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**(Un)Problematic  
constructions of teachers'  
professional identities in  
early childhood policies  
and practices in Aotearoa  
New Zealand**

Early Years Research Conference  
July 13, 2019



# CONTENT

- **Framing a research on teachers' professional identities**
- **Planting the seed of 'business' services and professional identities in the New Zealand ECE**
- **Re-framing teachers into 'business managers'**
- **What is left (un)problematic in the identity construction of teachers as 'business managers'?**

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How have teachers' professional identities been constructed in ECE policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last two decades?
2. How have discourses in policies and practice constructed teachers' professional identities, and what are their effects?
3. What identities are accepted, rejected and negotiated in teachers' specific institutional contexts, and why?

# RESEARCH DESIGN

1.

Discourse-  
analysis  
of policy  
texts



2.

Focus groups  
with teachers,  
professional  
leaders and  
managers



3.

Individual  
Interviews



# THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY

“Teachers’ professional identities provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society and negotiate their experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15).





# SHIFTING POLICY DIRECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

1996 to 2009

- Participation of **all children** in **quality** ECE services
- 20 Hours **Free** ECE
- Improving teachers' **status** and **democratic professionalism**
- Strengthening collaborative relationships

2010 to 2017

- ECE for '**priority learners**'
- 20 Hours **Free** ECE hours
- **Competition** over the same funding
- **Privatisation, marketization** and **individualisation** of the sector
- '**Business**' services, identities professionalism

