

# Music Education and the Neoliberal Turn in Aotearoa New Zealand

Graham McPhail

University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

Jeff McNeill

Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

*In this paper we explore the adoption of a neoliberal turn in New Zealand's education system and its consequences, focusing particularly on secondary school music education. In the 1980s, New Zealand was one of the first states in the Western world to implement comprehensive neoliberal economic policies. Some 35 years later, education in New Zealand is situated in a highly devolved institutional framework that privileges neoliberal objectives. This article outlines the genesis of this socio-political context and the downstream effects of this environment on the secondary school music curriculum. Our central question is this: What have been the results of the "New Zealand Experiment" in terms of the type of music curriculum students now experience? The deeper problematic of the paper, however, concerns the fragmentation and instrumentalization of knowledge. On balance, we conclude that effects of the neoliberal turn within education in New Zealand may have been more detrimental than beneficial, as these agendas have encouraged a break with past more liberal and humanistic aims for education. However, we also argue that the changes have not been the product of any systematic project but rather the result of a confluence of complex and stratified causal mechanisms at work in the socio-political world.*

*Keywords: Neoliberalism, secondary school music, music curriculum, knowledge fragmentation, devolution*

## 1. Introduction

New Zealand secondary school music teachers working 35 years ago would never have imagined that their country's economic policies of the future would, in domino-fashion, result in Mozart's 39th Symphony, a set work in the Western Art Music (WAM) based national syllabus, becoming unknown to most of today's music students—and quite possibly to their teachers. At that time, the music curriculum, as for other secondary school subjects, was tightly prescribed by the Department of Education. Today, New Zealand's education system is

situated in a highly devolved institutional framework that places most curriculum decisions in the hands of teachers. New Zealand was one of the first countries in the Western world to implement neoliberal economic policies. Known as the “New Zealand Experiment” (Kelsey 1997), the adoption of neoliberal capitalism in the 1980s “was hailed by the World Bank, The Economist, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as an example for the rest of the world to follow” (Shore 2010, 3). The broader philosophy has infiltrated every aspect of New Zealand life, including its approach to education (Humpage 2015). Our key argument is that the changes in education are the result of a shift in the collective political consciousness caused by country’s adoption of the ideology of neoliberalism. Although of special interest domestically, New Zealand’s experience of the early adoption of neoliberal policy has wider lessons for other countries who have more recently adopted neo-liberal elements in their education practices.

We focus this paper on tracing the effects of neoliberalism in secondary school music rather than in primary school because of inconsistency in primary music education delivery. Most New Zealand secondary schools offer music as a stand-alone subject taught by specialist teachers. Students can progress from general studies in the first two years of high school (Years 9 and 10), towards a more specialized curriculum, from which they can gain credits towards the national qualification, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). These upper secondary school courses (Years 11 to 13) also go some way to preparing students who wish to further their music studies at tertiary institutions (McPhail 2019a)

The structure of the paper is as follows: In Section 2 we highlight the key concepts of centralization, devolution, and neoliberalism, plus several concepts from the work of Basil Bernstein—the English educational sociologist—which we use as tools for analysis and discussion later in the paper. In Section 3 we provide a brief vignette of a typical senior secondary school music classroom in New Zealand. We use the vignette to set the scene for describing the curriculum and assessment changes, as well as “The New Zealand Experiment” and its effects on education and music education in Sections 4 and 5. In Section 6 we discuss the idea of neo-liberal capture of education and the consequences and

challenges that result from this. We make our concluding observations in Section 7.

## 2. Key Concepts

Centralization, devolution, and neoliberalism

Recent research by the authors responding to calls to make the secondary school music curriculum fit for the purposes of the twenty-first century sought to identify the likely form and content of such a curriculum. In a Delphi survey we carried out in 2017–2019 (McPhail and McNeill 2019, McNeill and McPhail 2020, McPhail and McNeill 2021), we found that international experts agreed change was necessary, but, perhaps unsurprisingly for an international study, we also found they shared no single preferred vision of curriculum. Who then decides the curriculum in the absence of consensus?

One proposed solution is to establish a centralized decision-making process, typically within a Ministry of Education or similar body, to undertake development of curriculum frameworks, national standards, prescriptions or guidelines (Sinnema, Nieveen, and Priestley 2020; Sinnema and Aitken 2013; Voogt and Roblin 2012; Priestley and Sinnema 2014) preceded by some form of public consultation. Another proposed solution is to devolve decision-making to regional or local authorities, or even to individual schools. By devolve we mean the transfer of power, authority, and responsibility to lower levels of institutions. Decentralization, in contrast, refers to delegation only of power and authority to these lower levels (Boston, et al. 1996). Arguments for and against centralized and devolved decision-making have given rise to ongoing debate among those seeking to balance organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Litvack and Seddon 1999). Interestingly, evidence now suggests that devolved education administration promoted over the last few decades has not been as successful as had been anticipated (Blanchenay, Burns, and Köster 2014). New Zealand has experienced both centralized and devolved education administrations since moving away from a highly centralized system within the context of a larger neoliberal turn that began in the mid-1980s and continues today. In this paper we focus on devolution as a key mechanism in the realization of

successive New Zealand governments' neoliberal aims within education (The Treasury 1987a).

General agreement can be found in understanding neoliberalism as the extension and installation of competitive markets into all areas of life, including education. Neoliberalism entails, as Birch (2015) notes, both positive and normative assumptions: that the market is more efficient for organizing human life than other institutions, such as family, state, community, and society, and it *should* therefore replace these institutions as the main mechanism for creating, promoting, and maintaining social order (e.g., Hayek 1944). In contrast to the way it is understood by laissez-faire capitalists, the market is construed by neoliberals as “constructed” rather than “natural,” requiring the state to protect or create markets and competition. Neoliberalism is therefore inherently devolutionary; it seeks to locate decision-making at or as close as possible to the individual—or consumer—level.

Arguments for devolution are well rehearsed in the political science domain, and they are supported for a range of reasons. Ideologically, devolution reallocates power to a locus close to individuals; the breakup up of the monolithic state also creates markets and customers. According to the thinking of Tiebout (1956) and others, if authorities are sufficiently small, individuals can “vote with their feet.” In education this means parents can choose the school to which they send their children, rewarding “high performing” schools with more students – and greater income. The 1990s ushered in an awareness of comparison and competition between schools not previously known.

Also, key to devolution is the notion that individuals and/or communities know their own interests best and that information necessary for good decision-making on their behalf is attenuated by geographic and hierarchical distance. For example, a school board—at least in theory—should know and respond to the education demands of its schools' students and families, as well as those of its community.

On the other hand, the arguments used in support of devolution can also be used against it (De Vries 2000). Instead of bringing about empowerment and success for local communities, devolution can lead to failure, since individuals or communities may lack the resources or the capability and capacity to provide the necessary level of services entrusted to them. The homogeneity required to

achieve correspondence between schools and communities may also give rise to entities that exclude or discriminate against minorities. Further, devolution leading to fragmentation of jurisdictions may lead to duplication of effort. Inequality, under-provision, and capriciousness are the possible alternatives to the dead hand of the Leviathan state (Walker 2002), suggesting centralizing provision of some public goods might be desirable to ensure equality in local public good access and quality.

Importantly, in relation to curriculum and its centralization or devolution, we acknowledge that curriculum design is inherently political (Apple 1979). A curriculum maintains, reproduces, and replicates the structures of power in society, as well as the power to define what is “valued knowledge” (Thwaites 2018). It determines what information and ideas generations of children are exposed to, and what is excluded or down-played, reflecting dominant social discourse and educational ideologies. Accordingly, relocating the locus of decision-making may have the effect of reassigning privilege or disempowering particular interests. The argument for devolution is that a devolved system empowers communities and revalues their knowledge, while centralizing disempowers local voices. The location of curriculum decision-making is therefore critical, and the determination of who gets to decide what and how knowledge is delivered to schoolchildren is contested. Hence, the location where curriculum decisions are made is political.

