-competitive and de-individualizing.

Also directly opposed to the individualising GERM logic are teacher unions, which are organised around the principle of collective organization in order to protect collective interests (Bascia, 2015). Hence, teacher unions have come under sustained attack with the global ascendancy of a neoliberal, marketized conception of education (Compton and Weiner, 2008). Despite such attacks, teacher unions have retained strong memberships and politicized constituencies (Bascia, 2015; Compton and Weiner, 2008; Stevenson and Mercer, 2015). However, certain issues work to constrain this undoubted political potential. For example, in the well-documented US context, teacher unions have been constrained by hierarchical, bureaucratic structures, a focus on influencing the Democratic Party and winning material gains for the membership (Uetrict 2014; Weiner, 2012). Weiner (2012, n.p.) coins this model ‘business unionism’, ‘a totally bureaucratic approach’ averse to rocking the boat politically, thus encouraging ‘member passivity’, thereby reducing teachers’ capacity to resist the GERM agenda. Further, union school site presence is eroded as power becomes centralised, leading to a growing disconnect with prescient social justice issues within their communities (Uetrict, 2014; Weiner, 2012). This has contributed to feelings of alienation from their unions (Brickner, 2016; Popiel, 2015), meaning teachers are drawn to digital platforms to articulate their ethical positions on education policy in more atomised, individualised modes (Berkovich, 2011; Brickner, 2016).

However, against this depoliticising and individualising trend, recently there have been encouraging moves towards a social movement teacher unionism, which challenges the dominance of the business model (Stevenson and Mercer, 2015; Weiner, 2012, 2015). Unions which have employed this model in order to successfully push back against neoliberal education reforms include the British Columbian Teachers Federation (Ewbank, 2015; Poole, 2007, 2015), the Chicago Teacher Union (Gutstein and Lipman, 2013; Meiners and Quinn, 2016; Uetrict, 2014) and the National Union of Teachers in England (Murch, 2008; Stevenson and Mercer, 2015). Their campaigns have resisted public school closures, mass firings of teachers, public cuts to education and the privatization of schools through the charter school model.



Through such campaigns, unions have drawn clear lines between their vision for public education and the policy preferences of neoliberal market reformers. They also represent new ways of doing educational politics, emphasising the formation of strong bonds between their memberships, parents and the wider public, through the articulation of a shared ethical culture, which rejects neoliberal individualism (see Meiners and Quinn, 2016). Social movement teacher unions can also be distinguished by their moves towards developing less hierarchical and more community-based and flexible forms of organizing (Popiel, 2015; Weiner 2013), together with the making of new alliances with other social justice advocacy groups (Eidelson and Jaffe, 2013). Interested readers are referred to one of the best-documented transitions from business to social movement unionism in the story of how the Chicago Teachers Union was taken over by a Caucus of Rank-and File Educators (CORE). Soon afterwards, CORE forced Chicago's city government to back down on implementing massive school closures in vulnerable communities, following the first teacher's strike in a generation (Gutstein and Lipman, 2013; Uetricht, 2014; Meiners and Quinn, 2016).

In summary, progressive union movements in Anglophone countries face a number of challenges to their ethical legitimacy and political potential. Rather than operating as a space for the elevation of feminist care ethics into a political platform for change, business unionism has all too often reproduced the individualised and self-interested model of teaching inherent in the GERM. However, I argue that social movement teacher unionism has the potential to both challenge neoliberal hegemony and offer a platform for the articulation of an alternative, imagined through the collective ethics of teachers and their communities. In the following section I offer a conceptual framework, based on the work of Ernesto Laclau, which theorises how this can be engendered through media campaigns.

### **Ethical populism: A conceptual framework**

This section argues that a way that teacher unions can become a political platform for the articulation of collective ethics, and thus potentially achieve the successes of unions such as the CTU, is populism. This may seem problematic to many readers, who are wary of populism's recent associations with the right

of the political spectrum. Indeed, research on the intersections of the media, populism, and education has tended to focus on its right-wing variants, in particular the far-right (Wodak, KhosraviNik, and Mral, 2013), and the dangers this poses to liberal democratic processes (Mazzoleni, 2007), as well as the democratic sensibilities of young people (Ranieri, 2016). However, I argue that this body of work draws on a representation of populism as the necessary site of an irrational, extremist and superficial politics (Stavrakakis, 2014). In contrast to this view, the work of Ernesto Laclau has sought to conceive populism as an ‘articulatory logic’ (Laclau, 2005b, p. 44), and thus a neutral conduit through which *any* ideology may be carried, including leftist progressivism.

However, there are problems with applying Laclau’s theory to union practice, which include the negation of human agency and culture (Paniza, 2005; Simons, 2011), and an under emphasis on the ethical dangers of populism as a discursive strategy (Arditi, 2010; Žižek, 2006). Hence, this section, after outlining some of his key terms, attempts to integrate another area of Laclau’s theory with his theory of populism, *the ethical*, in order to mitigate against these issues and progress a model of ethical populism for teacher unionism. The key terms I am going to outline are *articulatory logic*, *demands*, *equivalences* and *ethical signifiers*.

An *articulatory logic* refers to a mode of representing society through discourse (Laclau, 2005a). A populist articulatory logic is the most political way of doing this (Thomassen, 2016), because it constructs all issues in terms of ‘us’ against ‘them’, thereby limiting the ability of a ruling regime (such as neoliberalism) to address demands on an individual basis. At the other end of the scale is the institutionalist articulatory logic, which places emphasis on the desirability of consensus and the modulation of antagonisms (Laclau, 2005b).

The difference between the two logics can be illustrated through reconsidering the contrast between business and social movement unionism. The former assumes that teacher requests for the foregrounding of care ethics in schools ‘can be satisfied in a non-antagonistic, administrative way’ (Laclau, 2005b, p. 36). A technocratic, pragmatic approach holds sway, in which claims are dealt with on an individual basis as requests

and are thus commonly prevented from progressing to the more politically antagonistic and collective level of *demands* (2005a, pp. 74-5). The latter, by contrast, would seek to find *equivalences* between those claims and others, such as equality, democratic empowerment and a collaborative working environment, turning them into a collection of demands. Once these equivalences are forged, the institutional system finds it increasingly difficult to absorb them on an individual basis as claims, meaning they become perceived as denied demands. Hence, following the accrual of this critical mass, we see the increasing dominance of the more polarising, populist articulatory logic.

This equivalential collection of demands finds unity at one level through the commonality of being denied. However, what unites them more concretely is the naming of an antagonist, ‘an unresponsive power’ (Laclau, 2005a, p. 86) which is constructed as continuously failing (or even staunchly refusing) to address them. Hence, equivalences are also made between signifiers which represent that antagonist, and is only through reference to this excluded Other that a collective populist identity is able to emerge. This is why the antagonist is termed a ‘constitutive outside’ (Mouffe, 2005), because it is the act of symbolic expulsion itself which constitutes the inside, collective identity (Szkudlarek, 2016).

What Paniza (2005) highlights, however, is that what is missing from Laclau’s framework is an account of human agency and strategy. Paniza stresses that demands must be formulated by human actors, and do not just result spontaneously from denied claims. In other words, demands are constituted within a shared culture with a strong sense of collective ethics, such as the profession of teaching. As will become clear below and in the following discussion of the NZEI’s campaigns, I argue that an important aspect for the legitimacy of social movement demands is that they emerge within, and thus tap into, the pre-existing collective ethics of a group.

