

## Sell, sell, sell or learn, learn, learn? The EdTech market in New Zealand's education system – privatisation by stealth?

Noeline Wright & Michael Peters

To cite this article: Noeline Wright & Michael Peters (2017) Sell, sell, sell or learn, learn, learn? The EdTech market in New Zealand's education system – privatisation by stealth?, Open Review of Educational Research, 4:1, 164-176, DOI: [10.1080/23265507.2017.1365623](https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1365623)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1365623>



© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 23 Aug 2017.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 31



[View related articles](#)





[View Crossmark data](#)



OPEN ACCESS



# Sell, sell, sell or learn, learn, learn? The EdTech market in New Zealand's education system – privatisation by stealth?

Noeline Wright  and Michael Peters 

Wulf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

## ABSTRACT

An article in *The Atlantic* 'Quantifying the Ed-Tech Market' (2015), which draws on a review by the Education Technology Industry Network, reports that the U.S. Ed-tech market totalled \$8.38 billion in the 2012–2013 academic year, which is up from \$7.9 billion the year before, and up 11.7 per cent from 2009. K-12 online course revenue including any digital curriculum increased some 320% and the testing and assessment market, the largest single category, generated \$2.5 billion. The New Zealand business organisation EDTechNZ, indicates on its website that educational technology is the fastest growing sector of a global smart education market worth US\$100 billion, forecast to grow to US \$394 by 2019. The same source indicates that Cloud-based educational technology is accelerating at 20% growth per annum and is forecast to reach US\$12 billion by 2019. These returns are unequalled by most other economic sectors. Our concern in this article is that the market imperative based on selling has become a driving logic for digital technologies in schools while learning gets lost in the rush for companies to profit from schools, creating de facto privatisation by stealth. Aspects of the New Zealand educational context are used to illustrate our thinking, especially since most educational provision is still state owned and taxpayer funded.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 March 2017

Accepted 7 August 2017

## KEYWORDS

Privatisation; education systems; New Zealand; digital technologies; education market

## Introduction

This article raises concerns about the inroads of private enterprise into New Zealand's taxpayer funded, state education system. The New Zealand Ministry of Education's own website proclaims that a 'child's education is free between the ages of five and 19 at state schools (schools that are government owned and funded) if they are a New Zealand citizen or a permanent resident' (Ministry of Education, 2016, Section 3). Various governments have, over time, tinkered with this premise, reducing schools' operational funding to the point where most have trouble in providing the services and opportunities necessary for a well-rounded education, thus finding themselves charging parents 'donations' which become school fees. Over time, these have ossified into almost

**CONTACT** Noeline Wright  [n.wright@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:n.wright@waikato.ac.nz)

© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

compulsory forms of revenue for schools, as the squeeze on operations grants from central government do not match what is expected of schools. The 2015 budget round, for example, garnered this reaction from a Radio New Zealand (RNZ) blog post, 'School operations grants will increase just 1 percent next year, half as much as in previous budgets' (Gerritson, 2015, para. 4). Various governments have also made attempts to introduce greater private company access to schools through various means, including private/state partnerships in schools, such as in the private ownership of school buildings, called Public–Private Partnerships. Another has been the inroads of vending machines into schools. These are now commonplace.

The present New Zealand government is arguably the most determined to introduce privatised schooling and has been incrementally dismantling the state education system, one brick at a time. The latest inroad, and we suspect the most successful, is in the digital technology sphere and we wonder – is this an example of the privatisation of the New Zealand state education by stealth? By illustrating our ideas with examples from the New Zealand education context and its intersection with the private sector regarding digital technologies, we will attempt to answer this question. We will also demonstrate, by examples from international contexts, where private enterprise has created captive markets for its digital products, which, in our view, amounts to an abuse of school-aged learners and the places where they should be safe to learn. To begin with however, an exploration of the international, neo-liberal digital market landscape is necessary to situate the focus on education in New Zealand.

### International landscape

Touraine's (1971) late 1960s focus on post-industrialism predicted the rise of new social movements associated with this economic shift. His analysis emphasised ways in which social life, including education, was being increasingly integrated into the realm of production. During the 1960s, Fritz Machlup and Marc Porat charted the employment effects of an emerging U.S. 'information economy' and argued for productivity gains from investment in the information sector. A range of sociologists, economists, philosophers of technology, geographers, engineers and politicians have debated the meaning and significance of the technical transformations wrought by communications and information technologies from the post-war period. A recent expression of this discourse was Al Gore's popularisation of the 'information superhighway' (Wiggins, 2000).

