Journal of Educational Administration

Volume 57 Number 4 2019

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

Guest Editors: Nina Kolleck and Miri Yemini

317 Editorial advisory board

318 Guest editorial

322 Understanding school-NGO partnerships
    Peter Sleegers

329 The third sector and innovation: competitive strategies, incentives, and impediments to change
    Christopher Lubinski and Laura Perry

345 Ethics in third sector–school partnerships: a conceptual framework
    Ori Eyal and Izhak Berkovich

361 NGO–school interactions as portrayed by elite and popular press in Israel and England
    Eran Tamir, Miri Yemini and Khen Tucker

376 Opportunities and challenges for NGOs amid competing institutional logics
    Joshua L. Glazer, Laura Groth and Blair Beuche

393 Governments, markets, and instruction: considerations for cross-national research
    Donald J. Peurach, David K. Cohen and James P. Spillane

411 The power of third sector organizations in public education
    Nina Kolleck

426 Commentary
    Antoni Verger


www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/jea
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 (Lubinski, 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
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, Sleegers 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
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
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.

Nina Kolleck
Freie Universitat Berlin, Berlin, Germany, and
Miri Yemini
Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

References


Abstract

Purpose – In the author’s reflection on the special issue, the author will start with a brief discussion of the different theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of the articles. In addition, the author will argue that the challenge for research on school–non-governmental organization (NGO) interactions is to move beyond the use of a myriad of conceptual models to a more coherent framework to better understand what system and nonsystem actors do, how they do it and how the broader institutional system enables or constrains collective action. The author concludes with some suggestions for future research. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – In this paper, the author reflects on the design and findings of articles that focus on the involvement of non-governmental or third sector organizations in education.

Findings – By taking up these different themes, the articles reported in this special issue help the author to get a better picture of the growing plurality and power of third sector organizations and their interactions with schools. The work also raises questions about the legitimacy of NGOs in education, the weakening of democratic control over public schooling and the possible role of private interests and the concentration of power in facilitating equal opportunities for all students and promoting educational excellence. Given their methodological designs, the studies make an important contribution to our understanding of what nonsystem actors do and how they interact with schools.

Research limitations/implications – By using a neoinstitutional framework, the research on school–NGO interactions will be informed by a coherent conceptual framework that conceives school systems as open systems and focuses on the intersection of instruction and organization, while simultaneously treating the system as the relevant unit of analysis (see Cohen et al., 2018). The works of Glazer et al. and Peurach et al. reported in this special issue are good examples of the kind of research that is needed. Following this work, future studies into the involvement of third sector organizations in education using a neoinstitutional lens should give careful attention to historical analysis and also need to examine changes over a longer period of time as new institutionalized patterns do not emerge quickly and “interact with the hand of history in shaping instruction” (Peurach et al., p. 25).

Practical implications – The articles in this special issue may prompt more researchers to inquire school–NGO interactions and push future research efforts to understand the complex picture of increasing institutional diversity from a more neoinstitutional perspective. Findings from these cross-national studies, with careful attention to historical analysis of the intersection between organization and instruction, may help the author to develop a theory of design (Rowan and Miskel, 1999) that can provide practitioners with tools to redesign and change the regulative, normative and cognitive mechanisms that constrain and enable collective action.

Originality/value – Different studies have examined how policy decisions emerge and are implemented, and how this affects the “technical core” of schools (Cohen and Hill, 2001; Hiebert et al., 2005). However, most of these studies have predominantly focused on the vertical interactions between formal system actors at the state, district and school levels to analyze how policy decisions are shaped as they move through the multilayered system. Little attention has been paid to the horizontal exchange relations between the public policy system and NGOs and how these connections influence management and instruction (Coburn, 2005; Rowan, 2006). Given the increasing institutional diversity, conflicting trends and dilemmas school systems are faced with, scholars have emphasized the need to develop an understanding of the role the educational infrastructure can play in supporting improvement (Cohen and Moffitt, 2010; Cohen et al., 2018).

Keywords School reform, Educational policy

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

Since the 1990s, educational policy aimed to bring systematic reform to educational governance, the increased demand for accountability and the growing marketization in education have altered the institutional reality of education worldwide (Cohen et al., 2018; Yemini et al., 2018). In addition to social actors that are part of the formal system of policy and governance (e.g. state agencies, district offices and school administration), so-called
system actors (see Coburn, 2005), different nonsystem actors, including families, voluntary and professional organizations, universities and private firms, have taken a stronger role in the governance of education, the provision of educational services and the formulation and implementation of policy. As a result, the institutional landscape has changed from a monistic into a pluralistic world (Meyer and Rowan, 2006).

Different studies have examined how policy decisions emerge and are implemented, and how this affects the “technical core” of schools (Cohen and Hill, 2001; Hiebert et al., 2005). However, most of these studies have predominantly focused on the vertical interactions between formal system actors at the state, district and school levels to analyze how policy decisions are shaped as they move through the multilayered system. Little attention has been paid to the horizontal exchange relations between the public policy system and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and how these connections influence management and instruction (Coburn, 2005; Rowan, 2006). Given the increasing institutional diversity, conflicting trends and dilemmas school systems are faced with, scholars have emphasized the need to develop an understanding of the role the educational infrastructure can play in supporting improvement (Cohen and Moffitt, 2010; Cohen et al., 2018).

By examining the involvement of NGOs or third sector organizations in education in different countries, the work reflected in the articles in this special issue adds to this line of research. This is not the place for a comprehensive summary of what can be learned from this set of articles. In my reflection on the special issue, I will start with a brief discussion of the different theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of the articles. In addition, I will argue that the challenge for research on school–NGO interactions is to move beyond the use of a myriad of conceptual models to a more coherent framework to better understand what system and nonsystem actors do, how they do it and how the broader institutional system enables or constrains collective action. I conclude with some suggestions for future research.

Multiple perspectives on school–NGO interactions
The authors take up different themes in analyzing the role NGOs play in education, using different theoretical perspectives and methodological designs. In their conceptual contribution to the special issue, Lubinski and Perry (2019) discuss the often assumed promising role of the third sector in developing and disseminating innovations in public education systems. After conceptualizing the third sector as a sector, they analyze the structure of the sector, focusing on the case of the charter movement in the US context. The findings of their conceptual analysis suggest that the third sector often responds to competition rather than improvement and has often adopted innovations developed in the public school sector, thereby revisiting the notion of the third sector as a space to incentivize educational innovation.

Eyal and Berkovich (2019) outline a comprehensive model of ethical conduct in school–NGO partnerships. In their model, ethical behavior is defined as a multi-dimensional construct, including five dimensions: low aggression, transparency, low opportunism, accountability and absence of organizational deviance. Based on a review of the literature, they propose that the presence of trust, goal congruence and symmetry of power, as indicators of the quality of school–NGO partnerships, will positively affect ethical conduct. In addition, the authors assume that organizational characteristics, including high organizational formality and high organizational ideology, are negatively related to quality of partnership and ethical conduct. Finally, Eyal and Berkovich propose that environmental turbulence is negatively related to both the quality of partnership and ethical conduct and moderates the correlation between organizational characteristics and the quality of partnership. The proposed model may help future studies to focus on relevant (proximal and distal) antecedents in explaining ethical conduct in school–third sector organizational partnerships.
By applying cognitive theories of media influences, Tamir et al. (2019) examine the role of elite and popular newspapers in Israel and the UK play in framing public opinion regarding school–NGO interactions within public education. They analyzed 2,200 articles published in 2014–2015 from four newspapers (two elite and popular newspapers from Israel and two elite and popular ones from the UK), using framing and critical discourse analyses. Based on these analyses, the results show that popular and elite newspapers differ with respect to the way they framed school–NGO interactions: the elite newspaper in both countries was more critical of the power relations between NGOs and schools than the popular ones. These findings indicate that elite newspapers play a more supportive role in building a civic democratic discussion over relevant policy issues in education, while popular newspapers leave the mass much more uninformed.

Glazer et al. (2019) explore how NGOs deal with complex environments and their competing value systems (technical effectiveness vs conformity to local conceptions of schools), using an institutional logic framework. To analyze how two comparative NGO cases that operated neighborhood high schools in the Tennessee Achievement School District manage the competing institutional logics they are faced with and what the implications for their organizational functioning are, longitudinal (interview and observational) data were gathered. The results show that the experiences and organizational capabilities of both NGOs, albeit different, were seriously tested while coping with the complex, contested and contradictory environmental demands. By focusing on the role and dynamics of NGOs in the broader system in which they are embedded, the findings indicate that NGOs can contribute to a larger school improvement effort.

In their contribution, Peurach et al. (2019) examine the relations between government, NGOs and management of instruction in US public education, using an institutional lens. To frame these relations, they provide a historical analysis of the role of NGOs in the USA, followed by an analysis of contemporary reforms aimed at reducing disparities and educational excellence. Based on these analyses, they discuss how two different US public school districts that are extensively engaged with NGOs as primary providers of resources and services, organize and manage instruction in response to a contemporary press for excellence and equity. By doing this, they illustrate that the relations between government, NGOs and management and instruction are enabled and constrained by the historic institutionalized social, political, and economic ideals and system in which they are nested. The authors conclude with some considerations for cross-national research investigating the participation of NGOs in education.

Finally, Kolleck (2019) explores how one of the greatest German foundations wields power in order to shape the education agenda and exert influence on schools, building on a three-dimensional (structural, discursive and relational) concept of power. By using a mixed method approach, including document analyses, qualitative in depth-interviews and social network analyses, Kolleck analyzed the interactions between actors from schools and the foundation and their power relations. The results show that the structural and discursive power sources used by the foundation to gain legitimacy and to promote educational improvement were not always successful. In addition, it shows that the foundation was strategically connected to other important actors, indicating the central role of the foundation’s relational power. These findings suggest that the foundation is not perceived as a legitimate player in German education, limiting the effective use of power and impact of this NGO on schools.

Contributions and limitations

By taking up these different themes, the articles reported in this special issue help us to get a better picture of the growing plurality and power of third sector organizations and their interactions with schools. The work also raises questions about the legitimacy of NGOs in education, the weakening of democratic control over public schooling and the possible role of private interests and the concentration of power in facilitating equal opportunities for all
students and promoting educational excellence. Given their methodological designs, the studies make an important contribution to our understanding of what nonsystem actors do and how they interact with schools. However, in investigating the interaction between schools and NGOs, most of the studies do not take the broader institutional system in which NGOs and schools are embedded as the relevant unit of analysis. As a consequence, most of the findings do not help us to develop a deeper understanding of how and why the broader institutional system enables or constrains possible courses of the action of NGOs and how this affects the technical core of education (Coburn, 2005; Rowan, 2006; Spillane and Burch, 2006).

Although Lubienski and Perry have made a strong case for revisiting the notion of the third sector as a space to incentivize educational innovation, their conceptual analysis is treating lightly the broader institutional context in which the marketization of education has emerged. For example, they do not pay attention to the historical emergence of private schools (e.g. Chubb and Moe, 1990; Rowan and Miskel, 1999) and how the charter movement exists in the same fragmented, pluralistic institutional environment with a mix of market and institutional pressures that have produced homogeneity and institutional “competitive” isomorphism in education (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Moreover, research has shown that the pressure school leaders of charter schools face from the organizations on which they depend, align more to formal administrative practices and surface-level measures of progress such as standardized test and parental satisfaction than to deeper issues of instruction and pedagogy, ongoing instructional improvement or innovation (Yurkofsky, 2017).

The comprehensive model to explain ethical behavior as developed by Eyal and Berkovich is built on organizational theories about organizational partnership and ethical behavior. Although environmental turbulence is included in the model to explain organizational ethical behavior, the model still treats the organization as the relevant unit of analysis. Moreover, as the technical core – teaching and learning – is not part of the model, Eyal and Berkovich do not discuss the relations between the quality of school–NGO partnerships, ethical behavior and instructional practices. By restricting the model to one level of the system, the organizational level, while simultaneously neglecting the impact of ethical behavior on management and instruction, the model does not help us to explain how the broader institutional educational system enables or constrains the quality of school–NGO partnerships and ethical behavior and how this, in turn, affects the technical core of schools.

Tamir, Yemini and Tucker’s cognitive analysis of the media coverage of power relations between school–NGO interactions focuses on the nature and the content of educational policy messages. By doing this, the study investigates how newspapers as ideological institutions shape the public discourse toward policy issues in education. Although it pays attention to cognitive and normative mechanism through which policy messages affect systems and nonsystem actors, the analysis is still restricted to one level of the system. The study does not analyze how the framing of school–NGO interactions in different newspapers in different countries shape policy ideas, how the ideas in the media are connected with different educators (administrators, school leaders and teachers) who are engaged with NGOs and transform them, and how these linkages affect leadership and teaching practices in schools. By analyzing the broader ways in which newspapers affect the nature of relationships between system and nonsystem actors and how social actors respond to news items, the study would have contributed to our understanding of the critical role newspapers play in shaping educational policy.

In exploring how the German foundation wields power in order to shape the education agenda and exert influence on schools, Kolleck also confined her empirical work to one level of the system, the power of a German NGO as perceived by individuals from schools and the foundation that were involved in school–NGO interactions. Although the study refers to institutional dimensions in which NGO–school interactions take place, it does not analyze the power sources used by a NGO, while simultaneously treating the system as the relevant unit...
of analysis. Moreover, examining the role NGOs can play in supporting management and instruction in schools seems to be beyond the scope of the work. As a consequence, the findings do not contribute to a better understanding of how and why the broader institutional system and already existing and changed institutional arrangements at various levels of the system affect the likelihood that power sources used by NGOs will be successful in influencing schools and promoting educational improvement (Rowan, 2006).

The works of Glazer et al. and Peurach et al. are an exception to this. By using an institutional logistic framework, Glazer et al. do pay attention to the fragmented, pluralist and institutional environment in which two different NGOs are nested and show how these NGOs deal with the inherent conflict between social legitimacy of the community and educational effectiveness. Peurach et al. demonstrate how a conventional suburban school district and a charter school network that are both engaged with NGOs, differ in the way they manage and organize instruction, while simultaneously attending to the architecture and dynamics of contemporary reforms at different levels of the system and its historic institutional ideals. By doing this, these researchers move beyond documenting what NGOs do and how they do it to develop an understanding of how and why the broader institutional system enables or constrains possible courses of the action of NGOs and changes in their role and functioning. Although the researchers examined the relation with instruction, they payed scant attention to how different elements of the institutional environment affect teachers’ classroom and leadership practices in schools.

