

Chapter 9

Businessing Around Comprehensive Schooling



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Abstract The idea of education as a commodity, particularly as a field of export, has gradually taken hold in Finland creating a base for government collaboration with edu-business. In that logic comprehensive schooling for citizens in a small nation like Finland is positioned as a tool for a platform economy and to make profit within a sector of welfare society that has traditionally been considered separate from business-making forces. In this chapter after briefly describing the commercial actors in comprehensive schooling in Finland, we aim to understand how businessing around comprehensive schooling works in Finland based on interviews with different types of actors who aim to create this industry. We distinguish the rationalities, logics and modes of operation of edu-business. The rationale behind private actors' involvement in comprehensive schooling in Finland rests on their claimed ability to create "innovations" that schools themselves cannot make, mainly related to the use of technology. Possible negative side effects are not discussed. Edu-preneurs emphasise "evidence based" activities done outside the academic community, nevertheless they call this research. Industry-making in education is conducted via networks facilitating various edu-business related activities by connecting interests and actors. We conclude that society needs to be wary of multiple lines of products and policy pressures by global edu-business creating new policies like auditing and quality assurance policies to guide and consult education policy-makers. Overall developments in businessing around comprehensive schooling raise questions about democracy and schooling as public service in a small nation like Finland.

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Today education is frequently seen as an area of business investment or opportunity. As many scholars have pointed out, education around the globe provides “lucrative opportunities for investment and profit”¹ and forms an entire *global education industry (GEI)*.² Finland has become caught up in these developments especially in the area of education technology. What is astonishing to us is the systemic way in which business aims to penetrate education as a national asset and how representatives of the state are amongst those promoting business in the education sector. At times this is stated very clearly in policy documents:

The platform ecosystems and platform industry develop fastest by opening up national development environments (hospitals, schools, factories and energy networks etc.) and key technology/data resources to pilots and experiments conducted with customer interface (asiakasrajapinnolla). This way we can significantly speed up the development of Finnish companies’ products and services towards the needs of customers.³

This strategising towards the so-called digital platform economy and the vision to harness schools and other public institutions to business development was jointly published by the Prime Minister’s Office (Juha Sipilä Government 2015–19), the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland and a state organisation that funds ‘innovations’ namely Business Finland in 2017. Scholars have emphasized that platforms are not neutral digital tools. Mathias Decuypere and colleagues suggest they should be viewed with ‘a *critical platform gaze*’ as “... active socio-technical assemblages that are in the process of significantly transforming the educational sector”.⁴ In *Platform Society*, José vanDijck and colleagues argue that powered by the Big Five tech corporates (Alphabet-Google, Apple, Amazon, Facebook and Microsoft) platforms push new concepts of learning that disregard education as a vehicle for socioeconomic equality.⁵ Education as common good is likely to get redefined by platformisation because it shifts the values: “bildung vis-à-vis skills, education versus learnification, teachers autonomy versus automated data analytics, and public institutions versus corporate platforms”.⁶ This chapter arose out of a question about the current developments leading the businessing of comprehensive schooling in Finland, or what we call edu-businessing.

At first glance, Finland is not much of a market for educational products and services. In comprehensive schools, the most obvious commercial products used historically have been printed materials, mainly books, produced by long-established publishing companies, some of them state-owned. The content of learning materials was nationally inspected until 1992 by the National Board of Education and since then evaluation of textbooks has been the responsibility of municipalities and teachers,⁷ guided by the National curriculum. Over the last decade and particularly the last few years, various actors in Finland have started to develop education-related products to create a market and financial gain. Over the last decade the branding and focus of education materials have moved towards “digital learning”, with a raft of new slogans and products.

Commercial actors and related activities in education are discussed typically under the notion of privatisation. A comprehensive review of literature on private sector participation in public education in Europe over the last thirty years⁸ has identified two main lines of research. One is to do with practices that make the public

sector more business-like (‘Privatisation in education policies’ and ‘privatising identities and institutions’). The other, more recent, analyses the spaces that nurture private sector involvement within and across the borders of the European nation-states (‘actors and market studies’ and ‘networks of privatisation’). This chapter focuses on the ‘actors and market studies’ of commercialisation in education—particularly in education technology⁹—in Finland, and relates to the ‘networks of privatisation’ discussed more in detail in the chapter by Kiesi in this book.