One contemporary variant of this 'information society' discourse is closely tied to neo-liberalism; it is wildly utopian, using the hyperbolic language of 'revolution', attempting visions of the future. This future emphasises universal and abstract 'techno-fix' solutions to educational, social and economic problems. It focuses upon technical transformations of society, particularly highlighting commercial benefits. It also treats digital technologies in general neutral and, by association benign, needing no social or political analysis. Increasingly, the educational technology industry directly intervenes in education.

This is the focus of our argument as current New Zealand government policy supports the technological disruption of the ideals of a welfare state education vision based on equality. Instead, current policy appears to encourage ideals of knowledge capitalism, enveloping schools in digital circuits of an emerging global system of digital technologies and processes provided by multinational info-utilities through their providers. McRae

(2013), for example, acknowledges ways in which new technologies have ‘amplified our desires for choice, flexibility and individualisation’ providing a 24/7 customised market for services, writing about the dreams for personalised learning promised through technologies:

Notions of mechanized teaching machines captured the imagination of many in the late 19th and 20th century. Today, yet again, a new generation of technology platforms promise to deliver ‘personalized learning’ for each and every student. This rebirth of the teaching machine centres on digital software tutors (known as adaptive learning systems) and their grand claims to individualize learning by controlling the pace, place and content for each and every student. This time around, however, it is personal. (para. 1)

Governments also embrace this language ‘in an eagerness to reduce costs with business-like customization and streamlined workforce productivity – all with the expectation that a flexible education system will also be more efficient and (cost) effective’ (McRae, 2013, para. 3). He also observes that this ‘system’ is potentially ‘a movement that could be the last tsunami that systematically privatizes public education systems’ (McRae, 2013, para. 14).

He argues that it is behaviourist through using operant conditioning to reward (or not) learners through increased standardised, centralised and adaptive learning systems.

Tiffin and Rajasingham (1995) earlier presented a vision for education and training, by referring to their own practices in using the digital affordances available to them at the time. They speculated on their value to create efficiencies of scale in higher education. Their prescient thinking can be seen when they predict a ‘learner-centred, market-driven model of education’ (p. 85), suggesting that this may become *the* global solution to problems of modern education. They justify their vision in systems theory, where they argue that ‘education is communication’ and ‘the classroom is a communication machine’ (Tiffin and Rajasingham (1995, p. 20). They define communication as having three functions: *transmitting*, *storing* and *processing* information.

Since their focus is higher education rather than compulsory schooling, this is, perhaps, unsurprising. They suggest that students might weigh up transport costs to a campus with digital learning modes instead, constituting a conception of what education is or can be. As a paradigm, this is understood as solutions to traditional problems of space, place and temporality in conventional campus-based education. In addition, this potentially new paradigm is presented as learner-centred, problem-focused, flexible, accessible and much cheaper than traditional education provision. When learners are not restricted by place, time or space, they can access information from anywhere, anytime. Education then becomes a global educational utility using online affordances to transmit packages of learning. Such a global educational utility in NZ would presumably be provided and controlled more by private industry than government, through, perhaps, a contracted consumer-driven education.

The recent ‘COOL Schools’ announcement from the Ministry of Education (<http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/legislation/the-education-update-amendment-bill/establishing-a-regulatory-framework-for-online-learning/>) may be a harbinger of things to come, even in the light of a recent research report from the U.S. about virtual and blended schools (Miron & Gulosino, 2016). These authors note that U.S. virtual schools have, compared with traditional school intakes, fewer enrolments from minority or low-income family learners, but online schools had a very high student:teacher ratio –

44 students per teacher, compared with 16 students in traditional U.S. schools. Significantly, the report also concluded that results from virtual schools lagged ‘significantly behind that of traditional brick-and-mortar schools’ (p. 5) while blended were even worse in performance measures. This point was mitigated, however, by noting that blended contexts serve ‘substantially’ more minority and low-income student communities. Worryingly, they also report that

