The emergence of the marketing professional in schools

ABSTRACT

The marketisation of schools has emerged as a defining feature of the education landscape. While the role of principals and lead teachers in carrying out marketing work was investigated in the late 1990s, there has been scant evidence of how the people and practices of marketing in schools have evolved into the 21st century. Expanding on existing literature on educational marketing practices in schools, and through in-depth interviews with a unique sample of school marketers, this study explores the emergence of the school marketing professional. The interviews reveal the diverse backgrounds and experiences of these individuals, the transfer of their business skills into schools, and the tensions in professional boundaries with educators who traditionally performed school marketing activities. Ultimately, the study furthers insights into the co-existence of educational and managerial agendas in the schools market.

The shifting and contested educational landscape is marked by privatisation, competition for financial and social resources, and market-based reforms. Schools, with the establishment of 'quasi-markets' in educational services, have become increasingly 'business-like', that is, conscious about their reputations and engaging in a range of corporate managerialist and marketing practices (Cribb and Ball 2005). The initial wave of research into the marketization of schools in the late 20th century concurred that marketing had become a necessary feature of school management and spawned a host of 'how to' books on school promotion (e.g., Gray 1991; Kotler and Fox 1995). Around two decades of literature established marketing management as exclusively the domain of principals and selected teaching staff (James and Phillips 1995; Oplakta 2002), who balanced the demands of educational and market environments (Oplakta and Hemsley-Brown 2004). Indeed, in a 1995 study, James and Phillips reported no instances of anyone other than principals and teachers being responsible for the marketing function. Further, since Oplakta and Hemsley-Brown's (2004) review of teachers' roles in school marketing, relatively little attention has been paid to who carries out marketing work within schools. In essence, the literature shows marketing has taken its place as an inevitable function and set of practices within schools, but not as a specific professional role within school management and administration.

Like traditional organisations and professions which are facing the demands of competition and marketized and managerialist agendas, schools have introduced professional roles responsible for creating distinct and clear identities to attract and retain stakeholders (Ball 1994; Hwang and Powell 2009; Maguire et al 2001). These professional roles are now likely to include human resource personnel and management consultants (Abbott 1988). Even not for profit organisations with social justice agendas have been caught up in this competitive and managerialist turn, as they seek to create unique identities to attract stakeholders and resources, while balancing their central rationales and agendas. In the education sector, the

pressures of market demands and the importance of marketing and identity management for school survival are especially relevant in highly competitive educational markets (Forsberg 2018; Ball 1994).

Through the integration of dual theoretical perspectives, namely, marketization discourses in education (e.g., Ball 2003; Wilson and Carlsen 2016) and managerial perspectives on organisational professionals (e.g., DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Hwang and Powell 2009), this article seeks to develop new knowledge of the professional groups and practices that are emerging in Australian schools. In the sample of 19 private/non-government high schools accessed for the study, all employed dedicated marketing professionals. The study had three specific aims, the first of which was to reveal insights into the emergence of the marketing occupation in schools through an understanding of the backgrounds and specialisations of marketing professionals, the parameters and limits of their roles, and the unique contributions they claim to make within school environments. The second related aim was to illuminate how marketing practices have evolved through an investigation of the extent and nature of practices deployed by schools, and what, if any, limits might be placed on such practices by educators or other school staff. The third aim of the study was to expose any tensions related to managerialism and the marketization of education and how these tensions are managed. For the purposes of this study, we define marketing practices as the strategic creation, design and presentation of promotional, sales and public relationship activities which are focused on the needs and wants of a school's partners, stakeholders and customers (DiMartino and Butler Jessen 2016; Foskett 2002).

School responses to market-based reforms in education

The market oriented education system has led to profound changes in education jargon, with notions such as inputs, equity, centralised bureaucracy, mass education and unionisation, which defined post-world-war schooling, being replaced by new language such as

performance, outputs, added-value, choice, quality, competencies, flexibility, deregulation and school-business partnerships (Robertson 1996). Although a strategic approach to marketing may make schools more open and responsive to the communities they serve (Foskett 2002), pragmatic concerns have also been raised. These include the extent to which investment in branding and marketing practices detracts from the financial resources available to improve education (DiMartino and Butler Jessen 2016; Lubienski 2005); the potential for marketing to be used as a subtle gatekeeping method to deter less desirable applicants (Jabbar 2016); and the segmentation of the educational marketplace, where schools compete against smaller subsets of schools for particular students (Wilson and Carsen 2016). A study by Forsberg (2018) revealed that the deployment of marketing differs between strata of schools depending on their financial, social and cultural capital, and showed how the intensity of the school choice environment has heightened the need for marketing in order to compete.