The term neoliberal is often applied indiscriminately and pejoratively to characterize social processes, institutions, and actors and within different analytical understandings (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009). Moreover, rather than a single idea, neoliberalism can be seen as a confluence of economic theories, including monetarism, supply-side economics, and rational expectations. These differing positions help explain how Anglo-American countries starting from quite different positions—the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, for example—reoriented themselves in the 1980s from active state economic intervention and regulation to policies emphasizing “free market” outcomes that were then consolidated and entrenched by subsequent governments (Swarts 2013, Blyth 2002).

## Recontextualization and trainability

In an effort to bring order to a complex topic, filled with layered and stratified causal mechanisms at work, we employ Bernstein's meta-concept of recontextualization (Bernstein 2000). This concept acts as a theoretical device to assist with the explanations we aim to make in this paper. Bernstein uses recontextualization to describe the process whereby various ideas vie for influence within a field. He suggests the recontextualization process "selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order" (Bernstein 2000, 33). For example, ideas are recontextualized within education from various fields of knowledge production, including psychology, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, and history, into the region of education. Our focus in this paper is on the recontextualization of several ideas broadly linked under the conceptual umbrella title of neoliberalism and its effects on education.

Bernstein theorizes that recontextualization occurs in two fields: one at the level of the state and its agents (the official recontextualizing field), and the other at the level of pedagogic transmission and acquisition (the pedagogic recontextualizing field). This second field includes teachers in schools and other educational institutions. Within the official recontextualizing field, the official pedagogic discourse of the state produces dominant principles that generate policies and guidelines about school organization and management, curricula, and evaluation. The most important point to note is that the discourses appropriated in a given educational setting at a particular time are the result of the dynamic interplay between the "dominant ideology in the official recontextualizing field" and "*the relative autonomy of the pedagogic recontextualizing field*" (Bernstein 2000, 53, italics added). We note below, as an example of this process in action at the micro level, that teachers often selectively justify aspects of neoliberalism and recontextualize them as student-centered.

The concept of recontextualization works at various levels, from considering the influences on a teacher's motivations and values in enacting various pedagogical approaches (e.g., direct instruction or group work) to political ideas influencing educational policy. At the policy level, the recontextualizing principle of neoliberalism has become dominant in educational policy world-wide through international policy borrowing (Lilliedahl 2015, Robertson 2012,

Lourie 2020) and as a requirement accompanying structural adjustments in developing countries (Hoadley 2018, Sou 2019). In New Zealand education, this principle has been realized by the reification of marketisation through choice and relevance, both of which have affected educational structures and processes such as qualifications, assessment, and curriculum content (Hipkins, Johnston, and Sheehan 2016).

The second key concept we draw from Bernstein is *trainability*. This is Bernstein's conceptual take on the rise of genericism and instrumentalism that he witnessed before the end of his life in 2000. Trainability is the state of readiness required of human capital in a *knowledge* economy where, ironically, the focus is on generic skills and dispositions rather than on specialized knowledge. Actors are required to have generic skills and dispositions "at the ready" for whatever market requirements dictate. Bernstein was concerned with the rise of what he judged to be a new form of instrumentalism, or trainability. He saw it as undermining the humanizing interrelationship between knowledge and knowers that has been characteristic of western knowledge production for the last 1,000 years:

There is a new principle guiding the latest transition of capitalism. The principle of the markets and its managers are more and more the managers of the policy and practices of education. Market relevance is becoming the key orientating criterion for the selection of discourses... This movement has profound implications from the primary school to the university... There is a new concept of knowledge... This new concept is a truly secular concept. Knowledge should flow like money to wherever it can create advantage and profit. Indeed, knowledge is not like money, it is money. Knowledge divorced from persons, their commitment, their personal dedications. (Bernstein 1996, 87)

We draw on these concepts when needed in the following sections as we look at the devolution of the New Zealand secondary school curriculum as a means by which the state established the institutional framework for a marketplace for knowledge in secondary schools.

### 3. A Vignette

Thirty-five years ago senior music students may not have played or sung a note in class, and the music they studied, set in a national curriculum, was

representative of the Western Canon; movements from each of a Beethoven concerto, a Mozart symphony, a Haydn string quartet, and in a nod to modernity, Penderecki's "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima" and Louis Armstrong's "West End Blues." As well, they would have gained a grounding in writing four-part harmony. Today, as our vignette shows, music classes are very different:

*Ms. Andrews has a combined Year 12 and 13 class of 14 students this year—the final two years of high school, respectively. The students are a diverse group, but all hope to accrue as many credits as they can from their music course which will contribute to them achieving their National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 (L2) and Level 3 (L3), respectively. For each level, the students need 80 credits total across all their subjects for a pass; a full subject course is usually 18 to 24 credits. The students are working toward different credit totals in Ms. Andrews' class as she lets them choose whichever Achievement Standards (AS) they want to achieve. Each AS is worth 4 to 8 credits, and there are around twenty to choose from.*

*All 16 students are aiming to achieve either the L2 or L3 Solo Performance Achievement Standards. Max is the exception, as he is into both experimental digital composition and song writing instead of solo performance; he is doing L3 Composition and L3 Song Writing. Max also plays guitar in a rock band, so he is being assessed for L3 Group Performance with that. To top it off, he is undertaking the L3 Arranging Standard as well, so he spends lots of independent time in the back corner of the classroom on Logic Pro. That's a total of 24 credits for Max.*

*It's Monday morning and the students dribble into the room. They seldom meet as a class. Max greets Ms. Andrews, and she reminds him he has some composition drafts due this week for her to check. She's going to come over during the lesson and have a listen. She also reminds him to put in the entry for his band for the local Rock Quest competition. If that performance is video-recorded and goes well, that will get him and the members in the band four credits each at this*

*level. Max disappears under the headphones as other students wander in and check in with Ms. Andrews. Five of them are off to practice in the practice rooms, four more disappear under headphones at the computers to work at arranging, and four sit at desks and get out work for a research Achievement Standard. No one in the class this year has opted for harmony, aural, or analysis of set works.*

*Ms. Andrews begins her rounds.*

Our vignette depicts a typical New Zealand senior secondary school music class, drawn from observations made by one of the authors, who was a secondary school music teacher, then moderated the internal assessment for NCEA nationally, and now regularly visits high school music classrooms to observe pre-service teachers. Readers from other jurisdictions might find the degree of individualized learning notable. The senior school system certainly provides the potential for a high level of choice, where curricular foci and assessments are determined by the students and directly related to their interests and strengths. What may be less visible in the vignette is the way in which the NCEA has come to act as a type of knowledge and assessment supermarket, where students trade in a currency of credits. We will discuss these unintended outcomes in Section 6 below.

#### 4. The Pre-1993 Curriculum and Beyond

Since the 1990s, New Zealand's educational landscape has been characterized by a great deal of international policy influence (Lourie 2018, Lourie 2020). New Zealand has followed international trends by recontextualizing global ideas for qualifications frameworks<sup>1</sup> and more generic standards-based curricular and assessment reforms (Sinnema, Nieveen, and Priestley 2020; Sinnema and Aitken 2013; Voogt and Roblin 2012; Priestley and Sinnema 2014), which can all be regarded as part of the global neoliberal policy agenda (Robertson, 2016). The "New Zealand Curriculum Framework" (Ministry of Education [New Zealand] 1993), was established in 1993 and was one of the first such frameworks in the world. All qualifications—both secondary and tertiary—are listed on the NZQF and "come with an assurance of quality that is recognized and

McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

trusted worldwide” (Ministry of Education n.d.-a). National curriculum statements were then developed for all seven “essential learning areas.” All schools’ boards of trustees are required to implement learning programs based upon the underlying principles, essential learning areas and skills, and national achievement objectives contained in the national documents; however, in matters of curriculum realization, schools retain considerable autonomy.

Within this framework, a series of national curriculum statements were developed for newly termed “learning areas:” English, arts, health and physical education, languages, mathematics and statistics, science, social sciences, and technology. Somewhat symbolically, the arts learning area—comprising art, drama, dance, and music-sound arts—was the last to be developed and appeared in final form in the year 2000.<sup>2</sup> By 2007 however, all the separate curricular documents had been compressed into one lean document with values, visions, and generic key competencies (e.g., managing self) taking center stage at the front of the document, and a meager measure of generic guidance for curricular content in the learning areas was moved to the back end of the document. In keeping with the neoliberal drivers of devolution and localization, the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) is intended to be a guide rather than a prescription for schools to follow (Ministry of Education 2007). Curriculum content is not specified, but outcomes at the various levels of schooling are described in terms of broad Achievement Objectives (“know-how-to” or procedural knowledge rather than propositional knowledge or “knowledge-that”). For example, an Achievement Objective for music in the first year of high school includes “Represent sound and musical ideas in a variety of ways” (Ministry of Education 2007).