**Toward an institutional analysis of NGOs in education**

The work in this special issue supports the emphasis on the need to understand how the dynamic and pluralistic institutional landscape with system and nonsystem actors of all sort support instruction and learning in schools. It is an important line of research that needs to be promoted much more extensively. Research on third sector participation in education would profit from using a more neoinstitutional lens that focuses on how actions and beliefs of system and nonsystem actors are embedded in socially organized environments and constrained by regulations, normative obligations and/or cognitive schemes of that environment. The challenge is to investigate the interaction between schools and NGOs and how these linkages shape management and instruction, while taking the broader institutional system in which NGOs and schools are embedded as unit of analysis (Coburn, 2005; Spillane and Burch, 2006; Rowan and Miskel, 1999). By applying institutional analyses, research on the partnerships between third sector organizations and schools should move beyond the dichotomy between institutional and technical environments and the notion of loose coupling (or decoupling) as a key mechanism through which schools deal with the number of inconsistent environmental pressures (Rowan, 2006; Yurkofsky, 2017). A growing body of research has expanded the scope of institutional analysis by identifying how systemic reforms and tightening demands for accountability have produced complex patterns of both tight and loose coupling between different dimensions (e.g. content, materials and teaching strategies) of the technical core and particular elements (curricular domains and agencies) of the institutional environment (see e.g. Spillane and Burch, 2006). Research on policy implementation has shown that routines, structure and tools in schools play an important role in the extent to which instruction is tightly or loosely coupled with the broader institutional environment (Spillane et al., 2011; Woulfin, 2015). Moreover, researchers have demonstrated how educators (administrators, school leaders and teachers) make sense of and respond to reforms, how this is shaped by their own beliefs about “good instruction” and how connections between nonsystem actors (e.g. school improvement agencies) and system actors can support both surface-level and deeper changes to instructional practice (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Cohen et al., 2013; Coburn, 2005; Mehan et al., 2010; Sleegers et al., 2009).
Suggestions for future research

By using a neoinstitutional framework, the research on school–NGO interactions will be informed by a coherent conceptual framework that conceives school systems as open systems and focuses on the intersection of instruction and organization, while simultaneously treating the system as the relevant unit of analysis (see Cohen et al., 2018). The works of Glazer et al. and Peurach et al. reported in this special issue are good examples of the kind of research that is needed. Following this work, future studies into the involvement of third sector organizations in education using a neoinstitutional lens should give careful attention to historical analysis and also need to examine changes over a longer period of time as new institutionalized patterns do not emerge quickly and “interact with the hand of history in shaping instruction” (Peurach et al., p. 25).

Most studies in this special issue analyzed school–NGO interactions within the same national setting. Only two studies examined the role NGOs play in education by comparing two different countries. In order to better understand the conditions under which school–NGO partnerships can be improved, more cross-national studies are needed. The four lines of cross-sectional research as suggested by Peurach et al. seem to be fruitful lines for future research.

Finally, one area needs further attention. None of the studies reported in this special issue investigated the impact of school–NGO interactions on teaching and learning. As teaching and learning is affected by larger institutional structures and processes, studies are needed that examine how interrelationships between third sector organizations and system actors can build and sustain a coherent educational infrastructure and support the implementation of deep level changes in teachers’ classroom practices (Cohen et al., 2018; Yurkofsky, 2017).

The articles in this special issue may prompt more researchers to inquire school–NGO interactions and push future research efforts to understand the complex picture of increasing institutional diversity from a more neoinstitutional perspective. Findings from these cross-national studies, with careful attention to historical analysis of the intersection between organization and instruction, may help us to develop a theory of design (Rowan and Miskel, 1999) that can provide practitioners with tools to redesign and change the regulative, normative and cognitive mechanisms that constrain and enable collective action.

References


Corresponding author
Peter Sleegers can be contacted at: peter.sleegers@bmc.nl

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
The third sector and innovation: competitive strategies, incentives, and impediments to change

Christopher Lubienski
Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA, and
Laura Perry
Murdoch University, Perth, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – Much justification for third sector involvement in education advances from the notion that attributes from business and non-profit fields could benefit state-run public schools. The purpose of this paper is to explore this issue by examining theoretical underpinnings and expectations for third sector participation in public education systems, particularly with respect to educational innovations and improvements, and the structural opportunities, incentives, and impediments for such innovation.

Design/methodology/approach – The question is how third sector participation shapes the rate, nature, and types of innovations in education as schools interact in response to competitive pressures. This conceptual analysis of the third sector examines the political-economic features and structures of the sector in fostering innovation, with reference to the US sector that was specifically positioned to enhance the innovative capacity of publicly funded education.

Findings – The analysis indicates that educational innovations are not necessarily more prevalent in or because of the third sector, and that there are obstacles to their creation and diffusion. Moreover, schools often respond to competitive incentives in ways unanticipated by policymakers, such as school marketing rather than instructional improvement, sometimes in ways detrimental to goals set out for public education, such as social sorting. In fact, instead of the third sector simply developing or incentivizing innovations, there is evidence that this sector has adopted innovations developed in the state sector.

Originality/value – The analysis suggests that a third sector based more on a professional, as opposed to a competitive, model may better facilitate the development of innovative capacity in education.

Keywords Policy, Private sector, Competition, Public sector, Markets

Paper type Conceptual paper

The past few decades have seen a global movement to draw models and mechanisms from non-state sectors into public administration, including in education. Indeed, the third sector has been nurtured and leveraged by policymakers, in part so that public education would adopt new, more entrepreneurial strategies, often from business and non-profit models. Yet, outside of expanding the third sector at the expense of more direct public control of schooling, the impacts from efforts to borrow private sector mechanisms such as competition, choice, and autonomy are far from clear. Indeed, some of the stated intentions for third sector-oriented policies, such as enhancing the innovative capacity of schools, appear to be not only potentially useful policy objectives, but also effective rhetorical strategies for advancing these policies in an era infatuated with innovation. But while competition sparked by the third sector may, at least in theory, increase the rate of innovation in education (Becker, 1999), there are also considerations regarding the nature of such innovations, including their portability and desirability.

A range of policymakers have demonstrated a widespread and deepening appreciation for the third sector in its ability to access some of the known advantages of the business sector while maintaining crucial public benefits and accountability. Removed from direct state control and regulation, and fueled by both social benefit and competitive impulses, it is often assumed that third-sector organizations have the ability and incentive to work with a
range of stakeholders, experiment with new and different approaches, and respond to the unique needs and preferences of underserved communities. In doing so, they can spark creative disruption of what some see as the public sector “monopoly” on public schools, inducing them to adopt more innovative and effective practices for the benefit of all (Brandl, 1998; Christensen et al., 2008; Forstmann, 1999; Kolderie, 1990; Narodowski, 2008; Nathan, 1996). However, in examining the structures of different sectors, we argue that regardless of the source and types of innovation, the interface between the third sector and the state sector may make useful innovations not only difficult to produce, but also difficult to share, as pathologies from the market dynamics in a public-good endeavor necessarily perverts possible sources and pathways for innovation.

In this conceptual analysis of the role of the third sector in shaping innovations, we examine the political economy around the third sector that structures both its internal logic and its interactions with the state sector. In doing so, we focus on a sector that was explicitly positioned to enhance the innovative capacity of publicly funded education. Rather than charting the diffusion of innovations, our goal in this endeavor is instead to understand the structures shaping opportunities and impediments to innovation. That is, we are interested not only in the relative innovative capacity of different sectors, but also in how that capacity might be reshaped through the interface of the third sector with other sectors.

To that end, the next section offers an explanation of how we are conceptualizing the third sector, considers some of the thinking behind the increasing emphasis on third-sector approaches, and describes some of the primary players in that sector and its expansion. Moreover, it discusses some of the imperative for innovation placed on that sector. Then we offer a brief synopsis of the empirical record regarding the patterns of innovation associated with the third sector, focusing on the charter school movement in the USA. That synopsis points to some of the possibilities and problems around the third sector as a source of innovation, and highlights evidence that, instead of simply developing and disseminating innovations, the third sector also adopts innovations from state-run schools. The concluding discussion revisits the thinking behind positioning the third sector as a space to incentivize educational innovation, noting some obstacles to innovation in more competitive environments. We argue that the way the third sector has been structured in the USA around a more competitive model pre-empts possibilities for innovation from professional impulses, and presents impediments for the dissemination of improvements in schooling.

**The third sector in education**

Historically, the third sector has been involved in education in two ways: through the creation and provision of educational inputs and, more recently, through support for or provision of education that is conceptualized as an alternative to public schooling. Throughout the history of schooling in the USA and many other countries, the third sector has played a large role in the creation and development of educational inputs, such as textbooks, curriculum materials, teaching and learning resources, and professional development opportunities. Indeed, many, if not most, educational inputs used in schools are developed by third-sector actors. On the other hand, the third sector’s involvement in the funding, sponsorship, operation, and/or ownership of alternative forms of schooling in the USA – at least since the common school era reforms of the nineteenth century – has been a small but constant and significant presence, one which has been steadily growing in influence over the last few decades. In this paper, we are exclusively interested in third sector involvement in forms of education that compete with traditional forms of public schooling; our analysis does not include third sector involvement in the provision of educational resources or services.

The idea of leveraging the third sector to reform and improve education systems is evident around the globe. In the UK, the most recent move away from state control of
schooling with the rise of academization and free schools has seen the rise of non-state, non-profit charitable organizations that manage publicly funded schools. Many of these groups, such as ARK, emerged from the private investment community, and are positioned to bring business acumen to state-funded schools, and provide competition with schools still administered by local authorities. In New Zealand, after decades of decentralized state schooling, the previous government allowed for community groups, businesses, and other entities to run “Partnership Schools” to offer further alternatives to families, particularly from minority or marginalized communities. In this model, non-state actors approved by the government could access public funds, while still enjoying substantial autonomy from state requirements, in some ways similar to the autonomy afforded to church-run schools integrated into the publicly funded system. Developing countries are also seeing similar growth of the third sector, often in response to, and between, a moribund and under-performing state system and a fee-charging for-profit sector. In a number of nations, such as Liberia and India, governments and edu-businesses have formed public-private partnerships (PPPs) to expand subsidized access to higher quality school options beyond the traditional state or private sectors (Chaudhry and Uboweja, 2014; Olmedo, 2016; Srivastava, 2016).

While it takes on different manifestations within and across nations, the general idea is to enhance entities that are removed from both direct state control and the for-profit impetus of the business sector (Kolleck, 2016; Nathan, 1996). Construed broadly, this third sector can include a range of actors, including philanthropies, think tanks, NGOs and non-profit management organizations, religious institutions, grass-roots community organizations, and even – one could argue – for-profit companies such as benefit corporations adopting a corporate social responsibility ethos, or pursuing a positive social impact (Eyal and Berkovich, 2019; Yemini and Sagie, 2015). The key factors here are that such actors are essentially independent of the government, and have some orientation at their core toward socially desirable outcomes. As we have noted elsewhere, the rise of the third sector increasingly blurs boundaries between public and private sectors as they have been traditionally understood (Lubienski, 2001). This happens either through creating hybridized organizational forms that defy traditional categorizations as a state or a business entity, establishing alternative organizational arrangements such as PPPs, or by reconfiguring the environment in which different entities operate, so that traditional forms as a “public” or “private” endeavor become less important (Gulosino and Lubienski, 2011). In that regard, for-profit organizations can also participate in the third sector. What matters most is the institutional arrangements, and in particular an organization’s institutional environment and consequent behavior – its dispositions, orientation, etc. – since state organizations may take on profit-maximizing behaviors, while business firms may adopt socially beneficent objectives (Henig et al., 2003; Weisbrod, 1998). Thus, the growth of the third sector does not necessarily require simple privatization processes, but can also result from marketization of a sector, as well as “out-sourcing” government functions or otherwise encouraging the entry of private interest groups into public policymaking processes (Whitty and Power, 2000; Lubienski, 2016).

Thus, there are two areas in education where the rising influence of the third sector is most evident. First, and most pertinent to this analysis of innovation, is the growth of schools run by non-state organizations. These are typically publicly funded schools not only operated by independent, non-state organizations, but can also include schools contracting with the government, as with PPPs, non-profit private schools, such as those run by religious or community organizations, or even for-profit schools that are either directly or indirectly subsidized by the state, philanthropies, or other funding agencies. But, second, the third sector is being shaped not only at the school level, but at the governance and policymaking levels as well (Kolleck, 2019). While the third, or “voluntary” sector has
traditionally been an arena for civic and community organizations, the growth of non-state schools, and the influence of private interests in schooling, has also meant increasing influence for non-state actors in education governance and policymaking (Au and Lubienski, 2016; Kolleck, 2019; Lubienski, 2016; Lubienski et al., 2016; Reckhow and Snyder, 2014). Although church groups have traditionally had some degree of influence in many contexts, particularly in “integrated” systems such as New Zealand or Australia, or in otherwise subsidized systems such as with vouchers in Chile, the entrance of new types of actors in school management has diversified the third sector. Now, additional charitable organizations, consultancies, contractors, employer and training concerns, social advocacy organizations, and an almost unlimited range of other types of organizations can offer schooling, and thus demand policy influence on how school is offered (Gunter and Mills, 2016). Moreover, in addition to the expectation that school managers should have some say on policy, as states have contracted with non-state entities such as philanthropies or consultancies to essentially make policy, or have otherwise abrogated or retreated from much of their governing responsibilities, they have created a space in which private managers, funders and other interests can assume or share policymaking responsibilities (Ball and Junemann, 2012; Layton, 2014; Verger et al., 2016).

In that respect, one of the most important forces in the enhancement of the third sector is, in addition to neoliberal policymakers, third sector organizations themselves, with philanthropies and think tanks in particular leading the charge. Such institutions have been instrumental in laying the intellectual groundwork for a move away from state-administered services, both by funding that intellectual work, as well as nurturing the advocacy infrastructure necessary to advance those ideas through the policy process (Hess in Barr et al., 2008; Lubienski et al., 2016) In fact, research has shown discernible networks with these philanthropies as primary movers in education policy, whose agendas are then operationalized through think tanks and other intermediary actors such as advocacy organizations, community groups or policy entrepreneurs, or bloggers, and normalized through media outlets (Au and Ferrare, 2014; Kolleck, 2016; Lubienski, 2018; Olmedo, 2016; Scott and Jabbar, 2014; Tamir et al., 2019). The increasing influence of private interests in public policy through philanthropy, or “philanthrocapitalism,” represents a new form of the older humanitarian traditions of the wealthy, with a new focus on evidence for effectiveness, business sector sensibilities, political strategies, and venture-style investing (Hogan, 2014; Hogan et al., 2016). Thus, despite a rhetoric of improving opportunities for poor children, critics argue that these forces tend to strengthen existing systems of inequality (Giridharadas, 2018; Saltman, 2010).

In advancing agendas favoring the third sector, these groups have been drawing from a specific diagnosis and remedy regarding state administration of public services in general, and education in particular. On the one hand, state administration of public services is seen in this perspective as inherently ineffective. Drawing from public-choice perspectives, theorists contend that administration through state agencies prioritizes not the public that is supposed to be served, but more importantly an entrenched, self-serving monopoly of government bureaucracies and special interest groups (MacLean, 2017). Therefore, in this logic, direct state administration of public services leads not to innovation and improvement, but to calcification and unresponsiveness to the preferences of those using state services. The argument that the public interest requires direct public administration does not hold sway in this way of thinking, since democratic or “political” control of education is often captured – it is argued – by these self-maximizing special interests, at the expense of both service “users” (i.e. children or their parents), and non-government sources of ideas and expertise (Walberg and Bast, 2003).

On the other hand, many (but not all) of those promoting third-sector options also cast a suspicious eye on the idea of moving more fully toward the private sector to address the
ineffectiveness of direct state administration, with New Labour in the UK, and New Democrats in the USA epitomizing this perspective. They express concerns about market failures, treating children as consumers or schooling as a commodity, exacerbating exclusivity and inequitable outcomes through markets, and enabling greater (self-) segregation through parental choice (Lubienski and Weitzel, 2009; Nathan, 1996). Still others see the dangers of public administration, while minimizing the problems with private control, and see third-sector options as a useful strategy for eventually moving toward a more privatized system (Friedman, 1955, 1995).