Only 131 virtual schools and 26 blended schools had data specific to on-time graduation in 2013–14. The on-time graduation rate (or four-year graduation rate) for full-time virtual schools and blended schools was half the national average: 40.6% for virtual schools, 37.4% for blended schools, and 81.0% for the nation as a whole. The graduation rates for virtual schools have worsened by 3 percentage points over the past few years, even as graduation rates in the country have been improving about 1 percentage point each year. (Miron & Gulosino, 2016, p. 5)

These results suggest that students are not particularly well served by private enterprise online learning, so the opening up of the notion of COOL schools in New Zealand may result in dire consequences if not handled well, or if Te Kura (the long-established distance learning school in New Zealand) is not properly funded with a reasonable staff:student ratio. The neo-liberal view that the individual is solely responsible for every facet of their lives, feeds into a narrative about ‘personalised learning’, understood as self-teaching. Machine learning and mastery frames link those together, captured by Simons and Masschelein (2008) who argue that

learning has become a matter of both government and self-government – in other words, that we regard learning as that which guarantees self-government and that which at the same time renders us, and society as a whole, governable.

In short, the ‘governmentalization of learning’ implies that, inasmuch as we consider learning to be a fundamental process and govern ourselves accordingly, we are part of a particular, advanced liberal, governmental regime. (p. 393)

Notions of digital technologies being the ‘answer’ to providing learner-centred, readily accessible education link to the *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) (Ministry of Education, 2007). This document advocates e-pedagogy, social learning and student-centred approaches. The lure of what digital technologies can offer in properly constructed learning contexts masks some of the ways in which it can be interpreted to fit a neo-liberal, privatised, deprofessionalised education agenda. This is an agenda using big data to create mastery learning feedback loops for learners. It is cheaper, more efficient and involves fewer teachers. However, a key issue with this kind of thrust is that the capabilities needed for successful citizenship and employment centre on creativity, adaptability, critical thinking and nuanced understandings of complex ideas. Mastery learning, instead, is often focused on providing behaviourist instant feedback, rewarding content knowledge rather than an ability to argue, critique, create and repurpose. This is because content ‘facts’ can be quantified and machine assessed.

So is it that mastery tools and methods are attractive to teachers because they efficiently mark themselves? Or, because students respond so positively to digital technologies that teachers want to keep using them (Wright, 2015)? Or do they offer options for students to be self-directed and or provide things not otherwise available in schools? Through examining the context of New Zealand’s educational landscape in

terms of digital technologies, we ponder such questions, beginning by examining two readily accessible texts for teachers. The first is *Interface* magazine and the second is [educators.co.nz](http://educators.co.nz).

### Illustration 1: *interface*

This magazine has been available since 2007 with a stated distribution of over 14,000 copies through about 1300 schools. Its website asserts that the 'magazine is having a major influence on the decisions schools are making about the use of ICT and how they implement it in the classroom' (*Interface*, <https://interfaceonline.co.nz/about/>). The editor, Greg Adams, explained that the magazine arose when he worked as an IT journalist, partly working with the now 30-year-old TUANZ (Telecommunications Users Association of New Zealand). Adams identified a gap between education and commerce in the technology sphere. He noticed that schools were desperately looking for advice, help and inspiration regarding digital technology hardware and software, while the technology industry was looking for new customers. Adams identified a 'big disconnect between the two' (interview 24/5/16) and felt that he could develop something to bridge that gap. He said that

I felt I was in a good position to create something between the two, and had the desire to have my own business. I therefore decided to build something at that point – it was a perfect storm of the three things. (Interview 24/5/16)

The *Interface* purpose, as stated on its website, is about being 'the technology magazine for educators to learn about using ICT', while its target audience is 'primary and secondary schools in New Zealand ... from principals and senior management through ICT specialists to teachers in classrooms'. It prides itself on having informative, inspiring and *independent* content, and that its chief aim is to

... support the use of ICT by schools and to give educators more confidence using technology through providing informative, inspiring and independent coverage of the issues relating to the use of ICT in learning. It's easy to read and full of resources, tips and advice to help teachers gain a better understanding of the ways in which they can successfully and safely integrate technology into their classroom. (*Interface*, <https://interfaceonline.co.nz/about/>)

Early issues of *Interface* showed that while 24/42 pages (Issue 13, 2009) contained overt advertisements, some pages were also advertorial. Issue 14 contained 21 pages of overt advertisements while Issue 42 (2012) contained 28 pages of overt advertisements, many of which were full page, or logos or mentions. Issue 53 (2014) had 21/46 pages with some form of advertising. I excluded from all counts of advertisements the four pages of *File share*, a popular repository of information about various sites and their potential uses for learning. By the time Issue 70 arrives (2016), the magazine is able to devote a page to its sponsors, including N4L and The Ministry of Education. N4L is a commercial company created and owned by the New Zealand government. The filip of this sponsorship implies that *Interface* is to be trusted for advice about education and digital technologies.