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) qualification instigated in 2002 (see vignette above) marked a radical departure from the previous norm-referenced examination-dominated system (Hipkins, Johnston, and Sheehan 2016), as it is a standards-based system (i.e., theoretically, all students can pass if they meet the required standard) and a “modular” system (where students choose, and complete assessable tasks derived from a suite of Achievement Standards); these tasks are assessed either internally (at school level) or externally (at a national level). The qualification covers three levels:

Level 1 (Year 11, age 15–16), Level 2 (Year 12, age 16–17), Level 3 (Year 13, age 17–18: the last year of high school).

The NCEA also provides increased opportunities for teachers to design courses locally. Each teacher (or student) can select a series of Achievement Standards to suit the specific needs of the students in the class and develop a course around the Standards. Courses typically include a mix of solo and group performance (the group performance AS allows up to 8 players),<sup>3</sup> composition, analysis of music works, and aural perception, and more recently, digital, recording, and amplification technologies. Currently, there are 25 music Achievement Standards: six at Level 1, nine at Level 2, and ten at Level 3; plus four music technology Achievement Standards.<sup>4</sup>

The Achievement Standards utilize outcomes-based statements to describe what students can do and what they know in outcomes at four possible levels: not achieved, achieved, merit, or excellence. (See an example of a music Achievement Standard in Appendix 1.) When a student achieves a Standard, they gain credits that count towards an NCEA certificate in that subject. Thus, a student does not “pass” a subject, but rather achieves a series of Standards within that subject. All NCEA Achievement Standards are stand-alone, allowing both teachers and students to choose which assessments to complete within subjects. The student “plugs” the credits achieved into their growing qualifications portfolio until they have the required number of credits. In a sense, a qualifications “market-place” has been created, where choice and relevance are the driving ideologies rather than access to coherent disciplinary systems of meaning (Wheelahan 2010). Given the generic nature of the subject-specific content of the NZC described above, the Achievement Standards, with their comparatively more explicit description of knowledge content, quickly became—and remain—a default curriculum (Hipkins, Johnston, and Sheehan 2016).

Before these curriculum and qualifications changes were begun in the early 1990s, the curriculum experienced by New Zealand secondary school students in all subjects was highly centralized. All students across the country studied the same material and were assessed using the same examination administered throughout the country on the same day. The music curriculum was centered on Western art music traditions (WAM) and music classes were predominantly places for developing aesthetic, historical, and analytic knowledge through the

study of numerous set works. The curriculum comprised listening, score reading, harmonic analysis, the history of WAM, and some derivative composition. Performing and original composition were not part of the assessed curriculum. In this old system, there was too much emphasis on knowledge—that is lists of facts to know, with insufficient opportunity to put that knowledge to use in procedural ways (know-how-to) to enable deep learning (McPhail 2020). Now, the pendulum has swung the other way.

The curriculum was first broadened in 1993 to become more “accessible” and “relevant” to a wider range of students. The effects of new postmodern ways of thinking about curriculum as needing to become more democratic and representative of societies’ increasing plurality can be detected here (Elliott 1994; Goehr 1992; Small 1977, 1998). The curricular focus before this time tended to act as a disincentive for students whose musical interests did not align with WAM. As part of the localization process set in motion by the neoliberal turn, teachers could now select the music works they wished to study with their students. The inclusion of performance also had the effect of opening the music classroom to students with interests in popular music and jazz.

A third key change was the introduction of composition as part of the curriculum. Students were now encouraged to engage in popular song writing and instrumental composition in any style that interested them. The assessment system was also altered so teachers could to assess composition and performance locally, but with national moderation of the grades awarded.

Overall, the New Zealand Curriculum and the NCEA are generally regarded by stakeholders as relevant, inclusive, and able to be personalized (since no specific content is prescribed) (Hipkins, Johnston, and Sheehan 2016). The curriculum has been devolved, so that teachers have a high level of autonomy to develop a local curriculum relevant to their students’ strengths and interests, and to choose appropriate ways to assess them. These changes are a response to international trends and bear the fingerprints of both neoliberalism and postmodernism in aiming to make education more relevant, choice-based, outcomes-based, experience-based, student-centered, inclusive, culturally responsive (i.e., to deemphasize WAM), and technologically enhanced. It is accurate to say that a music education model based on cultural transmission of WAM has largely given way to alternative conceptions focused on popular music and

student rights of ownership regarding curriculum content (McPhail, Thorpe, and Wise 2018).

## 5. The New Zealand Experiment Back Story

Although our focus is on music education, in this section we consider the neoliberal turn more widely, returning in particular to the issue of devolution raised at the beginning of the paper. We also note how administrative reforms facilitated curriculum change.

New Zealand has been seen internationally as the poster child for neoliberalism; its 1987 Treasury Briefing (The Treasury [New Zealand] 1987a) a blueprint for other countries adopting neoliberal economic trajectories. Yet this characterization is simplistic and to some extent context specific. The reality in New Zealand – as elsewhere – was more nuanced, with neoliberalism revealing different meanings and intensities in its implementation. Although the mid- to late-1980s reforms in New Zealand have been cast as radical, Scott (2001) makes the point that previous governments had embarked on a program just as radical in terms of imposing an Eastern European-style regime of economic expansion and state-sponsored investment in heavy industry. The pendulum has lurched from side to side, from expansion to contraction of the state.

### New Zealand education and the neoliberal project

New Zealand's education policy development has reflected this neoliberal turn. Its education administration was and is remarkably different from that of many other countries. For example, individual schools are funded by the national government, rather than municipalities, with attendant accountability implications. Thus, the centralized state formerly exercised real control on education, which in any case remained primarily a matter of debate among educationalists (i.e., administrators and teachers) (McLaren 1974).

Nevertheless, a 1983 OECD report (OECD 1983) found “substantial satisfaction” among stakeholders about the overall performance of the education system, and a “substantial quality of provision.” Incremental changes had led to innovative education ahead of what other countries had achieved, without radical change and dislocation. The OECD reviewers were observing the tail end

of a post-War consensus on education that had depoliticized education policy. Other stakeholders had different thoughts, concerned at over-centralized decision-making, failure to promote equality of opportunity for minority groups (women and Māori in particular), and the influence of universities on curriculum (Barrington 1990, McLaren 1974).

Moreover, the Treasury briefing to the incoming Labour government of 1984 sought to reframe education as a private good, moving from a liberal humanistic view (education for its own sake) to an instrumental one (education must have a utilitarian outcome):

Education tends to be thought of as a natural sphere for government intervention because it is a social or public good.... In the technical sense used by economists, education is not in fact a “public good” ... [E]ducation shares the main characteristics of other commodities traded in the marketplace (New Zealand Treasury 1987b, 32–33).

The Treasury sought to up-play individual benefits of education—suggesting a user-pay element in its agenda (The Treasury 1987b). The reforms had two elements, overhauling school administration and curriculum. Both school administration and curriculum decision-making were devolved, essentially creating markets for provision and content. The idea of a localized curriculum has received recent reemphasis by the Ministry of Education over the last year with the instigation of a series of three “Leading Local Curriculum Guides” for curriculum leaders (<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Strengthening-local-curriculum/Leading-local-curriculum-guide-series>).