Consequently, for different reasons, many have come to advocate for quasi-market models and mechanisms, such as promoting parental choice and competition between providers, or opening up entry to third-sector management and policy organizations to strengthen a third sector in both schooling and in education governance and policymaking (Olmedo, 2016). In practice, this often means public funding or loose public oversight that has largely been outsourced to nongovernmental organizations (Ball and Junemann, 2012). This, they argue, offers the best of both – public and private – worlds. In this logic, education is a sector where private interests such as families of school-aged children or independent, nongovernmental (and typically non-profit) organizations either make decisions or make public policy, respectively.

Thus, in general, the third sector has been advanced largely by thinking that perceives the state sector as too restrictive and inward-serving. While the business sector might also not be directly applicable for organizing and providing public education, policymakers and reformers believe that the third sector offers a site where mechanisms and models from the private business sector can be leveraged to improve the administration of public services. These include attributes such as competitive incentives, opportunities for entrepreneurialism, freedom from regulation and often from collective bargaining agreements, sensitivity to consumer preferences, and ability to innovate.

This question of innovation is particularly important because, under this theory of change, it is a – if not the – key factor for improvements in quality, efficiency, and responsiveness, in schools as well as in policymaking. Innovation is linked with the notion of experimentation and finding new approaches for educating children, especially those marginalized in state systems. These result in achieving superior outcomes, finding more cost-effective ways of achieving those outcomes, or better reaching the needs of different users. Indeed, rather than identifying specific innovations, one could argue that if there are improvements, innovation has occurred.

Of course, the problem that many reformers identify is in freeing up individuals and organizations to be more innovative (Coulson, 1999; Kolderie, 2014; Moe and Chubb, 2009). In this logic, the public sector, as a realm governed by rules and regulations (such as employment contracts), is inherently inhospitable to innovation, so that new ideas are slow or even impossible to bring to fruition in that environment. Instead, the private sector is seen as inherently favorable to innovation since organizations are forced to experiment and adapt in order to successfully compete for resources in a sink-or-swim environment. Thus, in lieu of direct privatization of state entities such as schools, policymakers embracing this view look to the third sector as a site where marketization can make schooling more amenable for innovation, and then force state organizations into competitive arrangements within the third sector, so that they are induced to adopt innovations created in the third sector, or else develop their own. Consequently, many students will benefit from more innovative, effective, and responsive learning experiences.

But for the third sector to play a key role in benefiting substantial populations of students, it is not simply a matter of producing innovations, if indeed it has any special advantages in doing so. Additionally, there must be opportunities, incentives, structures, and channels by which such innovations can be conveyed to larger sets of
schools serving those students, a factor that is presumably addressed as schools outside
the third sector are incentivized to adopt or develop such innovations. This then
highlights the question we address in the remainder of the paper: While policymakers
often assume that the third sector can serve as a font of innovation for mass school
systems as a whole, even if it can, how is that sector situated in ways that can encourage
or impede the adoption of such innovations?

Shaping the third sector in the USA
There has been a global trend toward utilizing the third sector as a space for education
innovation and reform. Some countries, as noted above, have pushed their state schools into
more market-like environments that approximate a third sector, in terms of relatively little
direct state control and substantial involvement from private interests, or have formed new
types of schools to inhabit the third sector. Australia in particular has seen a dramatic
growth in the market share of non-state schools since the 1970s, when the federal
government began to provide public subsidies to non-government schools, with some states
allowing for “independent public schools” that have greater managerial autonomy (ABS,
2018; Watson and Ryan, 2010). Other countries, such as Chile and Sweden, have
appealed more directly to the private, for-profit sector in shaping a third sector for
schooling. Chile moved to a voucher system in the 1980s, creating a sector in which
municipalities, non-profit and for-profit organizations could administer schools. Similarly,
Sweden adopted market-style education reforms in the 1990s, and has seen substantial
penetration of for-profit companies running school chains. In these instances, it is clear that
policy innovations in shaping the third sector have led to innovative governance and
management arrangements, but it is less clear that they have resulted in instructional
innovations (Carnoy, 1998a; Espinola, 1993; Gauri, 1998; Lubienski, 2009).

While a number of countries have embraced the third sector for education reform in
different ways, we focus here on the USA to help understand how third sectors may relate to
educational innovation. The USA has seen a relatively recent sea-change in education policy
that has profoundly shaped the structure and composition of the emerging third sector.
Until recently in the USA, a traditional separation of church and state has largely prevented
a third sector from flourishing, since non-state schools and the organizations that run them
have typically been prevented from accessing taxpayer funding for public education, so that
the third sector was primary funded by families enrolling their children in church-run
schools. Indeed, going back to the origins of the public system in the nineteenth century,
for-profit private providers have been essentially excluded from offering primary and
secondary schooling in most places, although they have participated in early childhood,
supplementary, as well as tertiary (usually vocational) education. Instead, compulsory
education in the USA has been dominated by the state, largely through local authorities and
a constellation of affiliated interest groups, mostly non-profits, such as teachers unions and
professional associations, as well as some influence from a few for-profit interests such as
the testing and publishing industries.

But there has also been significant involvement from the private, non-profit sectors, both
in terms of support and management. Regarding the financial and institutional support
many (but not all) private schools enjoy, one way that the USA is rather unique is in
providing relatively generous tax structures that encourage private giving. By way of
contrast, in Australia, for instance, philanthropic activity in education is rare, and mostly
involves the promotion of initiatives and programs in schools, not the establishment,
operation, or funding of schools per se. For example, one of the largest philanthropic
organizations involved with education in Australia is the Smith Family Foundation, which
provides funding and support to disadvantaged students and communities through clubs,
programs, and direct sponsorship of students and families. Compared to countries such as
that, in the USA, philanthropy plays a much larger role, largely due to tax incentives and correspondingly a more vibrant tradition of philanthropy, and not only among extremely wealthy families. Consequently, middle-class families get a tax benefit in many states for private school expenses or other gifts (to public and private schools), and the rich such as the Walton family and Bill Gates enjoy tax advantages for funding schools, such as elite private schools and charter school chains. Similarly, the tax structure also incentivizes them to fund philanthropies, think tanks, media outlets, advocacy organizations and other entities that are involved in issues around private and third-sector schools (Saltman, 2010; Scott and Jabbar, 2014).

In terms of school management, for decades, private, tuition-charging schools have occupied about 10–12 percent of the K-12 education market in the USA (Lubienski and Lubienski, 2014). With few exceptions, these have been almost exclusively sectarian schools, with the Catholic Church, until recently, operating the majority, although conservative Christian evangelical schools have recently achieved a plurality (Lubienski and Lubienski, 2014). Essentially, then, the USA has a long history of substantial but limited participation from non-state actors in primary and secondary education, which has been dominated by state and associated forces. The third sector, as it existed, was composed largely of a few philanthropies funding, but not necessarily directing, local and limited efforts at reform.

Traditionally, the public, state-funded sectors, and the private, church-based sectors, co-existed. Competition between the two sectors was minimal. As much as it happened, competition had been largely at the policy level in previous decades when Catholic leaders in some cities had sought to access public tax dollars, but were effectively excluded from that through Federal and State constitutional measures separating church and state (Justice, 2007; Viteritti, 1998). Even with Milton Friedman’s (1955) voucher proposal, the subsequent rise of white-flight academies initially supported by tax-funded vouchers were quickly brought in line with America’s traditional and legal conceptions of strict separation of church and state as had been understood for generations. Instead, public and private schools occupied distinct and largely stable market segments, and eschewed competitive strategies across or within sectors. While the public sector may have arguably been more “innovative” in terms of more quickly adopting trends in teaching in learning, often in a very “faddish” and trend-sensitive way, parents and policymakers did not necessarily look to school sectors for innovation, since market-style logic had not really been applied to schools (Ravitch, 2000, 2003). Practices were relatively similar across sectors, indicating some sharing or otherwise diffusion of ideas. Differences that did exist between school sectors were largely reflections of the nature of those sectors, with private schools having the freedom to adopt more exclusive practices, such as uniforms, single-sex schooling, and narrower, more academic curricula, while public schools generally had to avoid such practices in order to meet their mandate of serving all (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987).

However, in the last quarter-century, the USA has embarked on a major shift in policy – the suddenness of which was not always evident because of the decentralized nature of education governance. Starting in the 1990s, states as well as the federal government started to incorporate non-state actors into the wider public education system in a number of roles which would together re-shape the third sector in education. While this has been a multi-faceted movement, two elements in particular have contributed to this trend.

First, what has become to be known as the education reform movement in the USA and elsewhere was arranged largely around the idea of moving public education away from a strict public sector basis by inviting private interests into education governance, and in doing so, creating a new, third sector for education. Perhaps, the heart of this reform movement has been school choice policies, and in particular charter schools, which were themselves an explicit effort to bring down the traditional boundaries between public and
private sectors in order to access greater levels of innovation, which policymakers (although probably not parents) now expected from schools as a way to improve educational equity and outcomes (Lubienski, 2003). Charter schools reflect a direct attempt to import business-style practices into public education, particularly with the emphasis that policymakers placed on competition, autonomy and innovation (Weitzel and Lubienski, 2010). One of the key aspects of charter schools is their rather unique management, whereby non-state actors can run public schools. Not only has this diminution of traditional sector boundaries meant that community groups, civic organizations, non-profit and even for-profit management companies have entered and expanded the third sector through this route of operating charter schools, but that such groups have then taken a larger role in pushing the third sector into political action and policy advocacy, which has further expanded the role of the third sector. However, despite the participation of non-profit groups, it should be emphasized that a third sector structured on business-style competition may force even non-profit organizations to adopt for-profit style behaviors, as state and non-profit organizations can be transformed by the competitive climate in which they suddenly find themselves, or by the profit-maximizing organizations with which they may partner (Au and Lubienski, 2016; Eyal and Gross Yarm, 2018; Gulosino and Lubienski, 2011; Lubienski et al., 2009; Weisbrod, 1998).

Second, one of the biggest forces behind the school choice movement has been the rising influence of private philanthropies, which have been particularly instrumental in the expansion of school choice in general, and charter schools in particular. In 2014, corporations donated almost 18bn US dollars, while foundations gave almost 54bn (Au and Lubienski, 2016). Certainly, in the past, philanthropies such as Ford, Annenberg and Carnegie have been active in education, leveraging their great wealth to support improvements in public education; however, the Gates Foundation alone, the largest philanthropy ever, now leverages more than twice the funding of Carnegie and Rockefeller combined (Saltman, 2010, p. 33). More importantly, in recent years, this sense of social duty has been supplanted by the “venture philanthropy” movement in which those controlling great fortunes – typically from the business community – target their giving as an investment for which they expect to see evidence of impact (Saltman, 2010). Thus, they often support a business-style model for addressing social problems, and seek to overcome democratic processes that they often cast as impeding social processes. Consequently, edu-philanthropies often nurture advocacy and research organizations that will “influence the political process and policymaking” and foster “jurisdictional challenges” that create third-sector alternatives to public education such as through charter schools, alternative educator preparation and grooming a new generation of sympathetic policy leaders (Reckhow and Snyder, 2014, p. 187; Lubienski et al., 2016). Such strategies by the most active six large philanthropies (the Broad, Dell, Fisher, Gates, Robertson and Walton foundations) are notably aligned in their goals and approaches, with substantial efforts going to creating an alternative, third sector of schooling supported by a heterarchical, public/private policymaking infrastructure (Ball and Junemann, 2012; Scott and Jabbar, 2014).

Together, these two factors have been largely responsible for shaping a third sector in US education around market-style principles. Drawing from a business logic of the benefits of competition and deregulation, education reformers have argued specifically that such policies are desirable because they will lead to greater innovation in education, just as they have in information technology, retail, and other sectors from which many of these philanthropists gained substantial wealth.

The third sector and innovation
The question then emerges as to the evidence regarding the extent to which third sector participation enhances the rate, nature, and dissemination of innovations in education.
“Innovation” can be conceptualized in different ways, such as creating a substantively novel process or product, or simply creating the appearance of newness in a local context (Lubienski, 2003; see also Rogers, 1995). As we have discussed such different conceptualizations previously, we are less concerned here with defining whether each given practice is “innovative,” and instead consider whether it is reported as an innovative addition at the system level. In that regard, evidence from multiple countries with competitive education systems suggests that innovations may be uneven across institutions (Lubienski, 2009). Although competitive pressures may be related to the creation of some innovations, those may tend to be more in terms of organizational factors such as administration and governance, marketing, or in some cases delivery, rather than in classroom-level improvements. For instance, Australia has higher levels of competition between schools of any OECD country. While market logic would suggest that this would increase innovation in classrooms, Australian academic results are flat and notable generation and transfer of educational innovation between schools and/or sectors has not been documented, although schools are developing innovative ways of shaping their enrollments (Ho, 2018).

As another example, the longstanding voucher-based policies in Chile moved education away from a primarily state-run model to include non- and for-profit providers, but have not resulted in substantial improvements in learning practices or outcomes, and instead are associated with innovations in school marketing and increases in student social segregation; where educational innovations have occurred, they have come from the state bureaucracy (Carnoy, 1998b; Elacqua, 2012; Espinola, 1993; Gauri, 1998; Gonzalez, 2017; Hsieh and Urquiola, 2002; McEwan and Carnoy, 2000; Parry, 1997a, b; Treviño et al., 2016). Similarly, Sweden’s experiment with market-style competition has brought the participation of for-profit companies to compete with state schools, but has not resulted in improved outcomes, although there have been growing levels of segregation and increased emphasis on school marketing (Björklund et al., 2005; Carnoy, 1998b; Daun, 2003; Lindbom, 2010; Verger et al., 2016).

However, the third sector in US education is somewhat different. While that sector has been characterized by the involvement of non-profit NGOs, it has also increasingly been based on a competitive model of schools of different types being positioned to pursue competitive advantages in the marketplace. Myriad organizational forms, spurred on by prominent philanthropies, have become influential in education policy and governance, although, with a few exceptions, schools in the third sector themselves tend to be not-for-profit (although for-profits are the predominant players in a few cases). Still, there is a general consensus in the research that innovations are more apparent again at the organizational level, in areas such as governance, employment, and contractual arrangements, expansion, and marketing; while policymakers established competitive conditions explicitly to foster classroom-level innovations, those are much more difficult to perceive (Lake, 2008; Lubienski, 2003).

But aside from the development of innovations in the third sector, there is the larger question of innovations from the third sector, as it has been positioned as a source of research and development for the wider publicly funded system (Rofes, 1998; see e.g. Kolderie, 2014; Nathan, 1996; Vanourek et al., 1997). With regard to organizational and administrative innovations, it must first be remembered that third-sector schools are themselves essentially a result of an innovation in policy, as reformers created the space for publicly funded, but privately managed, schools. While a few local education authorities in the state sector have voluntarily attempted to embrace that model in order to gain some competitive advantages in an emerging education market, much of the effort to expand this policy innovation is coming from private philanthropies seeking to use public policy to force state school systems to adopt this model – for instance, witness the Broad Foundation’s
attempts to expand charter schools across the Los Angeles Unified School District through electoral means, or the Walton and Broad Foundations’ funding of the Progressive Policy Institute’s campaign to make all state schools into charter schools (Guzman-Lopez, 2015; Progressive Policy Institute, 2015).