Some of the features about schools and digital technologies often centre on particular brands of device or service. Issue 70 Term 2, May 2016, for example, contained a number of school case studies, including St Mary's College's 'Taking the BYOD journey'. The school mandated a particular named device for students, and the article describes what the

school finds positive about it. There is very little in the feature about the value to learning in any researched sense, but is mostly centred on recording people's impressions and anecdotal evidence. And why would a school bag its own choices? At the end of the piece, a national department store chain is also named, attaching helpful contact information, implying a connection to the school that is not explicitly referred to in the feature itself. Term 1's issue (volume 70) features six teachers in six different school sites or centres using 3D printers. While these teachers provide inspiration for others in using these printers for highly authentic, problem-based learning outcomes (such as a school working with a local vet to design a 3D orthotic brace for dog with a leg injury), the pages also strongly associate with a particular 3D printer brand. Such subliminal features are symptomatic of a relentless connection between what schools are doing with devices and private enterprise.

The magazine, therefore, acts as gateway access to teachers and learners for private companies. Most digital technologies companies selling to schools focus on WHAT to use in their classrooms as sellers, not educators. Pedagogical purposes have a low priority. Mishra and Koehler's (2006) TPACK framework, for example, argues that unless professional development focuses on the pedagogical value of technologies to teachers' own classrooms, the uptake and purposeful learning use of digital technologies will remain shallow and perfunctory; *having* a technological tool is not enough – knowing *why* and *how* is crucial if positive outcomes for learners are intended. Consider Molnar's argument about commercialism in schools:

Commercialism is an expression of advanced capitalist culture and a profound threat to democratic institutions. Its impact on schools is, at its most basic, to transform the guiding ideal of public schools as centers of learning serving the public good to centers of profit benefiting private interests ... Schools have come to be seen as markets for vendors, venues for advertising and marketing, and commodities to be bought and sold. (Molnar, 2005, p. 16)

The focus of *Interface* magazine, and how it presents itself, is an example of, as Rudd (2013) put it, a 'stimulation of an educational technology marketplace, and the embedding and transmission of ideologically informed assumptions about the nature and purpose of education' (p. 148). Rudd observes that in U.K. contexts, 'existing products intended for other sectors were adapted quickly for sale into the burgeoning schools marketplace with scant regard for pedagogy or broader cognitive or learning processes' (p. 150) and this concurs with points we made earlier. Rudd's interpretation appears to fit with the kinds of articles published in *Interface*, which focus mainly on the technological tools themselves rather than any robust evidence about their intended *learning value*.

Selwyn (2016) takes this blinded-by-the-headlights love affair with the tools themselves to task, saying that

... it is surely not satisfactory that the dominant framing of education and technology blithely marginalizes, ignores and/or denies the complex and compounded inequalities of the digital age. Similarly, it is surely not helpful to avoid proper discussion of the political economy of digital education, and the corporate reforms of public education through privately sponsored technological means. The limited language of education and technology therefore needs to be challenged by anyone concerned with matters of fairness, equality and genuine empowerment through digital education. (p. 440)



Selwyn's critique is useful to remember when teachers talk about the digital technologies they use. Some design effective and creative learning opportunities for their students that precipitate deep thinking and thoughtful engagement in concept knowledge development. A few, however, may use digital technologies as shortcuts to learning, not focusing on the intended learning outcomes. For example, some fail to deliberately teaching effective online search and verification strategies, are not even aware that they should, or know how to embed such practices in classroom work. Some teachers – particularly in secondary schools – have difficulty in seeing beyond the *content* of their subjects, looking only for content-oriented digital solutions, not how they might increase students' own abilities to problem-solve, critique and create knowledge with expert guidance. Selwyn's charge, therefore, of aiming for 'matters of fairness, equality and genuine empowerment through digital education' (p. 440) is increasingly important to focus on.