# SHIFTING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

**DEMOCRACY**

**Advocate-activists**

**Teacher-saviours**

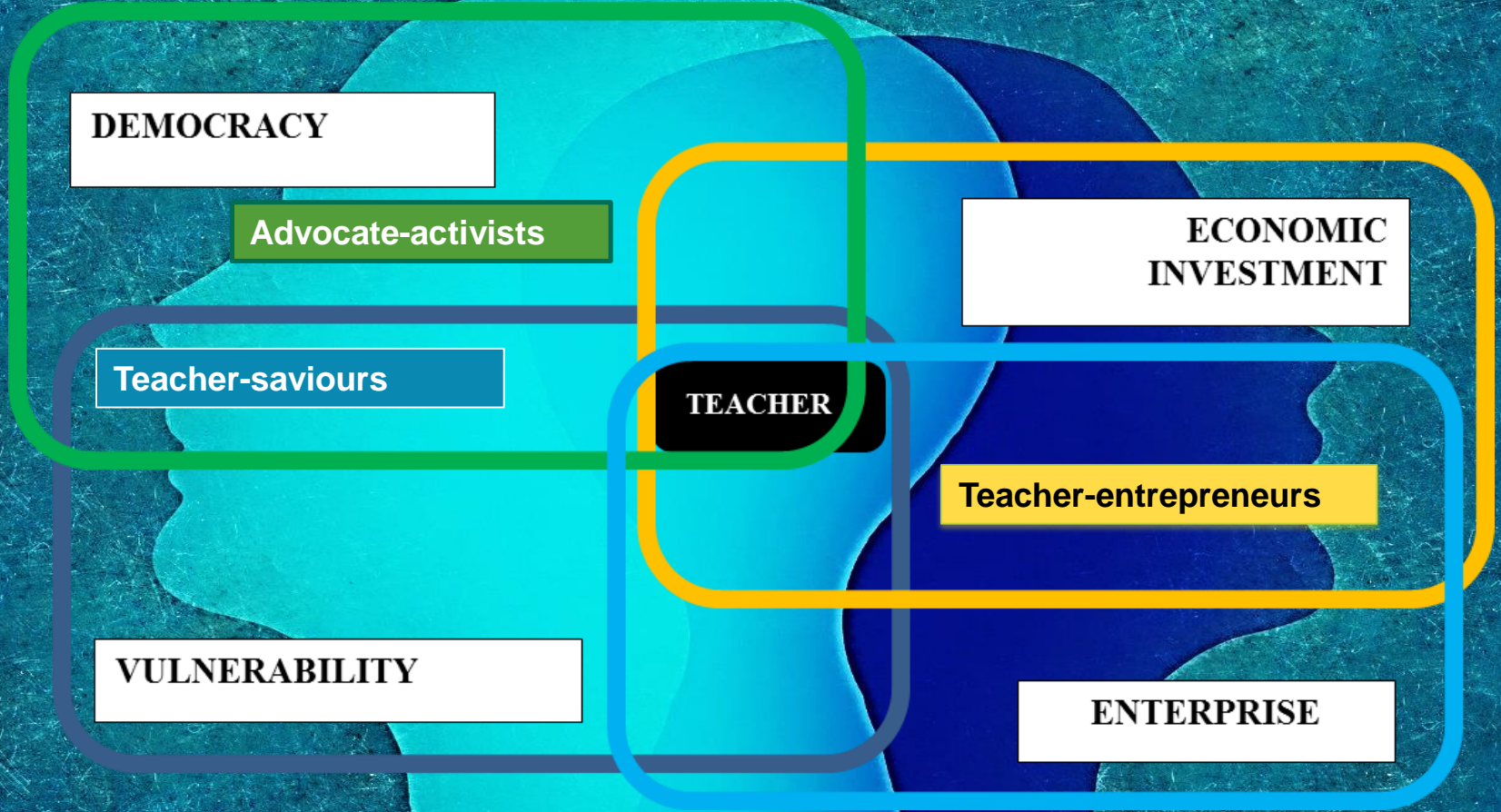
**VULNERABILITY**

**TEACHER**

**ECONOMIC  
INVESTMENT**

**Teacher-entrepreneurs**

**ENTERPRISE**



# Re-framing teachers into ‘business managers’

“The biggest challenge for us is to balance between making the profit and supporting the vulnerable children to stay longer in our centres.” (Focus groups, ECE managers)

“ We need to meet both, the ‘social’ [teaching] and ‘business’ [making profit] expectations of our job.... We are business and it is just how the business works.” (Focus group, ECE managers)



# Business principle and for-profit interests in ECE

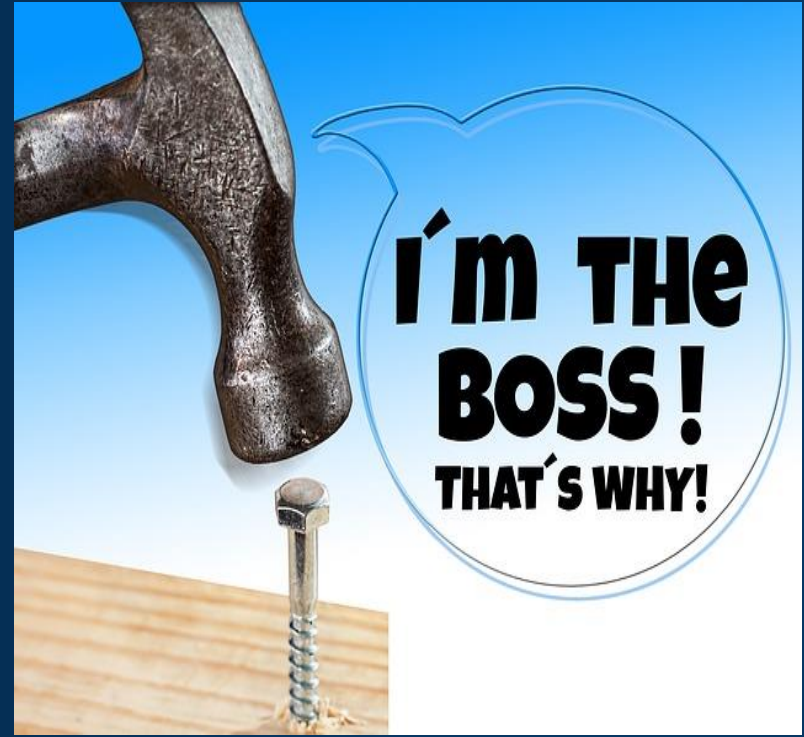
“Our company is very good in giving money to support children's learning and buying teaching resources, but we still have the pressure from the business side of our job. ....But...we still have that expectation ... to get this type of occupancy [referring to enrolment numbers]. We need to be within the given budget, and to still make sure that business side is getting enough money and that everything is not free. (Interview, Karla)