One of the impacts of marketisation on the roles of principals and teachers includes tensions between acting as 'educator' and 'marketer' (Birch 1998). The market-oriented teacher is said to perform their work in accordance with the mission of the school, and follow the instructions of the management team in order to improve the reputation of the school among parents and students (Fredriksson 2009). Illustrative of empirical work in this area is Kenway and Bullen's (2001) study which found that school principals had become educational entrepreneurs, hustling for customers, reputation and resources, cultivating the media, and seeking sponsors. Similarly, Lundahl, Erixon Arreman, Holm and Lundstrom (2013) who examined school marketing practices in Swedish high schools across 60 municipalities, found that more than half of the schools had invested considerable resources in marketing and a third had hired advertising companies. Most principals and teachers were involved in marketing activities through a range of channels which included school fairs, printed

materials, special offers and advertisements in newspapers and on the internet, radio and TV, and via emails and text messages. In the face of rising competition, principals increase their advertising and outreach, adopt more managerial and entrepreneurial rather than instructional roles, and experience an escalation in workload (e.g., Loeb et al. 2011; Oplatka 2007b).

The literature addressing how the marketisation of public education has influenced teaching has also emphasised the discursive dimensions of education policy change (Ball 2003; Maguire 2004). Related to this body of work has been research examining school communications as a form of marketisation. These studies focus on the symbols and visual images used by schools in their marketing, promotional and advertising materials, often using critical discourse analysis or semiotics (e.g., Drew 2013; Wilson and Carlsen 2016). The research concludes, in general, that marketing materials can both exclude and also target particular families through the use of subtle language and symbols that convey the right 'fit' between certain families and the particular school (DiMartino and Jessen 2016; Jennings 2010). In their communications, schools also often emphasise test scores in order to valorise the academic value of their educational programs (Stevenson and Wood 2013). The use of metrics as a marketing tool is further associated with what is referred to as 'cream-skimming', whereby middle class students who can be cashed in for improved school performance, are actively recruited by schools eager to control their intakes (Ball 2004). Research has also examined the impact of communications on supply side questions of school choice, often comparative to other decision factors including social networks and open days (e.g., Kimelberg and Billingham 2013; Oplatka 2007a).

A small body of work has further explored how market-based reforms have led to changes in the ways schools endeavour to attract funding, such as connecting with donors to support financial and social capital goals and to develop public-private partnerships. For example, Molnar (2002) in an early US study, identified the kinds of strategies used by schools to

support their educational and extra-curricular activities. These included exclusive agreements on the sale/use of corporate products in schools' incentive programs which reward student behaviour with commercial products; sponsorship of education materials that advance corporate interests; electronic marketing; and the appropriation of public spaces such as naming rights for sporting facilities.

The above literature suggests the ways in which schools have responded to, and been affected by, the marketisation of education in order to harness their unique identity to garner resources. However, the picture remains partial, with relatively few recent empirical studies in the field, and a substantial proportion of published studies either speculating about how schools are being re-shaped by market-driven reforms via discursive shifts in educational policies, or utilising data gathered not from within schools, but from publicly available sources such as prospectuses and websites, or from parents and students. Specifically, the literature has placed an almost exclusive emphasis on educators' activities while neglecting how other professionals carry out this work within schools. While the language of corporatisation is not new for schools, the employment of new actors whose roles are specifically designed to advance corporate and marketing related interests, represents a substantial shift in the field of educational marketing in schooling. They are consequently an important group to subject to sociological critique.

Theorising the emergence of new actors in schools

In addition to the work on the marketization of education detailed above, our analysis of the rise of the school marketing professional is also informed by organisational theory. In particular, our study speaks to conceptualisations of the rise of the organisational professional (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) or the administrative class (Friedson 1994). The emergence of this new category of employee, which is linked to an increased focus on efficiency and rationalization in organisations (Abbott 1988), challenges the power and legitimacy of

traditional professions and occupations. Unlike the latter, new types of professional actors have the organisation rather than their profession as the core of their rationale, offering their services across multiple organizations and sectors. This means their administrative expertise and knowledge are standardized and commercialized (Suddaby and Greenwood 2006), and able to be offered in multiple organizational sites. These "upstart professions" (Hwang and Powell 2009; p269) compete for organizational resources with existing professions, encroaching on their professional boundaries and practices in pursuit of the managerialist imperative.

In their conceptualisation of the impact of the creation of 'new fields' in corporations, Suddaby et al (2007: 333) explain that a struggle emerges between traditional and organisational professionals around existing professional standards. How this manifests in terms of tensions over an organisation's purpose and the allocation of resources and over professional roles and identities has been demonstrated in empirical studies of the not for profit sector (Karl 1998; Hwang and Powell 2009) and groups pursuing social justice causes (Sanders et al 2014).