In this chapter we describe how the field of business in education has emerged and seek to understand how edu-business works in Finland. We begin by using government documents to show how the idea of education as a commodity, particularly as a field of export, gradually took hold in Finland. This trend started in tertiary education after the triumphant PISA results in the early 2000s, creating a base for government collaboration with edu-business which eventually reached into comprehensive education. Second, we describe the commercial actors in comprehensive schooling in Finland. Third, we aim to understand the phenomena of businessing around comprehensive education in Finland based on interviews with actors involved in edu-business.¹⁰ For analysing the interviews we use a framework by Marcelo Parreira do Amaral and Christiane Thompson¹¹ which distinguishes *the rationalities, logics and modes of operation* of edu-business.

How Finland’s Education Export Kicked Off

Finland’s PISA successes of the early 2000s led to the view that education could become a commodity exported from Finland. By 2009 the Matti Vanhanen II Government (2007–10) announced a strategy to establish a new export industry: education, and this led to a Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) strategy paper in 2010.¹² This paper emphasised support for “efficient collaboration” between public and commercial actors.¹³ It proposed undertaking education export through a state owned company (FinPro, currently Business Finland) which would seek to take advantage of “... changes in [the] education business field in target countries”, including possible new education policies.¹⁴

Referring to comprehensive education in Finland, the strategy sought commercialisation within Finland stating that “... functional domestic markets are a prerequisite for successful export”. On the one hand the MoEC spelled out how a “... strong publicly financed education system needs to be secured” but they also pointed to the need to “... develop public administration’s skills to purchase education technology and related service”¹⁵ in order to “... keep up domestic markets of education export”.¹⁶ In other words, government actors were clearly promoting the expansion of business opportunities in education in Finland. The toolbox for this included joint services, product development, and quality control.

The strategy included an intention for tertiary education actors to become education exporters.¹⁷ Development towards selling tertiary education had already been promoted from 2005 with fees for foreign students,¹⁸ and further strengthened in

2007 through a law change allowing tertiary education to sell degree education to groups outside the EU.¹⁹ The MoEC in 2010 was strongly promoting a new role for universities. However, their tasks in legislation do not include business-making as such but rather “... to promote independent academic research as well as academic and artistic education, to provide research-based higher education and to educate students to serve their country and humanity at large” and to “... interact with the surrounding society and promote the social impact of university research findings and artistic activities”.²⁰

During the following Jyrki Katainen Government (2011–14), delegations of ministries and edu-business actors were sent to various parts of the globe “to foster collaboration and promote Finnish education expertise”. MoEC press releases indicate delegations to Brazil, Chile, Peru, Japan, China, and South Korea in 2013 and to Indonesia and the USA in 2014.²¹ For the first time reference to education export aimed at evaluating possibilities based on recently introduced fees for University students outside the EU.²² The state was acting not only to facilitate and promote collaboration between different state actors (e.g., ministers in the field of Work and Finance, Education and Culture, and Foreign affairs) but also to bring together “... stakeholders interested in education export and offered support ranging from production to export delegations.”²³ This 2013 development was called the ‘Future Learning Finland’ project²⁴ and by 2015 it became an organisation that promotes education export, Education Finland, led by the National Agency for Education. Comprehensive schools were also now expected to participate in building of the global education industry.

A reform of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education was taking place at the same time and was completed in 2014. It invited markets in “technology and digital in learning” in comprehensive schools and state actors were active to promote them.²⁵ The Alexander Stubb Government (2014–15) described digitalisation as “... a central opportunity for economic growth for Finland” and it developed a platform for an educational cloud service standard (*koulutuksen pilvipalvelumväylä*, later called *EduCloud Alliance*). Estonia was also involved:

Along with solutions by EduCloud Alliance it is easier to produce, purchase, share and use tools for digital learning. Tools can be, for example, materials, games, applications and services. Development is done in close collaboration with ministries and agencies that are responsible for national service architecture as well as with the Estonia state. The emphasis of the new curriculum is in using and understanding ICT and putting the digital tools required by work in schools more easily into the reach of pupils, students and teachers.²⁶