#### Administrative reform

The administrative reform began with a wide-ranging review, resulting in a report to government, *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education*, known as the Picot Report (Picot 1988). The government responded with its policy statement, *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange 1988). Picot had picked up many concerns raised in the 1970s about over-centralization and unresponsive and ossified administration. His proposals reflected wider administrative philosophy applied across New Zealand public service rather than education administration (Barrington 1990). The proposals were framed within a highly devolved agency framework (Martin 1991), with “individual learning

institutions” [schools] forming the “basic unit” of the system. They were to have “clear and explicit objectives, drawn up locally within national objectives ... and set out in a charter ... the “lynch pin” of the structure...” (Picot 1988, xi). The individual learning institutions is where “there will be the strongest direct interest in the educational outcomes and the best information about local circumstances” (xi). Schools would be run as partnerships between the professionals (teachers) and the communities in which they were located. The mechanism for this partnership would be an elected board of trustees for each school, consisting largely of parents and the principal, that would draw up its own charter and be responsible for managing its allocated budget. Schools were audited by the newly established Education Review Office (ERO) to provide national level accountability, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) was also established to be responsible for national qualifications and assessment.

In New Zealand in 1988, “self-managing” schools were promoted, ostensibly to allow parents more say in their children’s education and local school administration. The Tomorrow’s Schools reform policy texts included social democratic partnership rhetoric, positioning principals as professional leaders working collaboratively with elected parent boards of trustees. However, the new ideology of parental choice of school within a local schooling marketplace, underpinned by a chief executive or market managerial model of principalship, was later operationalized through mechanisms of “steerage” from the center. While radical (Treasury) market liberal arguments for labor market deregulation and consumer choice failed to gain widespread support, the State Services Commission<sup>5</sup> preferred market managerialist strategies for promoting public accountability of schools (based on aggregate student achievement outcome data and centrally determined national educational priorities) were successfully embedded during the 1990s (Court and O’Neill 2011).

A governance and administrative framework was established, as Picot was careful to ring-fence curriculum. The board was not to tell teachers what or how to teach, recognizing teachers as trained professionals equipped with the tools and skills necessary to help their students. Nevertheless, the report considered each school’s curriculum should be determined cooperatively by the community and its teachers together, working within broader national curriculum objectives. This structure was adopted largely in full and has proved remarkably

stable. Change has been made only at the margins to further advance neoliberal ideology in New Zealand's education administration. For example, provisions were made for establishing charter schools in 2012 as part of the National Government's election agreement with its neoliberal coalition partner. However, the new and current 2017 Labour-led coalition government strongly opposed them, and by 2018 all charter schools had been transitioned to become state-integrated schools.

Nevertheless, the central Ministry of Education, as the dominant force in the official recontextualizing field, has been reluctant to relinquish authority, imposing stringent national elements to be included in the school charters and retaining in large measure financial funding control. The overall effect has been to eliminate regional levels of central government education administration, with their work being taken over by volunteers of parents elected as school board trustees and the government outsourcing its responsibilities to communities.

Neoliberalism continues in New Zealand as an intellectual project with support across political parties that ensures its far-reaching and comprehensive changes will endure. The benefits have been variable, but Boston and Eichbaum (2014) argue the biggest return has been a societal change from egalitarianism and communitarianism to individualism. They observe that although the neoliberal experiment remains incomplete due to constitutional pushback, a robust epistemic community and to some extent policy community continues to sustain it. Nevertheless, there remains a public expectation for the "welfare state" even though elements of user-pays is to some extent accepted (Humpage 2015). New Zealand might therefore be characterized as a "liberal welfare state," where the labor market is considered the first source of welfare, supported by comparatively low levels of social benefits with constrained eligibility. Now, with over two generations of experience, neoliberal reforms and values have become normalized and accepted by the public (Humpage 2015). Today's schoolchildren, like their parents had done, are growing up in a neoliberally configured society.

To conclude this section, we note that neoliberalism, while a major influence in government economic and structural reforms, was not the only ideological force in action in this period. We take a realist perspective in suggesting

that events in the world are brought about by confluence of complex and stratified causal and relational mechanisms at work (Wheelahan 2010). As noted above, the 1990s and beyond have been a time of tremendous social change, and it would be naïve to claim that neoliberalism is the sole cause of the pervasive shifts experienced in New Zealand and in New Zealand education since the late 1980s. We use the term “postmodernism” to encapsulate and note the wider social changes of this period both in the academy and in society more widely, including culturalism.<sup>6</sup> The two narratives—neoliberalism and postmodernism—are consistent with outcomes such as “the de-politicization of the working class; the decline of universalism; the rise of pre-modern groups based on race, religion, and tradition; and the increasing power of global elites” (Rata 2012, 12).

Although the two prominent ideologies of neoliberalism and post-modernism are seemingly contradictory in essence, the former driven by a market ideology and the latter by a rejection of any meta-theories, there is in fact a common concern with “the local.” This apparent common ground has enabled teachers to, at least partially, turn a blind eye to the more negative effects of market ideas in education, instead focusing on those they do consider more democratic and more student centered.<sup>7</sup> In the discussion section below, we explain how the apparent democratic ideals of choice and relevance are in fact Janus-faced. The end result in the New Zealand educational context is a curious mixture of democratic devolution on the one hand (school boards and a “local” curriculum) and market approaches on the other (e.g., curricular choice, compliance through ERO and NZQA and consequent ranking of schools by the public media).

## 6. Consequences, Capture, and Challenges

### Consequences

New Zealand’s current music curriculum provides, at least theoretically, a level playing field for stylistic and cultural inclusion. In this sense, we see an interesting alignment between neoliberal ideals of choice and postmodern ideals of decentering the hegemony of a western curriculum. Students can achieve national assessment credits via studying and playing any content—Māori waiata

McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

(indigenous song), beat boxing, live looping, bagpiping, gamelan, or Bach. This freedom of choice, ostensibly opening up access and ensuring relevance, has however resulted in some unintended consequences, particularly for those students who decide to progress to tertiary study (Moore 2014, McPhail 2018a). It is to these matters that we turn next.

The effects of the modularized model for assessment (the chunks of knowledge represented in Achievement Standards)—where choice and relevance are normative ideals—has resulted in some particular consequences for the way in which students have come to regard their education in the senior school years. The first consequence we note is curricular fragmentation, which has risen to the level of national consciousness. There is currently a staged review of the NCEA underway that aims to reduce the number of Achievement Standards to only four in each subject at each of the three levels of the NCEA (Ministry of Education n.d.-b). The review findings derived from public consultation suggest that having fewer Standards will make it easier for teachers to identify core knowledge, enhance knowledge coherence, reduce knowledge fragmentation, and reduce the amount of assessment students are subjected to. As outlined above, knowledge is currently made available in chunks (Achievement Standards—see Appendix 1), which carry a credit value, and students can usually pick and choose what Achievement Standards they wish to utilize. On the positive side, this has led to more students choosing to take music as a subject and for generally high levels of motivation and engagement. More generally, and on the negative side, students have become known as “credit hunters” (Rata and Taylor 2015), often choosing to participate only in activities that are worth credits, exhibiting the attitude that “any credits will do,” or “cherry picking” easy credits (Hipkins, Johnston, and Sheehan 2016). This is, in a sense, a form of “consumer sovereignty”—the localized site-based management of learning that was certainly not present in education before the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s.

This brings us to a second consequence: assessment has become the default curriculum. This is in part because the NZC document itself is intended to serve as a guide from which schools will devise their own localized curriculum; it is a response to the pre-1990 problem of over centralization in education. In relation to specific subjects, the guidance for content in the NZC is minimal,

although it does vary from subject to subject. Irrespective of the normative influence of assessment in the senior high school years, teachers who go in search of more detail about *what* they might teach can find such information only in the Achievement Standards. However, the Achievement Standards were never intended as a curriculum, but as a means to assess a wider and more holistically designed curriculum. However, because the New Zealand Curriculum is content non-specific and the Achievement Standards refer to selected dimensions of a subject's possible structure, the risk is that these bites of knowledge will tend to become separated from the wider system of disciplinary meaning.