By not publishing researched evidence, *Interface* continues to be more of an advocate for technology companies rather than learning per se. We can argue then, that it is treating schools as marketplaces, keeping its own discourses upbeat, focused on the technologies and glossy. Selwyn (2016) alerts us to this discourse, arguing that the language of EdTech is 'highly political in both its nature and its effect' (p. 438). His view of 'Ed-Tech Speak' is neither benign nor neutral in its choice of words and phrases to describe itself in educational spaces. He sees these choices as a 'powerful means of advancing the interests and agendas of some social groups over the interests of others' (p. 438), posing a 'serious problem for anyone concerned with the democratic potential of digital technology in education' (p. 438). The tendency to draw a straight line between digital technology use and what is described as transformative learning is strong, ignoring the complexities of classrooms, teaching and learning: lures of straightforward solutions to complex issues of teaching and learning are strong. These tendencies suit the sales and journalistic frame of magazines like *Interface* thus supporting market thrusts into schools.

Yet, as Ertmer (2005) argued, 'If educators are to achieve fundamental, or second-order, changes in classroom teaching practices, we need to examine teachers themselves and the beliefs they hold about teaching, learning, and technology' (p. 26). *Interface* does not address this. This publication has a wide reach, yet does not seek out, highlight or use relevant research for its audience. Should it do so, it might better counterbalance the strong commercial and tool-focus orientation prevalent in the magazine.

This strong commercial and technology tool focus is likely to be related to the *Interface* Editor's own knowledge and vision for the magazine, which is, sensibly for him, to make a living out of it. In a telephone interview, he says that he 'Tries to plot a course of 30:70 but will never turn an ad down. I have to balance between getting copy and balancing the books'. He also adds that he 'targets K-12 educators to include anyone working in a school with keenness to learn about IT', displaying the interest in the technological rather than the pedagogical reasoning that should drive teachers' use of digital technologies. This last point is important, for teachers will most likely persist with technologies for learning purposes if they see that it has learning benefits for students, even if there are persistent obstacles to overcome (Wright, 2015).

The editor of the *Interface* magazine's background is journalism, not education, wanting snappy content. Many teachers approach him with content to share in *Interface*. While this sharing aspect is a common feature of New Zealand teachers' practices, and is a valuable feature of our education landscape, this sharing is often anecdotal, and about what the



teachers *did* with specific technological tools rather than the outcomes students experience or the *meanings* or *outcomes* arising out their use. While the enthusiasm is admirable, these teachers effectively short-change the profession and the potential for deepening pedagogical knowledge – and in particular, TPACK, by not taking a more critical, researched stance with their experiences and their learning outcomes.

## Illustration 2: educators.co.nz

*Educators* is a website describing itself as being *for* educators. It is, however, entirely staffed by journalists, marketers, web developers and a variety of other contributors and technology geeks. None of the contributors profiled on the site describe any background directly related to an interest or expertise in education. Their main focus is, instead, promoting digital technologies to teachers, relaying online articles. The educators.co.nz site reports articles which push technology advertising and advertorials to educators. For example, on two occasions, similar versions of the same report were featured (Knowles, (2016a; 2016b); 26 May 2016) about wearables in education. The articles focused on schools as sizeable markets for these devices. The original report (Technavio, 2016), while mentioning educational value as in 'The implementation of wearable technology has enhanced students' engagement as now they can learn easily and speedily' (para. 1), sees schools as sites of commerce and opportunity; it is a report about markets, not education. Incidentally, the report itself costs 'only' US\$2500 and is therefore beyond the scope of any educator to either access or critique. Knowles' articles repeat that market emphasis, recounting very low-level applications to education:

According to Jhansi Mary, *Technavio* lead analyst for education technology research, 'Faculty of educational institutions are increasingly adopting smartwatches as these are loaded with useful functionalities and are discreet and cost-effective. They can be used to take attendance, track students' behaviour, and assess their performance.

Academically, these devices are useful mainly for STEM topics, according to *Technavio*. For instance, they are used for looking up information on chemical symbols or solve equations using the built-in calculator. (Knowles, 2016a, paras 7–8)

The examples of looking up information or using the built-in calculator are not, to an educator, compelling arguments, for these functions already exist in more common devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, and represent rudimentary activities for learners. Also, functions related to content retrieval do not develop or foster critical thinking – a core purpose of education. Perhaps, this is because *Technavio* is a company that says that its 'research and analysis focuses on emerging market trends to help businesses identify market opportunities and develop effective strategies to optimize their market positions' (<http://www.technavio.com/content/about-us>). Perhaps, a highly critically aware citizenry is antithetical to markets.

