

Principals' and Teachers' Awareness, Knowledge, and Differentiation of Privatization — A Secondary Publication

Masaaki Katsuno*

Department of School Improvement and Policy Studies, School of Education, University of Tokyo, Japan

**Corresponding author:* Masaaki Katsuno, mkatsuno@p.u-tokyo.ac.jp

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Abstract: Based on the keynote report by Professor Martin Thrupp, this paper discusses the hollowing out of education provision by the state and the permeation of managerialism. It was pointed out that principals and boards of trustees in socioeconomically advantaged areas may not be willing to share their benefits with schools in less advantaged areas. The new liberal policies have hollowed out state provision of education, so the education system has come to rely heavily on private actors. This paper also presents the current stage of privatization in Japan and the principals' and teachers' perceptions of privatization.

Keywords: Privatization; Education; Principals and teachers

Online publication: February 25, 2024

1. Hollowing out of education provision by the state and permeation of managerialism

One of the striking things in Professor Martin Thrupp's keynote was the acceptance, if not active promotion, of privatization in and around the public school system by New Zealand school administrators. This is the result of principals' resistance to the initial report of the independent task force on Tomorrow's Schools, specifically the Education Hubs. The resistance of school principals to the report's proposal to establish "education hubs" can be seen in their opposition to what they perceived as a restriction of their autonomy regarding the use of private providers, i.e., the reintroduction of bureaucratic layers. The rationale for creating "education hubs" is to address the issue of the gap in the ability to use various resources, including services and goods, that exists between schools, then the resistance of these principals is a challenge to the principles of equality, equity, and social justice in education.

In response to the author's question, Professor Thrupp pointed out that principals and boards of trustees in socioeconomically advantaged areas may not be willing to share their benefits with schools in less advantaged areas. While this is true, principals in both types of schools are encouraged to take advantage of the self-reliance provided by the Tomorrow's Schools program and respond in a later paper that the reality is more complex.

Resistance to a standardized approach to leadership and resource allocation that can contribute to equality among schools is not necessarily found only among principals in more advantaged neighborhoods. That is how widespread the culture of managerialism culture is so pervasive.

How did principals come to embrace the idea of privatization? Professor Thrupp theorizes that the autonomous school management policy introduced in the 1980s by Tomorrow's Schools influenced principals' business orientation. Over the next several decades, a managerialist culture gradually permeated the principals. Despite the often raised issues of quality, cost, and relevance of services provided by private actors, the new liberal policies have hollowed out state provision of education. As a result, the education system has come to rely heavily on private actors, as pointed out by Professor Thrupp. Both the business-oriented culture of principals and the regression of educational provision by the state are not easy to rectify. Professor Thrupp warned of the difficulty of reversing the process of privatization.

2. Current stage of privatization in Japan

Perhaps Japan is not far behind New Zealand in terms of privatization in and around public education. Over the past 20 years, Japan's central government has been keen to expand opportunities for private actors to participate in school management ^[1]. In 2003, along with school corporations that have a long history of providing private schools, it became possible for joint-stock companies to establish and operate private schools in "special zones for structural reform." In addition, deregulation measures have been implemented to make it easier for private actors (e.g., joint-stock companies, non-profit organizations, etc.) to become school corporations by providing support through the transfer or loan of school land. In 2015, further deregulation was legislated, allowing local governments to outsource the comprehensive operation of schools to private actors in "National Strategic Special Zones." Prior to this, some school operations (e.g., cleaning, food service, security) were outsourced to private actors. The relaxation of these regulations has resulted in the opening of Suito International Junior and Senior High School in 2019 as the first publicly funded private school in the country. The city of Osaka established the school with the aim of "fostering future global innovators" using the International Baccalaureate (IB) program and other programs. The city of Osaka entrusted its operation to the Osaka YMCA, a school corporation (<https://osaka-city-ib.jp>). Shibuya ^[2] considers the opening of this public-private school as the nexus between neoliberalism and "education for international understanding." According to Shibuya, the introduction of the IB "fulfills both the political and economic intention of increasing competitiveness in the global marketplace, as well as the educational intention of promoting international understanding" ^[2]. The rhetorical gap between the preliminary school plan published by the Osaka City Board of Education and the school's official website on the one hand, and the School Guide 2019 prepared by the Board of Education and the Osaka YMCA on the other hand, reflects the two-sided nature of the two.