This negation of culture from Laclau’s model has been critiqued elsewhere (see Simons, 2011), and brings us to the crux of my argument here. Laclau’s model works very well in theory, but has some ethical dangers attached for the practice of leftist educational movements. Primary amongst these is the previously mentioned construction of an excluded Other, who

represents everything that 'we' are not. As has been well noted (see Žižek, 2006), this scapegoating function, in particular when directed towards vulnerable groups, is at best ethically questionable and at worst can lead to ethnic cleansing.

However, the division of the political terrain into terms of 'them' against 'us' also leads to another ethical hazard. As Arditì (2010) has recognised, there is a danger that the application of Laclau's populist discursive strategy could lead to a degree of misperception, whereby the politicized activist sees all issues in terms of this stark black and white divide, making shades of grey and thus compromise increasingly difficult. As Arditì (2010) puts it, it becomes a precondition of the populist movement that 'something fundamental escapes them [the activist]' (p. 496), meaning they can be manipulated and/or deceived by the leader/theorist, reducing the ability of teacher unions to move towards more democratic and less hierarchical structures.

However, I argue that these dangers can be mitigated against for the unionist by integrating another branch of Laclau's (2000, 2014) theory: *the ethical*, which was unfortunately never incorporated into his theory of populism before his untimely death in 2014. Laclau theorised the ethical as political because it is on the opposite pole to the normative, in a similar way to populism and institutionalism. While the normative represents the gradual build-up of agreed procedures, the ethical represents their pure negation, by way of reference to universal values (Carusi, 2017). These values become articulated through *ethical signifiers*, such as justice and authenticity, which point to a vision of a fully ethical society, one that is currently denied by the normative structure.

However, those ethical signifiers cannot fully capture the ethical values positively. This is because there is no set agreement on what a fully just or fully authentic society looks like; we only collectively know what constitutes injustice and inauthenticity. Slightly paradoxically, is their very indistinctness, or inability to be represented positively, which increases the political potential of these signifiers. Because they can never be fully captured within normative structures, they retain an almost mystical, ephemeral nature. When articulated through social movement discourse they then imbue action with a sense of purpose and rightness, lifting political demands above the often mundane,

physical world of organising, to the metaphysical realm of ideals and values.

As I argue in the below analysis section, if those ethical signifiers also represent the history and traditions of a professional culture such as teaching, it can democratically ground a movement, providing legitimising justification for political demands and countering the more ethically questionable elements of populism. This is particularly important for teacher union movements, where campaigns need to make sure that they do not lose touch with the relational care ethics which ground teaching (Popiel, 2015). As I will outline, further mitigation can be achieved through the provision of accessible online spaces and the direction of antagonisms towards a globally hegemonic system. Firstly however, I wish to provide the reader with some context on the recent educational context in Aotearoa New Zealand and the NZEI union.

### **Background on the New Zealand educational context and the NZEI union**

In November 2008 the centre-right National Party came to power in New Zealand and quickly implemented their flagship National Standards policy. The policy purported to increase school accountability and transparency by ensuring that every student from year 1 to 8 would be assigned one of four grades (above to well below) for reading, writing and maths, by way of an Overall Teacher Judgment (OTJ), based on existing assessments (O'Neill, 2014). These results would be issued to parents by way of bi-annual reports. School-level results would also be published online which allowed newspapers to convert the data into league-tables to rank and compare schools. The process of assigning grades did not account for socio-economic disadvantage, which further increased pressure on academically low-performing cash-strapped schools in deprived communities (Thrupp and White, 2013). Objections raised by unions and academics that the tables would reproduce and reinforce inequalities were positioned as 'anti-transparency' by government and the media (Salter, 2018).

Together with being marginalised by hostile government and media articulations around the policy, there was a growing feeling of disempowerment amongst teachers and their union (Thrupp and Easter, 2012). The development of the National

Standards was marked by a rushed, behind closed doors process and sector 'consultation' amounted to a token gesture (Thrupp and Easter, 2012). As I outline below, the recognition that the Government were not going to address their concerns, or heed their demands for a small-scale trial, contributed to a shift in the NZEI's goals and strategies.

The NZEI was founded in 1883 following the implementation of a national education system for the first time in New Zealand (Simmonds, 1983). The union was born out of the pragmatic requirement for the communication of geographically dispersed, isolated teachers' concerns, as one united voice to central government, in order to influence policy. Hence, prior to the National Standards policy, the NZEI had a long-embedded tradition of 'promoting policy change within education through negotiation and discussion' (Gordon, 1992, p. 25), rather than populism or political antagonism.

At the same time however, the NZEI had a mission from inception of promoting 'the interests of education' (Simmonds, 1983, p. 15) within the halls of power. Over its history, this has translated into the principled promotion of the interests of teachers and children, together with what they saw as the best for a strong New Zealand education system (Simmonds, 1983). During the mid-20th Century the NZEI had been closely involved in promoting a broad, holistic curriculum, linked to social democratic values, alongside a progressive Labour government (Simmonds, 1983). By the 1970s, this contributed to New Zealand becoming world-renowned for a pedagogical approach which privileged openness, autonomy and creativity (MacDonald, 2016; Peters, Marshall, and Massey, 1994). This holistic philosophy or ethos integrated contemporary research with teacher knowledge gained in the classroom, to devise innovative curricula which sought to develop the whole child in order to benefit wider society, reduce inequality and maintain a healthy democracy (MacDonald, 2016).

However, this ethos was marginalised in the late 1980s with the onset of neoliberalisation, when New Zealand experienced the most profound and rapid changes to its economic and social infrastructure of any Western nation (Kelsey, 1995). Following the marketization of the school administrative structure in 1989, which excluded teachers from having an input into policy, the

1993 curriculum enacted a ‘technocratic ideology’ (Peters et al., 1994), reifying the diverse richness of the learning process into standardised, measurable achievement objectives. This then reduced the professionalism of teaching, by conceiving it as a technical process, simply involving the transmission of a list of skills into students (Codd, 2005). However, the 1999-2008 Labour government somewhat reversed this trend through the lengthy and inclusive consultation process around the construction of the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum, and by the final document reflecting the holistic and caring values of New Zealand’s teaching culture (see Ministry of Education, 2007).

Hence, when their recommendations concerning the National standards were ignored by the government, the union perceived these shared cultural values, embodied by an educational system they had been involved in from inception, as under threat. Hereafter, the NZEI was forced to change tactics from its traditional methods of negotiation and discussion. In late 2009, the union leadership decided, following a series of urgent meetings, to launch a systematic campaign to mobilise teacher and parent support and shift public opinion onside using a variety of communicative strategies. In the next section of this paper, I will describe and analyse the NZEI’s media campaigns between 2010 and 2013.

### ***Hands Up For Learning* campaign**

The *Hands Up For Learning: Trial National Standards Not Our Kids* campaign was launched shortly after the official launch of the National Standards policy in October 2009, in order to lobby the government to agree to a small-scale trial before full national implementation. The campaign included a website, videos, a petition, numerous press releases, the organisation of a cross-sector forum to discuss the policy, and the design of a campaign poster (figure 1).