By “system of meaning,” we mean the interrelated abstract concepts in a disciplinary or practice area, which are highly systemized and interrelated in disciplinary structures and more ad hoc in everyday or more informal contexts (Bernstein 1999). We argue learning is “instrumentalized” as it is expressed in terms of outcomes and credit value, rather than conceptual structures. The risk is that procedural knowledge (know-how-to) becomes disconnected from theoretical or propositional knowledge (knowledge-that) which provides access to deeper, context-independent meanings (McPhail 2020). As Wheelahan (2010) so aptly puts it, “a focus on ‘knowledge in use’ may result in students being given access to contextually specific applications of disciplinary knowledge but not the system of meaning in which it is embedded and made meaningful” (119). In a form of market relativism, all knowledge becomes equivalent by assigned credit values. We thus suggest that, on balance, the effects within the New Zealand secondary school system have been equally detrimental and beneficial. In particular, we suggest neoliberal agendas have encouraged a break with past, more broadly liberal, humanistic aims for education.

By more *broadly liberal humanistic aims*, we mean an emphasis on an education that provides access for students to a holistic, rather than segmented, partial, or instrumental understanding of a subject area. By *holistic*, we mean the overall “system of meaning” of the subject, which is a recontextualized form of the discipline as it is understood and developed in knowledge production fields such as universities and in musical communities of practice. We are drawing on the concept of “powerful knowledge” here, conceptual knowledge that empowers learners because of its generative and abstract, conceptual nature. Our argument, made more fully elsewhere (McPhail 2020), is that deep

learning develops from a marriage of knowledge-that (conceptual knowledge) and know-how-to (procedural knowledge). In other words, knowing how to do something in the realms of disciplinary knowledge is likely to be more deeply developed and embodied when it is underpinned and combined with knowledge-that (propositional, abstract, conceptual knowledge). For example, understanding how western tonality works as a system of meaning with multiple interconnected concepts opens up a wealth of alternative possibilities for students to contribute more knowingly to the conversations of the subject (e.g., as a student composer). We link this recent development in the sociology of knowledge, known as social realism (Barrett and Rata 2014; Maton and Moore 2010; Moore 2013; Young and Muller 2014, 2019) to broader humanistic aims in the way that access to powerful knowledge provides students with the means to “think the unthinkable” and to question the social and political constraints of their world (Bernstein 2000).

A third consequence is the high level of devolution and the resulting autonomy experienced by teachers in creating a localized curriculum. On the one hand seen as a strength, this autonomy may also be a weakness where teachers lack sufficient knowledge to design courses well, where parts of courses lack integration, and where teacher and student choices might result in students missing out on foundational knowledge that could be critical for their overall musicianship development, for entry into tertiary study, or in relation to requirements for professional work (e.g., sight reading). As universities have found out, there is now no “common currency.” As a consequence, catch-up courses in music conceptual knowledge are now commonplace for first year music students (University of Auckland, Head of School, personal communication). The emphasis in the New Zealand education system on know-how-to, derived from an outcomes-based, assessment-driven curriculum means that students’ music education can be lacking many potentially powerful knowledge dimensions. Access to powerful knowledge is dependent on the teacher and the school in a de-centralized, localized system. While the pre-1990s curriculum was a culturally narrow, fact-based curriculum, we have replaced it with one that indicates only outcomes and only very obliquely addresses the concepts and the content needed to acquire access to powerful knowledge.

## Capture

In this overview of New Zealand's neoliberal turn seen through a lens of recontextualization, we find a story of ideological capture. Capture of education by neoliberal ideas has occurred at various material levels, including devolved school governance, a market approach to assessment (see descriptions of the NCEA system above), and the instrumentalization of knowledge. But, perhaps most significantly, capture has occurred at the symbolic level. Ideas about the "rightness" of a market approach now pervade the consciousness of New Zealanders as a form of symbolic control (Humpage 2015). As Bernstein (2000, xxvi) notes more generically, there remain deep contradictions in the neoliberal discourse, for example in the form of "de-centred centralisation:" "Collectivism may have weakened, the market may have greater autonomy, but the devices of symbolic control are increasingly state regulated and monitored through the new techniques of de-centred centralisation." Capture presents its own challenges and has implications in turn for devolved decision-making. Devolving curriculum choice and design to schools and indeed individual pupils may introduce flexibility and relevance to create a "student-centered" pedagogy. It may also result in an education less valued and thus less marketable than anticipated. In this regard devolution, choice, and relevance are Janus-faced. As indicated above, Bernstein (2000) coined the term *trainability* to encapsulate what he saw as the emphasis on genericism and instrumentalism plus the continual reformations required by the new international discourse of life-long learning to fulfil the needs of the knowledge economy. He saw trainability as "based in the acquisition of generic modes which it is hoped will realise a flexible transferable potential" (59), or, in other words, transferable generic skills. At a deeper level, Bernstein (2000) suggests the generic skills required by the new trainability mark a significant break with the past, in that the sense of an epistemic identity and a certain "sacredness" about knowledge has given way to viewing knowledge and education predominantly in terms of its utility and what it can provide for us in an instrumental sense (Barnett 2009, Beck 2002). This recalls the quote above where Bernstein notes "a new concept of knowledge ... [as] a truly secular concept" (Bernstein 1996, 88), where there appears to be an increasing separation between knowledge and knower which dehumanizes

knowledge. As Bernstein (2000) rather pessimistically puts it, “knowledge ... is divorced from inwardness and literally dehumanised” (86).

We also see this discursive shift towards trainability and performativity in secondary school education and in music education in New Zealand. Students are now well enculturated, and they expect to see the outcomes of learning in advance so they can “purchase” and “choose” what they will invest in based on the criteria of relevance and utility. Often the first question on students’ minds when undertaking a task in class in the senior secondary school is “how many credits is this worth?” The emphasis on skills, outcomes, and knowledge as quantifiable chunks with a credit value is an expression of the underlying ideology of the market recontextualized in an educational context. This is not unique to New Zealand. As Grace notes, “what we are witnessing in contemporary society is an attempted market culture colonization of all forms of social service ... Knowledge itself is being reconstructed as a commodity ... that can be traded like any other commodity in the global economy” (Grace 2014, 24).

The current capture of New Zealand education by neoliberal ideas is now considered by some commentators to be hidden within the neo-progressive narrative of 21st century learning discourses (Couch 2018). Its hiddenness is most clearly manifested in the imposition of new Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) buildings (open plan, digitally enhanced learning spaces) on the school sector and the new pedagogies associated with these spaces (Lourie 2018, Lourie 2020, McPhail 2019b). These ILE spaces are compulsory in all newly built schools, and they are often administered in a public-private partnership. Moreover, Couch’s (2018) critical analysis suggests that “whilst an ILE [innovative learning environment] is being presented as child-centred, a critical exploration ... exposes a deeper undercurrent of instrumentalism at play which dramatically reorients the term [progressivism] from its humanist foundations towards a neoliberal philosophical anchor” (131). Couch notes a gradual pressure has been placed on students “to mirror the self-managing, enterprising, innovative traits expected of the schools and teachers” (129). The spaces students and teachers now appear to occupy are framed by a discourse derived from human capital theory, which regards education as an investment in human capital, and a private rather than a social good.

## Challenges

As a result of an initial concern with governmental over-centralization in education in the late 1980s that resulted in self-governing schools, the curriculum itself has also been “devolved” to such an extent that the education a student acquires in one location may vary significantly from that acquired in another. The principle for knowledge acquisition, Wheelahan argues, is now “its relevance as determined by the market, with knowledge valued insofar as it is valued by the market” (2010, 27). While lack of access to theoretical music knowledge—the conceptual knowledge that underpins the discipline more widely, its “system of meaning”—is not necessarily a problem in society generally, we theorize it can become a matter of distributional justice within education, where access to this “powerful knowledge” is not provided for students or to only some (Muller 2000, Muller and Young 2019, Rata 2012, Wheelahan 2010, Young 2008, Young and Muller 2014). If the curriculum gives away access to theoretical (context-independent knowledge), then we have, we suggest, made a major philosophical and political maneuver, a move from liberal humanism (the idea of education for its own sake) to instrumentalism (education must have utilitarian purpose).