The literature on schooling (Birch 1998; Grace 1995; Oplatka 2002) has already noted tensions between educational and managerialist and marketization agendas for principals and teachers. In this paper we expand on this work drawing on organisational theory in order to open up to scrutiny the dynamics between school educators and marketers.. Investigating the work of marketing professionals in schools offers the opportunity to reveal more about their managerialist practices and the fissures emerging in educational practices, resources and principles.

Schools in Australia

The Australian non-government school sector is an ideal setting in which to examine marketing practices. Australia is a country which has enthusiastically embraced the neo-liberal conditions conducive to the dismantling of public schooling (Smyth 2008), and vigorously adopted the interrelated policy technologies characterised by Ball (2003) as market, managerialism and performativity. Although they have been more resistant to the excesses of managerialism than the university or vocational education sectors (Connell 2013), Australian schools have become increasingly competitive as they respond to public rankings and the encouragement of parental choice of schools (Shiller 2011).

The Australian schooling system includes what are referred to as 'private/non-government' or 'public/state/government' schools. Non-government schools, which are not governed by the state, are further categorised as either Catholic or Independent, usually with association to a religious order or to the grammar school system. Non-government schools constitute 34% of all schools, but they receive approximately 21% of public education funding (Harrington 2011). They also receive income derived from the school's stakeholders in the form of tuition and building fund fees, usually paid by parents; bequests and donations from alumnus and corporate and private benefactors; interest and revenue from assets owned by the school; and fundraising activities. Since the majority of Australia's population is concentrated in urban areas on the Eastern seaboard, both government and non-government schools operate in close competition with each other. As Forsberg (2018) and Oplatka and Hemsley Brown (2004) note, competitive urban settings are where school marketing and 'choice' are most apparent and important for schools.

Australians have embraced the 'choice' tradition with up to 40% of high school students attending private/non-government schools (McKay 2018) creating a competitive market for students. In addition, the state has responded by introducing 'secondary' colleges offering

private-like school attributes for students with aptitude in a specific discipline – for example creative industries; science and technology; or aviation. As such Australia is prone to utilise techniques evidenced in other competitive school markets.

The shifts that have occurred in the Australian educational context are illustrative of global neoliberal agendas of rebuilding (public) services as 'adaptive, responsive, flexible and diverse, rather than paternalist, monolithic and operating on a model of 'one size fits all' (Clarke et al. 2000: 261). Yet the inherent dangers of following the belief that organisations which receive public or charitable funding should be consistently more business-like have been widely acknowledged. For example, there have been significant critiques in Australia of democratic notions of 'choice', contentious debates about the specifics of public-private school funding arrangements, and associated concerns about falling national educational outcomes. Hence, Australian non-government schools exist in the ambiguous space between the market and the state (Brainard and Siplon 2004).

This study draws on in-depth interviews with those responsible for marketing in 19 Australian non-government high schools. Although the evidence used for the analysis is drawn from Australian schools, there is considerable reason to believe that the phenomena investigated will yield insights that have relevance in other neoliberal market economies which are undergoing similar educational transformations.

Methods

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the parameters of school marketing specialists in terms of their backgrounds, unique roles and contributions?

2. To what extent do educators place limits on the practices of marketing specialists?

3. How are tensions related to managerialism and the marketization of education managed in schools?

Our data collection method comprised lengthy (up to 90 minutes) semi-structured interviews with those responsible for marketing practices at 19 high schools operating in the non-government education sector located in south-east Queensland, Australia. The sampling process involved initially compiling a list of 'similar', non-government high schools, that is, schools with fees/parent contributions over $A5,000 per year; a figure that is available for all Australian schools via the 'MySchool' website (see http://www.myschool.edu.au/). We set this lower limit in order to focus on schools which were likely to have available sufficient financial resources to have employed a marketing specialist and to allocate to a range of marketing activities. Schools ranged in size with student populations of between 600 and 1,200.

We contacted the schools directly via email providing relevant information about the study and requesting an interview with the staff member responsible for marketing at the school. Of the total 31 schools we contacted, eight did not respond to our request to participate (after one reminder), and four declined to participate. Of the 19 schools which participated the principal nominated to be interviewed in four cases with the remaining 15 interviews being conducted with marketing professionals. There did not appear to be any systematic differences between the characteristics of sample schools and non-responding or declining schools. However, the sample (see Table 1) was monitored to include schools with different gender profiles (same-sex/co-educational), and whether the school was Catholic or 'Independent' (a catch-all phrase comprising all non-Catholic schools, including grammar or non-denominational schools, Lutheran, Uniting Church and Anglican schools). Interview questions were consistent regardless of the occupational title of the participant. Of the marketing professionals interviewed, seven were male and eight were female. Of the four principals interviewed, three

were male and one was female. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Table 1 here

Interview questions addressed the following themes: biographical trajectory in terms of discipline background and fields of experience; the scope and nature of job roles and responsibilities within the school relative to other school employees (e.g., principal, teachers, 'back office' staff); reporting and supervisory arrangements; and the nature and scope of marketing activities deployed. During the interviews, respondents frequently referred to and often gave us copies of school documentation, including newsletters, prospectuses, annual reports, websites, DVDs and school signage. While this documentation was not directly utilised in our analysis, it featured indirectly in that respondents used the material to support their responses.

