

## Understanding third sector participation in public schooling through partnerships, collaborations, alliances and entrepreneurialism

In the last decade, an increasing involvement of third sector organizations (in particular non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) in public education systems has been observed in different countries. This tremendous growth in external voluntary and philanthropic organizations in schools is associated with a global trend toward decentralization, commodification, privatization and neoliberalism. As those new actors are becoming more prominent and visible within education systems worldwide, questions concerning the associated risks and/or benefits for students and schools arise, especially within the global discourse of education's role in facilitating equal opportunities and fostering quality. However, despite considerable research on involvement of such external agencies in schooling in developing countries (e.g. Edwards, 2015), and a flourishing research on for profit providers worldwide (Lubienski, 2013) in developed countries the engagement of third sector organizations in schools and the interactions between public schools and non-state actors have been researched scarcely (for few exceptions, see: Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Honig, 2009; Kappauf and Kolleck, 2018; Kolleck, 2016, 2017, 2019; Kolleck *et al.*, 2015; Reckhow and Snyder, 2014; Sagie *et al.*, 2016; Yemini *et al.*, 2018; Yemini and Sagie, 2015).

This special issue addresses this gap of research by bringing together leading scholars in the field of school-third sector interactions. It joins contributions with innovative theoretical conceptualizations and recent empirical findings, maps the conceptual, methodological and empirical consequences on the increasing involvement of third sector organizations in public education systems and contributes to further theory-building. More specifically, the contributions in this special issue empirically and theoretically examine the interactions and social relations between public schools and third sector organizations in various countries and educational contexts and further outline avenues for future research. In doing so, the special issue aims to provide a comprehensive resource for the study of the involvement of voluntary and philanthropic organizations in schools as well as a valuable source for educational practitioners and policy makers concerned with the opportunities and challenges of third sector organizations in public education worldwide.

In the last decades, third sector entities have become a central social power in western countries. Many of them function within the field of education (Berkovich and Foldes, 2012), and in recent years they have become significant players in public schools (Bulkley and Burch, 2011). The growing involvement of these organizations within education derives mainly from such organizations' ability to address the state's failure to effectively and efficiently deliver services (DeStefano and Schuh Moore, 2010). Third sector organizations play a variety of roles in supporting education service delivery. Some of them are primarily involved in advocacy, pressuring governments to fulfill their commitment to education for all. Some aim to improve the quality of public education through "school adoption" programs. Others are directly involved in education provision, primarily with the goal of providing educational opportunities to those students excluded from formal government schooling. In any case, in recent years, various organizations' roles in education have shifted in significant ways, as they have become more closely intertwined with the daily operations of public education (DiMartino, 2014).

Yet the growing involvement of non-governmental actors in the provision of public service also presents disadvantages. Politicians and public officials perceive a threat of reduced governmental control inherent in non-governmental involvement in the delivery



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of public education. Moreover, disadvantaged students may be left behind in the deteriorating public schools that lose the support of more educated parents, thus leading such schools to rely on external and unregulated services. Since education potentially plays an important role in social mobility and is an instrument governments can use to promote greater equality, the involvement of different providers in educational service delivery threatens the government's ability to promote equality through education. In addition, involvement of non-governmental players may face resistance from certain stakeholders. For instance, teachers and other employees may see such external actors as non-compliant with the common goals (Kolleck *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, more research needed regarding the effects of this type of partnership on educational results. Few assessments of these partnerships have been undertaken, and most existing assessments do not follow academic procedures (Kolleck, 2017).

This special issue addresses the involvement of third sector organizations in education, focusing on school-NGO interactions and suggesting a new approaches, methodological frameworks and theoretical conceptions, which might be useful for future scholars in this field aiming at establishing a new strand in the future research.

At the outset, Slegers opens the debate on third sector participation in public schooling with a reflective commentary based on the different theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions presented in the special issue. He stresses the importance of the special issue and the urgent need for more research on interactions between non-state actors and schools. However, he also expresses limitations. His concerns mostly relate to a neglect of the institutional dimension of most of the articles published in the special issue. This criticism may also be related to the author's specific understanding of the "institutional" dimension since the contributions in particular refer to institutional aspects of school-NGO interactions in different national or regional contexts.

The first conceptual article by Lubienski and Perry examines the promises third sector organizations make concerning innovations in public education systems. The authors explore the promises made to advance third sector participation in public education and analyze educational innovation and improvement initiatives. Based on an analysis of third sector involvement in US American public schools it is shown that innovations are often not triggered by third sector organizations but by the government and that the third sector is often only reacting to the innovations initiated by the state.