Regarding the classroom level, in light of a weak record of producing substantial innovations in teaching and learning, the third sector has instead been more successful in adopting, and often amplifying, innovations, or at least practices, from state schools. For instance, many of the practices claimed as innovations in charter schools were already in use in public schools (Lubienski, 2003). Some famous approaches associated with charter schools, such as the focus on chants, engagement, and discipline in KIPP charter schools, were actually developed in the state schools (Hill, 2001; Robelen, 2011), supporting Eyal’s (2009) suggestion that the public sector may also be a fruitful source of innovation. Other classroom practices represent a direct appeal back to practices associated with traditional education, with the connotation that public schools have turned their back on proven approaches, or at least those associated with “real” schooling (Metz, 1990).

On the other hand, some of the “innovative” administrative practices reportedly produced in the third-sector schools, such as contracting with private providers for ancillary services like food or janitorial service providers, are also being adopted in the state system, which is often also under the similar fiscal pressures to reduce expenses, although for perhaps different reasons. At the same time, some specific practices in the third sector, such as parent interviews for school admission, are largely non-transferable to the state sector because of its mandate to accept all students. Other practices, such as investing in marketing to attract students away from other school options, are being embraced across sectors, as schools, no matter their organizational form, are increasingly forced into an environment where they must compete for students (Brouillette, 1999). While this innovative practice may be associated with greater levels of student sorting instead of improvements in effectiveness, what is of interest for the present purposes is their dissemination across sectors due to the pressures of increasingly competitive institutional environments sparked by policy changes.

**Conclusion: a fine mess**

The patterns of innovation development and dissemination in and from the third sector in US schooling suggest some pathologies, either within the incentive structures of that sector, or in the interface along the increasingly indistinct boundaries between the third and the state sectors. By “pathologies,” we mean not full-blown market failure, but inherent defects such as inefficiencies and perverse incentives as market mechanisms operate in a quasi-public good such as public education, and more specifically as the public education sector interfaces with the private and third sectors (Lubienski, 2006). In this concluding discussion, we highlight some of the factors that might help explain some of these patterns, including issues of incentives, channels, models, and strategies. In general, we argue that in disrupting established sector boundaries to foster what could be seen as creative chaos, policymakers gave little thought to the question of the development of innovations, much less their dissemination, relying instead on unexamined assumptions about the power of market mechanisms as applied to public education. While drawing on the US case, our conclusions raise questions which may be useful for understanding third-sector engagement in other national contexts, as well as for developing theoretical insights more generally.

Indeed, in shaping the modern third sector in education, US policymakers pursued an agenda of disrupting the state system by creating an essentially undefined sector that straddled public and private institutional environments, organizational logics, and accountability systems (e.g. Christensen et al., 2008). In eradicating traditional boundaries and fostering a hybridized model, they appear to have been guided by the idea of disrupting
the public sector by scrambling traditional boundaries in the hopes that competition would then cause innovations to emerge, perhaps organically from the chaos, but particularly from the new third-sector institutions freed from government constraints (Hess and Maranto, 2000). This involved importing private sector mechanisms such as competition, organizational autonomy, and consumer choice into the public sector in order to access some of the advantages associated – rightly or not – with the business world, including effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness and innovation (Weitzel and Lubinski, 2010). Instead, what seems to have happened is, that some of those assumptions about the benefits of the private sector were misguided, and, perhaps more importantly, the logic undergirding such perceived advantages may not be operational, but instead pathological, when applied to the institution of public education.

Looking more specifically at expectations for the development of innovations, policymakers clearly assumed that, free of much state regulation, the third sector would produce more innovations, particularly at the classroom level. They were clear in positioning charter schools as “laboratories” and “research and development” centers for new approaches to “teaching and learning,” without considering the obstacles and disincentives in the third sector that might hinder such innovations, including the imperative for legitimacy, for appealing to consumers who wanted more traditional approaches, and for limiting risk by adopting proven methods (see e.g. Kolderie, 2014; Nathan, 1996; Vanourek et al., 1997). While there have been innovations, these are much more evident and clearer at the organizational level, in areas such as marketing and employment arrangements, than at the classroom level where policymakers explicitly expected to see change.

There are a number of possible ways of understanding these patterns of innovation at different levels. It is clear that there is an entrenched conservatism in how teaching is conceptualized and approached, with sanctions (often from parents as proxy-consumers) on providers that offer teaching that is too innovative or different (Metz, 1990). Indeed, it is not at all clear that most consumers choose schools largely on classroom-level practices (although some certainly do). Instead, consumers often consider the clientele being served, rather than what they are being served, as an indicator of quality (Schneider and Buckley, 2002). In a sense, and especially in view of the importance of a student’s peer group, the clientele is itself the product being sold, thus diminishing the incentive for classroom improvements and instead incentivizing student selection (Épple and Romano, 1998; Hanushek et al., 2003). Likewise, the very fact that subsidies are used to fund public and charter schools may undercut competitive incentives for more entrepreneurial approaches to teaching (Éyal, 2007). Indeed, faced with a competitive climate, a school (positioned as a business) has a number of strategic options available to it, as would any business firm. But competition through pricing is generally not an option for schools serving the public, while – as noted – innovations in classroom practice are often difficult and not appreciated by consumers, not to mention uncertain and potentially ineffective, and therefore costly. Instead, innovating at the organizational level, in areas such as marketing and student selection, may offer more comparative advantages. In fact, inasmuch as schools are increasingly emulating profit-seeking behavior, cost-efficiencies at the organizational level may be a higher priority than improvement in classroom practice.

But more significantly, even if classroom-level innovations were to be developed, policymakers gave little to no attention to the issue of the mobility of innovations within the third sector or across the third- and public-sector interface. While one might assume that the competition policymakers promoted between schools would cause lower-performing schools to adopt the practices of schools that are more successful in educating students, just as firms in other sectors might emulate the practices of more successful rivals, there are problems with such an assumption in a market-driven education system. For one, factors inherent to
the state sector, such as the need to be open for all, can prevent them from adopting practices of exclusion that are used in some third-sector schools to shape student enrollment. Practices such as marketing can be apparent and easily emulated, while policies such as behavior and dress codes are more difficult to enforce in open-access institutions. Moreover, in order to emulate a more successful competitor, the practices responsible for that success need to be apparent. But while the visibility of a marketing strategy is obvious by definition, classroom-level practices and improvements, often discreet and nuanced, are more difficult to observe, and thus more difficult to emulate. Indeed, in a competitive climate, organizations and individuals may be incentivized to limit the visibility of useful innovations so as not to lose a competitive advantage over rivals, and therefore this may seek to guard innovations as private, proprietary information. Certainly, some public and third-sector organizations develop and share innovations out of a professional motivation to provide better education for more children. But that professional ethos is nonetheless at odds with clear disincentives built into a competitive model of schooling increasingly animated by the rise of the third sector in education.

Thus, a primary concern here is that policymakers have pushed education more squarely into a market model, which has on its own both advantages, as admired by policymakers, and disadvantages, that policymakers appear to have neglected. Moreover, some of the advantages of the market model are compromised or even pathologized when applied to a non-market enterprise, including a quasi-public good such as education. In such cases, incentives for self-maximizing behavior run into social and professional mandates for equitable access to a quality common good.

In fact, the nature of public education as a quasi-public good with private good aspects reflects different, often conflicting, models. As recent third-sector reforms in the USA indicate, there are indeed market aspects to education, such as the individual benefit enjoyed by consumers, more opportunities for organizational responsiveness to consumer preferences, and allocative efficiency as choosing can lead to more effective matches between students and schools. In that regard, market forces could indeed produce greater levels of innovation, although the evidence suggests that it is likely to be limited and dependent on optimal conditions, and that there are disincentives for dissemination in a market environment. But education also exhibits characteristics that point to non-market modes of organization. For instance, the externalities associated with widespread access to schooling (or lack thereof; Friedman, 1955), the imperative for social cohesion, and the multiple and conflicting goals for education (Aristotle, 1946; Curren, 2000; Labaree, 1997, 2000) suggest a need for public funding, and – by most accounts – administration and accountability. Furthermore, there are technical aspects of education, such as identifying learning styles and interventions, that would lend themselves to more influence by professionals with expertise in arcane, specialized knowledge. In these cases, innovation is encouraged not by competitive incentives but by professional impulses to provide the best service possible, as indicated by the many innovations that emerge from the public and professional sectors.

Moreover, the professional model does not create the same structure impediments and disincentives for dissemination of innovations. Motivated by the professional mandate to find and implement improvements that can benefit both immediate clients and the larger society, educators in a professionalized system are better positioned to freely share innovations within their own organizations, as well as across organizational and sector boundaries. Indeed, the original idea for charter schools very much embodied a professional model, eschewing competitive incentives in favor of professional opportunities for teachers to try new and different approaches to educating children (Budde, 1988, 1989; Shanker, 1988a, b). It was only when market-oriented reformers and policymakers co-opted the charter school movement that this element was lost,
and innovation was relocated to the organizational level as education management organizations would be incentivized to innovate.

There is nothing inherent to the third sector that makes it necessarily amenable to, or hostile to, innovation. Instead, the key factor is the essential nature of such a sector as it has been configured through policies and institutions, and the internal and institutional arrangements and orientations of organizations within those sectors. Those may be adversarial, characterized by competitive pressures toward innovation or organizational conservativism, toward privatization and protectionism of ideas. Or they may be professional and cooperative, as evidenced by a desire to find and spread solutions to chronic challenges facing schools.

References


Budde, R. (1988), Education by Charter, Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement, Andover, MA.


Coulson, A.J. (1999), Market Education, Transaction, New Brunswick, NJ.


Gauri, V. (1998), School Choice in Chile, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA.


Guzman-Lopez, A. (2015), “Billionaire’s proposal for 130,000 LA charter school seats draws fire”, 89.3KPPC (radio), September 23.


Kolderie, T. (1990), Beyond Choice to New Public Schools, Progressive Policy Institute, Washington, DC.


Corresponding author
Christopher Lubienski can be contacted at: clubiens@iu.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Abstract

Purpose – In recent years, third sector–school partnerships have become more common and received increasing research attention. Yet, the ethical aspects of third sector–school partnerships have not been discussed in-depth. As a result, the field lacks a conceptual framework that makes possible in-depth understanding of the ethical characteristics involved in partnerships between public schools and the third sector. The purpose of this paper is to fill this lacuna.

Design/methodology/approach – An integrative review of the general literature on stakeholder theory, corporate social responsibility, cross-sector partnerships (CSP) and strategic alliances, as well as of empirical studies on partnerships between schools and the third sector, offers insights on ethical conduct in these partnerships and their antecedents.

Findings – Based on the general literature on CSP and the educational literature on third sector–school partnerships, the authors offer a conceptual model and propositions about ethical conduct in these partnerships and its antecedents.

Originality/value – The innovative conceptual model makes possible a re-evaluation of existing knowledge on third sector–school partnerships, and can support direct research of ethical aspects in these partnerships. In addition, the model provides conceptual language for administrators for managing practical ethical dilemmas in these partnerships.

Keywords Ethics, Schools, NGOs, Third sector, Cross-sector partnership

Paper type Conceptual paper

In recent decades, third sector organizations have begun playing an active role in public education in the west. Third sector–school partnerships are a relatively new phenomenon in education, therefore the ethical aspects of these partnerships have not been discussed at length to date. As a result, educational research lacks a theoretical framework that permits in-depth understanding of the ethical aspects of third sector–school partnerships. The present work addresses this gap by building on the general literature on stakeholder theory, corporate social responsibility (CSR) theory, cross-sector partnerships (CSP) and strategic alliances, and on previous empirical studies on partnerships between schools and the third sector. Our review aims first and foremost to conceptualize ethical conduct in these partnerships and to breakdown their antecedents and potential pitfalls. Specific, we offer formal propositions that can be used to advance future research. We intend to stimulate interest and reflection on ethics in third sector–school partnerships.

CSP represent an important major mechanism by which the third sector delivers social services. CSP include at least two of the three sectors (government, businesses organizations and third sector organizations) (Selsky and Parker, 2005). These partnerships are designed to achieve common goals by leveraging shared resources (Berger et al., 2004). Operating in the space between government and private enterprises (Lehr-Lehnardt, 2005), third sector
organizations espouse different attitudes toward government policies: some oppose the government and its policies, seeking to change the political agenda; others provide supplementary and complementary services to those provided by the public sector (Young, 2000). In both cases, the alleged legitimacy of the organizations derives from the perception that they represent public interests and are driven by altruistic motives (Lehr-Lehnardt, 2005). The present paper focuses on government-nonprofit partnerships prevalent in the field of education. These partnerships involve third sector organizations providing supplementary and complementary services to public schools. Past empirical work suggests that school staff rarely contest the legitimacy of CSP in education. This acceptance of partnerships by schools is apparent even when NGO agendas are perceived by schools as deviating from their public mission, and it contributes to the general conceptions that schools are fully aware of the underpinning agendas and can cope with them (Author, 2018). These conceptions are based on numerous assumptions regarding the capacity of schools to vet their potential collaborators, to regulate the shared programs (e.g. monitor and possibly censor instructional content and pedagogical methods), and to shape the instructional outcomes of the alliance (e.g. avoid adverse effects by setting assessment criteria and conducting the assessment). Partnerships are therefore validated as a positive course of action and seen as instrumental in serving school goals, without any apparent sacrifice of the educational agenda of the school (Author, 2018).

Venture philanthropy and NGOs regard public education as a critical arena for social intervention (Au and Lubienski, 2016; Ball, 2008). Such intervention may be driven by one or more of the following motivations: altruism, public recognition and image, tangible rewards (e.g. taxation benefits) (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007), support of legal and institutional frameworks, public legitimacy and attempting to gain influence on a large scale (Ball, 2008; Brinkerhoff, 2002). Berliner (1997) argued that CSP in education stem from the belief that no single organization can create successful schools and that all those interested in the success of the education system must be recruited to take responsibility (see also Wohlstetter et al., 2004).

The vast research on interactions between governments and third sector organizations focuses on how-to and outcome-based explorations (Selsky and Parker, 2005). Ethical aspects of third sector–school partnerships are seldom discussed and have not been conceptualized. In a non-recurrent interaction, the consequences of unethical behavior and loss of contact are minimal (Brass et al., 1998). But in frequent interactions, as in the case of CSP, the opportunities for unethical behavior multiply, so that decisions by one party have the potential to affect the interests, welfare or expectations of others. For example, frequent cross-sectional interactions often expose each partner to the weaknesses of the other side, lowering the level of inter-organizational regulation and increasing the likelihood of opportunistic behaviors. This is because partnerships generate resource dependency and increase vulnerability (Babiak and Thibault, 2009). As a result, in continuous relationship, when self-interests are promoted, the potential for damaging one’s partner increases (Brass et al., 1998). Thus, in partnerships, the probability for unethical conduct, defined as behavior that has a harmful effect on others (Jones, 1991), is high. Even more harmful is losing the relationship (Brass et al., 1998). In education, NGOs often embrace an ideological agenda (e.g. promoting human rights or twenty-first century skills), but ideological zeal may not be similarly prioritized and can become an interest of one partner more than of the other. For example, ideological commitment may suppress local considerations or constraints (Mumford and Fried, 2014).