Given that the mainstream media were overwhelmingly supportive of the policy (see Salter, 2018), and the government were unresponsive, the leadership team (including the elected President, the National Secretary and the Director of Communications), recognised that a media campaign aimed at getting their point across to powerful elites was not going to be enough on its own. Hence, the decision was quickly made to communicate the ethical values of the campaign to a wider

audience through a bus tour, beginning from the start of the school year in February 2010 (when the policy was due to be implemented in schools). Two busses would begin from either end of the country, visiting numerous schools and communities – with the aim to meet in Wellington in March of the same year, for the symbolic delivery of a petition to parliament, demanding that the policy be trialled.

The campaign attracted much media attention, and its direct tactics aimed more at public, than government opinion, marked a transition point between their traditional methods, to one of a campaigning, social movement union. While equivalences were being made between signifiers that represented ‘us’ and ‘them’, the populist articulatory logic seen later in the *Stand Up For Kids* campaign was not yet fully evident. Had the government agreed to a trial at this stage, the momentum behind the movement may well have dispersed, meaning the equivalential aggregation of multiple demands seen later may not have developed.

However, complicating Laclau’s model, the call for a trial can be seen as a demand already richly imbued with historical meaning, rather than simply emerging as the result of a denied claim, disconnected from cultural context. While the trial was in the process of being denied by the Government, the singular demand already represented something much more than itself, through reference to ethical signifiers, due to its emergence from within a culture. National Standard’s implementation without a trial was becoming represented as denying ethical values shared by teachers and parents, linked to the recognition of diversity and vibrancy in children. This is evidenced in the below analysis of the NZEI’s magazine *Education Aotearoa*, a video made to document the bus tour and the campaign poster.

### **Education Aotearoa**

*Education Aotearoa* is a quarterly magazine which circulates both online in pdf form, and circulated in print form to schools, delivered to each of the union’s approximately 50,000 members. It includes both ‘news and views’, including feature stories and forwards by the President and the National Secretary, which often comment on the politics of education. Shortly before the bus tour, the magazine published a story entitled ‘Tension 2010 – national standards vs the curriculum’ (Clement, 2010). The article explicitly framed the debates in terms of a stark,



‘Jekyll and Hyde’ opposition between the two policies, through interviewing school principals on their opinions. While the curriculum was equivalentially linked to the ethical signifiers of community, empowerment and authenticity, National Standards was articulated with testing, prescriptive, threat, fear and league tables. Hence, the interviewed school principals’ views could be seen as representing a growing understanding in the sector that National Standards represented a return to the technocratic ideology behind the 1993 curriculum. In short, it was seen as threatening to re-reduce teaching to a routinized, technical vocation, rather than something which was creative, empowering and holistic.

### **Bus Tour Video**

A video made shortly after the bus tour reached Parliament on 31 March 2010 documented the experiences of three teachers who participated. This two-minute video can still be viewed online on the NZEI’s heritage website (NZEI, 2010). As the bus tour moved around the country visiting schools, teachers could hitch a ride between towns and cities, increasing feelings of connectivity to the campaign. When the two busses reached Wellington from the far North and far South of the country, that feeling increased as educational activists from around New Zealand converged on Parliament to deliver the petition, covering the grounds with orange school community statements articulating communal concerns around the policy. This ‘sea of orange’ spectacle created by school community statements covering the lawn in front of parliament represented the collective educational culture, which was seen to now be symbolically colonising the halls of power.

In the video, the three teachers talk primarily about strong feelings of collectivity, rather than the instrumental goal of delivering the petition to parliament to demand the trial. In other words, what was important was that the bus tour and campaign began to ‘feel like a movement’ (Meiners and Quinn, 2016), providing a space for the mediated articulation of a culture and ethical values which are shared between teachers and the public. One teacher professed it was ‘amazing’ to be on the tour, and ‘so positive to be with other activists’, while another that the support displayed by a school hall full of signed petitions was ‘overwhelming’.

### ***Hands Up For Learning: Trial National Standards, Not Our Kids poster***

The aesthetics of this shared culture were anchored by the initial design of the poster seen in figure 1 below. As mentioned, this generated the orange theme of the campaign, which was then reproduced on the website, t-shirts, school community statements, and the tour busses themselves. This linking of a specific colour to the campaign was also a key part of the CTU's successful generation of public support in Chicago (Gutstein and Lipman, 2013), where it became a key signifier of your affiliation to a movement to wear a red t-shirt.



*Figure 1: 'Hands Up For Learning: Trial National Standards, Not Our Kids' poster (reproduced with permission from the New Zealand Educational Institute collection).*

However, the orange colour in figure 1 is further complemented by a diversity of colours in children, both in skin and clothing, who are holding up their hands 'for learning'. This colourful diversity is a visual signifier for New Zealand's child-centred, holistic educational culture, which celebrates creativity and human growth for the good of society and democracy, rather than only the economy. In this way, the design points

to a vision for education that had become symbolised by the 2007 curriculum, but which was being denied by an overly scientific and instrumental approach to kids, embodied in National Standards. This technocratic approach to schooling would sooner experiment on the lives of children than trial a policy, hence denying the ethics of diversity, democracy, vitality, empowerment, community and authenticity, together with feminist care ethics. The poster both constituted and reflected back a shared culture, which was having its ethics denied by the Other: the neoliberal, GERM agenda.

### ***Stand Up For Kids* campaign**

The *Stand Up For Kids, Protect Our Schools/Fight the GERM* campaign was launched at the NZEI's annual conference in September 2012, and became strategically centred on national rallies in April 2013. The campaign was motivated by the introduction of two more highly controversial policies by the government: charter schools and an increase in class sizes, both of which were strongly opposed by the sector. Class sizes was announced in May 2012, and led to an embarrassing defeat for the government the following month, after a successful and united campaign by educational organisations, which garnered massive public support. Building on this confidence-boosting show of support, *Stand Up For Kids* was envisaged by the NZEI leadership as a campaign directed at changing the general conversation around education; promoting an alternative vision to the neoliberal, GERM agenda, rather being only centred on resisting a single policy. Further evidence of public support for this vision had been provided through surveys, which also confirmed the ethical imperatives of their teacher membership.

At that conference Pasi Sahlberg spoke about his term the GERM (discussed earlier), and this provided the ideal opportunity for the union to more concretely articulate what this shared vision was opposed to. The leadership team employed a cartoonist to come up with the below grotesque germ cartoon figure, dripping with slime, wearing an insidious grin and carrying a briefcase (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Fight the GERM campaign image.

### **Fight the GERM website**

Figure 2 was taken from a dedicated ‘Fight the GERM’ campaign page (NZEI, 2013). On that page, the image was placed below a description of ‘the antidote’, ‘those fighting to protect a quality public education system which is fair and equitable, based on collaboration and trust’. This vision was juxtaposed against a global, ideologically-driven agenda which deliberately seeks to create crises within public education systems, in order to ‘impose a business model’ (NZEI, 2013, n.p.). The two contrasting educational philosophies were also summarised in a table, reproduced below. The table makes equivalences between the key demands of the shared culture, and those of the antagonist Other, articulating a clear division between two irreconcilable visions for education. Each demand of the Other is horizontally situated next to its ‘antidote’; standardisation is contrasted to personalised learning, competition to trust and professionalism, and so on.