There were further developments under the Sipilä Government (2015–19) with a focus on ‘modernised learning environments’, the ‘opportunities offered by digitalisation’ and ‘new pedagogical approaches’ for learning.²⁷ The Sipilä Government planned to make Finland into “... a world-class laboratory of new pedagogy and digital learning”.²⁸ It also pressed for new legislation so that “... obstacles to education exports [were] removed”.²⁹ In 2016 this government named a “Chief Specialist in Education Export” to commercialise Finnish education and facilitate export.³⁰

In those years Finnish public sector was increasingly aimed towards digital business in education and this commodification of education was linked with the platform

economy planned by Juha Sipilä's Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, and Business Finland. In this 'growth environment' the private sector (companies), the state and the public schooling system are intended to work together in order to promote, sell, invent, invest, test and share products and services. With "... better use of data resources, favourable conditions will be provided for new business ideas".³¹ The platform economy is new to the fields of public policy and related legislation, and so far is very much economically driven.³² Under Sanna Marin's government (2019–), the Minister's Office has prepared a statement that indicates that the laws and policies concerning the platform economy are being considered alongside the EU, and should be considered nationally and internationally with multidisciplinary groups.³³

To sum up, tendencies towards considering education as a business started in Finland following its PISA success in 2000. Although PISA is based on the scores in compulsory schooling, the edu-export attempts centred particularly on the university and vocational education sectors.³⁴ There is also an extension of business activities in the preparatory courses in access to tuition-free higher education in Finland which particularly involves high-school students.³⁵ The business around various products and "innovations" in comprehensive education, despite Finnish schools being almost entirely state-run, has emerged as a development of the market, to which we now turn.

Business Enters Comprehensive Schooling

There are different types of commercial or private actors with a range of agendas to bring to comprehensive schooling in Finland in recent years. The most prominent ones are long established publishing houses Sanoma Pro, Otava Learning and Edita Publishing. According to their websites,³⁶ Sanoma Pro has 47,000 teachers as users of their materials, Otava Learning reaches around 30,000 teachers per year, and Edita Publishing is the smallest of the three. All of them also cover other sectors than education. Many have shifted towards "learning services", rebranding to learning industry names over the last decade.³⁷ In addition, a stock market-listed Media and Learning company, Sanoma has been creating a new market in Finland in teaching and tutoring outside school hours, having bought a company for tutoring students in 2016 and selling digital courses for upper secondary schools since 2017.³⁸ This daughter company of Finland's largest learning material producer has had an advertising campaign³⁹ for pupils in their last years of comprehensive schooling and those in general upper secondary with the slogan "individual teaching since 2010". It was one of the first times pupils who were well under 18 years had been targeted by such services in Finland. There was not any particular educational content on offer but rather a focus on strengthening the pupil's position in formal schooling, targeting higher grades with the slogan "Keskiarvo ylös!"; "Grade point average up!".⁴⁰ Having a higher-grade point average could be attractive to families as it would help their children to get more competitive position at the next level of education.

Technology corporate Microsoft is a prominent actor in Finland building markets in education business. Some schools in Finland participate as so-called showcase schools, that is to “... engage with Microsoft and like-minded school leaders around the world to deepen and expand education transformation using the Education Transformation Framework”.⁴¹ Microsoft promotes “education transformation” illustrated as holistic and this is supported by information labelled “[r]esearch from policy makers and academics where learning transformation initiatives have made dramatic improvements”.⁴² Attached to digital learning environments and platforms, furniture companies also brand themselves using learning and pedagogy. An example is the century-old Finnish furniture company ISKU with an “Active Learning concept—creating modern and smart learning and innovation environments with pedagogy driven design”.⁴³

The other distinct group of edu-business actors in Finland are various startup companies, typically looking for quick business growth in the education sector with products they can test in Finnish schools, scale up and sell in many countries, not only or even particularly in Finland.⁴⁴ Startups are also supported by business actors like business accelerator companies, some of which target edu-business in particular.⁴⁵ A not-so-visible group of actors around edu-business are investors who are targeted as participants to edu-business events.⁴⁶

Having started identifying actors doing business in comprehensive education in Finland, we frequently came across those that advocate commodifying education and creating a market in the edu-business sector⁴⁷ as also described in the growth of education export above. This intertwining of commercial/private and public actors in education relates to the concept of ‘Public Private Partnership’ (PPP)⁴⁸ and to a particular form of governance in society, network governance.⁴⁹ How private actors collaborate with public actors in Finland in order to promote edu-business and impact the governance of education are discussed in the chapter by Kiesi in this book.