It is therefore possible to ask whether organizational and environmental features shape the nature of partnerships in a manner that leads to a preference for the interests of one of the stakeholders. In other words, do the organizational and environmental characteristics of an emerging partnership shape the ethical conduct of the partners. Brinkerhoff (2002)
suggested that the normative support of government-nonprofit partnerships is justified because such partnerships are ethical, as they empower citizens and promote civic participation. In contrast, scholars critical of such partnerships have argued that the activities of NGOs have negative externalities (Schmid, 2004), and schools lack the ability to effectively monitor and regulate the relationships with external actors in a way that supports their public mission (Ball, 2008; Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Yemini et al., 2018). Thus, there is a concrete need for a theoretical breakdown of the dimensions comprising the ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships, and its antecedents.

**Analytic approach**

CSP can be explained by several highly relevant theoretical perspectives, such as stakeholder theory, CSR, CSP, and strategic alliances. Note that we do not argue that these theories and domains are the only relevant bodies of knowledge, but rather that they represent different perspectives on partnerships that are useful for our purpose. First, we aspired to define what ethical conduct of organizations and between organizations is, turning our attention to management research, which contains a vast literature on this topic. We used a series of electronic searches with Google Scholar engine by combining terms such as "stakeholder theory," "corporate social responsibility," "CSP" and "strategic alliances" with the word "ethics." Thematic analysis assisted us in identifying the distinct dimensions of ethical conduct (i.e. aggression, transparency, opportunism, accountability, deviance) as well as certain antecedents of ethical conduct in partnerships (i.e. trust, goals, power, formalization, ideology, environment). Figure 1 contains an explanation for each theory or research domain, and its view of ethics, and the main ethical conduct dimensions that each theory underlines.

Next, we used a second series of electronic searches. The keywords noted above were combined with organizational keywords (i.e. “partnerships,” “alliances,” inter-organizational,” “nongovernmental organizations,” “NGOs,” “philanthropy,” “voluntary sector,” “corporations” and “businesses”), and with educational keywords (i.e. “schools,” “charter schools” and “education”). We read the abstracts to screen the

---

**Notes:**

- **Stakeholder Theory** encourages a broad reflection on “who or what really counts,” in a manner that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders and invests effort in identifying them (Mitchell et al., 1997)
- **VOE** – Ethically speaking, the theory emphasizes relationships over rights, views stakeholders as unique and non-generic, and values satisfying all stakeholders and promoting relationship gains (Burton and Dunn, 1986)
- **ECD** – Low aggression (e.g., consensus and elimination of conflict) – Low opportunism (e.g., relationship that prevents exploitation) (see Burton and Dunn, 1996; Jones, 1995)
- **CSR** is defined as “the serious attempt to solve social problems caused wholly or in part by the corporation” (Fitch, 1976, p. 38)
- **VOE** – From an ethical standpoint, it concentrates on preventing negative externalities in interactions with consumers, employees, the environment, local community and economy, business community and overseas community (Brunk, 2010)
- **ECD** – Absence of organizational deviance (e.g., code of conduct) – Transparency – Accountability (e.g., environmental externalities, community support, etc.) (see Brunk, 2010)
- **Strategic Alliances** are “voluntary cooperative inter-firm agreements aimed at achieving competitive advantage for the partners” (Das and Teng, 2000, p. 33)
- **VOE** – From an ethical position, it focuses on relational and performance risks associated with partner cooperation and alliance performance, to ensure the benefits for each of the partners (Das and Teng, 2001)
- **ECD** – Low aggression (e.g., consensus-making process) – Low opportunism (e.g., goodwill trust) – Transparency (e.g., behavior control of information exchange and usage) (see Das and Teng, 2001)

---

**Figure 1.** Summary of four organizational perspectives on the ethics of organizations and between organizations
results, and downloaded the works we deemed to be relevant for further review. We also complemented the searches by consulting the reference lists of several publications on the topic of the third sector and schools. Note that despite the wide-ranging scope of the project, this is not a systematic review of literature, as our primary objective is to offer an integrative conceptual framework. We used content analysis as a method for organizing the data on the antecedents and their associations with dimensions of ethical conduct. The analysis yielded the model discussed in the next section.

Model of ethics in partnerships between schools and the third sector

Based on the literature review, we outline a conceptual framework to discuss the ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships (Figure 2). First, we suggest that ethical conduct in partnerships between schools and the third sector contains five dimensions: low aggression, transparency, low opportunism, accountability and absence of organizational deviance. Second, we discuss the role that the nature of the partnership (trust, goal congruence and symmetry of power between partners) plays in predicting ethical conduct. The nature of the partnership serves as a proximal antecedent of ethical conduct. Third, we address two groups of distal variables that can serve as antecedents to ethical conduct in these partnerships: organizational characteristics (formalization, organizational ideology), and environmental characteristics (environmental turbulence). Proximal antecedents are factors that are temporally adjacent and directly responsible for changes in the outcome variables, distal antecedents are factors that contribute more indirectly to explaining changes in the outcomes. Proximal and distal antecedents are common when conceptualizing multistage processes to better depict complex phenomena in social studies (e.g. Van Iddekinge et al., 2009), as in the case of ethics in third sector–school partnerships. We suggest further that the nature of the partnership mediates the relationship between organizational and environmental characteristics on one hand, and ethical conduct on the other. Finally, we argue that environmental characteristics moderate the effects of organizational characteristics on the nature of the partnership.

The five dimensions of ethical conduct in CSP as identified in the literature

Low aggression

Aggressive behaviors manifest as attempts to directly change the partners' views or ability to influence processes and outcomes (Jay Polonsky and Ottman, 1998). Aggressive or militant behaviors have been documented in partnerships in general as well as in CSP. The aggressiveness of one of the partners in the partnership may lead one side to cause damage to the other, resulting in an ethical failure (Munson et al., 1999). For example, at times, partners from nonprofit sector make a social project contingent on the presence of a certain individual in a managerial role (Lehr-Lehnardt, 2005). By contrast, an example of low
aggression is an NGO that would not pressure a school to accept conditions for a program or donation of funds. Reports in the USA indicate that partnerships can come to an end with the departure of a key management figure (Hess, 2004). In education, Scott (2009), also drawing on the US experience, argued that aggressive behaviors are more frequent when aggressive venture philanthropies seek to maximize returns on their investments. Aggressive NGOs may not only affect performance but also cause resentment among the partner’s employees, undermining the partner’s human capital and even leading to employees quitting (Rivera-Santos and Rufín, 2010). High aggression on the part of schools is less often discussed, but it may take the form of a school threatening to damage the reputation of the NGO if its activities do not conform to the demands of the school.

**Transparency**

Another element considered to be an essential part of ethical conduct between sides in a partnership is the transparent use of information (Munson et al., 1999). Addressing CSP in education in Latin America, Brady and Galisson (2008) suggest two aspects of transparency: transparency of goals (i.e. clarifies direction and interest) and of roles (i.e. clarifies authority and responsibility issues). The authors argue that transparency enables partners to create reasonable expectations about the process and work together. The literature on CSP advises to develop transparent procedures for problem assessment and outcome specification (Rondinelli and London, 2003). Partnerships are dynamic, therefore, to achieve rich information exchanges over time, each partner must develop mechanisms for information sharing (Rondinelli and London, 2003). In education, a US study by Russell et al. (2015) suggests that there is an inverse relationship between partnership complexity (many vs few actors) and the type of coordination and information structure (formal vs informal). In third sector–school interactions, it is necessary to have transparency in both formal and informal information exchanges. The literature also discusses situations of unreliability in communication on the part of one of the partners. In these cases, providing partial information to the partner harms synergy and effectiveness (Austin et al., 2007). An example of transparency in education is an NGO that shares with the school internal information regarding cash flow, which may affect its obligation to the program, or a school that provides to a potential partner with accurate input on staff resistance to involvement of the NGO.

**Low opportunistic behavior**

Opportunism refers to situations in which a conflict of interests arises and one of the partners acts in a manner that negatively affects the other, disregarding mutual obligations or contractual agreements (Fassin, 2005) and promoting its own interests (Das and Teng, 2001). Low opportunism (benevolence) represents a willingness to help one’s partners, regardless of the self-interests of the organization (Ganesan and Hess, 1997). Reeves’s (2008) study in Ireland identified opportunistic behaviors that produced conflict in CSP involving public schools. An example of low opportunism in education is an NGO that does not withdraw from a program that it believes will no longer have positive coverage in the media, or a school that continues its partnership with an NGO although national political climate has changed and the NGO is under attack. Figlio and Kenny (2009) discovered that private contributors give money primarily to successful schools rather than to needy ones, possibly because this practice enhances the contributors’ image as successful social benefactors. A different manifestation of such behaviors may result from the novelty of a social project wearing off, which in turn may lead to reduced public enthusiasm, causing a partner to abandon the project in favor of a more attractive initiative (Berger et al., 2004). Opportunistic behaviors are also related to promoting one’s agenda over the partner’s. Yemini and Sagie’s (2015) case study of
school–NGO interaction found that each actor attempts to gain value and resources, aiming to promote its goals, often at the expense of the other partner. But to enjoy long-term exchange beneficial relations, partners must be prepared to accept short-term losses, even if affecting their core goals, for the sake of promoting lasting partnerships and common goals. Low opportunism in partnerships is necessary to take advantage of each partner’s relative strengths, and save resources in the long term (Piercy and Lane, 2007).

Accountability
Ethical conduct in CSP should include accountability to stakeholders. Partners are expected to advance the goals of the direct stakeholders they represent (Wood, 2002), and at the same time to be committed to serving the public interest in general (Costa and Pesci, 2016). Functional effectiveness of NGOs, that is, the use of resources to gain immediate results for specific stakeholders, is different from strategic effectiveness, which takes into consideration long-term commitment of the partnership to advancing public good (Lehr-Lehnardt, 2005). It has been argued, however, that the dependence of NGOs on private funding may lead them to favor their donors’ interests over those of general society, which in turn may negatively affect accountability both to their direct stakeholders and to society (Ebrahim, 2003), eventually causing them to neglect their social mission. Akyeampong (2009) explored public–private partnerships in the provision of basic education in Ghana and found that the long-term financial security was not part of their design. This naturally makes sustainability of social impact problematic. An example of accountability in education is an NGO that assumes responsibility for what happens in the school after its program ends, and takes the necessary steps to ensure the success of the mission and community commitment, or a school that terminates a merit-based program if it has a negative effect on racial tensions between students. Scholars have found that universities and schools in the west (i.e. US and Israel) are changing their mission to obtain money and resources from their partners (Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Weisbrod et al., 2008). In similar vein, although some NGOs declare their explicit intention to reduce inequality plaguing weakened populations, pragmatic considerations (financial and managerial) make them focus their efforts on the middle class and concentrate them in geopolitical center rather than at the periphery (Joassart-Marcelli and Wolch, 2003). The Berkovich and Foldes (2012) have also discovered similar considerations affecting the involvement of NGOs in Israeli public education, which paradoxically undermined the social (and often organizational) goal of narrowing social gaps, perpetuating inequality. Moreover, when the operation of the NGOs depends on matching funds by local government or service recipients, the financing policies of the NGOs prevent them from assisting disadvantaged populations that are located in geographic areas in which the population has a low socioeconomic status (Berkovich and Foldes, 2012; Fyre and Milligan, 2003).

Absence of organizational deviance
Various types of deviant organizational behaviors have been identified as a part of unethical conduct in partnerships. Examples of deviant organizational behaviors noted in the literature include managerial violations, inflated staff, inferior quality of services, nepotism and the use of fear tactics as a managerial technique (Victor and Cullen, 1987). Brauner (2005) suggested that deviant work behaviors occur in nonprofit organizations, and Nair and Bhatnagar (2011) listed such destructive behaviors as embezzlement and bribes (property deviance), mistreatment of resources and money (production deviance) and organizational power struggles (political deviance). An example of organizational deviance in education is that of an NGO leader who gives a donation to a school and makes it clear that the school is expected to hire the consulting company owned by the leader. Likewise, Rabea (2013) described how patronage politics in some Israeli local authorities influence the
appointment of school principals. The literature also shows that senior management of the organization has a decisive effect on the ethical decision-making process of the organization (Volery and Mansik, 1998): it is the organizational ethical leadership that provides role models and sets the reward system that either thwarts or cultivates deviant organizational behaviors (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008). Thus, deviant behaviors do not necessarily develop at the individual level, but can be collective and represent the ethical climate of the organization (Peterson, 2002). An example of organizational deviance in schools is using donations to give jobs to unskilled personnel based on personal relations with the principal. The educational literature mentions some cases when partnering between businesses and schools that appears to undermine the quality of schools. Molnar (1996) reported that in the USA, at times school processes are corrupted by the corporate interests with which they partner. Similarly, some US charter schools that often form CSP (Wohlstetter et al., 2004) have been found to be contaminated by corruption, cronyism and nepotism (Carnoy et al., 2006).

Based on the literature reviewed above, we expect that:

P1. The construct of ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships consists of five distinct dimensions: low aggression, transparency, low opportunism, accountability and absence of organizational deviance.

P2. Low aggressiveness, opportunism and organizational deviance, and high transparency and accountability correlate positively with the general perception of the partner as ethical.

The nature of the partnerships as a proximal antecedent of ethical conduct in CSP

Having outlined the dimensions of ethical conduct in CSP, we proceed to explore the proximal antecedent of ethical conduct in partnerships. We identified three central variables in the literature related to ethical conduct: trust, goal congruence and symmetry in the balance of power between partners. Note that these variables may be influenced by other factors. For example, the duration (long-short-term) of the partnership may increase the dependence between parties, thereby destabilizing the symmetric power relations in the partnership and ultimately, its ethical conduct. This may be further affected by the partners’ (dis)agreement on the content of instruction (technical and ideological). In their study on CSP in education, Eyal and Yarm (2018) found that the main factor characterizing the ability of schools to maintain their obligation to public ethos was the level of mutuality between parties, rather than the time span or the content of the partnership. Therefore, it appears that the aforementioned proximal antecedents are the key determinants of ethical conduct in partnerships.

Trust

Argandoña (1999) argued that “trust is a necessity in every kind of contract, [and] the indefinite and dynamic nature of these new forms of cooperation (organizational partnerships) increases the importance of a trust shared by the partners” (p. 218). Trust is seen as a central factor in partnerships because it is impossible to cover all obligations in contractual agreements (Volery and Mansik, 1998). Cross-sector partnership opens each partner to potential harm, for example, by the misuse of partnership resources or the sharing of confidential information (Rondinelli and London, 2003). In the education literature, Rose’s (2011) study on NGOs in the field of education in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan found that despite formal and written rules of partnership with the government, it was not possible to formalize all relationships, and that good faith and ongoing deliberation
between partners were needed. Based on the analysis of the situation in England, Davies and Hentschke (2006) argued that trust in CSP was critical for the success of the partnership. CSP may be especially difficult to maintain because the partners’ fundamentally different missions may create conflicts of interests and their vastly different cultures may increase distrust (Rondinelli and London, 2003). Wohlstetter et al. (2004) reported that in the educational sector, leaders use proxies of trust (e.g. prior knowledge on potential partners and potential partners’ reputation) to determine initial trust when initiating a partnership. Rondinelli and London (2003) advised partners to learn about each other’s culture and mission as a means to increasing trust.