In the first stage of analysis, we searched the transcripts for evidence of: (i) the qualifications, skills and backgrounds marketing specialists brought to their roles; (ii) how their roles were defined, governed and managed within schools; (iii) the types of marketisation practices deployed by schools; and (iv) where, if at all, marketing practices had been obstructed or limited. In a second stage of analysis, we examined the excerpts identified in the first stage of coding to uncover three themes representing what marketers believed were unique contributions they made to the school. The results are presented firstly in terms of the characteristics of marketers and the parameters of their roles in schools and secondly, according to the three themes identified in the second stage of coding: Promoting and corporatising the brand; Managing external risks; and Fostering a business ethos. As the findings show, marketing specialists attempted to promote their status and advance their practices through a complex and sometimes contested process of negotiation with teachers and school leaders. Overall, the analysis of interviews across multiple organisational sites,

and from the perspectives of these 'knowledgeable informants' (Gioia et al. 2013), offered an opportunity to reveal, both within and between schools, how various structures, social relations and language shape the extent and nature of marketisation in schools.

Results

The parameters of marketing roles in schools

Marketing in schools is no longer the domain of the principal or selected teachers, as reported by Oplatka and Hemsley Brown (2004). Rather, the marketing function is assigned to additional professional staff who, as interviewees explained, use a range of occupation titles such as Communications and Enrolments Manager, Director of Communications, Marketing Manager, and Director of Development. Their positioning within the organisational structure of the schools varied; some reported directly to the Principal and others to the Business Manager or General Manager. The majority of the seven male and eight female marketing professional interviewees held university undergraduate degrees in a wide range of disciplines including business, teaching, applied science, journalism and marketing. This range of disciplines, including many outside education, and their transferability, reflects the standardisation and transferability of practices across multiple industries and organisational sites (Suddaby and Greenwood 2006). Many had previous corporate experience – up to twenty years in some cases - in public relations, marketing, accounting and media firms, and government, and in sectors including tourism, banking, oil and petroleum, community, insurance, publishing, construction and education. Prior to their appointments, marketing tasks were outsourced by the schools, as referenced in the educational marketing literature (Lundahl et al 2013).

A universal response across the interviews was that marketing-related activities in schools are growing in scope and significance. This was reflected in interviewees' own biographies in that the majority were inaugural appointments. One participant, who had begun her employment in the school nine years earlier after a career in a large tourism corporation, recounted a narrative that was echoed across the interviews. She explained that her appointment was motivated by the expansion of the number and significance of marketing tasks that had previously been undertaken by teachers.

> Up until that time the school had enabled some of the functions of marketing to be undertaken by teaching staff as part of part load scenario. For example, our year book was done by an English teacher… Other teaching staff had responsibility for photography. They used to outsource public relations and advertising activities. So the Council decided to bring it all in under the one umbrella [Girls, Independent]

Marketing specialists described their areas of specialisation in terms of event management, grant writing, public relations, sponsorship activities, branding and journalism. In some schools the marketing professionals operated largely in a solo capacity, whilst others worked alongside staff in the school who held adjunct roles, including philanthropy, community engagement and liaison, events, web development, enrolments, graphic art and communications. In some schools, external consultants were additionally contracted to fulfil certain roles where particular expertise not held by marketers was required.

Evidence for the expansion as well as the formalisation of marketing roles was evident in the way interviewees outlined the types of managerial documents which guided their work. One participant prefaced a discussion of her typical week by stating that her role was informed by the school's five year strategic marketing plan and, in turn, the annual operational plan, both of which were developed with the assistance of external business consultants and approved

by the school board. Another described the governance of the marketing role in the schools as follows:

> We have four or five marketing reference groups. They are voluntary positions in the school… they are not the decision making groups. Essentially I make the decisions in conjunction with the principal… This was set up for me by a consultant who came in to the school and made the recommendation to hire someone for my role… we have a work group, we have an advertising group, a brand group and a tech group. [Girls, Catholic]

Budgets were allocated to each marketing specialist. Schools defined the scope of 'marketing' activities differently and assigned resources accordingly, but they included expenditure on publications such as magazines, media-related activities, events sponsorship, brand awareness strategies, and advertising and promotion such as billboards and newspaper advertisements. Consistent with Forsberg's (2018) work which showed how schools' marketing practices differ by financial and social capital, some schools were considerably better resourced in terms of marketing staff and budget allocation than others. This was a source of resentment for those with smaller budgets which they saw as insufficient, hence constraining their marketing aspirations. One marketer from a less affluent school for example, indicated that she needed to 'sell advertising and sponsorship to afford to have promotional documents printed or hold an event' (Co-ed, Independent).