Our Study of Rationales, Logics and Modes of Operation in Edu-businessing

In order to better understand edu-business and activities around it, edu-businessing, in Finland we conducted a selected set of interviews with different types of edupreneurs. Here we analyse interviews drawing on how Marcelo Parreira do Amaral and Christiane Thompson⁵⁰ use their analytical tools to understand how the global education industry is changing education and how it works: what are *the rationales* of expanding industry in education, and what are *the logics* and *modes of operation* in it. These three analytical distinctions are overlapping, but are useful in recognising commonalities and general trends in how the diverse actors in close collaboration with governmental ones promote education market. The rationales for expanding the Global Education Industry (GEI) are identified as (i) “Innovating, Growing, Sharing”, the Logics of Action in the GEI as (ii) “Shaping Reality, Crafting Solutions”

and the Modes of operation in GEI as (iii) “Construction crises, industry-making, and connecting interests”.

In the following we use this framework to analyse interviews by different types of commercial actors in Finland.⁵¹ The 13 interviews were conducted in 2019–20 (mostly face to face, but two online because of COVID-19) and typically took an hour or more. They were usually undertaken by all the authors and conducted in a similar way each time.⁵² Before the interview the commercial actors were sent a summary of their organisation based on internet resources in order to show that we already knew many basic facts and wanted to ask more in-depth questions than could be found in publicly available sources. The interview themes focused on aims and operations of these actors in education nationally and globally, the participation of private actors in public education and cooperation between the private and public sectors in comprehensive education. We also asked more general questions about the commercial actors’ views of education in Finland and education as business.

Rationales for Expanding the Edu-business: Innovating, Growing, Sharing

The rationales driving business in education globally rely on understanding that knowledge can be transformed into “innovations”, thus into economic growth, and with notion of “shared value” target to combine private and public interests in education in the exploitation of knowledge.⁵³ Innovations traditionally mean goods and services but also refer to any new behaviour or practice that can be applied to practice culminating in the commercialisation and the creation of value. Here we unpack these rationales and illustrate how the narrative of innovation, economic growth and shared value was evident amongst the edu-business proponents we interviewed in Finland.

The interviewees justified commercial actor participation in public education in Finland by their ability to innovate education related products and services, including anything attached to profit-making opportunities. In Finland these commercialised innovations are mainly related to technology and its use in schools. The unifying argument was that private actors can create innovations for teaching that can’t be achieved by a public school, at least not alone. The CEO of one 3D technology startup explains:

And yes, our significance is really big in bringing new ideas, as they do not come from the public by itself, for example the use of AR [Artificial Reality] in teaching. There is no way those come from the public. There are various pilot projects there, but they will not be able to achieve such long-term levels of innovation, which we can. (3DBear, a startup company)

What typically followed justifications of private actors’ skills to innovate in the public school system of Finland, was an account of the need to open and expand ‘the market’ for the businesses, and thus for economic growth for the entire country. Those

interviewed explained how allowing the involvement of business in Finnish education improved the chances of companies, particularly start-ups, to succeed in international education markets. This was seen to benefit Finnish society by increasing its economic competitiveness. Thus, Finland's role in edu-business was to develop a commercial environment and a reference market, a stepping stone to global sales and success:

There are certain doubts then, if we go in with only the purpose of making money, but Finland is a safe operating environment for it as we have teachers who are well trained and the public administration is the least corrupted. So, this is, in a way, a good market for developing this co-operation [between public and private]. So, it is more of this kind of ideological resistance. There is constantly the question of whether it brings in fees to our education, when our strength is that our social mobility in society is strong because education serves everyone and it is not sort of cherry picking, where you pick the best students from there. Instead, we learn from a young age to work together. (Education Finland, an organisation promoting edu-business)