It has been pointed out that the IB functions as a reproduction device for the privileged class ^[2]. If the IB is an excellent educational program that promotes international understanding of education, it must be enjoyed equally, and in this respect, Osaka City's insistence on "public" is commendable. While commending Osaka City's commitment to "public" education, he also warned of the growing inequality caused by the concentrated investment of public funds. Here, there are complex dynamics that are not straightforward. The school's specific management and educational activities and their effectiveness need to be carefully examined.

There are many other areas in which private actors are involved in schooling. Some examples are public finance (Public Finance Initiative), school administration support systems, online learning content and tools (e.g., Benesse and Softbank's joint venture of the same name, Classi), assessments, and testing, etc. It is noteworthy

that the central government is accelerating the introduction of ICTs in schools in the midst of the crisis caused by COVID-19 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's GIGA School Initiative, https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/other/index_00001.htm). This will ensure that the IT industry will take a larger place in school education. A comprehensive study of the extent to which the Japanese education system is and will be affected by private interests is not available at this time and needs to be conducted as soon as possible ^[3].

3. Principals' and teachers' perceptions of privatization

In these New Zealand and Japanese contexts, the author is particularly interested in how principals and teachers understand privatization. The author was directed by Professor Thrupp to a series of studies by Darren Powell of the University of Auckland on the issue of how New Zealand principals and teachers perceive privatization ^[4-6]. According to Powell, principals and teachers in New Zealand understand the danger of privatization in education. However, there is a disconnect between their beliefs and their daily actions. In other words, principals and teachers are willing to put aside their own concerns about private actors if they believe there will be some direct benefit to the students.

For the Academy in Nguranda, Papanastasiou ^[7] studies how principals draw boundaries as educators with respect to private sponsors and how they negotiate or challenge private sponsors. In the Australian context, Hogan *et al.* ^[8] used a questionnaire survey to explore teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of the commercialization of education in public schools. Here, commercialization means the development, marketing, and sale of educational products and services for schools by for-profit providers, including curriculum, assessment, data infrastructure, digital learning, remedial education, teacher training, and school administration support, etc. The scope of the business is wide-ranging. While acknowledging that certain aspects of commercialization are necessary for the successful operation of today's schools and classrooms, they also recognize the "subtle ways in which superficially innocuous services can be turned into perilous ones." In particular, concern was expressed about the possible loss of autonomy (de-professionalization) in what is taught and how it is taught. In the comprehensive study of the impact of private interests on education in schools, as Hogan *et al.* ^[8] argue, there is a need for an "ethical debate" on privatization or commercialization by schools, teachers, policymakers, and citizens.

Professor Thrupp's keynote report explores the need for privacy for New Zealand's principals, or as Wendy Brown calls it, the "neoliberal stealth revolution" ^[9]. Brown ^[9] embraces identity, defined as "the actions individuals engage in to create and maintain a personal identity that is consistent with and supportive of their self-concept," it seems to be in contrast to the work by Woods and Jeffrey ^[10]. However, the author argues that New Zealand educators, both principals and teachers, still hold to the public, egalitarian, and progressive values of education. What appears to be a change in the professional thinking styles of principals are thorough and pervasive, or do they represent only a few but powerful voices? It is imperative to learn more about how New Zealand principals have understood and dealt with the potential tensions that exist at the boundary between the public and private spheres. In a related article, Professor Thrupp asked about the "new breed of principals" who embrace educational standards as a means of imposing accountability for the academic achievement of children in New Zealand ^[11]. How have teachers understood and responded to the Tomorrow's Schools policies implemented over the past 30 years, and how have they responded to new, less dramatic, policy changes? The author is concerned with the tensions or fissures that can arise between the professional orientation of principals (school administrators, school leaders) and teachers. This is because it can threaten the cooperative and democratic management of schools.

Lastly, a more detailed explanation of the “discernment” of principals and teachers mentioned in the last paragraph of the keynote report is necessary. How do faculty members learn about the advantages and disadvantages of privatization? In this regard, Professor Thrupp responded that in addition to the role that research can play, there is a need for some kind of watchdog group to provide teachers and principals with information about private actors. The teachers and principals must be knowledgeable about both the benefits and problems of private actors and select those private actors that are less problematic in terms of value, networking, practices, etc. There are indeed important roles that education and research play in this, but are there other effective solutions? How can principals and teachers resist aspects of privatization policies and practices that undermine these values when they dare to preserve the public and democratic values of education? The answer is that it is up to all educators who struggle with such policies and practices to help them overcome the difficulties they face.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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