On a more positive note, however, it may be the case that arts and humanities courses can act as an antidote to the influence of instrumentalism. As one of us has noted elsewhere:

Perhaps, the “attitude of caring and commitment” (Bowman, 2002, 75) and the development of the strong pedagogic identities that music and the arts seem to engender can provide some counter to this pessimism. The arts remain an arena where inner commitments to knowledge can be predominant (McPhail 2017, 535)

Within the fields of recontextualization, as Bernstein (2000) notes, there is always a space for teacher agency, the relative autonomy of the pedagogic recontextualizing field, and it is in this space that teachers attempt to hold on to progressive ideas and create student-centered ideals for education (Mutch 2013), even as Couch argues (see above) they may be deceived. Nevertheless, simply providing a space for students to become more of who they perceive themselves to be may be insufficient in providing the means for students to become critical participants in their chosen field of musicking. In secondary

school music education in New Zealand, for example, the curriculum has literally become musically “instrumentalized” and fragmented in some instances, where through the selection of only performance and composition and arranging Achievement Standards (utilizing digital audio workstations), students’ musical education can be lacking any explicit development of conceptual knowledge or even the ability to read music notation. Of course, we recognize this may or may not be considered problematic depending on one’s position in regard to music education’s locally intended outcomes. Our position is that at the very least this abstract, conceptual knowledge should be made available to students and that they be encouraged to engage with it as it is integrated with creative and active pedagogies in a praxis of conceptualization (McPhail 2018b).

## 7. Conclusion

We have shown in this exploration of New Zealand education policy that the neoliberal turn is far more nuanced than is often recognized. It did not arrive in a vacuum but can be seen as a reaction against the previous centralized measures of conformity and rigidity of administration and within education prevailing philosophical and educational ideas. Neoliberal policies were adopted in New Zealand, as in other countries (Blyth 2002), as contemporary solutions to these broader concerns across society. As in other countries, too, implementation in New Zealand was not consistent or uniform, but evolved to become a prevailing orthodoxy regardless of who was in government (Swartz 2013). Its implementation cannot be seen as a continuous and thought-out project, but as a conflation of different causal mechanisms responding to circumstances as they unfolded. In any case, governments believed it necessary to create and maintain markets for public goods, rather than allowing them to emerge *laissez-faire*.

In education, we have seen an ongoing marketisation of administration and in curriculum beginning in 1989 that continues today. The Picot report and *Tomorrow’s Schools*, although focusing on administrative arrangements, established a structure that would enable fragmentation of the curriculum beginning in the 1990s and realized in the NCEA Assessment system of 2002 and the New

Zealand Curriculum of 2007. The changes made to New Zealand's secondary school music curriculum highlight the consequences of a full-scale neoliberal turn in education and its marketization for school pupils. Relocating decisions to individual teachers has provided them with flexibility and a means of adapting content to reflect the interests of their students. At the same time, student-centered choices of content and curriculum may have resulted in students' compromised opportunities for higher education (McPhail 2018a). Whether that matters, considering that most students do not go on to further music study, seems moot.

The move from highly centralized to devolved administration and curriculum in New Zealand nevertheless sits uneasily, seen by some as too extreme. Indeed, the government's 2019 "Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce" suggests a roll-back; promoting some sort of "regionalization" of administration, as well as the creation of a "national Curriculum Centre ... to ensure teachers ... have high quality advice and resources" (Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce 2019, 18). This Centre would enable the Ministry of Education to significantly increase "its focus on curriculum, learning, assessment and pedagogy" (19), representing a strong recentralization of content. In any case, the Ministry of Education was never keen to let go of control, its bureaucrats seeking almost to dictate content of schools' charters even though they were supposed to be an agreement between individual schools and their communities. Devolution has brought benefits to many students, but has, paradoxically, also limited some who have made poor subject and assessment choices. The tension between periphery and the center remains dynamic.

New Zealand's education system bears the hallmarks of the neoliberal project: decision-making devolved to individual schools and classrooms, strong managerialist accountability systems, and a curriculum that produces potential human resources for the knowledge economy. It also bears the hallmarks of postmodernism—in its alleged democratic concern for the local and its constructivist and student-centered ideals. In other words, despite the significant influence of neoliberal capitalism on education in New Zealand, arguments could equally be made for other ideologies that have exerted arguably just as much influence. The recontextualization of ideas is extremely complex, creating a stratified reality (Wheelahan 2010) particularly as the *pedagogic*

*recontextualizing field* exerts its potential autonomy either in line with or in opposition to the directives of the *official recontextualizing field* (as described by Bernstein and cited above). All these features permeate policy, curriculum design, and approaches to pedagogy in varying and varied ways.

That neoliberal reforms in New Zealand have accentuated an instrumentalized approach to education and weakened education's former more dominant humanist philosophical underpinnings is clear. Nevertheless, there has always been a dialectic between the instrumental/vocational and the theoretical/academic dimensions in education (Moodie 2016); indeed, the balance continually shifts (Adelekan 2020). So, while we cannot claim that neoliberal capitalism has created instrumentalism, we can say it has brought about a renewed emphasis on the instrumental purposes of education. While education is regarded as the key mechanism in the formation of a knowledge economy, education's more holistic purposes will continue to be weakened (Grace 2014).

The results of the "New Zealand Experiment," in terms of the type of music curriculum students now experience, is one that is literally more instrumentalized. There has been a new focus on procedural rather than theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, procedural knowledge is often divorced from its system of meaning, resulting in fragmentation of the knowledge students have access to, credit hunting, and frequent avoidance of difficult content. We suggest teachers require more knowledge about the significance of disciplinary systems of meaning to counter the effects of curricular fragmentation and instrumentalization. But neither New Zealand overall, nor its education sector in particular, has been the product of any systematic project. Rather, both are the results of different forces, of neoliberal and postmodern narratives driven by the reactions to past events. Educational reform affecting both governance and curriculum is accordingly nuanced and complex. We would argue that, at least in part, efforts to address long-standing, over-centralized administration has had consequential impacts on curriculum design with a curriculum that was outdated and overdue for change. The two together—governance and curriculum—created circumstances amenable for solutions promised in the neoliberal turn adopted by New Zealand's government in the mid-1980s.

Finally, we return to a question we asked in the opening of the paper: Who decides the curriculum in the absence of consensus? And from that, whether we

favor centralized or devolved curriculum making. The answer is: it all depends. It depends particularly on the societal context and what any proposed educational changes are reacting to or moving away from. For example, in the New Zealand case, we can see that, historically, there was justification for the initial move towards devolution and neoliberal reforms. Thirty years on, and in a vastly more culturally diverse society, a case could well be made for the need for some form of “middle range,” more centralized curriculum specifications. The current highly localized and devolved curriculum in New Zealand, with its deemphasis on abstract conceptual knowledge—the knowledge required for the development of abstract and critical thinking—could in fact be working against the educational needs of students and have implications for cohesive democracy itself (McPhail and Rata, 2019). Durkheim’s (1912/2001) concept of *collective representations* suggests that modern pluralist societies need to cohere around some agreed on values and ideals that can be passed on to the next generation.<sup>8</sup> The school is a unique social institution in that it is the only place where this passing on can occur in some ordered way. A national curriculum could well be such a collective representation.

The New Zealand Experiment was one of the “purer” examples of neoliberalism in execution. In secondary education, it took the experiment to its natural conclusion with the commodification of curriculum, where students can choose pop music or beatboxing or Beethoven. Their teachers could claim this student-centered education is more relevant to their students as a result. Yet, on balance, we conclude that there are likely more detrimental effects within education than positive, as neoliberal agendas have encouraged a break with past humanistic aims for education; this break results in students having less access to powerful knowledge, which we argue has happened in New Zealand. However, we also find that these changes have not been the product of any systematic project, but rather the result of a confluence of complex and stratified causal mechanisms at work in the socio-political world.

## About the Authors

Graham McPhail is a senior lecturer in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, in the Faculty of Education and Social Work, at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He took up this position in 2015 after twenty years of work in the secondary education sector. His research is centred on the role of knowledge in the curriculum, in particular within C21 schooling and music education contexts. He is the lead editor for New Zealand's first volume on secondary school music education, *Educational Change and the Secondary School Music Curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand*, published by Routledge in 2018.

Jeff McNeill, trained as a secondary school music teacher, practiced for many years as a policy analyst in New Zealand central and regional governments before taking up a senior lectureship in the School of People, Environment, and Planning, Massey University. His research focuses on the role and efficacy of subnational authorities within devolved polities.