Financial support for the professional development of those in marketing roles was routinely provided by schools. One example of this was a school-funded study tour to the United States for four school administrators as a means to 'see how schools there were badging and marketing' (Boys, Catholic). Some allocated school marketing budgets that were 'in the higher end of the market…around $AUS200,000 a year' (Boys, Catholic), with separate line

items for advertising, publications, branding awareness and marketing. These marketing budgets were additional to the salaries of marketers themselves.

Promoting and corporatising the brand

Unsurprisingly, marketers consistently claimed a core function of their role was to promote the school. Promotion encompassed a range of activities that had been undertaken before they had taken up their dedicated roles, such as producing the prospectus and regular parent or sports newsletters. However, the creation of specialist marketing roles meant a significant expansion of these practices. They explained that in taking on promotional work previously undertaken by teachers, they had focused attention on 'corporatising' or 'professionalising' the brand. Indeed, as the following quotation demonstrates, the nomenclature of 'corporate' peppered conversations about the nature of interviewees' work. In commenting on taking responsibility for the school year book one stated:

> It now has a corporate feel… that gives you a higher level. Whereas you see a lot of schools go for the kiddie feel, you know what I mean? Getting kids artwork involved in their promotional stuff and that sort of thing. That's fine, I understand that student touch there. But you are also losing some of that stature, because you need a corporate feel as well. [Girls, Independent]

Efficiency and accountability were key features of their work. Consistency across communications was repeatedly highlighted as critical to a 'professional' or 'corporate' brand. Participants described how 'the grammar, the style, everything must be spot on', with 'one set of eyes looking over everything' (Girls, Independent). To ensure consistency was maintained, school marketers monitored not only visual images such as font, logos and crests across letterheads and other documents, but also the use of language by teachers in everyday interactions. One participant described how they had developed a 'compulsory style guide to

direct teachers in their communication with parents and students' (Boys, Catholic). Another referred to the development of 'branding guidelines' which is 'a book which governs how we talk, how we report, so there is consistency across the school.' (Boys, Catholic)

Relatedly, teachers were considered by marketers to be central to the school brand but at the same time, chronically lacking in skills that were crucial to the task of positioning the school favourably. Marketers were eager to manage this by redressing such perceived skills gaps, marking a significant shift away from the notion of the market-oriented teacher (Birch 1998). Strategies included preventing teachers from sending out communications without them being vetted or through a concerted process of instructing them on correct procedures. One interviewee explained that 'the brand was so diluted' by the fact that teachers 'all made up their own little flyers' (Boys, Independent). In response she now inspected all communications for consistency.

Managing corporate and commercial partnerships was discussed as another major responsibility inherent to promoting the brand. These activities were designed to align the school with businesses that they could support as well as those from which they could derive benefits. One interviewee for example referred to the 'executive people' who were a 'big market' for the school and described the important relationships they had built with 'the big companies in town' (Co-ed, Independent). In another school, sponsorship was considered key.

> We have gold, bronze, silver sponsorship and we have some businesses who come on board and so they get promoted throughout the year. There is a parent directory so they would have their ad in here… We have a very good relationship with the new coffee shop that has opened up down the road… so we try to support those businesses in the local community. We have relationships with the local politicians and we send our newsletter to them. [Girls, Catholic]

Other branding activities undertaken by marketers included ensuring the school had a profile at significant community events and pitching positive stories about the school to journalists. The degree to which positive media is taken seriously by schools, and the extent to which it can, in some circumstances be privileged over educational goals, was evident in the way it was used to shape the learning day of students. This was communicated in one anecdote in which a respondent explained how she had convinced teachers about the benefits of positive media exposure and brand awareness:

> We got a great story… a couple of months ago with our kindergarten kids with their iPads. The kindergarten teacher was more than happy to work with me and the photographer for literally an hour and a half while we were trying to get the photo because it meant a page 3 story. [Girls, Independent]

Media management was also framed as a risk management activity which we address in the following section.

Managing external risks

In addition to specialist contributions to branding, marketers saw themselves as having a central role in managing risks. The key identified risks were falling student enrolments, negative media coverage, and somewhat ironically, a level of commercialisation which threatened the school brand. In terms of risks to student enrolments, marketing specialists were routinely responsible for monitoring how other schools were promoting themselves and in response, replicating or openly competing with these strategies. A further competitive strategy adopted by marketers to mitigate the risks of losing market share was utilising external consulting groups specialising in data benchmarking and educational marketing. One explained:

They can give us real hard stats as to where people with money are, so we can at least

target our advertising around that. It's all very well promoting yourself but if you

have 200 people coming in wanting 80% scholarships, that's not what we want either.