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

Table 1: The Germ versus the Antidote (NZEI, 2013).

Together with being demands, the list of terms on ‘The Antidote’ side could also be regarded as ethical signifiers. Equity and collaboration in particular fit our earlier definition, as they point to utopian values, which can never be fully captured by normative discourse. As they are ephemeral ideals, we can never actually experience a totally collaborative or fully equitable education system. Much more likely to be experienced conclusively is what constitutes an inequitable and uncollaborative system.

This inherent negativity increases these signifiers’ political potential for systemic change, and imbues the campaign with ethical legitimacy. Hence, such ethical values only become palpable when teachers experience their denial in the classroom, where the policy agenda of the government becomes enacted as constraints on their teaching (Thrupp and White, 2013). Therefore, explicitly juxtaposing these values with those from the common antagonist, the GERM, reflected back to teachers such experiences, increasing the ethical legitimacy of the campaign.

### ***Stand Up For Kids/Fight the GERM placards***

This process of articulating an ethically legitimate sense of ‘us’, against a delegitimised ‘them’ was furthered by two-sided placards (figure 3) which the NZEI produced and handed out to their membership, and were then displayed at protests, conferences and school notice boards.



Figure 3: *Stand up for Kids and Fight the GERM placards.*

The placards allowed members and parents to physically perform their identification to the *Stand Up For Kids* campaign,

but also, importantly, their disidentification to *the GERM*. As can be seen, the *Stand Up For Kids* side of the placard incorporated a profusion of images associated with vibrant school life. These images echoed the depiction of diverse vitality in the *Hands Up For Learning* poster, and represented New Zealand's broad curriculum, which includes subjects such as art, science, physical education and music. Hence, the placard could be seen to repeat the concerns of the interviewed school principals around National Standard's threatened narrowing of the curriculum, with its emphasis on the measurement of English and Maths.

### **Facebook group**

The *Stand Up For Kids* public Facebook group was established at the same time as the launch of the campaign, in September 2012, and is still regularly used at the time of writing, with nearly 10,000 members. Members include teachers and interested supporters, thereby facilitating a conversation with a wide audience. The group is administered by the NZEI communications team, who post articles and monitor for inappropriate posts and comments, but all group members are able to post. Hence, the group provided the union an avenue for the engagement of members on the political processes impacting education, while attaining a degree of control over the direction of debates. With a job that is intense, emotionally draining and increasingly pressured, and coming top of family commitments, teachers can otherwise overly rely on their principal or union hierarchy to keep them informed. Facebook groups such as *Stand Up For Kids* offer a more flexible, democratic channel, fitted around busy lifestyles, which teachers can dip into to become more informed on the political issues affecting their work.

Many members also share posts of teaching practice, which exemplify and celebrate shared ethical values. As argued by Brickner (2016), pictures of children 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. The group thus enables the mediated reproduction of the aforementioned shared, holistic teaching culture. Further, such 'articulations act as a form of political dissent and resistance' (Brickner, 2016, p. 12), implicitly rejecting, through their defiant presence, the GERM agenda.

In summary, the well-frequented *Stand Up For Kids* Facebook group offers the NZEI a relatively low-cost empowerment and engagement route, which builds capacity in members and contributes to a more democratic union structure. Rather than representing the agenda of a small leadership group, which is then imposed on the constituency as part of a ‘deception’ (Arditi, 2010), the concerns raised on the group have emerged from a bottom-up direction, mitigating against the ethical dangers of the populist articulatory logic.

### **Conclusions**

This article has argued that the NZEI teacher union employed a populist articulatory logic in the *Stand Up For Kids: Protect Our Schools/Fight the GERM* media campaign. Following Laclau’s theoretical assertion that populism does not necessarily convey right-wing political ideologies, this paper has demonstrated that it is a logic which can also convey a leftist progressive educational politics. While *Hands Up For Learning* formed equivalences between signifiers that represented ‘us’ and ‘them’, what made *SUFK/GERM* populist was its articulation of a clear dichotomy, which represented aggregated educational demands as frustrated by a common antagonist (table 1). Those demands found an equivalence through the common element of *being denied* by that antagonist.

However, I also argued that a further common element aided this equivalence. Those demands in table 1 had not simply developed from individual denied claims, but emerged within a collective educational culture, the origins of which can be traced back at least to the early 20th Century (MacDonald, 2016). This culture could also be seen to be reproduced within the earlier *Hands Up For Learning* campaign and bus tour. It is a culture which has continuously privileged the holistic development of the whole child for the benefit of wider society, arguing that the creative autonomy of schools, teachers and students was the best way to achieve that, rather than the measurement of individual achievement. Hence, its ethical signifiers could easily be articulated in direct contrast to the individualizing and competitive logics of neoliberalism (see table 1).

This embeddedness within the ethics of a collective culture provided a feeling of communal ownership, and thus a legitimacy which is usually absent from the business union

model (Weiner, 2012; Brickner, 2016; Popiel, 2015). Hence, I argue that this incorporation of ethical signifiers can mediate against the ethically dangerous elements of the populist logic for the education union activist. Adding further to this mitigation process was the democratic participation offered by the Facebook group. Also importantly, *the GERM* antagonist represented a dominant philosophy, rather than a vulnerable group. This philosophy is of course neoliberalism, causing considerable harm to children's education and teacher's lives on a global scale. Neoliberalism reconstitutes education as an instrument to effect economic growth (Carusi, 2017; Szkudlarek, 2016). It operates with a narrow conception of education which does not only re-purpose public funds to private corporations and de-professionalise teachers, but actually threatens democracies (O'Connor and McTaggart, 2017). Hence, the building of ethically authentic movements which are grounded in the beliefs of their communities and are capable of making links to wider social justice movements are of utmost importance.

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## **ACTIVIST REPORT**

### **THE INTERNET IS TEACHER UNION BUSINESS: A REPORT ABOUT THE NEW SOUTH WALES TEACHERS FEDERATION**

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*New South Wales Teachers Federation*

#### **Introduction**

The NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF, hereafter referred to as the Federation) is the statewide trades union for teachers in public schools, TAFE colleges, and Corrective Services. Representing a membership body of approximately 60,000 teachers, Federation's work requires active lines of communication that are equally accessible and effective for teachers in rural and remote areas as they are for those in urban centres.

The purpose of this report is to analyse union communications strategies, with a particular focus on the adoption of digital communications in union campaigns. As Communications Officer of the Federation and a former producer of an education podcast, my work enables me to reflect on the challenges of communicating with diverse internal and external audiences. This report begins with a historical overview of communications strategies within the NSWTF and then goes on to discuss specific communication strategies

#### **A context for teacher union activism in New South Wales, Australia**

As a union, the Federation has always existed to serve educators in the public sector. The NSW Teachers Federation formed in 1918, unifying a number of independent associations that had formed to cover different sections of the public school teaching profession over the previous decades. According to the first constitution adopted by the organisation, the purposes of the Federation included the goals of promoting the cause of

education in NSW, to pursue the advancement of teachers, and “to obtain for the Teaching Profession the same civil rights that belong to other members of the community”.

Throughout its history, Federation’s core focus areas have been fairly consistent: staffing levels, salaries and working conditions, the status and respect of the teaching profession, advocacy for public education, and securing adequate funding. These issues are central to the working rights and workplace experiences of teachers and, in turn, they define the educational experiences of students in the public education system.