## References

- Adelekan, Temitope. 2020. Knowledge and creative tension in the New Zealand university. PhD diss., University of Auckland.
- Apple, Michael 1979. *Ideology and the curriculum*. London & Boston: Routledge & K. Paul.
- Barnett, Ronald 2009. Knowing and becoming in the higher education curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education* 34 (4): 429–40.
- Barrett, Brian, and Elizabeth Rata, eds. 2014. *Knowledge and the future of the curriculum: International studies in social realism*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barrington, John. 1990. Historical Factors for Change in Education. In *Redistribution of Power? Devolution in New Zealand*, edited by Peter McKinlay. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Beck, John. 2002. The sacred and the profane in recent struggles to promote official pedagogic identities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23 (4): 617–26.
- Bernstein, Basil 2000. *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. Revised ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

- Bernstein, Basil P. 1996. *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Birch, Kean. 2015. Neoliberalism: The whys and wherefores ... and future directions. *Sociology Compass* 9 (7): 571–84.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12277>
- Blanchenay, Patrick, Tracey Burns, and Florian Köster. 2014. *Shifting Responsibilities - 20 Years of Education Devolution in Sweden*. Paris: OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jz2jg1rqrd7-en>
- Blyth, Mark. 2002. *Great transformations: Economic ideas and institutional change in the twentieth century*. Cambridge University Press. Non-fiction.
- Boas, Taylor C., and Jordan Gans-Morse. 2009. Neoliberalism: From new liberal philosophy to anti-liberal Slogan. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44 (2): 137–61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9040-5>
- Boston, Jonathan, and Chris Eichbaum. 2014. New Zealand's neoliberal reforms: Half a revolution. *Governance* 27 (3): 373–76.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12092>
- Boston, Jonathan, John Martin, Jean Pallot, and Pat Walsh. 1996. *Public management: The New Zealand model*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Bowman, Wayne. 2002. Educating musically. In *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*, edited by Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson, 63–84. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Couch, Daniel. 2018. From progressivism to instrumentalism: Innovative learning environments according to New Zealand's Ministry of Education. In *Transforming Education*, edited by Leon Benade and Mark Jackson, 121–33. Singapore: Springer.
- Court, Marian, and John O'Neill. 2011. "Tomorrow's Schools" in New Zealand: From social democracy to market managerialism. *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 43 (2): 119–40.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2011.560257>
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81.  
<https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

- De Vries, Michiel S. 2000. The rise and fall of decentralization: A comparative analysis of arguments and practices in European countries. *European Journal of Political Research* 38: 193–224.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1912/2001. *The elementary forms of religious life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elliott, David. 1994. Rethinking music: First steps to a new philosophy of music education. *International Journal of Music Education* 1: 9–20.
- Goehr, Lydia. 1992. *The imaginary museum of musical works: An essay in the philosophy of music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Grace, Gerald. 2014. Professions, sacred and profane: Reflections upon the changing nature of professionalism. In *Knowledge, expertise and the professions*, edited by Michael Young and Johan Muller, 18–30. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hayek, Friedrich. 1944/2001. *The Road to Serfdom*. London. Routledge.
- Hipkins, Rose, Michael Johnston, and Mark Sheehan. 2016. *NCEA in Context*. Wellington: NZCER Press.
- Hoadley, Ursula. 2018. *Pedagogy in poverty: Lessons from twenty years of curriculum reform in South Africa*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.
- Humpage, Louise. 2015. *Policy change, public attitudes and social citizenship: Does neoliberalism matter?* Policy Press.
- Kelsey, Jane. 1997. *The New Zealand experiment: A world model for structural adjustment?* New ed. Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland University Press: Bridget Williams Books.
- Lange, David. 1988. *Tomorrow's schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand*. Wellington: Dept. of Education.
- Lilliedahl, Jonathan. 2015. The recontextualisation of knowledge: Towards a social realist approach to curriculum and didactics. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy (NordSTEP)* 1.  
<https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.27008>
- Litvack, Jennie, and Jessica Seddon, eds. 1999. *Decentralization Briefing Notes*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81.  
<https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

- Lourie, Megan. 2020. Recontextualising 21st century learning in New Zealand education policy: The reframing of knowledge, skills and competencies. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*.
- Lourie, Megan 2018. 21st century practice in teaching and learning in New Zealand education: Strategic intention statements 2010–2016. *Pacific-Asian Education* 30: 21–32.
- Martin, John. 1991. Devolution and decentralization. In *Reshaping the state: New Zealand's bureaucratic revolution*, edited by Jonathan Boston, John Martin, Jean Pallot and Pat Walsh, 268–96. Auckland: OUP.
- Maton, Karl, and Rob Moore, eds. 2010. *Social realism, knowledge and the sociology of education: Coalitions of the mind*. London: Continuum.
- McNeill, Jeff, and McPhail, Graham. 2020. One Direction: Strategic challenges for twenty-first century secondary school music. *Music Education Research* 22 (4): 432–46.
- McPhail, Graham. 2017. Powerful knowledge: insights from music's case. *The Curriculum Journal* 28 (4): 524–38.
- McPhail, Graham. 2018a. Pedagogic populism vs. opportunities to learn: University music students' appraisal of their school music classes. *Music Education Research* 21 (3): 257–68.
- McPhail, Graham. 2018b. Too much noise in the music classroom? Towards a praxis of conceptualisation. *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 26 (2): 176–98.
- McPhail, Graham. 2019a. Pedagogic populism vs. opportunities to learn: University music students' appraisal of their school music classes. *Music Education Research* 21 (3): 257–68.
- McPhail, Graham. 2019b. Curriculum integration in flexible learning environments, challenges for teachers, and teacher education. In *Encyclopedia of Teacher Education*, edited by Michael Peters. Springer: Singapore.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1179-6\\_369-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1179-6_369-1)
- McPhail, Graham. 2020 The search for deep learning: a curriculum coherence model. *The Journal of Curriculum Studies*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2020.1748231>
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81.  
<https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

- McPhail, Graham, and McNeill, Jeff. 2019. One Direction: A future for secondary school music education? *Music Education Research* 21 (4): 359–70.
- McPhail, Graham, and Elizabeth Rata. 2019. The knowledge democracy connection and music education. *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 27 (2): 112–32.
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Some Direction: Towards a C21 secondary school curriculum. *Music Education Research* 23 (4): 484–97.
- McPhail, Graham, Vicki Thorpe, and Stuart Wise. 2018. *Educational change and the secondary school music curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand*. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- McLaren, Ian A. 1974. *Education in a small democracy: New Zealand*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ministry of Education. n.d.-a. Background to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. NZQA. <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/understand-nz-quals/nzqf/>
- Ministry of Education. n.d.-b. NCEA change package 2019. Ministry of Education, accessed 8-03-2020. <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/ncea-review/change-package/>
- Ministry of Education. 1993. *The New Zealand curriculum framework. Te anga marautanga o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Learning Media, Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. 2007. *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Moodie. 2016. *Universities, disruptive technologies, and continuity in higher education: The impact of information revolutions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moore, Gwen. 2014. Mind the gap: Privileging epistemic access to knowledge in the transition from Leaving Certificate music to higher education. *Irish Educational Studies* 33 (3): 249–68.
- Moore, Rob. 2013. Social Realism and the problem of the problem of knowledge in the sociology of education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (3): 333–53.
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

- Muller, Johan, and Michael Young. 2019. Knowledge, power and powerful knowledge re-visited. *Curriculum Journal* 30(2): 196–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2019.1570292>.
- Muller, Johan. 2000. *Reclaiming knowledge: Social theory, curriculum and education policy*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Mutch, Carol. 2013. Progressive Education in New Zealand: A Revered Past, a Contested Present and an Uncertain Future. *International Journal of Progressive Education* 9 (2): 98–116.
- OECD. 1983. *Reviews of National Policies for Education: New Zealand*. Paris: OECD.
- Picot, Brian. 1988. *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education: Report of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration*. Wellington: The Taskforce.
- Priestley, Mark, and Claire Sinnema. 2014. Downgraded curriculum? An analysis of knowledge in new curricula in Scotland and New Zealand. *The Curriculum Journal* 25: 50–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2013.872047>
- Rata, Elizabeth. 2012. *The politics of knowledge in education*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Rata, Elizabeth, and Anita Taylor. 2015. Knowledge Equivalence Discourse in New Zealand Secondary School Science. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 50 (2): 223. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-015-0020-1>
- Robertson, Susan. 2016. The global governance of teachers' work. In *The Handbook of global education policy*, edited by Karen Mundy, Andy Green, Bob Lingard, and Antoni Verger, 275–90. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Robertson, Susan 2012. Placing teachers in global governance agendas. *Comparative Education Review* 56 (3): 584–607.
- Scott, Graham. 2001. *Public sector management in New Zealand: Lessons and challenges*. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Shore, Chris. 2010. The reform of New Zealand's university system: "After neoliberalism." *Learning and Teaching* 3 (1): 1–31.
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