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# ‘Strengthening cost-conscious mentality in decision making’

“You [the teacher] cannot really do like, “Ok, I really felt that children needed this, and I am going to spend \$300” when you do not actually have it .... You are going to be told “That was not in your budget. You should not be spending that”. You do have these restrictions, and you need to make those decisions, like “Ok, we cannot do that, no matter how much we want it”. (Interview, Karla)



# ‘Staying within the budget confines no matter circumstances’

“It impacts on you in a sense that you want to do more ... You want to get more for your children and you always try to push that but you are still within the confines of what you can and cannot do. You still have those expectations [referring to profit making]. You just need to understand there are things that you cannot do, no matter how much you want to. (Interview, Karla)



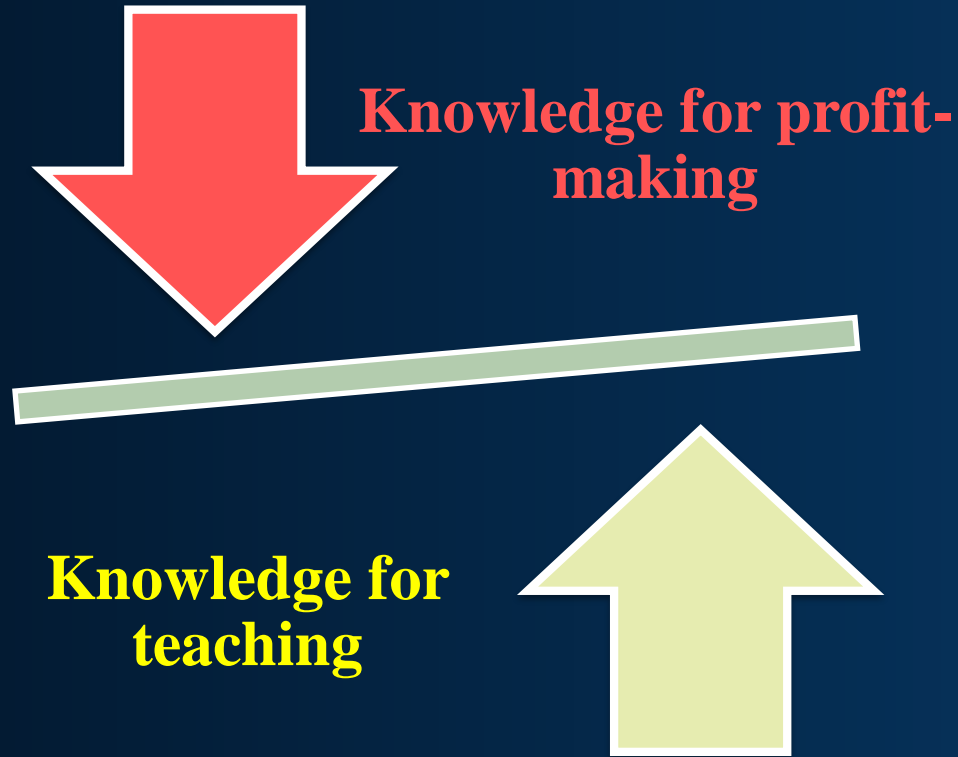
# ‘Wearing two hats’