While public education in Australia is constitutionally a state government responsibility, the Federal Government has, through funding, also played a role in education policy. In 1984, the Australian Education Union (AEU) was founded (originally as the Australian Teachers Federation) to provide national representation for teachers. In 2015 the Federation reconstituted as the NSW branch of the AEU. This change was prompted in part by the transition of TAFE teachers from a state to a federal jurisdiction under the Fair Work Act. The change was also made to harmonise the state and federal rules related to electing federal representatives. The majority of state teacher unions in Australia now exist as branches of the AEU, although they still function independently as each state and territory governs education differently, creating unique challenges.

Throughout the history of the AEU, a number of former officers of the Federation have been elected to the role of President or Deputy President of the AEU, and at the time of writing the current President of the Federation, Maurie Mulheron, is also AEU Deputy President.

### ***Internal organisational structure***

The Federation originally formed from a collection of independent associations. The internal decision-making structure takes the form of a representative democracy where teachers are represented by associations covering schools in geographical areas, and by associations covering non-school based positions, TAFE teachers and Corrective Services. This structure has been developed over time since the first full-time organiser position was created in 1936 to commence in 1937. Associations elect representatives to the State Council and

Annual Conference, two of the primary decision making bodies within Federation's governance model, while Federation's executive committee members are elected from among Association Councillors to oversee the ongoing operations of the organisation.

While the Federation currently employs more than 100 staff, the body of officers elected by the council that directs the work of Federation is elected from among the membership. As such the direction of operations within the organisation are often shaped by the knowledge, skills and interests of those who are elected. Elected organisers each have responsibility for working with associations to address workplace matters, prosecute campaign objectives, and disseminate information. The union is funded primarily by membership dues, though it also derives some income from leasing unused space in the building that houses Federation's main offices in Sydney. A complete financial statement of income and expenses is published every year in Federation's annual report.

### **Communication strategies and technologies**

Union communications serve the following objectives: to recruit and retain members; to communicate regarding, and engage members in, current campaigns relating to salaries, working conditions and the state of public education; and, to influence state and federal education policy. Towards these goals, the union continuously disseminates a wide range of information to members about membership, workers' rights and protections and professional development/education.

Historically, elected officers have communicated directly with members through workplace and Association meetings. Such communications have been supported over time by a range of technologies including print, telephone, fax machines, and more recently email and internet-based media. One of the union's oldest and most important strategies for workplace communications has been the maintenance of a union noticeboard in school staffrooms or a similarly prominent place within the school. This allows for key notices, advertisements or other information to be posted in a central location and also serves as a persistent visual reminder of the presence and role of the Federation in education and industrial matters.

The union has published the journal, *Education*, for almost a century to communicate with its members and supporters. According to the Federation's first annual report of 1919, the journal existed to be 'the teachers' organ, written by teachers, in the interests of teachers'. In 2018, as the Federation rolled out information in celebration of its centenary, it was noted repeatedly that the issues raised in early editions of the journal and other communications – salaries, working conditions, class sizes, the status of the teaching profession, systemic supports for teachers particularly in remote and rural areas – remained consistent with the issues the union pursues today. The format of the journal has changed with the cost of available printing technologies, starting as a pressed newsletter, spending many years on newsprint, and currently produced as a light-gloss tabloid print and digital ([news.nswtf.org.au](http://news.nswtf.org.au)) newspaper.

The Federation currently publishes eight editions annually, twice per school term – down from sixteen per year in the past decade. Of the union's 60,000 members, approximately 50,000 still choose to have *Education* mailed to their home address while the remaining 10,000 have opted to engage with Federation material in digital formats.

In addition to the journal, Federation produces a range of targeted content including newsletters, primarily relating to the work of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and specialist officers within the organisation that speak to issues that affect specific demographic groups and workplaces within the membership (e.g. LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Small Schools, Women, and early career teachers).

Changes in union communication strategies have been influenced by changes in modes of communication (e.g. introduction of fax machines and computers), the accessibility and cost of these technologies as well as the changes in organisational priorities. The conduct of mass meetings has been one significant area of change. A state as large and disparately populated as NSW presents significant challenges for mass meetings, which depend on participation by the entire membership base. For example, every 2-4 years the entire membership is required to vote on awards and staffing agreements that define the salaries and working conditions of teachers. Prior to 1989, Federation members would take stop-



work action in order to attend mass meetings held simultaneously at different locations around the state. Speaker's notes and relevant record-keeping documents would either be mailed to meeting convenors or taken by senior officers attending each meeting. For members in remote parts of NSW, attendance at such meetings was not possible, and so phone-in services were available for those members to hear relevant content.

Then, in 1985, Sky Channel was launched by Tabcorp Holdings to live-broadcast horse and greyhound races for the purposes of gambling. It also offered Sky Business TV, a part-time channel for other organisations and businesses to send out live broadcasts. Federation adopted this form of broadcast communication in 1989, which enabled simultaneous meetings to occur across the state. Members were able to listen to centralised presentations by the union's presidential officers and then debate and vote at their locations.

After the company chose to stop operating this TV channel, Federation transitioned to using pre-recorded messages to be played at meetings. While efforts were made to broadcast such content over the internet, the lack of reliable internet service across NSW meant that pre-recorded messages were still necessary. Since 2016, Federation has engaged the services of television corporation Foxtel to resume broadcast meetings across the state.

The introduction of fax machines into NSW schools from 1990 also changed day-to-day communications with members. Fax machines were replaced by computers and internet-based communications such as emails by the mid-2000s, although fax machines continued to be used until 2014.

As in many professions, teachers experience the constant tension between teachers exercising individual professional judgement and the managerial tendencies of governing bodies – in this case governments and government departments. The latter attempt to enforce policies and practices in a top-down manner that overrides teachers' professional judgement in the context of their workplace. From the perspective of NSW teachers, changes in education technology have also been accompanied by this tension between teacher autonomy and state managerialism.

A case in point is the introduction of computers and internet web-based services into schools, which was accompanied by an increased burden of bureaucratic work on teachers. While school principals were provided with organisational email accounts around the turn of the century, it was not until the mid-2000s that the the Department of Education and Training rolled out a state-wide email system and web services platform for all teachers. At this time, it was not uncommon for a staffroom of 8-10 teachers to have only one or two computers to be used during common break times to perform their recordkeeping duties. In 2002-2003, NSW Premier Bob Carr went so far as to deploy new web platforms that ignored the terms negotiated by the Federation for fair and reasonable working conditions. This decision prompted the union to place a moratorium on web services in schools from November 2003 to November 2005.

Teachers also experienced a digital divide early in the Labor Party's "Digital Education Revolution" (DER), introduced after their victory in the 2007 federal election. As part of the Labor election platform, the National Secondary School Computer Fund was established to provide improved broadband access to all schools. Every high school student from year 9-12 received a laptop device and high school teachers received both computers and technical support. While there were significant variations between states and territories, primary teachers were largely excluded from the DER.