The rationale behind the justifications and needs of edu-business actors in Finnish public education lay in promoting the common good: public actors benefit from business actors being involved in schools. The argument also promoted the idea that once innovation and growth are achieved, they become a shared value for all actors involved.⁵⁴ This rationale of shared value could be seen, for example, in the argument that schooling will isolate itself from society if it has no collaboration with business, particularly as the world of business is where many pupils will work in their adult lives:

It [school] cannot be any detached island from society. In other words, if we do not do that business collaboration, then there is the danger that the gap between school and the rest of the world becomes too big. And if we think about adults, how we work and how we for example use phone as a tool, then it is surely ridiculous, if that same model cannot be brought to the school, because they will do that at work, so we need to raise them [students] into those new ways of working, already at the school. (Seppo, a startup company)

The interviewed business actors raised concerns that if edu-business actors cannot collaborate with schools, the innovations and the related possibility of economic growth would slip away from Finland. On the one hand they claimed to value the public school system but on the other, they wanted an “education ecosystem” around it that could be exploited for profit. Furthermore, the interviewed actors stressed that the participation of the private sector in the public school benefits society by promoting common good. Private technological innovations were argued to be useful in facilitating the daily lives of teachers and students and in improving learning outcomes because they motivated pupils:

Probably most companies have a sort of a view that these products and services, that are done, can improve learning and take it to—quite a few always talk about how school should be made into a more meaningful place. And I do believe, in such an improvement of learning outcomes yes, but maybe precisely through making the school a more motivating and activating place. (Education Alliance Finland, an organisation promoting edu-business)

Edu-business actors positioned schools as needing edu-business if they wanted “to really develop themselves” for the best of the child. Furthermore, it was argued

that the use of public funds would be more efficient once schools got the products and services they needed, and thus co-development would be beneficial. Finland would then remain “a superpower of learning” as a representative of xEdu (an organisation promoting edu-business) put it. Overall, separating public and private gets seen as unnecessary once a child is seen as a stand-alone entity without any connections to social structure:

... I think the essential question is, how high-quality equality in education—as they say in the world [turns momentarily to English] *excellence and equity*, so that you develop both quality and equality—takes place in the best possible way, then I think that is the key issue, that all the discussion should begin from the best interest of the child, and not about if it is public or private. So, if the children are doing well and equality is increasing, then that is the key question, I think. (HundrED, an organisation promoting edu-business)

As this quote illustrates, the narrative of the common good in terms of equity or equality is typically emphasised among edu-business actors in the context of Finland where comprehensive schools are provided by municipalities and are publicly funded and governed. Strong arguments are needed to open up schools to business actors and so interviewees emphasised the reasons why the private sector is important and valuable to the public school system.

Logics of Action: Shaping Reality, Crafting Solutions

Of all the logics of action for edu-businessing, *evidence-based reforming* is seen by Parreira do Amaral and Thompson as particularly prominent across numerous country contexts.⁵⁵ In Finland the evidence-based logic of action stood out among edu-business actors when they argued the need to enter their products and offer commercial “solutions to shape reality” into schools. Furthermore, a striking feature in interviews was that business actors named many of their activities or their collaborators’ activities as “research”. Here we discuss evidence-based logic and how it is promoted and expressed through what is called research by the edupreneurs.

A common view amongst interviewees was that edu-business products and solutions need to be verified with empirical evidence, and thus commercial actors ought to have access to schools. The edu-business actors were seeking “evidence on the impact of learning products and services”,⁵⁶ even though education policy in Finland does not have much focus on performance testing of schools and pupils or “data-driven governance of education”.⁵⁷ Such evidence-based reforming was seen as essential in product marketing because “in the edu-sector, purchasing decision-makers may even demand that the solutions have been researched to be of high quality” (EdTech Finland, an association promoting education technology business). One edu-business, Education Alliance Finland, sells education products’ quality evaluations to edupreneurs. They appeal to “an academically sound approach” to evaluating the pedagogical design of a product based on the principles of educational psychology. They draw on what they call a “white paper” by two researchers from a company named ELE Finland.⁵⁸ ELE (Engaging Learning Environments) was founded by

professor of education psychology Kirsti Lonka from the University of Helsinki. Here evidence for edu-businessing came not from research conducted in university organisations but by their actors in companies.