Another post, with the headline 'NZ Education system not evolving fast enough' (Worthington, 2016), outlined NZTech's Chief Executive Graeme Muller's view who argues that schools should be creating market-ready employees:

NZTech recommends ongoing efforts to lift the responsiveness of the education system to the needs of tech sector employers. It is also critical for all children to develop skills to prepare them for the jobs of the future ... We urge faster implementation of computational

thinking and computer programming into the curricula, and teaching throughout New Zealand schools from year one. (<https://educators.co.nz/story/NZ-education-system-not-evolving/>)

While he then advocates for the laudable '... need to teach teachers how to bring technology into the classroom, not as a specialist subject, but as a method of teaching all subjects', there follows a statement which suggests that it is about 'skill development' rather than pedagogical nous and dispositional change. There is also no mention of the role school leaders must play in supporting and fostering this change. The direct, straight line drawn between skill development and full embeddedness implied in this ignores the complex nature of the teaching-learning continuum and the kinds of models deemed necessary for deep pedagogical change (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). It also suggests little understanding of the function of education. From an educator's point of view, it is about more than creating workers; highlighting differences between an orientation to market needs and the pedagogical complexities of classrooms and schools.

A post on this same educators.co.nz site (11 July 2016) by an anonymous contributor articulated the dilemma schools face in the relentless pace of change and innovation in the digital space:

The EdTech ecosystem is constantly evolving, with increasing numbers of platforms and applications being made available to schools. This increasing number of options is creating fragmentation in the ecosystem, which is confusing end users when it comes to selecting and using the right tools to achieving their desired learning outcomes. As an analyst tracking the category full time, it is incredibly hard to keep up to date with all of the various providers entering the market as well as the different product categories emerging. If we find it hard to stay up to date, how must users feel? ('Is the gap between education technology suppliers and end users increasing?' 11 July 2016, para. 2)

The kinds of information that sites like *Educators.co.nz* and *Interface* provide, go some way to plugging that gap, but may also serve to exacerbate the problem of too much technology to choose from, creating overkill, with 'end users ... crying out for simplicity' (para. 6) and this would include teachers.

While these are examples of mismatches between education and what market-orientations profess, there are much worse examples from other countries.

### International examples of private enterprise affecting schools

The United States and China provide perverse examples of privatisation. In the former context, a television channel (Channel One) has inserted itself into schools in various jurisdictions, delivering students and teachers to advertisers for a 'required' 12 minutes per school day. The company makes its money by selling this start-of-the-day advertising time (when people are freshest and most alert) at a premium. One site provides the statistics and perspective about this at <http://www.ibiblio.org/commercialfree/commercialism.html>. By the state reducing taxpayer funds for educating its citizens, it is instead, creating the conditions for schools to become more complete sites for the incursion of private enterprise and the selling of students to commercial imperatives. Private enterprise has little moral purpose or sense of altruism in its insertion into education but is driven by private profit. By schools being opened to private enterprise, teachers and students

become captive audiences of product pitch with, in our view, the aim of creating consumers, not thinkers.

In China, an even more perverse example exists, where tobacco companies sponsor Chinese primary schools (Moore, 2011). As Moore relates, “‘Talent comes from hard work – Tobacco helps you become talented’”, says one slogan, in foot-high gilt letters, on the front of the Sichuan Tobacco Hope Primary School’ (para. 2). Anti-smoking campaigners, Moore notes, argue that this level of sponsorship contravenes the World Health Organisation’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which China ratified in 1995, breaking its own international commitment to halting the spread of tobacco consumption. There are also reports of vendors selling individual cigarettes at school gates. With such blatant sponsorship, it is hardly surprising that smokers in China try their first cigarette at about 10 years old.

These two examples indicate a lack of ethic of care for young people, and rampant consumerism behaviours. In China’s case, the government owns the tobacco companies, so the conflict of interest is enormous, especially since in some areas of China, tobacco generates about 40% of a region’s revenue.