### **Digital Communications**

An internal driving force behind Federation's adoption of digital media and internet technologies has been John Dixon, the current General Secretary, and former Assistant General Secretary (Communications and Administration). In 1997, Mr Dixon, through Federation's Eric Pearson Study Grant, undertook a study tour to explore an area of practice relevant to Federation business. Mr Dixon's study program intended to explore "the use of information technology systems, in particular the internet in the development of campaigning and communication strategies for the New South Wales Teachers Federation". The resulting report, titled *@unions – the internet is union business*, also available in hard copy from Federation's library, observed that "Unions, particularly teacher unions, have always been in the information industry... The internet and its associated technology such as the World Wide Web

give us additional means not only to communicate with union members but also has the potential for stronger and faster participatory forms of communication regardless of distance”.

The Federation’s communications with members has significantly shifted into the realm of digital communications. At present, Federation’s primary communications channels include email, electronic newsletters, a password-protected website ([nswtf.org.au](http://nswtf.org.au)), Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts. The website was first established in the mid-nineties<sup>1</sup> while the Facebook page was created in 2008 (four years after the founding of Facebook). One of the challenges of digital communications is avoiding over-use, which risks overwhelming Federation communications with the white noise of a massive volume of emails. With this goal in mind, the union has developed a free mobile phone app that tailors information based on an individual’s membership status and preferences.

Currently, Federation maintains a communications units consisting of one elected officer and seven staff, of which there are a deputy editor, sub-editor, graphic designer, an administrative assistant and a staff manager. The positions of Digital Media Producer and Digital Communications Administrator were created in recent years to support the creation of digital content, and to consolidate management of content being shared via digital channels including email, websites and social media.

The officer has the primary responsibility for the publishing of the printed journal and ensuring that outgoing communications reflect Federation’s policy and campaign objectives. As digital communications rapidly became more complicated, external agents were engaged for the design, hosting and maintenance of internet sites, with Federation staff and officers taking on roles of content management.

The union occasionally employs third-party consultants and content producers for established media and marketing roles, such as production of radio and television commercials, and managing relationships with commercial media outlets. The union also currently maintains a small commercial-quality

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest version still available on the Wayback Machine is from December 1996, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/19961224224248/http://www.nswtf.org.au:80/>.

audio recording studio which is used for recording interviews and podcasts.

### **Key Campaigns**

As an industrial and professional union representing public sector employees, the Federation engages in campaign activities that are ultimately aimed at influencing government policy or legislation regarding education and the employment of teachers. Where possible, this is achieved through negotiation and consultation, escalating to public campaigns to influence public opinion and industrial action when this is deemed to be necessary. Campaign actions are historically directed by Federation's democratic representative governance structure, with campaign actions being carried out by the union's elected officers.

Early campaign communications relied primarily on interpersonal interactions to mobilise members. Organisers and volunteers would hand out flyers and petitions at public events. Activists would also go door knocking to talk to people individually as a way to raise awareness and support amongst the general public for individual campaigns. Other communication strategies included letter writing and postcard campaigns to politicians, as well as protest rallies and stop-work actions.

In a history of many notable rallies and strike actions, the first 24-hour strike and public rally took place 50 years after Federation's formation. In 1968, a majority of NSW teachers went on strike over issues of working conditions and salaries and attended a large rally held outside the Parliament House (Fitzgerald, 2011; NSWTF, 1968). In 1988, Federation held one of the largest rallies in Australian labour union history with more than 80,000 teachers gathering in Sydney to protest against state government policy (Poulos, 1988). Following the state election in 1988, Liberal Minister for Education, Terry Metherell applied the market-based model of self-managing small businesses to the administration of public schools. Many Federation members argued that this represented an almost complete degradation of the notion of an education system by reducing all schools to individual workplaces. This is an ideological battle that continues till today (Fitzgerald, 2011).

Over the past decade, Federation has incorporated the use of digital media into its campaign strategies. Facebook and Twitter have been the primary platforms used to engage members, particularly younger members, as well as the public. At various times, the union has also established and contributed to other short-term campaign-specific websites and social media accounts such as *Teachers Make a Difference* and *I Give a Gonski* ([igiveagonski.com.au](http://igiveagonski.com.au)).

### ***Teachers Make a Difference***

In 2011, the Federation launched the Teachers Make a Difference<sup>2</sup> campaign to provide a positive depiction of teachers in NSW public schools. Throughout 2012 and 2014, the union produced videos which featured narratives about the many ways that teachers in schools and TAFE colleges have a positive impact on students' lives. These ads sought to represent the more emotional and ephemeral benefits that an effective teacher can provide for students through positive connections and relationships.

These advertisements represented one of the Federation's largest media productions. The union engaged noted author and education advocate Jane Caro to write the scripts, and renowned Australian filmmaker Ray Lawrence to direct them. The campaign included four ads, made in pairs over two years, which were connected by the tagline "It takes a very special person to be a teacher". The first pair of ads, titled 'First Day' and 'Last Day' told stories about teachers beginning and ending their professional careers. The second pair of ads titled 'The Apprentice' and 'Hawa's story' told the stories of two students – a TAFE apprentice and a former refugee – who were motivated to succeed by their respective teachers. These videos were disseminated primarily through cinema advertising and revived in 2016 through a paid social media campaign.

### ***I Give a Gonski***

This national multiyear campaign formed in response to findings of the 2012 'Gonski report' on school funding. The report was written by a committee appointed by then Minister of Education Julia Gillard, and chaired by David Gonski (*DEEWR, 2011*). It recommended a significant increase in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://teachersmakeadifference.org.au/>

funding of schools, allocated according to the individual needs of students. This campaign consolidated decades of different state and Federal campaigns on the issue of fair federal funding of public education. The then-Labor government developed funding legislation informed by the recommendations of the report, which created a needs-based funding model that distributed funding according to the indicated socio-educational disadvantage faced by students in each school. The legislation included a six-year transition period to get schools up to the minimum required Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) – which meant that it stretched across multiple Federal elections and budgetary estimates periods. A core goal of the campaign was to secure this legislation and see the transition to the fully-funded SRS completed. The media component of the multiyear campaign incorporated political cartoons, videos, infographics<sup>3</sup> and Tweetathons that were produced and disseminated online at particular times to influence policymakers and the public.

### ***Political Cartoons***

In 2016, the Federation commissioned political cartoons by cartoonist Greg Gaul, to critique education policy and promote Federation and the AEU’s campaigns. Greg Gaul has produced cartoons for Federation’s journal and other publications for nearly 40 years.

The cartoon in Figure 1 highlights the disparity between schooling for rich and poor students. The line “a mix of old and new technologies” was a direct quote from the Prime Minister about the variations in the national broadband network, which contributed to unequal access to highspeed internet across Australia.

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<sup>3</sup> An infographic (information graphic) is a visual representation of largely quantitative information which aims to make the data easily understandable at a first glance. See Figure 3 for an infographic on the Gonski reform.

Figure 1 – Political Cartoon by Greg Gaul, produced during the 2016 Federal Election campaign



### **Videos**

The union produced multiple videos in support of the campaign. One highly-circulated animated video titled “What is Gonski?”<sup>4</sup>, narrated by Jane Caro, explained the technical details of the ‘Gonski’ schools funding model. This video was animated in the style of a hand drawing on a whiteboard to provide illustrations aligned with an engaging and informative narration.

Another example was a campaign video diary, which documented the Gonski Bus tour<sup>5</sup> where teachers travelled from their schools in Queensland, NSW, Victoria and South Australia to Canberra to a meeting of education ministers in Canberra. During the NSW leg of the journey, Federation staff and officers produced daily videos of the many school visits.