We need full paying ones obviously because it still has to be run as a business. [Boys,

Catholic]

The risk of losing market share was integrally linked with managing how academic

achievement metrics were communicated. Given the well documented rise in high stakes

testing and the use of results in the public domain (Stevenson and Wood 2013), it is not

surprising that many schools made confident claims that the institution enabled superior

academic results, either using metrics demonstrating the achievements of graduating pupils or

the proportion of students who go on to tertiary education. However, in terms of managing

risks, it was also acknowledged by marketers that very strong academic performance

rankings could not be guaranteed consistently from year to year, in the sense that 'you can be

knocked off that pillar easily' [Girls, Independent]. This tension was managed through a

finely balanced approach where participants promoted academic metrics at the same time as

they invoked the notion of the 'whole child'.

You have communities here who are concerned about a lot more things than the

academic results… It's a lifestyle, it's a community, it's a way of living and it's a way

of growing so they are not just purchasing a uniform and academic results and a

location. [Girls, Independent].

To the same degree, negative media was taken very seriously as a potential risk to be

managed by school marketing specialists. Their role in managing the media was seen as

'crucial' because the media 'is more interested in the negative side of what's happening'

(Girls, Independent) and would 'tear us down if they could' (Boys, Independent). Those

marketing specialists with backgrounds in journalism spoke of using their social capital to

leverage former collegiate relationships to their advantage in order to facilitate positive media about their schools not only for promotional purposes but for risk management:

> I was actually in Rotary with the editor and a couple of journalists… It is important to have a lot of good publicity so if God forbid something does hit the fan, we already have that collateral of being a solid school. [Co-ed, Independent].

The demonstration of leadership in media relations was a key example of how marketing specialists had autonomously shaped their roles. This included, as the following excerpt illustrates, excluding the school principal from speaking to the media.

> I'm here as a media buffer. All the media comes to me now, it doesn't go to [Principal]. He engages, he's just that sort of person, so I've had to tell him that that's not the way to do it. [Boys, Catholic]

Previous work has identified the tensions created for principals and teachers in the shift to a business agenda (Birch 1998). However, interviewees acknowledged that moving too quickly or too substantially to business-focused practices was also a 'marketing risk'. They asserted that practices such as advertising, corporate partnerships and corporate branding are beneficial to schools, but can also be a threat if they have the effect of making the school 'look cheap and nasty' or be seen to be 'prostituting itself'. Some marketers saw themselves as 'gatekeepers' in this respect. For example, they commented that specific practices, such as assigning commercialised naming rights to buildings on school grounds, were off limits. One interviewee described how she deferred to a new principal who wanted to 'keep the focus on education rather than commercialisation' because 'the name's pretty sacred' (Girls, Independent).

> There are parents within the school community that have businesses or a strong business sense and they say 'The school could be making money out of this..'. I don't

want to be seen as polluting the message with advertising and I've seen how other schools have gone down that path… [Girls, Independent]

These apparently self-imposed limits on marketing practices sat alongside the institutionally-imposed constraints discussed earlier, as well as counter-efforts by marketers to assert their autonomous roles and push some marketing strategies further. We describe these efforts in the following section.

Fostering a business ethos

A final unique contribution school marketing specialists claimed they make to educational organisations is fostering a business ethos. As marketers, they viewed themselves as contemporary and innovative, and the schools they worked in as akin to any other organisation – a business to be managed. As such, they believed they had a role as change agents, charged with instilling into the school a business culture where marketing was appropriately acknowledged as critical. In this regard they viewed teaching staff as particularly lacking, in that many expressed resistance towards marketing functions. One commented 'As a marketer we are all about change…but as a culture they (the teachers) have had challenges in accepting that change…. (Girls, Catholic). Marketers reported that their expertise was typically under-appreciated by staff in teaching and leadership roles.

Interviewees said they had a role to play in educating and informing teachers about the value of marketers and marketing. They discussed this profile-raising process by citing instances where teachers had, as they saw it, unduly influenced marketing strategies. One participant said a senior mathematics teacher constantly suggested marketing initiatives even though she 'didn't go to his trigonometry class telling him how he should be teaching that subject' (Girls, Independent). Marketers also recounted how earlier in their tenure, they had been requested to do menial tasks such as taking RSVPs for events and rewriting and photocopying letters.