“From my role of the centre manager [Karla became an assistant to the centre manager over the course of my study], I want teachers to start learning from very early about the business side. They need to understand when they get the answer “No, you cannot do it, and this is why” ... I want them to understand that there are restrictions in the business that restricts the learning and that is just the way that this business goes. You cannot expect that you will be given everything if you are not making money in your centre. You have to learn how to make the profit in your centre”. (Interview, Karla)



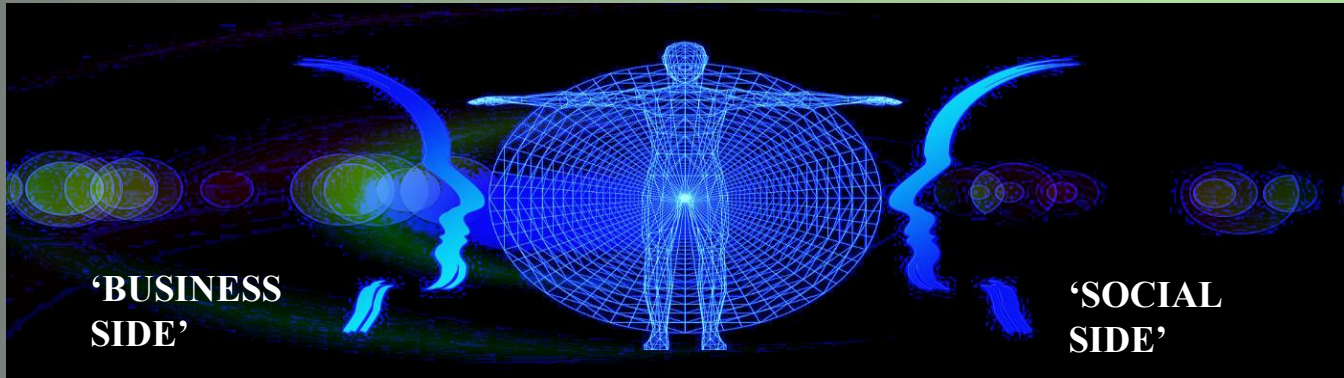
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# ‘Professionalism’ in ECE - Two baskets of knowledge



“You need to know how to keep the full occupancy in the centre, by welcoming new parents, showing them around and talking to them. This is what keeps families into the centre. It is about relationships that you form with them as soon as they walk into that door ...”  
(Interview, Karla)

# Juggling the business and social side of the job



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**“You definitely need these two different hats. You need a hat to be a teacher and a hat to be the business manager ... You definitely need to juggle ... When I am on the floor I am teaching, but in the back of my head I am also thinking of the business side “how this is going to impact on our business”. I am always wearing two hats, and .... always juggling. Every decision that I make on the floor must relate to the business side” (Interview, Karla)**

# What is left (un)problematic in the constructions of teachers as 'business managers' in ECE?



# (IN)VISIBLE IMPACTS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF BUSINESS MANAGERS IN ECE



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- The purpose of education – ECE as a commodity, fulfilling for-profit interests of business-owners **vs.** ECE for the best interests of children, families and community
- Managerial (institutional) professionalism **vs.** democratic professionalism from within the teaching profession
- Sense of belonging to the company **vs.** sense of belonging to the teaching profession
- Teachers as ‘agents of change’ in a business company **vs.** ‘agents of change’ within the teaching profession as a collective; contributing to the purpose of education in its broadest sense

## **WHAT IS A WAY FORWARD?**

**What is the purpose of education in its broadest sense?**

**Who are we as early childhood teachers?**

**Why do we do what we do?**

**How can we come together to strengthen advocate-activist teachers' identities and the teaching professional at a time in which competition, individualism and loyalty to the organisational (i.e. business) principles drive teachers' work, forcing them to choose enterprise interests over the wellbeing of children, families and community?**



**Never doubt that a small group of  
thoughtful, committed citizens  
can change the world; indeed, it's  
the only thing that ever has.**

Margaret Mead

# THANKS!

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