4 NSWTF Youtube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xylDiO17RGI>

5 Federation TV Showcase- <http://fedtv.nswtf.org.au/detail/videos/general/video/5363937304001/gonski-bus-tour-compilation?autoStart=true&page=2>

These videos conveyed messages from public school teachers in support of the implementation of the Gonski reforms. The bus tour and the videos raised the visibility of education in more remote communities and received sympathetic coverage from regional and local newspapers.

Figure 2 – ‘What is Gonski?’ infographic



### ***Tweethathons***

Twitter was created in 2011 and has become one of the primary platforms for campaign actions due to the public nature of all content and the ability to speak directly to people and organisations on the platform. Tweetathon is the name given to a coordinated effort to generate a large volume of posts within a limited time period in order to generate enough repeat uses of campaign keywords and hashtags (e.g. #Gonski) to have them appear in ‘trend maps’ or on lists of ‘trending topics’ and draw attention to associated campaign messages. These



events are coordinated nationally through email. Members are sent instructions along with samples of social media-friendly messages.

The first significant Twitter campaign action occurred on the evening of October 27 during National Gonski Week in 2015. By 9 pm, Gonski was the top-trending topic on Twitter in Australia. Two other highly successful Tweethathons were organised – to coincide with federal Budget announcements in 2016 and federal government announcements about a new Gonski 2.0 model in 2017.<sup>6</sup> Also during 2017, Federation sent out approximately 2200 tweets – each one with the name of a public school in NSW and the amount of funding they stood to lose in 2018/19 if the government’s new model was passed. All three Tweethathons included tweets in support of the Gonski reforms from high-profile federal and state politicians.

**Infographics:** An infographic (information graphic) is a visual representation of information, which aims to make the data easily understandable at a first glance. The Federation produced infographics to explain the scope and implications of the Gonski reforms for fair school funding reforms

### **Lessons learned**

The Federation’s experience suggests that multimedia communications circulated through online networks have contributed to union advocacy in multiple ways. First, new technologies have provided us with low-cost, speedy and direct means of communication with a diverse range of audiences across barriers of time and distance. Internet-based media also allows union activists to record and document mobilisations as they occur through photos, videos, Facebook posts and tweets, independent of coverage by mainstream media. Next and relatedly, the significant increases in our online followers<sup>7</sup> and subscribers tells us that the media is reaching a wide online audience – within and beyond the membership. Relatedly, we have observed the growth of vibrant online communities to

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<sup>6</sup> An estimated 14,900 tweets were sent over a 24-hour period, and a peak rate of 130 tweets per minute (according to data gathered from trendsmap.com).

<sup>7</sup> For example, the number of followers of Federation’s primary facebook page grew from 7100 in January of 2016 to more than 16000 by December 2017.

educate and advocate for greater recognition and respect for diversity within the union membership.

Limitations have to do with producing social-media friendly extracts which need to be very short summaries of key messages.

This practice runs the risk of reducing complex and situated analysis to superficial soundbites. Our goal here remains to use digital media to attract attention and then direct users to deeper engagement with complex policy and social issues related to public education. Last but not least, the Federation is careful to balance digital communications with traditional modes of communication and activism to support the necessary mobilisation of members and supporters for public events as required. In the union's experience, these strategies remain most effective in achieving broad participation of the Federation's membership.

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## **ACTIVIST REPORT**

### **CONFERENCE REPORT GLOBAL CHALLENGES: BORDERS, POPULISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION 14-16 June, 2018, Linnaeus University, Växjö (Sweden)**

**Doris Gödl**

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The *Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies*, established at Linnaeus University in Växjö, 'has ambition to reconstruct the past and analyse the present based on postcolonial theories that take into account several observers and new angles, all to make sure that we are presented with a multifaceted and nuanced understanding of history as well as of the present'.<sup>1</sup> This self-description of the study group lay ground for broad geographical and disciplinary perspectives. Besides research and teaching, this group organizes annual conferences to discuss current scientific issues from postcolonial perspectives.

Participating in this year's Conference I not only got very good insight into the work of this study group but also learned more about the special location of the university. The conference was held at Linnaeus University in Växjö, which is located in the southern part of Sweden and is situated near two big lakes, which makes the university campus a rather unique place.

The three-day international and transdisciplinary conference was based on keynote lectures and panel discussions. The contributors addressed questions of knowledge and knowledge productions from different perspectives and academic hierarchies. Each day started with keynote lectures

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1 Booklet Linnaeus University, 2018

of well-known researchers. In the following panel discussions, young scholars and doctoral students presented various case-studies on the topics of the keynote lectures. The variety of the presentations went from topics like *Imagining Ethiopia: Challenging Mainstream Postcolonial Approaches to Colonialism* (Juweri Ali) to *On Dying Colonialism and Postcolonial Phantasies in Recent Spanish Cinema* (Michelle Murray) and *Mayaland: Colonial Legacies, Urbanization, and the Unfolding of Global Capitalism in Yucatan* (Claudia Fonseca Alfaro).

The first day was about *Colonial legacies and postcolonial continuities*. In her contribution, Gurminder Bhambra (University of Sussex) put her focus on *Migrations from Nations to Empire (and Back Again?)*. Departing from current discourses about migration Bhambra analyzed European (Self)-Narrations to demonstrate that our knowledge of the past is framed by national terms and reproduced by methodological nationalism. In her analysis, Bhambra re-contextualized the history of the European Empire in unveiling the ideological frame of the discourse. Concluding with the idea of ‘shared histories’, she asks how can we overcome the distinction between ‘our history’ and ‘their history’ and how (Self)-Narrations can become shared histories. The panel discussion on *Postcolonial Europe – Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Continuities* dealt with ‘politics of location’ and insights into the perspectives on postcolonial Europe.

The case studies from Iceland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Denmark focused on racism and processes of racialization in different societal areas. With the keynote lecture *What use are the Humanities provided* by Dominick LaCapra (Cornell University) the first day of the conference came to an end. You can listen to the keynote lecture here, [https://play.lnu.se/media/t/0\\_05c3dsx3](https://play.lnu.se/media/t/0_05c3dsx3)

The second day offered sessions on *European Migration, Migration, Colonialism and Cinema across the Globe, Strategies of Bordering or Past and Present Colonial Perspectives in Literature*. Kirsten Husung (Linnaeus University) presented a case study about *The heritage of the Algerian Independence war: a Harki’s family history in L’art de perdre of Alice Zeniter*. Focusing on questions of identity, Husung used the concept of hybridity to deconstruct the recurring dichotomy of ‘use’ and ‘them’ in Western literature. Whereas Husung focused on

identity, Yu Huang raised the question of representation in her contribution *Imagining Trans-Asian Chineseness: the Sinophone writes back?* She used the concept of 'situated literature' and the concept of 'worlding' to challenge the dominant discourse in Western literature.

In her contribution the cultural theorist and video artist, Mieke Bal focused on the concept of migratory aesthetics, understood as 'performance of contact'. In her videos, she experiments with 'empathic unsettlement. Instead of simply recording the lives of others the three films *Close Encounters* shown at the beginning of the lecture are based on encounter and intimacy. The films, thus, all document both the situations they address and their own ethical predicament of the need for modesty and the need for knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Overcoming the dichotomy of cultural subject and cultural object, Bal talks about 'performance of contact' where knowledge is produced. Her films 'document both the situations they address and their own ethical predicament of the need for modesty and the need for knowledge.'