Evidence-based reforming was seen both as a common denominator of successful edu-businesses and as a possible form of collaboration between edupreneurs and academic researchers that would produce high-class innovations. An example is the “commercialisation and internationalisation of a learning platform developed at the University [of Turku]”, Eduten Playground.⁵⁹ Universities and some particular academic scholars⁶⁰ were seen not only as strong references that validate the products but also as potential partners, and business actors themselves. As explained by a representative of EdTech Finland (an association promoting education technology business in Finland), many innovations are done by researchers at universities but the universities themselves are not particularly “the ones who set out to productise and commercialise”. Indeed one representative of an ecosystem promoter expressed concern about universities’ participation in edu-business: universities might distort competition in the field:

[How] the hell does a small company or a startup, for example, or even a slightly bigger company compete against a university brand? Of course, if a university comes to say that they have an amazing service, and it’s cheap as well: “This has been developed as research work for like 20 or 10 years” then of course the head of the local education department in the municipality of Nuorgam, as an example, thinks that “This is just great. There is no risk, this is pretty cheap and this has a great brand behind it, this will produce a lot of good for us because it is a university and it has a great deal of know-how and it helps us.” But go there as a startup... (EduCloud Alliance, an organisation promoting edu-business)

To demonstrate evidence-based intentions some actors mentioned “research work” as being central to their work without particularly explaining what it means. For example, edu-business actor HundrED claimed to do research and professional development:

Then we do research work with different actors, again, if you try to understand why school development is challenging and how it could be done differently ... why do some innovations spread and others don’t? We will be doing little bit of [turns momentarily to English] *professional development* in the future, that is, for example, the Minister of Education, the heads of education, the people who deal with the school. We talk to them about examples of how digitalisation has been done successfully in some countries or otherwise and from an international perspective. And then we are really trying to solve real problems with existing solutions, if you think that the head of education in Sweden, Stockholm, says that we want to develop the teaching of artificial intelligence, then we can tell them that there are 10 ways to share with you from the world. The problem right now is that, if the head of education in Helsinki says she wants to find good ways to teach artificial intelligence, then where does she go? So, she goes to either to [biggest learning companies in Finland] Sanoma Pro or Otava. If she writes this to Google, she unfortunately can’t find how South Korea has been doing it for 10 years, for example. (HundrED, an organisation promoting edu-business)

As the quote indicates, HundrED seeks to shape the reality of education on a global scale by influencing education policy makers. Furthermore, the HundrED CEO mentioned that they recruit 15-year-olds who want to develop their schools as “youth ambassadors”⁶¹ in order to develop schools globally, in over 70 countries.

HundrED's aim is to focus on solutions in very specific questions, such as what is “*a good way to prevent school bullying, improve acoustics, improve school meals, re-train teachers, communicate with parents, and so on*” that can be seen as global consultancy products because they aim at “scalability”.

Whereas HundrED was focused on spreading “the best, stand-alone innovations” around the world, another global education consultancy business or market-making tool seeks to shape reality at the same time in all levels of education from policy to schooling practices. New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL), first funded by Microsoft, was then organised by the state-owned Training centre for education Educode and owned by Edita Publishing which has continued selling and spreading it to municipalities including providing an audit-manual in Finnish in order to “guide them to that systemic thinking and the right way to make that change” (Edita, a corporate).⁶²

What the mentioned evidence actually is, how it is gained in *evidence-based reforming*, towards what end and by whom both at a local and global scale is often vague and produced outside the norms science follows. Rather product development acts to both market products and shapes education policies and practices thus spans the markets.