The literature claims that trust in partnerships promotes the ethical conduct of partners. For example, it has been suggested that trust in cross-sector partnership promotes sharing information and reduces the risks involved in sharing too much information (McDonald and Young, 2012; Munson et al., 1999). In addition, trust between strategic partners has been associated with low opportunistic behaviors of partners (Munson et al., 1999).

Goal congruence
Goal congruence, the fit between partners’ values and their belief that a shared goal can be attained (Olson et al., 2005), determines the compatibility between partners’ interests and expectations. Goal congruence is considered to be critical for the initiation, success and sustainability of CSP in general (Bryson et al., 2015), and in education in particular (Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Wohlstetter et al., 2004), because it bolsters synergy in the partnership, which depends on sustaining the distinct identity of both partners (basic goals and mission) while promoting mutual adaptation (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Goal congruence is a condition for preventing mission drift of both partners and helps attain the objectives of the partnership (Brinkerhoff, 2002). In the field of education, a US study found that partnerships characterized by goal congruence between non-system actors and the state on given policies have been linked to effective policy implementation in the classroom (Coburn, 2005). The Author’s (2018) study in Israel also found that “transformative mutuality,” when the school and NGO engage in meaningful dialogue about educational values and goals, may advance pedagogical innovation. The literature also identifies situations of goal divergence. In Portugal and England, researchers found that NGOs active in citizenship education at times pursue specific and parochial interests that conflict with social solidarity (Ribeiro et al., 2016).

The literature suggests that the presence of goal congruence in partnerships promotes the ethical conduct of partners. Goal congruence, which creates a perception of shared benefits, is related to reduced potential for opportunism in partnerships (Leviten-Reid and Fairbairn, 2011), as opposed to goal divergence, which encourages opportunism (Grant and Mousavi, 2011). In education, Israeli studies found that NGOs and schools have demonstrated opportunistic self-serving behaviors (Yemini and Sagie, 2015), but nevertheless, on occasion schools accommodate the goals of their non-system partners (Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Yemini, 2018).

Symmetry in power
Power imbalance in CSP may be related to differences in resources and political capital between actors (Babiak and Thibault, 2009; Herlin, 2015). Babiak and Thibault (2009) argued that even perceived power imbalance between cross-sector partners can lead to feelings of ambiguity, uncertainty, suspicion and anger. Power imbalance in CSP “makes one party accountable to the other, but not necessarily vice versa” (Sagawa, 2001, p. 208). Waddock (1988) suggested that when there is power imbalance in partnerships, there is a need to establish mechanisms that promote balance in decision-making power and to encourage consensus building.
The literature suggests that power asymmetry in partnerships is associated with unethical conduct on the part of the partners. For example, when one side is dominant, the stronger partner often retains authority over decisions (Hamby, 1996). Asymmetry in power between partners creates a potential for opportunistic behavior (Reeves, 2008). The dominant partner may coerce the weaker one to pursue goals that conflict with their own (Fassin, 2005). Likewise, the educational literature suggests that underfunded schools might abandon their goals to attract donations (Weisbrod et al., 2008). Yemini et al. (2018) analysis of school–NGO interactions found that NGOs with resources impose their global agenda on local schools, especially schools serving poorer communities, at times in clear contrast to the needs that principals consider to be school priorities. Cardini (2006), drawing on the UK experience, suggested that power asymmetry in educational partnerships emerges when actors use political power to overrule the goals of schools and communities. Similarly, Kolleck’s (2016) study in Germany found that the NGOs tended to bypass school management, communicating directly with district leadership. Power asymmetry in partnerships may be more severe in certain national contexts in which public schooling is underfunded or ill-managed. For example, Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008) described how in post-socialist countries, such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the Soros Foundation was instrumental in supporting and correcting reforms in the educational sector, granting it unique power over local schools.

Based on the literature on the relations between the nature of partnerships (trust, goal congruence and power symmetry) and ethical conduct in partnerships in education, we suggest that:

P3. Trust is positively related to ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships.

P4. Goal congruence is positively related to ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships.

P5. Symmetry in the balance of power is positively related to ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships.

Organizational and environmental characteristics as distal antecedents of ethical conduct in CSP

The nature of the partnership and ethical conduct in partnerships are influenced by both organizational and environmental characteristics. Review of the literature suggests that the partners’ organizational formality and ideology, together with environmental turbulence, affect ethical conduct in CSP. These variables affect ethical conduct directly and indirectly, as they help explain the nature of the partnership. For example, Saxton (1997) noted that “although relationship characteristics alone appear to be better predictors of a firm’s initial satisfaction with an alliance […] the combination of both relationship characteristics and partners’ characteristics [has] superior explanatory power for predicting sustained benefits to partners in an alliance” (p. 454). Next, we will elaborate on several key organizational and environmental antecedents of ethical conduct in CSP.

Organizational formality

Organizational formality is a key aspect of organizational structure, signifying the degree to which regulations and procedures are dominant and guide organizational operations (Germain et al., 2008). The degree of organizational formality is considered to be a structural means of control designed to influence the discretion exercised by employees (Kelley et al., 1996). In organizational research, low organizational formality has been found to discourage technical judgments and encourage ethical considerations (Solymossy and Masters, 2002).
It has been suggested that high formality in arrangements between partners is related to unethical conduct in partnerships (Volery and Mansik, 1998). In the context of partnerships, formality breeds rigid arrangements (Joshi, 2009), associated with disregard of the partner’s needs. In developed countries, the formalization of government agreements with NGOs acting in primary education was found to be related to discomfort among NGOs and a feeling of being viewed as “mere contractors” (Batley, 2011), which is likely to result in low commitment. High formality can therefore reduce NGO accountability. It has been further suggested that formality harms the nature of the partnerships, for example, because formality decreases trust (Milne et al., 1996). In education, an Israeli study found that predetermined formal arrangements in cross-sectional partnerships have adverse effects on achieving the mission of the school (Eyal and Yarm, 2018).

Organizational ideology
Organizational ideology has been identified as a key factor in explaining ethical conduct in partnerships. In ideological organizations, a strong commitment to the goals is present. Thompson and Bunderson (2003) argued that “ideological organizations confront an irony in that success often depends on attenuating rigid adherence to the cause in order to avoid alienating important stakeholders and constituents” (p. 581). Employees of ideological organizations are less likely to react to a violation if they view it as ideologically justified (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003).

Organizations’ ideology has been found to be linked to unethical conduct in partnerships. With respect to CSP, Babiak and Thibault (2009) argued that the partner’s ideology can shape its overt motivations and behaviors in the partnership, impeding the realization of the collaborative potential. This may increase the likelihood of aggressive conduct by the ideological partner. Educational scholars have argued that private actors’ partnership with the educational sector, even in developed countries (i.e. UK, Israel), is often driven by ideological beliefs about what constitutes good educational practice, and such actors use financial leverage or political involvement to promote their ideas (Ball, 2008; Yemini and Sagie, 2015). The educational literature also indicates that organizational ideology can harm ethical accountability. For example, Williamson (2016) reported that high-tech firms partnering with schools in Silicon Valley in the USA attempted to mold school culture and students according to corporate and technological ideals, instead of those of public education. Such a neoliberal ideological stand may lead to widening social inequality, undermining the public good (Yemini, 2018). Based on the literature on how organizational characteristics relate to ethical conduct in CSP, we suggest that:

P6. High organizational formality is negatively related to quality of partnership and to ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships.

P7. A propensity for high organizational ideology is negatively related to quality of partnership and to ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships.

Environmental turbulence
The term “environment” includes a range of ecological, economic, government, legal, political, regulatory, social, cultural and technological elements, beyond the context of the cross-sector partnership. All these elements may influence the partnership (Clarke and Fuller, 2010). The literature indicates that environmental turbulence influences ethical conduct in CSP and the nature of the partnership. Environmental turbulence generates complexity, uncertainty and therefore jeopardizes organizational stability and survival (Emery and Trist, 1965). In the literature on CSP, Bryson et al. (2006) suggested that in the presence of environmental turbulence, organizations aspire to lower resource dependence
and decrease transaction costs. Studies have indicated that competition for limited resources and the struggle for organizational survival may cause organizations to act in an unethical manner in their decision-making processes (Etheredge, 1999).

With respect to partnerships, uncertainty in funding has been shown to be linked to the vulnerability of NGOs (Babiak and Thibault, 2009), which might cause them to engage in partnerships with lower levels of trust or goal congruence. In these cases, NGOs over reliance on private and government funding may prevent them from operating independently of the funding agency, leading NGOs to deviate from their original goals (Lehr-Lehnardt, 2005). For example, in education, reliance on matching funds from local authorities causes NGOs to deviate from just social goals for the sake of securing funding (Berkovich and Foldes, 2012). Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008) described how during the turbulence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, NGOs and foundations held unique power and influence in post-socialist countries over public schools. In the same vein, the Eyal and Yarm (2018), drawing on the Israeli experience, warned that in the face of scant resources, schools might engage in partnerships that endanger their mission attainment, exposing their students to unwanted ideological messages for utilitarian motives. Another example is that of divided societies, such as Kosovo, in which multicultural ideals in education are promoted by international organizations, and often these conflict with the local actors’ orientation toward state- and nation-building (Selenica, 2018), creating a reality of goal divergence. Daboub (2002) noted that in a complex and turbulent environment, the only way to avoid ethical failures is “to develop embedded relationships and cultures that facilitate ethical conduct” (p. 45). Indeed, the research on turbulent environments has found that high mutuality between partners is associated with trust. For example, a study conducted in the USA following a hurricane disaster found that the school district and schools were inclined to be more collaborative and trusting in their engagements with NGOs (Robinson et al., 2014). Based on the claims and the evidence presented above, we further suggest that environment turbulence has a moderating effect on the connection between organizational characteristics and the nature of the partnership. We posit that high environment turbulence moderates the effects of organizational features on shaping the nature of the partnerships, as manifest in lower trust and goal congruence, increasing the asymmetry in power. Therefore, based on the literature describing how environmental turbulence relates to ethical conduct in CSP, we suggest that:

P8. High environmental turbulence is negatively related to quality of partnership and to ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships.

P9. Environmental turbulence moderates the correlation between organizational features and the quality of partnership.

Concluding remarks
The purpose of this conceptual paper is to outline a comprehensive model of ethical conduct in school–NGO partnerships, grounded in prior theory and empirical research on general partnerships and education. The paper makes two main theoretical contributions. First, although previous research did address distinct aspects of ethical conduct in CSP (see, for example, Figure 1), it failed to chart the multi-dimensional scope of ethical behavior. The present paper expanded this line of exploration by converging multiple theories (stakeholder theory, CSR, CSP and strategic alliances) in a way that allow us to identify the diverse properties that make up what can be seen as a mosaic of ethical conduct in partnerships. This has the potential to stimulate future investigation and to expand our knowledge on ethical conduct in third sector–school partnership. Second, the present model identifies several key antecedents of ethical conduct related to the nature of the partnerships, and to the organizational and environmental characteristics reflecting the
complex relations between these factors and ethical conduct. Thus, unlike previous descriptive works that addressed mainly few factors and did not adopt a process orientation, the present study offers a multistage model that combines distal and proximal variables in explaining ethical conduct. Therefore, the present study can offer a theoretical framing through a multiple causal model, which in turn can serve as the basis for further investigation of ethical conduct in CSP in education.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the offered conceptual model has some practical implications. First, it provides administrators of both schools and third sector organizations that are considering initiating a new partnership with a basic understanding of the distal antecedents of ethical conduct in partnerships (organizational ideology, environmental turbulence, etc.). Thus, administrators should take into consideration the ethical complexities of alliance when selecting their partners, and set the formal structures needed to bridge organizational and institutional differences and expectations. Second, the framework can serve as a diagnostic tool for identifying initial manifestations of ethical misconduct. This can lead to introducing changes in formal arrangements and informal dynamics, in the course of self-regulation that is imperative for the success of the partnership. Third, the model can be used to stimulate the discussion between third sector organizations and schools about adopting a voluntary ethical code for partnering, and about mobilizing NGOs and schools to conduct ethical training for leaders for the enhancement of their ethical sensitivity.

The paper provides an initial model for ethical conduct in third sector–school partnerships, based on previous scholarship. Future research should explore the components as well as the interrelations between the model’s components. Thus, this work expands the literature and offers a productive conceptualization that is both grounded and applicable.

References
Berliner, B. (1997), What it Takes To Work Together: The Promise of Educational Partnerships, WestEd, San Francisco, CA.


**Corresponding author**
Ori Eyal can be contacted at: ori.eyal1@mail.huji.ac.il

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
NGO–school interactions as portrayed by elite and popular press in Israel and England
Eran Tamir, Miri Yemini and Khen Tucker
Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to map, characterize and conceptualize the press discourse of NGO–school interactions within public education in Israel and in England.
Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on a corpus of articles published in key elite and popular daily newspapers in Israel and in England. The data were analyzed through two complementary methodologies, framing analysis (FA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA).
Findings – Significant differences were observed in the way the topic is framed in the articles, in particular between the different types of newspapers. The elite newspapers (Haaretz and The Guardian) tended to frame the events in a thematic manner even when they contained episodic discussions, while the popular newspapers (Yedioth Aharonoth and The Times) tended to cover the events episodically with no thematic coverage whatsoever. CDA of news items identified two major themes: financial issues, and problematization vs normalization discourse. Consistent with the FA, CDA revealed differences in the approaches advocated by popular and elite news outlets in covering news concerning NGO–school relations in each of the examined countries.
Originality/value – It is shown how popular newspapers offer the masses that depend on it a narrow and inferior coverage, of the problematic relations formed between NGOs and schools. A discussion of possible implications of the findings is presented, in light of the growing prominence of external entities in public education.
Keywords Schools, NGO, Press
Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Education systems worldwide have undergone profound changes in recent decades, strongly influenced by neoliberal discourse (Ball, 2013). This discourse shapes two neighboring processes: school governance and decision making are gradually being decentralized (Hodgson and Spours, 2012), with decision making moving from the central administration to the local education authority (LEA) and schools (Addi-Raccah, 2015); and public education is being privatized, as external intermediaries are delivering education services that previously governments were required to offer (Scott and Jabbar, 2014).

The growing involvement of external organizations[1] in public education is a global phenomenon (Ball, 2007; Rose, 2010). Such organizations have attained great influence in both developed and developing countries. Neoliberal policies advocating decreased funding and lesser direct state involvement in the provision of public education created the context and need, which facilitates the involvement of various external actors in the system (Ball, 2007). The relations between these new and existing actors are shaped by the diffusion of economic mindsets and mechanisms that challenge actors’ respective roles, authority and autonomy, given the constant emergence of new actors and agendas (Ball, 2016).

Educational privatization and the entry of organizations into the education system take on a variety of forms in different contexts and in different countries. In some countries (e.g. the UK and USA), public entities’ establishment and management of schools, alongside evolving legislation (Gibton, 2013), comprise expressions of privatization. In others (e.g. Israel and Germany), privatization is manifested primarily through NGOs’ partial control over schools’ curricula and classroom teaching (Sagie et al., 2016).
Alongside the privatization of education systems in many countries, scholars have been addressing the growing media role in educational policy making (Grey and Morris, 2018). Studies highlighted the role of the media in reconstructing educational realms (Yemini and Gordon, 2017; Tamir et al., 2018) and addressed the differences in media coverage of education-related issues in various countries (Rutkowski and Rutkowski, 2016).