I wasn't regarded as either an equal or worthy then because I had a marketing role... I had one publication where one of the teachers circled different things in red pen and put it on my desk. Never in my lifetime in corporate would anyone do that…. [Girls, Independent]

Marketers 'sold' the idea of teachers conforming to the marketing agenda, being 'part of the business process' (Boys, Catholic), and by definition, integral to a more corporate ethos, by claiming if they failed to do so, they may be responsible for reduced school enrolments. One said her message to staff was that marketers 'recruited students and families so that we all have jobs' (Co-ed, Independent).

As a means of redressing what interviewees saw as teachers' deficiencies in marketing, or, as Fredriksson (2009: 299) suggests, to afford emphasis to the subject position 'the market-oriented teacher', some schools had dedicated professional development to marketing related activities. One marketer for example described an activity she had developed which required teachers to role play a series of scenarios in which one group was asked to act 'in the correct way' and the other 'in the wrong way', to demonstrate positive/negative marketing. The scenarios involved teachers pretending to interact with students and parents, both within and outside school hours, such as at a party after a few drinks or shopping for groceries after school.

Further reflecting tensions between teachers, and what Hwang and Powell (2009: p269) refer to as upstart professionals, marketers described the opposition they experienced from teachers and school leaders in their attempts to foster more corporate values. Some reported that educational leaders had a range of concerns about the school projecting a business orientation to external stakeholders and that in outward facing claims, they preferred to privilege the educational advantages and the school's social mission more prominently than corporate themes. This was a source of significant frustration because of the associated limits placed on their marketing activities.

> I report directly to the Deputy but he doesn't have a good understanding of marketing and he doesn't have experience in that area so he relies on what we say to a degree. But then he still has his education mind and he says, "I want this done this way", and I say "I understand where you are going with that but from a business perspective…"
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> [Boys, Catholic]

Part of the frustration of not being able to shift school values towards a corporate mind-set far enough or quickly enough, was reflected in the fact that only one of the 19 schools in the sample included marketers in their senior management teams. Leadership teams tended to include those in curriculum and other educationally-focused roles, rather than those who 'are part of the business process' (Boys, Catholic). This organisational structure was seen by marketers as not only anomalous – 'What other organisation would you not have your marketing director as part of your senior leadership?' (Girls, Independent), but also indicative of the fact that their role was under-valued and that ultimately this meant the full potential of marketing benefits could not be realised.

Discussion

This study addressed a significant evidence gap in the educational marketing in schools literature – the emergence of new roles in schools to deal with the marketisation of education. The study may be the first to examine this question by gathering data directly from individuals in dedicated school-based marketing roles and to reveal the scope, as well as some of the limits, of marketing practices, including the contested and dynamic ways in which these play out. The findings suggest that the introduction of dedicated marketing roles has expanded the scope of school marketing activities and that an apparent professionalisation of these activities is emerging. For example, in addition to marketing

expertise, some schools had also enlisted the specialised knowledge of staff with graphic art, communication, philanthropy and web development skills. References to enlisting the support of external consultants such as education foundations, data experts and education management organisations, were also commonly mentioned in the interviews; a finding that is consistent with reports of the emergence of an increasingly corporatised education services industry (Saltman 2010).

Drawing on marketization discourses in education and managerial perspectives on organisational professionals to examine the emergence and evolution of school marketers and marketing practices in schools, highlights two key themes. Firstly, it reveals the importance of these organizational professionals in bringing standardization and commercialization (Suddaby and Greenwood 2006) to the school sector. The combined salary costs of these new actors in school education, and the significant marketing budgets allocated to them, leaves little doubt that the importance placed on marketing functions in Australian non-government schools has increased exponentially in recent years. A second useful insight is that despite the changes occurring in education around marketing professionals, market-based strategies and practices are not proceeding unabated. As Suddaby et al (2007: 35) observe, the emergence of a new category of professionals in corporations is not passively diffused nor passively accepted. Rather, tensions associated with marketization agendas and traditional educational discourses and functions are carefully managed in a fine balancing act designed to promote a desired outward image that does not risk damaging the school's reputation as being primarily educationally-focused.

Previous research suggests school-level marketing practices have had a profound effect on the nature of teachers' roles and the conditions of their work. Fredriksson's (2009) study for example, demonstrated that teachers in Swedish for-profit charter schools were more market oriented than their public school peers. They were more likely to adopt the mission of the

school, trying to realise its spirit in the classroom, and they had a propensity to attempt to improve the reputation of the school among students and parents. The current study suggests marketing specialists in schools make significant attempts to enlist the cooperation of teachers in their strategies. These efforts are not always successful and from marketers' perspectives, the involvement of teachers should be primarily limited to promoting a positive brand image in classrooms and externally to parents and the community. Meanwhile, 'expert' marketing practices, such as ensuring consistent branding in communications and engaging with the media, were seen as outside the remit of teachers and even principals.