Connell’s Australian (2013) view describes the private ‘cascade’ into education thus:

Increasingly, education has been defined as an industry, and educational institutions have been forced to conduct themselves more and more like profit-seeking firms. Policy changes across the sector have been introduced by different governments, state and federal, and in different forms. But the policy changes all move in the same direction – increasing the grip of market logic on schools, universities and technical education. (p. 102)

The market logic grip on education in New Zealand is not in the same league as the U.S. or China, but those countries’ examples indicate the end game, if market logic prefers consumers not thinkers. In New Zealand’s education system, the proliferation of product placement in *Interface* magazine highlights the bombardment of teachers’ students, while the market-oriented pitch in *Educator.co.nz* chips away at readers’ abilities to conceptualise ideas in terms other than how a market might interpret ideas, events or tools/resources for learning. Perhaps, it is telling that the Ministry of Education is a listed sponsor of *Interface*.

The contradiction between the intention of commerce to create consumers compared with the task of teachers to create critically aware citizens is thus starkly in focus in the cases illustrated here. With journalist and sales backgrounds writers driving commercially oriented texts for New Zealand teachers and schools (such as *Educators.co.nz* and *Interface*), the focus and pitch will most likely stay at the buy, buy, buy, and sell, sell, sell level, exacerbated by apparent governmental support through its ideological drivers. Remember too, that private enterprises are unlikely to know or care much about, the kinds of ethics and principles of learning and achievement that teachers value and seek (Wright, 2015).

### Other privatisation inroads into schools

On the *Educators.co.nz* site on 18 July 2016, a press release from Nikki Kaye, the Associate Minister of Education, outlined how property services for schools could be ‘centralised’ and ‘put to market’:

... further work has been undertaken to refine the facilities maintenance costs of newly rebuilt schools which have product warranties and other services that were not part of the pilot, such as cleaning and grounds maintenance. The experience and knowledge gained from this work is now being used to determine whether a facilities management contract for schools should be put to the market and also to inform the funding review. (Williams, 2016)

Connell (2013) presciently commented on Kaye's intentions: 'Needs formerly met by public agencies on a principle of citizen rights, or through personal relationships in communities and families, are now to be met by companies selling services in a market' (p. 100). In other words, removing another brick in the dismantling wall of publicly provided services. The idea of privatisation change by stealth – the gradual tinkering and chipping at the edges of these public services, is gaining momentum, going hand in hand with creating COOL and charter schools – that is, putting education in the hands of people other than qualified teachers. Charter schools do not have to appoint qualified teachers for example, contradicting Kaye's statement that, 'We want quality teaching and learning because we know it makes the biggest difference to educational achievement' (Connell 2013). Instead, this requires all those working with students as 'teacher', to have more than a passing knowledge of pedagogy, for teaching people how to think critically is a long-term and deliberate process, yet is not always visible to unqualified eyes. Having large numbers in virtual classrooms who step themselves through mastery learning may not result in creative problem solvers and critical thinkers. The increased privatisation of educational provision, coupled with private companies offering digital technologies and associated affordances to New Zealand schools, risks forsaking rich pedagogical practices and learning opportunities for profit motives that serve private companies, not future citizens.

## Conclusion

Have we made a case for the privatisation of New Zealand education by stealth via digital technologies? Our examples indicate the softening of both teachers and students to private incursions into their learning spaces. When teachers are responsible for providing the best they can for their learners, but without enough funds to execute it, options are few. The current government appears to encourage turning to private enterprise for solutions. The *quid pro quos* schools are presented with for this, are not necessarily in our learners' best interests. The most frightening example of an end game is the state-owned tobacco companies' sponsorship of hundreds of primary schools in China. The selling of children's minds to a lethal product is the worst outcome possible. The Channel One US example is only marginally less reprehensible. What will be the worst New Zealand example?

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

*Dr Noeline Wright* is a teacher educator at the University of Waikato. She specialises in researching and teaching digital technologies in secondary education, which closely links with an interest in the effects on pedagogical practices of digital technologies. A third research interest is how new schools

come into being and create their own place, culture and vision, particularly when inhabiting schools built with modern learning environment principles and which offer robust broadband affordances.