This study maps, characterizes and conceptualizes the press coverage of NGO–school interactions within public education in Israel and England, to reveal the evolving dynamics and framing of this ever-prominent phenomenon. We illustrate how school–NGO interactions are presented and framed in Israeli and English contexts to diverse (elite vs popular) audiences. Specifically, we identify how neoliberal notions are used and communicated to the public, and we highlight the role different newspapers play in framing and shaping public opinion regarding emerging engagements between schools and third-sector organizations. This is critical because it reveals how episodic framing used by popular press to handle this complex issue narrows the discussion and, as a result, may have considerable impact on the public. If that continues, the public may potentially be excluded from informed, critical democratic discourse regarding the future face of education. We discuss our findings in light of the various faces of privatization of the education system in both countries.

Study context

NGO interactions with schools

The increasing involvement of NGOs in the field of education is a well-known phenomenon worldwide (e.g. Ball, 2007; Bulkley and Burch, 2011; Kolleck, 2017; Williamson, 2014; Yemini and Sagie, 2015; Yemini, 2017). The expansion of neoliberal policies prepared the ground and created the need for increasing interactions between schools and external (for-profit and non-profit) organizations. The entry of these entities into schools can be seen either as encouraging cooperation and broader involvement for students’ advancement, or as supporting and promoting private interests at the expense of public good and to the further exclusion of underprivileged groups (Hodgson and Spours, 2012; Tamir et al., 2018).

Moreover, the specific roles external agencies take on within school systems vary greatly. Some NGOs are designed to support the delivery of educational services, while others pressure governments to fulfill their commitment to provide education for all, operate programs to improve the quality of public education, or provide educational opportunities for students who drop out of the public school system (Rose, 2009). In general, NGOs in Israel and in England either operate learning programs that comprise part of the formal curriculum or provide enrichment programs (Williamson, 2012). In England (e.g. alongside the USA and Sweden), NGOs also own and operate schools (Chitty, 2014).

The Israeli education system and its relationship with NGOs

The establishment of the State of Israel was inspired by a strong social democratic vision with a deep commitment to provide free comprehensive public services to citizens (Berkovich and Foldes, 2012). Beginning in the 1980s, the absolute control of the Ministry of Education (MOE) began to dissolve, as part of a comprehensive move by a new right-wing government to liberalize and privatize the Israeli economy. A series of policy decisions aimed to decentralize power was launched offering school principals greater flexibility and responsibility with broad administrative control to address local needs (Gibton, 2011).

Today, NGOs have become an integral part of the Israeli education system, often blurring the lines between public and private in the school curriculum (Yemini, 2017).
NGOs are important stakeholders whose views substantially impact decisions related to core school activities (Yemini and Sagie, 2015). Yet, until recently, the MOE has enacted no official policy regarding NGO activities in schools letting them operate in schools in a largely unmonitored and unsupervised manner. Moreover, MOE regulatory role was loudly critiqued, in a context of increased activities of ultra-religious NGOs in secular schools (Yemini and Sagie, 2015). Finally, while the MOE encourages and supports, external entities’ involvement on a local level, it resists, both formally and indirectly, giving up central control to NGOs (Eden, 2012).

The English education system as a semi-privatized system

The English education system has developed in a society scarred with deep class divisions and an educational system known to reproduce elite privilege through closed net of selective elite schools (Ball, 2007). The election of Prime Minister Thatcher in the 1980s marked a historical shift in the UK’s education policy with a massive emphasis on marketization and privatization. In the early years of the twenty-first century, the English education system completed its implementation of a variety of neoliberal education policies which allowed a prominent presence of external actors in state schools (Ball, 2013).

A major neoliberal breakthrough was the legislation of the Law of Academies in 2010, which allowed the Department for Education (DfE) to contract with individual schools – many of them “academies” run by external entities and financed by the state (Fenwick-Sehl, 2013). Chitty (2014, p.119) notes that “the DfE defines these academies simply as ‘publicly-funded schools’ though, in practice, this description now covers a wide verity of different institutions, the only common factor being that all academies share a governance model that increases their independence from local authorities and create stronger links with the Secretary of State (i.e. The Secretary of State for Education).”

One implication of the reform was the creation of a market-like structure in education by increasing parental choice in selecting their children’s school, which has formed a new type of schools called “independent schools,” funded partly by the DfE and partly by private entities (Bhattacharya, 2013). Indeed (like in Israel), English public education seems to be shifting hands from the central government control to the volition of various private actors with different interests (Hilgham, 2014). As a result of these reforms, English system is rather decentralized, enabling school administration and even ownership by private actors (Hodgson and Spours, 2012).

A rationale for comparison between the English and Israeli educational systems

The educational systems of Israel and England share some common characteristics but also differ substantially. The similar structure of the two education systems, alongside the distinction in the way they involve external agencies, provides a worthwhile case for comparison. Both education systems were initially mainly centralized; both underwent decentralization reforms in the 1980s and 1990s and implemented neoliberal policies, which were investigated before, through comparative lenses (Gibton, 2011). Both systems encourage the entry of various organizations (including NGOs and for-profits) into schools, and in both countries, this trend is on the rise. Yet, the systems differ especially in their adoption of privatization policies. While England has adopted radical privatization policies, including the establishment and management of schools by private for-profit entities (Gibton, 2013), Israel encourages the involvement of NGOs only as operators and providers of particular curricular segments in schools. Finally, this realm in Israel is mostly unregulated despite undergoing a series of changes in recent years; England, in contrast, enacted elaborate legislation that organizes and clarifies how private entities are expected to participate in the system (Gibton, 2011).
Media discourses on education

Despite the ever-growing presence of NGOs in educational spheres (Silova and Steiner-Khamsi, 2008), and notwithstanding the increasing media coverage of such interactions, the research on media coverage of school-NGO interactions is limited. We turn to cognitive theories of media influence, specifically framing, to investigate the media’s capacity to shape people’s views of their environment (Katz, 1987, p. 528). Media frames select “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Framing is important because it assumes that power and influence are generated by the media and other powerful institutions and move to a less powerful audience.

Media channels may claim to provide an unbiased presentation of reality, but ultimately they play a role that shapes public policy (Levin, 2004). Research has revealed social, cultural and political meanings that are processed and communicated through media coverage (Fairclough, 2000; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). The media impact on policy production is widely documented (Levin, 2004; Thomas, 2003). As Van Dijk (1998, 2001) notes, newspapers in particular are ideological institutions that mobilize discursive power to shape public opinion and navigate the public discourse toward certain directions.

Research exploring press coverage of NGOs in education is scarce in general (Hale, 2007), and comparative studies on the subject are lacking in particular. Our study aims to fill in this gap by investigating a key issue in education policy – school-NGO interactions – employing a framing method to analyze press coverage in Israel and in England.

Methods

Data collection

This study is based on a corpus of articles published in elite and popular daily newspapers[3] in Israel – Haaretz (elite, center left) and Yedioth Aharonot[4] (popular, center right), and in England – The Guardian (elite, center left) and The Times (popular, center right). We employed the respective digital archives of the two Israeli newspapers, alongside the Lexis Nexis and Pro-Quest search engines to search relevant news items for the two English newspapers. We selected these particular newspapers for their elite or popular affiliation, national scope, broad focus, considerable volume of articles related to education, wide readership and availability in a searchable online database. To capture all possible news articles related to the search, we began data construction by reading a broad range of news articles discussing education to avoid overlooking items that might be omitted through exclusive reliance on specific search terms. Next, we narrowed the search, scanning for references to the terms “school(s)” in combination with “NGO,” “third sector,” “nonprofit,” “non-governmental,” “non for profit,” “not for profit,” “intermediary organisation(s)” and “academ(y/ies).”

To assure reliability, we jointly reviewed our selection process of news items repeatedly. Overall, the basic search yielded about 2,200 articles published in 2014–2015 from all four newspapers. After further consideration, which involved reading and sorting the articles for relevance (as many articles were not focused on NGOs at all), we were left with 39 articles in Haaretz, 34 in Yedioth, 40 in The Guardian and 40 in The Times. Our inclusion criteria required that articles in the corpus present relevancy, meaning address issue/s related to interactions between schools and NGOs. We excluded articles that included the basic search words but did not present any relevant description or discussion of the topic. We analyzed the data through two complementary methodologies, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and framing analysis (FA), as detailed below.

CDA coding

We followed a procedure developed by Fairclough (2000) and implemented in a similar media study by Punakallio and Dervin (2015). This method is particularly useful for the
analysis of media texts because it enables examination of the language used in a text as a social activity, constructed to represent reality in a certain matter. Through this process, we aimed to understand “the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 353). Practically, we analyzed each of the articles separately, coding and interpreting it line-by-line and commenting alongside the text to connect between different themes and ideas. Our comparative analysis was guided by Gabriel and Lester’s (2013) protocol that consists of: “(a) repeated readings of the texts while making theoretical and analytical memos throughout; (b) selection, organization, and identification of discursive patterns; (c) generation of explanations linked to the overarching patterns; and (d) reflexive and transparent documentation of our claims” (p. 11). We achieved truthfulness through triangulation of the authors’ individual coding and interpretations.

**FA coding**

We also applied the framing theory to operationalize the role of the press in shaping the public dialog regarding external agencies’ involvement in schools. Exposure to specific frames can influence responsibility attributions (Iyengar, 1991), the type of considerations taken into account when making a political decision, the robustness of attitudes and trust in government; occasionally, the public framing of an issue can even directly shape attitudes themselves (e.g. Kinder, 2003). As in previous studies (Tamir and Davidson, 2011; Tamir and Raskin, 2018; Tamir et al., 2018), we applied a quantitative FA and a related set of codes to the contents of the included news articles, to identify generic frames and issues covered. We started by coding variables related to basic descriptive information, such as the type of external and education-system agents mentioned in the article (we categorized these by the relative space devoted to each agent that is mentioned in the article and by the number of times each agent was mentioned). Next, we coded the prevalence of thematic and episodic framing in each article, based on the theoretical definition presented by Iyengar (1991) and elaborated by Davidson (2007). First, we identified the presence and respective prevalence of both thematic and episodic frames in the headline and in each paragraph. Then, we made a holistic and projective judgment regarding the dominant overall frame for each article, taking into account multiple factors such as the dominant frame in the headline and the location of the two types of frames within an article, as well as the proportion of each frame within the entire article based on number of paragraphs dedicated to it. Thus, we are able to report both the proportion of thematic vs episodic paragraphs per article and each article’s overall dominant frame. Reliability was assessed by coding items by each of the authors independently and then discuss till full agreement reached. Applying CDA and FA together allowed us to investigate the data with the required analytical depth, especially important in comparative studies.

**Findings, analysis and discussion**

We begin this section with identifying the main actors and entities featured in the news coverage. Next, we present how the two newspapers in each country frame NGO–school interactions. Finally, we depict the results of our CDA analysis of the press coverage, in accordance with two dominant themes that first emerged in a previous analysis of NGO–school interactions in Israel (Tamir et al., 2018): financial issues related to NGOs operating in schools and the problematization vs normalization discourse.

**Actors featured in the news coverage**

Who are the major actors that the press identifies as involved in the interactions between schools and NGOs? We started by recording the number of times each actor was mentioned
in each of the newspapers (within the screened items). Such records serve as a rough initial indicator to help identify the actors and reflect on the relative prominence or weakness that each one of them plays in the interactions (see Figure 1). Note, that categories were assigned to players based on their appearance in the coverage and do not subsume each other. Thus, we created categories for the government, department of education and the secretary of education based on their separate appearance in the news coverage. As can be seen, pupils and the MOE/DfE received most mentions (excluding the NGOs and schools, which functioned as the basic keywords in the initial search); but other actors, such as the external agencies’ managers and employees, teachers, principals/school heads, parents, politicians, the Minister of Education/Secretary of Education and the government, received considerable coverage as well. While the MOE/DfE high number of mentions may be explained in their central and critical position as the regulator of these interactions, it is harder to explain from that perspective why pupils received a major role in the process. It seems that overall the press coverage of NGO–school interactions included most of the active and known education stakeholders in the field. One notable exception is the relative absence of mayors of Israeli cities from the news coverage, despite of their prominent position (according to experts) vis-à-vis NGOs, school funding and policy making (Gibton, 2011). The local authorities were covered in both countries and newspapers, but in a spatial context and not the political one. On the other hand, school pupils received a high number of mentions, but our qualitative analysis reveals that they tend to occupy a relatively passive and subordinate position in the press.

The framing theory can offer additional insights into why certain players appear or are absent from the news and why they appear in a specific way in particular news outlets. Unpacking these processes is critical for understanding how media outlets play a major role in setting the policy agenda and shaping how the public think about the growing prominence of external entities in public education. For example, when covering students, elite newspapers, positioned them as a silent actor, while other actors were offered the opportunity to express their positions. The popular newspapers, in contrast, interviewed students frequently, enabling them to share their views. This latter coverage framework corresponds to episodic framing, which emphasizes individuals’ narratives.
For example, an article in Yedioth Aharonoth (from April 15, 2015) called “Turn on the Or (light)” describes the ascending success of a student named Or: “She is only 17 years old, a startup manager, and a brain researcher. Meet Or Asulin from Acre.” The Times also presented student testimonies in a number of articles – albeit not to the same extent as Yedioth Aharonoth, where the students and their voices received broad coverage.

The spotlight placed on an individual student or a group of students reflects the narrow perspective applied by The Times and Yedioth Aharonoth’s authors and editors, who usually chose to focus their news coverage on cases of specific students and principals, and/or a particular NGO. Haaretz, on the other hand, which employed a more thematic framing, emphasized activities of the MOE, whereas The Guardian (with even greater thematic inclination) tended to cover politicians; trends that, in part, may reflect who’s in charge of educational policy making in the two countries, but also illustrate the two news outlets’ civic/democratic commitment to generate informed discussion about educational policy and school governance thru a critical lens. While the Minister of Education/Secretary of Education and his/her office received broad coverage in all four newspapers, the two elite newspapers mentioned these policymakers about twice as frequently and were far more likely to feature them as the prominent actor (except for The Times with the Education Secretary). The difference is a matter not only of quantity but also of quality. While the elite newspapers highlight the political aspect – the struggle for agenda-setting and the broad view of policy making – the popular newspapers focus on the individual aspects of policies, the narrow angle of a particular debate or a story (e.g. the Minister of Education’s response to or quarrel with a union leader, or the MOE response to a particular complaint of parents from a certain school). These results matter because they illustrate how the particular framing of a player in the news may affect how the audience read, understand and interpret the overall importance and relevance of the news to their daily life. Episodic stories can offer immediate satisfaction for juicy details about a politician, student or a teacher. A thematic story that positions the story of the same politician, student or a teacher within a larger historical, social and political context may illuminate a picture of injustice that in turn generates among some readers a strong call for action. The findings reported in the following section offer additional details on framing tendencies of news among popular and elite mass media and why they are relevant and important.