Examining schools through a managerial perspective brings to the fore the way in which teachers, who may in one sense welcome the removal of the additional burden of marketing responsibilities, are also kept at arm's length from core marketing activities. This is consistent with the notion of repositioning professionals as non-experts for strategic purposes (Larson 1988). Examples of repositioning teachers as non-experts in the current study included centralising and coordinating all outward facing communications, lecturing and training them about their importance to marketing and the risks of ignoring the place of marketing in schools, and disallowing them to speak to the media for fear of revealing information that could be reputationally risky.

Importantly, the marketing professionals were engaged in activities beyond those practices documented for principals and teachers in the educational marketing literature (e.g., Lundahl et al 2013; Molnar 2002). Similarly, they were not acting in an ad-hoc manner with little attention to research or strategy as previously described in studies of school marketing (Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown 2004). While the marketing professionals interviewed were responsible for instrumental promotional type of work such as open days, brochures, newsletters and the like, they were also heavily engaged in risk management work around the identity and reputation of the school. These tasks were seen as strategic and aligned with

achieving business outcomes and averting threats to actualising managerial goals. By bringing to schools their corporate skills acquired in other organisational settings, the marketing professionals believed they were adding to the level of managerialism and accountability of schools in which they worked.

Teachers who attempted to contribute to marketing practices were resisted and at times, resented, by marketers. However, a limitation of the study was that the accounts of teachers' orientations to school marketing practices in our interviews were provided by marketers, rather than through the voices of teachers themselves. While our approach of interviewing one targeted individual in each of 19 schools offered insights across multiple schools operating in the same competitive environment, future research could usefully contrast the differing perspectives of educators and other school staff within a smaller number of targeted schools.

The results also show how limits were placed on overtly commercialised practices on the basis that they risked polluting educational ideals. For example, at the same time as having significant budgets, and a degree of apparent autonomy in many school promotion activities, marketers were typically constrained in promoting a strong business ethos by governance structures. Particularly frustrating for them was the fact that with only one exception, marketers were not included in school leadership teams. This limited their potential influence, despite their prominent role in managing organisational risks and developing externally facing communications, leaving senior educators to make the ultimate decisions on how far marketing practices reached and what constituted appropriate limits. Also interesting was that some marketers reported self-imposed limits on the full extent of marketing practices.

Such constraints on marketing practices in schools seem warranted when we consider that although marketing happens at a school level, it also has systemic effects (Wilson and Carlsen 2016). Promotional efforts and marketisation shape the overall distribution of school

options within a "local education quasi-market" (Lubienski and Weitzel 2009), creating incentive structures that encourage schools to shape enrolment rather than provide equitable access (Lubienski, Gulosino and Weitzel 2009). The strategic monitoring (and replication) of competitor school promotion strategies revealed in this study aligns with the segmentation argument. A focus on competition, ranking and satisfying and retaining students has also been linked with grade inflation and an emphasis on easily measurable teaching content rather than dispassionate applications of professional judgement (Lundahl et al. 2013; Wikstrom and Wikstrom 2005). Yet in many education systems around the world that have been radically and extensively decentralised and transformed, we continue to see evidence of not only competition and commercialisation, but also counter-efforts to retain core, traditional educational values. In the case of Sweden for example, where the education system is said to have fully embraced new public management principles, aspects of the older social democratic policy paradigm are still visible with regard to the assigned functions, values and governance of education (Lundahl et al. 2013). Our study in the Australian context, supports this previous research.

The schools targeted for this study operate in the 'private'/ non-government sector of Australian education. The sector is a politically sensitive one, in that it has been the subject of divisive public debate on a range of issues, not least the extent of public funding it receives alongside its considerable additional resources derived from tuition fees, donations and partnership-based funding. It is likely that this context generates some defensiveness in non-government schools which may lie behind the emphasis, expressed in the interviews, on marketing for the express purpose of philanthropy, social justice and serving the disadvantaged. It is also possible that in education especially, some stakeholders may be sensitive to the expression of what might be construed as extreme market-driven values,

because they fear they will be seen as a threat to democratic, pro-social principles (Eikenberry 2009) that should underpin education.

The study raises inevitable questions about the extent to which and how government schools might also be adopting marketing, branding and business practices in order to 'operate within the marketplace as private institutions would' (DiMartino and Jessen 2016: 469). With few exceptions (see McCandless 2016), in the Australian context there has been a dearth of research examining how public/government schools market themselves, who is involved in marketing, and how these marketing efforts impact key stakeholders (Olson Beal and Beal 2016). This study has begun to address such questions in the private/non-government educational market in Australia. However, the generation of contextualised knowledge of school-based marketing practices, and the emergence of the role of marketing professionals across different educational markets and in diverse educational jurisdictions, is crucially important if we are to understand the precise ways in which education is being profoundly re-shaped around the world.

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