**Michael A. Peters** is Professor in the Wilf Malcolm Institute for Educational Research at Waikato University, Emeritus Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Professorial Fellow at James Cook University. His research interests focus on educational philosophy with a focus on contemporary philosophical movements to the framing of educational issues, especially philosophical and political economy questions of knowledge production, distribution and consumption. His recent writing and scholarly activity revolves around two interrelated areas: contemporary philosophy (critical theory, poststructuralism, hermeneutics and analytic philosophy) with a focus on philosophy of education, and the politics of education, educational reform and welfare policy in NZ and elsewhere (<http://www.michaeladrianpeters.com/>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Adrian\\_Peters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Adrian_Peters)).

## ORCID

Noeline Wright  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3393-7460>

Michael Peters  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1482-2975>

## References

- Connell, R. (2013). The neoliberal cascade and education: An essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2), 99–112. doi:10.1080/17508487.2013.776990
- Ertmer, P. A. (2005). Teacher pedagogical beliefs: The final frontier in our quest for technology integration? *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 53(4), 25–39.
- Gerritson, J. (2015, 21 May). Govt tightens education purse strings [blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/political/274260/govt-tightens-education-purse-strings>
- Is the gap between education technology suppliers and end users increasing? (2016, July 11). Educators.co.nz. Retrieved from <https://educators.co.nz/story/gap-between-education-technology-suppliers-and-end-users-increasing/>
- Knowles, C. (2016a, May 3). Did you hear? Classroom wearables are where it's at. *Educators: Technology-focused news for New Zealand Educators*. Retrieved from <https://educators.co.nz/story/did-you-hear-classroom-wearables-are-where-its/>
- Knowles, C. (2016b, May 3). Wearables in the classroom – it's all the rage. *Educators: Technology-focused news for New Zealand educators*. Retrieved from <https://educators.co.nz/story/wearables-classroom-its-all-rage/>
- McRae, P. (2013). Rebirth of the teaching machine through the seduction of data analytics: This time it's personal. Retrieved from <http://philmcrae.com/2/post/2013/04/rebirth-of-the-teaching-machine-through-the-seduction-of-data-analytics-this-time-its-personal1.html>
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2016, April). Education in New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://www.education.govt.nz/home/education-in-nz/>
- Miron, G., & Gulosino, C. (2016). *Virtual Schools Report 2016: Directory and performance review*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/virtual-schools-annual-2016>
- Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108(6), 1017–1054.
- Molnar, A. (2005). *School commercialism: From democratic ideal to market commodity*. New York, NY: Routledge/Falmer.
- Moore, M. (2011, September 21). Chinese primary schools sponsored by tobacco firms. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8779180/Chinese-primary-schools-sponsored-by-tobacco-firms.html>

- Rudd, T. (2013). The ideological appropriation of digital technology in UK education: Symbolic violence and the selling and buying of the "Transformation Fallacy". In Neil Selwyn & Keri Facer (Eds.), *The politics of education and technology: Conflicts, controversies, and connections* (pp. 147–166). New York, NY: Palgrave/Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9781137031983\_8
- Selwyn, N. (2016). Minding our language: Why education and technology is full of bullshit ... and what might be done about it. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 41(3), 437–443. doi:10.1080/17439884.2015.1012523
- Simons, M., & Masschelein, J. (2008). The governmentalization of learning and the assemblage of a learning apparatus. *Educational Theory*, 58(4), 391–415.
- Technavio. (2016). Global classroom wearables technology market 2016–2020. Retrieved from <http://www.technavio.com/report/global-education-technology-classroom-wearables-technology-market>
- Tiffin, J., & Rajasingham, L. (1995). *In search of the virtual class: Education in an information society*. London: Routledge.
- Touraine, A. (1971). *The post-industrial society. Tomorrow's social history: Classes, conflicts and culture in the programmed society*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Wiggins, R. (2000). AI Gore and the creation of the Internet. *First Monday*, 5(10). Retrieved from <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/799/708>
- Williams, S. (2016, 18 July). Progressing 21st Century school infrastructure. Retrieved from <https://educators.co.nz/story/nikki-kaye-speaks-progressing-21st-century-school-infrastructure/>
- Worthington, S. (2016, June 22). NZ Education system not evolving fast enough. *Educators: Technology-focused news for New Zealand educators*. Retrieved from <https://educators.co.nz/story/NZ-education-system-not-evolving/>
- Wright, N. (2015). A case for adapting and applying continuance theory to education: Understanding the role of student feedback in motivating teachers to persist with including digital technologies in learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(4), 459–471. doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.969105