- Sinnema, Claire, and Graeme Aitken. 2013. Emerging international trends in curriculum. In *Reinventing the curriculum: New trends in curriculum policy and practice* edited by Mark Priestley and Gert Biesta, 141–63. London: Bloomsbury.
- Sinnema, Claire, Nienke Nieveen, and Mark Priestley. 2020. Successful futures, successful curriculum: What can Wales learn from international curriculum reforms? *The Curriculum Journal*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.17>
- Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- Small, Christopher. 1996. *Music, society, education*. Hanover & London: Wesleyan University Press. (Original work published 1977).
- Sou, Sokuntharath 2019. *Global Governance and Curriculum Design: The Influences on Cambodian Universities*. Masters Thesis, The University of Auckland.
- Swarts, Jonathan. 2013. *Constructing Neoliberalism: Economic Transformation in Anglo-American Democracies*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division.
- The Treasury. 1987a. *Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987* Volume 1. Wellington: The Treasury.
- The Treasury. 1987b. *Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government 1987* Volume 2: Education Issues. Wellington: The Treasury.
- Thwaites, Trevor. 2018. Curriculum and assessment changes in music education in New Zealand 1987–2016. In *Educational change and the secondary school music curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Graham McPhail, Vicki Thorpe, and Stuart Wise, 12–26. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Tiebout, Charles M. 1956. A pure theory of local expenditures. *Journal of Political Economy* 64 (October): 416–24.
- Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce. 2019. *Our schooling futures: Stronger together. Final report*.
- McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81.  
<https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

Voogt, Joke, and Natalie P. Roblin. 2012. A comparative analysis of international frameworks for 21st century competences: Implications for national curriculum policies. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 44 (3): 299–321.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2012.668938>

Walker, David. 2002. *In praise of centralism—A critique of the new localism*. London: The Catalyst Forum.

Wheelahan, Lessa. 2010. *Why knowledge matters in the curriculum*. London: Routledge.

Young, Michael. 2008. *Bringing knowledge back in: From social constructivism to social realism in the sociology of education*. London: Routledge.

Young, Michael, and Johan Muller. 2019. Knowledge power and powerful knowledge re-visited. *The Curriculum Journal* 30 (2): 196–214.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2019.1570292>

Young, Michael, and Johan Muller. 2014. On the Powers of Powerful Knowledge. *Review of Education* 1 (3): 229–50.

McPhail, Graham, and Jeff McNeill. 2021. Music education and the neoliberal turn in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 44–81.  
<https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.44>

## Appendix A

Example of an Achievement Standard. NCEA Level 1.

**Achievement Standard**

|                            |              |                                      |                               |                   |                  |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <b>Subject Reference</b>   |              | Music 1.3                            |                               |                   |                  |
| <b>Title</b>               |              | Compose two original pieces of music |                               |                   |                  |
| <b>Level</b>               | 1            | <b>Credits</b>                       | 6                             | <b>Assessment</b> | Internal         |
| <b>Subfield</b>            | Music        |                                      |                               |                   |                  |
| <b>Domain</b>              | Making Music |                                      |                               |                   |                  |
| <b>Status</b>              |              | Registered                           | <b>Status date</b>            |                   | 17 December 2010 |
| <b>Planned review date</b> |              | 31 December 2020                     | <b>Date version published</b> |                   | 20 November 2014 |

This achievement standard involves the individual and/or collaborative composition of two original pieces of music.

**Achievement Criteria**

| <b>Achievement</b>                    | <b>Achievement with Merit</b>                   | <b>Achievement with Excellence</b>               |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Compose two original pieces of music. | Compose two effective original pieces of music. | Compose two convincing original pieces of music. |

**Explanatory Notes**

1. This achievement standard is derived from *The New Zealand Curriculum*, Learning Media, Ministry of Education, 2007; Level 6 strand, *Developing Ideas in Music - Sound Arts*, and is related to the material in the *Teaching and Learning Guide for Music - Sound Arts*, Ministry of Education, 2010 at <http://seniorsecondary.tki.org.nz>.

This standard is also derived from Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. For details of Te Marautanga o Aotearoa achievement objectives to which this standard relates, see the [Papa Whakaako](#).

2. *Compose* involves the individual and/or collaborative generation, development, structuring, and representation of original musical ideas to create music. A student may compose either two compositions as an individual, or two compositions as a member of a group(s), or one of each.

*Compose effective* pieces of music means that the musical ideas are developed, structured and represented coherently, and the music demonstrates stylistic control.

*Compose convincing* pieces of music means that the musical ideas are developed, structured and represented skilfully, and the music is stylistically assured.

3. *Generation* refers to the creation of musical ideas eg riffs, motifs, chords, ostinato, use of tonal centre(s).

*Development* refers to the way that musical ideas are manipulated using timbre, textures, and compositional devices eg repetition, sequence, layering, te mita o te reo Māori.

*Structure* refers to the ways in which musical ideas are organised eg verse/chorus, ABA, whakapapa (genealogical narrative).

4. Representation must convey compositional intent as appropriate to the style/genre. Representation must include both audio and visual representation.

Representation of a composition must comprise:

- an audio or audio visual file playable on a CD player or computer without specialised music software
- a visual representation that is appropriate to the style/genre and conveys compositional intent eg standard music notation, lyric and chord chart, lead sheet, tab, graphic notation, narrative description, or a combination of these.

5. Collaborative composition must involve 2–5 students, working in a group. Each student's creative contribution to the group composition must be individually assessed.
6. For improvisation sufficient detail must be supplied in the visual representation to give a clear indication of the composer's intentions.
7. The assessment criteria must be applied to provide an overall judgment based on the weight of evidence across both compositions.
8. Conditions of Assessment related to this achievement standard can be found at <http://ncea.tki.org.nz/Resources-for-Internally-Assessed-Achievement-Standards>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/understand-nz-quals/nzqf/>

<sup>2</sup> David Elliott visited New Zealand in 1999 at the time of national curricular reform and was, at least indirectly, influential in the reconceptualization of aspects of the New Zealand music curriculum.

<sup>3</sup> In New Zealand secondary schools, students learn an instrument or singing either through state-funded music lessons taught by “itinerant” teachers at their school, or, from private teachers at their own expense. Classroom teachers do not teach instrumental or vocal performance.

<sup>4</sup> The matrix for the general courses can be viewed here: <http://ncea.tki.org.nz/Media/Files/Internally-assessed-standards/The-Arts/Music/Music-matrix>

<sup>5</sup> The State Services Commission is the central public service department of New Zealand charged with overseeing, managing, and improving the performance of the State sector of New Zealand and its organisations.

<sup>6</sup> Culturalism is an ideology which promotes the belief that individuals are constructed within the social relations of their ethnic or racial group; the group to which they have an ancestral genetic connection. This has implications for identity formation and subsequent educational priorities.

<sup>7</sup> In 1937, an international organisation known as the New Education Fellowship held a conference in New Zealand. This was a watershed moment in New Zealand’s educational history, where the new “progressive” ideas of John Dewey and others were disseminated throughout the country, with governmental support (all schools were closed for the conference), and it established New Zealand’s long-standing relationship with student-centred, progressive ideas, particularly in the primary school (Couch 2012, Mutch 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Durkheim used the term *collective representations* to refer to the shared sense of reality, which, in replacing the mythologies that played the same integrating function in traditional societies, enables modern societies to cohere.