Eyal and Berkovich's article addresses the ethical nature of alliances between public schools and the third sector. The authors implement an integrative review of the literature on stakeholder theory, corporate social responsibility, cross-sector partnerships and strategic alliances, and the empirical studies on partnerships between schools and the third sector with the aim to better understand the ethical conduct in school-NGO interactions. The review results in a conceptual model and propositions about ethical conduct in public private partnerships in education. Furthermore, the authors discuss the most relevant variables that serve as antecedents to ethical (mis)conducting from alliances, helping enhance the ethical posture and productivity of such interactions.

Tamir, Yemini and Tucker analyze the framing strategies and dynamics in the media discourse on NGO-school interactions within public education in Israel and the UK. This contribution is problematizing the perceptions of NGO-school interactions in diverse contexts. The authors show how the neoliberal notions are being promoted and normalized through the media, and how the popular newspapers frame the NGOs as integral part of the system without problematizing the issues of financing, responsibility and equality.

Glazer, Groth and Beuche explore demands confronting NGOs when operating in complex and contested educational environments. Using a comparative case study design of two NGOs that operated neighborhood high schools in the Tennessee Achievement School District in the USA they examine important questions that arise when studying the

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increasing relevance of non-state organizations in public schools. First, the authors consider whether NGOs are able to improve learning outcomes at the school level. A second question concerns the ability of NGOs to generate and maintain social legitimacy in the eyes of the communities they serve. Finally, the manuscript reflects how third sector organizations manage competing institutional logics and what the implications for their organizational strategy and allocation of resources are. The study's findings show demands and the extraordinary capabilities that challenge organizations operating in and disputed field.

Peurach, Cohen and Spillane, in their contribution, provide a historical analysis of the emergence and role of non-state organizations in US Public Schooling. More specifically, they explore the relations between government, NGOs and management of instruction in the US public education, referring also to cross-national research and other countries which show a growing participation of non-governmental organizations in public education. Based on findings of their historical analysis they conduct a contemporary analysis of the proliferation of NGOs in response to federal and state efforts to advance academic standards, performance assessments and accountability regimes. Furthermore, they discuss case studies with complementary perspectives on the interactions between schools and NGOs. The authors show that the influence of NGOs can be traced back to historic institutionalized social, political and economic ideals which hamper educational reform and innovation.

Based on a mixed methods design including quantitative and qualitative analyses the article "the power of the third sector in education" by Kolleck develops a theoretical framework on NGO power in public education. The study identifies three dimensions, i.e. relational, structural and discursive dimensions of power. In order to illustrate the theoretical framework, the author analyses an explanatory multi-stakeholder initiative, highlighting the role of third sector organizations in framing educational settings, concepts and structures of the education system as such. It is shown, how a single foundation in this initiative was able to follow its goals through gaining more freedom in macro-level structures, though micro-level processes of bargaining and through taking part in shaping discourses. The three dimensional power perspective developed in this article provides evidence on the way the NGO is provided with alternative means to exert power in education, allowing it to pursue multi-dimensional strategies if necessary. In other words, the organization can employ discursive, structural or relational power resources at the same time or use them as substitutes, employing different forms of activities according to the specific situation or context or the requirements of the issue in question.

Finally, Verger summarizes main findings provided by the six articles of the special issue and outlines, brings together main research lines and outlines prospects for further investigation concerning third sector participation in public education. This commentary focuses on the uniqueness of the educational context in research of school-NGO interactions and suggests methodological as well as theoretical foundations for future research.

In general, the contributions included in this special issue demonstrate the complexities of school-NGO interactions and show how the vast variety of NGOs influences their partnerships with schools. The authors provide different and innovative theoretical and methodological approaches to study these interactions, which are of increasing relevance for educational administration and educational settings as such. More research in this field is crucial, not only because of the increasing power of non-state actors in education due to the retreat of the state, but also because NGOs seem to push educational reforms in their own directions, resulting in an increasing uncertainty of schools which seek to find ways to deal with these actors and to find the best solutions to promote quality and equity. Hence, the contributions collected in this special issue can also be considered as an invitation for future research. What are the reasons and motivations underlying the interactions between NGOs and schools? How do administrative, political and social patterns affect the different varieties of those interactions? What types of interactions do we find in which political and

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administrative systems in different national and regional contexts? Many questions still remain unanswered. To gain a better understanding of the logic of actions and interactions between NGOs and schools, more theoretically based empirical studies are indispensable.

Guest editorial

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