On the third day on the panel discussion on *Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Welfare State*, colonial and racial origins of European welfare states were addressed. European colonialism is strongly linked with the development of welfare states especially with the politics of inclusion and exclusion which themselves are based on racialization. Peo Hansen (Linköping University) rose the important issue of refugee reception and welfare politics in Sweden. In his analysis, he used Modern Monetary Theory to develop a kind of 'Refugee Keynesianism'. Using Sweden as case study he showed, that refugee integration in small and middle-sized municipalities increased monetary transfers. This is a real chance to change the public perception that migrants are always only a budgetary burden. Read more: <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2017/11/01/the-accidental-keynesian-how-refugee-spending-in-sweden-challenged-austerity-put-the-local-fiscal-houses-in-order-and-proved-beneficial-to-all/>

The conference program provided various current transdisciplinary postcolonial discourses. As a social scientist,

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2 Conference Flyer 2018

I got insights into current theoretical debates. On the broad variety of issues was interesting. On the other hand the question arose if everything is labeled “postcolonial” these days. What does postcolonial actually mean? If every current critical knowledge production is labeled as postcolonial, there is a danger of the term becoming an ‘empty signifier’. We cannot take refuge in the so-called “right or final position” but we have to build upon the dynamics of critical thinking. (“Achse der fragenden Bewegung”)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chambers Iain. 1996. Migration, Culture, Identity (Migration, Kultur, Identität). Tübingen: Stauffenberg

## **REPORT**

### **PROBLEMATISING RESEARCH IN/FOR THE GLOBAL SOUTH: THE POWER/KNOWLEDGE NEXUS**

#### **A GLOBED SUMMER SCHOOL REPORT**

**Giulia Montefiore**

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The GLOBED Summer School marks every year the halfway of the 2-year journey of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree in Education Policies for Global Development (GLOBED). Developed by the consortium of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Malta, and University of Oslo, with the participation of the University of Amsterdam, this itinerant European Master degree focuses on issues of education and development through the lens of globalisation and from a sociological perspective. The Summer School, organised by the University of Malta, this year took place on the island of Gozo (the second most inhabited island in the archipelago that constitutes the Republic of Malta) over the third week of June. With a different theme as its focus every year, this edition's Summer School was dedicated to problematising research in and for the Global South by focusing on the nexus between knowledge and power. With the objective of equipping students with appropriate tools for undertaking their Master thesis fieldwork in the Global South, but also in the South of the Global North, the Summer School brought together internal and external professors to speak with and of their own expertise, previous cohorts' students sharing their fieldwork and thesis experiences and challenges, and current students as active discussants and not just as receivers of knowledge. Cultural and recreational activities such as visits to museums, walks



around the island's villages and in nature, and film forums formed integral part of the week and were designed to be shared by all participants.

The Summer School rationale was characterised by a focus on raising questions about ways of conducting research in the presence of, within, and dialectically against historically and geographically located power imbalances, finding their roots in colonialism. The discussion followed a downward movement that started with an exquisitely theoretical handling of the topic that progressively acquired substance and ended with an examination of the concept of banking education and a call for socially-relevant research. The de-colonial challenges within the Politics of Knowledge in research were introduced by Arathi Sriprakash from the University of Cambridge. Using the metaphors of 'shine' and 'shadow' (Rudolph, Sriprakash, Gerrard, 2018) she opened the discussion to the duality of research in its possibilities on the one hand, and its foundation in and capacities for epistemic and racial violence on the other.

Through the concepts of ruination (Stoler, 2008), carceral imaginaries (Benjamin, 2016) and domestication (Hage, 2017), she materialised the 'shadow' and this led to interrogatives of action, suggesting Tuck and Yang's (2014) politics of refusal as a possible tool. The 'shadow' was more openly framed within postcolonialism and postcolonial theory by Peter Mayo from the University of Malta. Introducing education as a site of struggle and as a key vehicle for the 'colonisation of the mind', he focused on the importance of understanding education not only as something colonial to undo, but also as a tool of positive transformation through its different omissions within the postcolonial paradigm. Indigenous Knowledge Systems as a realm upon which the 'shadow' of colonialism has been cast was explored by Catherine Odora Hoppers from the University of South Africa (UNISA). She delved into how indigenous holistic ethical, social, religious and philosophical sub-systems were ruined, fixated and domesticated and into how they now require archaeology, re-appropriation, development and protection. This endeavour not only can challenge existing procedures for legitimation and accreditation of scientific knowledge and enable economic and socio-cultural empowerment of communities, but should be aimed at integrating knowledge systems in an effort of reciprocal valorisation.

More substance was given to the concept of Indigenous Knowledge by Censu Caruana from the University of Malta. In his session he explored how the monolithic Western notion of development dictates theory and practice of it and on how Indigenous notions of development can be theorised and practiced by Indigenous people and not. The question of how to conduct research about, with and for the oppressed without inadvertently silencing them was then raised by Simone Galea from the University of Malta. Using women as an example of a category whose ways of knowing are ignored and colonised, she explored how ever present is the risk of epistemic violence. She specifically warned against assimilation and overly simplistic representation of the experience of the subalterns as narrated by them.

Deconstruction (Spivak, 1994) and epistemological border-crossing, achieved through the continuous self-questioning of the researcher herself, are presented as strategies for minimising these risks. The role of alternative epistemologies as more active and less in need of archaeological and protective efforts was opened for examination to the class by Aziz Choudry from McGill University. By directly engaging with the students, he generated a discussion about the role of social movements in producing legitimate knowledge outside of universities and about the role of public intellectuals. The discussion was brought to a close by Xavier Bonal from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, who tackled the concepts of banking education and banking education policy. Building on what had been previously discussed, he presented a critical way of learning and advocated for socially relevant research and for research with a social impact.

Every day, after the speakers' presentations, students from the current edition of the Master presented the topic at hand with the aid of a poster based on a set of assigned readings, with the objective of starting off a discussion within the class and between the class and the professors. The presentations started as very theoretically focused, but students quickly adapted them in response to the format of the preceding professors' speeches, transforming their presentation time into a place for challenging and questioning critical points and concepts and presenting practical examples. The effort to come up with practical applications based on personal experience, be that professional or research, was encouraged

by the work done by some students of the previous cohort of the Master degree programme. These students, about to graduate, conducted, during this year, Summer School sessions involving detailed reports and reflections on their fieldwork and thesis development experiences.

Finally, the daily workshop sessions provided students with moments for more hands-on work on ideas in connection with their thesis. In these spaces, students could present in detail their thesis proposals, ideas and fieldwork plans in smaller groups to professors, peers and previous cohort students, obtaining feedback and engaging in discussions which led to changes in their thesis projects.

The design of the 2018 GLOBED Summer School encouraged horizontal and mutual learning and sharing of both theoretical and experiential knowledge. While taking a clear normative stance with respect to the ethical use of power of the Global-North in research, the week was characterised by an inquisitive rather than a specifically prescriptive flavour. This week of collective retreat managed to bring together, in a productive way, experienced academics and professionals, young researchers, and students challenging themselves together in the search of a truly democratic research.

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