Modes of Operation: Construction Crises, Industry-Making, and Connecting Interests

The construction of crises as a mode of operation by education industry has centred on scandalising public education in order to provide justification for why private and business involvement is necessary. The “discursive destruction and construction of education”⁶³ is how commercial activity in the education sector is made and shaped. One could suppose that due to its PISA success the narrative of crisis⁶⁴ might be an unfamiliar mode of operation in Finland, yet crises are nevertheless constructed around portraying schools as old-fashioned because they apply too little technology in teaching. Once schooling and comprehensive schooling are portrayed as old-fashioned, it leads to an argument that education technology and thus various business activities around it are a required solution. As discussed elsewhere,⁶⁵ the discourse of needing to “change” comprehensive schooling especially for educating twenty-first century skilled workforce for the future (digital) economies was evident in our edu-business actor interviews, but not amongst policy-makers. The argument was that once society and the world get digitalised, schools could not operate in isolation from this development:

So, if we consider this digital revolution that is currently happening around us. ... and then we look at education sector, we have to ask, is the school going to remain as an old analog fortress or is it going to become part of universities and society? (xEdu, an organisation promoting edu-business)

Through digitalisation and technology for schooling a whole new sector of an industry is created, namely “digital learning”. What follows from the construction of crises in schooling is *industry-making* as a mode of operation in the education business. The role of state has become “a central facet” for the global education industry. It is now “a powerful connector that initiates, facilitates, and sponsors many of the activities in the GEI”, and thus becomes an entity that *connects interests* as a mode of operation.⁶⁶ The role of the state seems vital in education industry-making in Finland as well where state actors have become heavily involved in building an education platform economy.⁶⁷ The line between the private and the public becomes blurred, and connecting of private and public interest takes places through networks as explained in the chapter by Kiesi in this book.

Conclusion: Business with Public Schooling in a Small Nation

This chapter began by considering why comprehensive schools are positioned as tools for the platform economy and profit derived from a sector of Finland’s welfare society that is traditionally considered separate from business-making forces. Various actors aim to create an industry and markets in education, and this has become promoted by state actors. Based on our interviews with edu-business actors, we provide here one way to understand *the rationale* for the education industry in Finland, as well as their *logics of action* and *modes of operation*.

The rationale behind private actors’ involvement in comprehensive schooling in Finland, and how they justify their existence rests on their claimed ability to create innovations in a way that schools themselves are unable to do. These innovations are mainly related to the use of technology. According to this rationale, edu-business will benefit the whole society as the eduproducts are believed to improve learning and can improve economic growth especially if they can be sold. An assumption is that edu-products have no negative side effects and schooling will be better off than they would otherwise be without edu-products⁶⁸ and that schooling should be harnessed to serve the growth of the economic sector.

What follows these rationales as *logics of action* are the edu-products and consulting that “shape reality and craft solutions” with help of “empirical evidence”, for instance under slogans such as “products’ learning impact” and “research- or evidence-based” activities. There is a market niche in edu-business for the most entrepreneurial professors of education to set up their own companies. Various entrepreneurs also conduct what they regard as research, but the activities often lie outside academic practices and logics. There are signs that edu-business in Finland is taking new steps towards some audit and quality assurance tools to guide and consult education policy-makers and other education actors operating amidst a jumble of digital tools.⁶⁹

Finally, a *mode of operation* discursive destruction and construction of education⁷⁰ was evident in Finland after schooling and comprehensive schools were portrayed as old-fashioned by edupreneurs. This led to the argument that education technology and thus various business around schooling is needed to help schools. Typically, the edupreneurs articulated this as necessary to prepare for the future of education as we discuss in more detail elsewhere.⁷¹ The industry-making in edu-business is conducted through networks that facilitate various edu-business related activities by connecting interests and actors.

In closing, it is important to note that businessing around compulsory schooling might not be limited to attempts to make Finnish comprehensive schools serve related industry because there are also global companies who have multiple lines of other business and ways to bend education policy in their favour. Such global companies are not only limited to selling ed-tech products to schools and operating global private school chains, but also produce management services and consultancy to various school owners or operators.⁷² These global developments in businessing around schooling and particularly its connections to education policy-making need to be watched carefully. Such developments challenge democracy and in Finland they threaten schooling as public service and practice.

Notes

1. Verger, A., G. Steiner-Khamsi, and C. Lubienski. 2017. The emerging global education industry: Analysing market-making in education through market sociology. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 15:3, 325–340. [10.1080/14767724.2017.1330141](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2017.1330141)
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52. These were generally ‘elite’ interviews with CEOs of the businesses concerned. Typically one of us asked the thematic interview questions and others in the team asked a few supplementary questions.
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