Framing the school–NGO interactions

Following Iyengar’s (1991) approach, we observed significant differences in the newspapers’ framing preferences – particularly between the different types of newspapers (see Figure 2). The elite newspapers tended to frame the events thematically, while the popular newspapers tended to cover the events episodically. Popular, center right Yedioth Aharonoth was vastly tilted toward episodic framing; 74.1 percent of its articles in our corpus were identified as episodic. Similarly, we found that 63.7 percent of the articles from The Times were episodically framed. The elite newspapers exemplified a different image, with the elite, center left Haaretz, featuring mostly thematically framed articles (55.6 percent) and the Guardian showing even higher thematic tendencies, with 68.5 percent of its articles identified as thematically framed. Moreover, even the episodically framed articles in the elite newspapers had strong thematic tendencies; for example, they highlighted the context of the subject discussed or provided a broad perspective. In the popular newspapers, these elements were completely absent from episodically framed articles.

An example of a thematic description can be seen in the following paragraph from the elitist newspaper The Guardian entitled, “No proof that academies raise standards, inquiry
finds; Education committee make a series of recommendations to address concerns over governance, transparency and oversight”:

A parliamentary inquiry into the coalition’s education reforms has called on the government to stop exaggerating the success of academies and to be more open about how it runs the programme.

The report by the cross-party education select committee said that although it was clear that academisation led to greater competition which helped drive improvement in schools, there was not yet proof that academies raised standards either for disadvantaged children or overall. (Weale, January 27, 2015)

This thematic description is rooted in social, political and economic contexts. The author employs a wide lens in a quest to understand educational reform by bringing together all players involved in initiating and implementing it, including the Parliament, the Government and its executive arm – the MOE – as well as the academies and schools.

In the popular Yedioth Aharonoth, articles tended to be not only episodically framed but also short, describing a specific issue presented in isolation and offering the reader a limited context at best. In contrast to Haaretz, where school–NGO interactions were featured primarily in the economic/financial section, in Yedioth Aharonoth, the same subject (involving different contents) was often covered in short gossip columns. In other cases, articles did not cover the subject directly and did not focus on the link between schools and NGOs, but rather conveyed personal stories with the main subject in the background. The article “Is it Possible?” tells the story of one NGO worker who led a program of Jewish–Arab relations, reflecting this tendency toward episodic framing in Yedioth Aharonoth:

In the joint conversations at the end of the year, the pupils testify that “it started as a project and ended with love.” Rimaaz Sadif, an 11th-grader, recently wrote to the NGO that she still maintains contact with the Jewish friends she met in the 4th grade. “It’s like ice cream coming out of the freezer,” she says. The first lick was cold, in the second it started to warm up and then the ice cream melted in the mouth and left a taste for more that made us say, or sing: may this never end. (Shir, 2014)

In this paper, we become acquainted with an NGO (“Another Way”) that introduces Arab and Jewish students to one another. The focus is not on the school–NGO interaction, but rather on the female funders of the NGO and their deep commitment and aspiration to promote coexistence, which is presented in simplistic non-critical terms, with no hard questions being asked and no extra details provided. This distinctly episodic framing typifies a common approach to coverage among popular media newspapers like Yedioth Aharonoth and The Times.
In summary, the articles’ framing tended to be more thematic in the elite newspapers (especially in The Guardian and to a lesser extent in Haaretz), whereas the popular newspapers featured primarily episodic articles (see Figure 2). Notably, the articles in the elite newspapers were longer than those in the popular ones, which sometimes included only one or two paragraphs. This latter feature in itself may attest to the superficiality of most articles in the popular newspapers[5].

The major themes from CDA
Following previous CDA findings of the Israeli press (Tamir et al., 2018), two major themes were identified: finance and funding issues and problematization vs normalization discourse. Consistent with the FA, CDA revealed substantial differences in the perspective, approach and stance taken by popular and elite press outlets in covering news concerning NGOs–school relations.

Finance and funding. The analysis reveals an overwhelming emphasis on issues concerning finances and funding of NGOs’ operations in schools – particularly in Haaretz, where a majority of articles (82.5 percent) dealt with the economic dimensions of school–NGO interactions. In contrast, only 30 percent of the articles in Yedioth Aharonoth covered economic issues. In England, both newspapers referred similarly to funding and budgeting of schools and third-sector organizations, with The Guardian and The Times devoting to this subject 47.5 and 51.4 percent of their articles, respectively. Nevertheless, despite the quantitative similarity in the English case between elite and popular newspapers, the two media outlets in both countries varied substantially in their approaches and emphases when covering the economics of the school–NGOs interaction.

While all four newspapers applied a critical perspective asking tough questions about the distribution of resources to prominent players and examining NGOs’ budgets and expenditures, their perspectives differed considerably. Most articles in Haaretz emphasized the potential problems, financial waste, and breach of trust involved in privatization processes implemented by the MOE. While sometimes posing specific doubts and tough questions, Yedioth Aharonoth’s coverage tended to accept privatization as an integral part of the system, disregarding its challenges and risks to social and educational equality.

A similar pattern emerged in the English case. While both The Guardian and The Times were critical of academies – raising questions about issues including managers’ salaries, profits, and expenditure vis-à-vis organizations’ missions and needs – articles in The Guardian covered these topics more extensively, offering detailed explanations and commentaries, whereas The Times’ descriptions were short, offering little context for the case-based (often sensational) reporting. This tendency toward case-specific framing manifests, for example, in the following article from The Times titled, “Academies claim 1m for ghost pupils”:

The academics movement suffered another blow as an inquiry confirmed that a group of schools wrongly claimed almost £1 million to fund “ghost” pupils. The Barnfield Federation, in Luton, was also criticized over large payments made to its outgoing director-general. Sir Peter Birkett, who resigned in September to become chief executive of a group of private schools, GEMS Education UK, was offered two lump sums and an additional month’s holiday and allowed to keep his Audi Q5 company car. Governors said that they were part of an agreement under which Sir Peter would not “poach” staff in his new role. He has since left his post at GEMS. Hertfordshire police investigated the group’s finances but said yesterday that they would take no further action. It is the latest in several cases of misuse of public funds by academies, which are independent of local authorities. (Hurst, 2014a, b)

This citation comprises nearly the entire original article, describes a false demand by an academy to receive government payments for graduating “ghost students” (who registered, but never graduated the school). Although the article describes the specific case as part of a larger phenomenon, it remains vague and no details or context are provided.
Instead, the content is communicated in alarming, sensational fashion, focusing on one person – the CEO.

*The Guardian*, in contrast, explains the problem under discussion and then situates it within its broader context. The following paragraph, which refers to news related to financial mishandlings of the academies and civil servants’ accountability for the protection of public funds, exemplifies the different approach taken by *The Guardian*:

MPs on Wednesday questioned the way academies can employ trustees, family members and their companies without proper oversight. Chris Wormald, the Department for Education’s permanent secretary, said he would re-examine the way in which “related party transactions” within autonomous, state-funded schools are dealt with after Tory and Labour members of the public accounts committee questioned whether civil servants were protecting public money. It followed the Guardian’s disclosures in January that at least nine academy chains had paid millions of pounds into the private businesses of directors, trustees and their relatives. Margaret Hodge, the Labour chair of the committee, asked if the department was aware of the payments. “It is just wrong to hand money to a company in which you have a financial interest if you are a trustee,” she said. (Syal, 2014)

In this paper, *The Guardian* could have developed a sensational storyline examining how particular individuals in nine academy chains mishandled public funds and made millions in profit, but instead used the story as an opportunity to educate on the need to form better civil norms, structures and government overview.

**Problematization vs normalization.** A second theme emerging from the coverage is partly related to the previous one and concerns the type and nature of NGO–school relationships. We start by asking how these relationships are described. Are the relations between the parties described as mutual and synergistic? Or exploitative or one-sided? In particular, we are interested in the type of discourse surrounding these relationships, which shapes them as controversial and multifaceted or as “normal,” thus unchallenged.

The analysis suggests that in elite newspapers, relations are often portrayed as problematic, involving the use of public funds or the public education system to promote a political, business, or religious agenda. For example, *Haaretz* tends to perceive NGOs–school relations as characterized by exploitation of NGO players who are constantly searching for new ways to benefit from public funding and perks, as well as to implement their political/ideological/religious missions – as exemplified by the following excerpt: “Secular and pluralistic education is under constant threat, among other things by external bodies doing what they want in schools […] I hope that now secular parents will understand that they cannot rely on the education system” (Kashti, 2015). Indeed, *Haaretz* paints a picture of “external bodies” as a threat to the public at large and particularly to secular and pluralistic education.

*The Guardian* demonstrates the same practice of coupling for-profit and non-profit organizations. It often presents private schools that charge tuition alongside tuition-free academies operated by organizations (including for-profit enterprises). The process of “academization” – the transformation of regular public schools into academies – is presented in *The Guardian* as part of a broad process of privatizing vital public service. An example of this tendency can be seen in an article entitled, “Hedge funds have no place in children’s services: only in Britain do we delegate to the market critical decisions about the welfare and safety of our most vulnerable children”: “As with academy schools, we know how the parent company then makes it profit - it charges its subsidiary whatever it wants for management, facilities and support services. It is a money maker” (Jones, 2015). The paper portrays academies as a profiteering tool under philanthropic guise and over the backs of vulnerable children – a mechanism to exploit the state and transform public funds into personal profits, as part of a broader process of privatization and commercialization of public services.

In contrast, the popular press emphasizes external entities’ role as a natural and integral part of particular schools’ eco-system. This type of discourse accepts the status quo, even
when it encounters problems. Thus, in Yedioth Aharonoth, some articles are critical of specific NGOs, described as profiting from their connections to schools. In these cases, Yedioth Aharonoth described how money or favors switched hands and also revealed the “revolving doors” phenomenon, whereby NGO senior officials accepted public-sector positions and vice versa. Yet, Yedioth Aharonoth stops short of raising fundamental doubts or calling for structural changes in the current education system.

Conclusion
Mass media is both a player in and an arena for the struggle over the future of education policy making (Baroutsis, 2016; Blackmore and Thorpe, 2003; Tamir, 2008; Tamir and Davidson, 2011; Tamir et al., 2018). Yet, nuanced analysis that compares the impact of elite vs popular press coverage remains scarce. In the present study, we advance this research agenda by comparing elite and popular newspapers in England and Israel, showing considerable disparities in how the various media outlets cover school–NGO interactions.

Despite the differences between the two education systems – particularly with England undergoing a longer and more profound educational privatization process – we find relatively small differences in the overall patterns of news coverage between the two countries. On the other hand, our analysis of elite and popular news coverage suggests a wide and consistent gap in how these news outlets choose to frame education news.

In the popular press, Yedioth Aharonoth and The Times demonstrated a significant tendency toward episodic framing when covering the interaction between schools and external organizations. Such coverage often includes specific reports (sometimes context-blank and thus misleading) that focus on personal and sensational elements while overlooking the motivations and modus operandi of the organizations involved, as well as the broader social, cultural, political, economical, historical contexts surrounding the stories they report on. Given that episodic framing tends to dampen readers’ political and social involvement (Mcleod et al., 1999), this type of coverage may be a convenient platform for powerful organizations to promote their ideology and interests in a relatively comfortable environment that does not pose difficult challenges or demand accountability measures (Iyengar, 1991).

Similarly, we showed that the framing prism adopted by the elite newspapers, the Guardian and Haaretz, is characterized by thematic coverage that employs a critical lens, aimed at providing a detailed inquiry into particular cases situated within wider political, cultural, economic and historical contexts that help illuminate broad phenomena and the policy problems and solutions associated with them. These components are not only essential for readers’ ability to evaluate, analyze, and develop an independent and more informed opinion on the role of non-profit organizations in public education, but are also likely to promote readers’ civic and political desire for change, as well as to motivate engagement in political organization and action (Mcleod et al., 1999).

We believe that these findings should be a source of concern, as they describe the pre-conditions of a perfect storm in the field of education. Indeed, education systems in both Israel and England have experienced a gradual shift of power from the central government and its bureaucratic apparatus to various non-profit organizations that are driven by ideological and religious ideals, as well as by money lust (i.e. Chitty, 2014). Both these democracies knowingly privatized their education systems, which now face serious challenges meeting their core missions (Gibton, 2011, 2013; Chitty, 2014).

Under these circumstances, particularly given the weakness of the state, the potential role and importance of the news media is elevated further. Newspapers can (and some say, should) be independent, critical entities that investigate, examine, report, hold those in power accountable for their decisions and actions, and indirectly empower political participation and resistance (e.g. Giroux, 2012). This study provides insight on the nature
and roles that the press outlets chose to take, and identifies two such roles in the context of school–NGO interactions. At one end of the spectrum are the popular news outlets of Yedioth Aharonoth and The Times, which have taken a supportive position in favor of NGOs’ school involvement, offered limited criticism of individuals (not phenomena), and employed a non-intrusive journalistic style. At the other pole, we identified the elite publications – Haaretz and the Guardian – which demonstrated unapologetic, critical reporting, offering a barrage of detailed examinations, documenting abuse and corruption in the era of privatized educational systems, and calling for profound systemic changes.

Overall, despite minor difference, the comparison reveals that elite newspapers play a supportive role in building a civic democratic discussion over the future of educational policy, while criticizing those in power and suggesting pathways for policy solutions[6]. Alas, in the absence of such discussions in popular newspapers, the masses are left uninformed and excluded from the decision-making loop. This reality corresponds with a model of a constrained democracy – one that is ruled by elites, for the elites, and where only the elites are able to participate and shape the discussion from an informed position.

Notes
1. We include under this category of “external organizations” the terms “third-sector organizations,” “nonprofits,” “foundations,” “intermediary organizations” and “NGOs” interchangeably, despite differentiations some scholars make between them (i.e. Kamat, 2004). In some countries (e.g. the USA and Germany), the terms “intermediary organizations” or “foundations” are used to describe entities taking on roles similar to those NGOs undertake within Israeli and the English education systems.

2. NGOs are characterized as self-managed organizations that operate with no profit motivation and raise at least a portion of their revenues from donations (Parsons and Hailes, 2004). Despite the non-profit mission and status of such organizations in the educational realm, many prominent business entities fund them to implicitly promote their economic interests (Rose, 2009).

3. We choose to include two newspapers: one targeted at the elite and one intended for a popular readership. In communication studies, scholars have often differentiated between elite and popular media outlets, claiming that the former conduct their work professionally for the public good while the latter are occupied with cutting costs and making profits by offering low-quality entertainment news (Ericson, 1995). Others argue that elite media proliferates expert ideas disregarding the masses, while popular media outlets offer a forum for alternative ideas coming from the periphery (Roeh, 1993). The framing theory, as applied in political communication, brings these differences to the fore. Previous works analyzing observed differences in the coverage of educational policy reveal that elite media outlets are more likely to include thematic coverage, whereas popular media outlets are more likely to include episodic reporting (Tamir and Raskin, 2018; Hall, 2007). In addition, including these two dimensions helps to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the role that mass media plays in communicating and shaping public opinion regarding key issues in educational policy.

4. The articles in the Israeli newspapers were originally written in Hebrew (a mother tongue of all three authors) and were translated by the authors. In order to reduce translation errors and biases, all three authors independently verified the translations of the articles cited in this paper.

5. We say this based on the assumption that it is often impossible to build a well-elaborated argument backed by reasonably detailed explanations and embedded within suitable cultural and economic contexts in one or two paragraphs.

6. We do not intend to imply that the elite newspapers covered all the key participants (e.g. mayors and municipalities were excluded from the discussion despite the tremendous power they possess over educational matters) or key issues (surprisingly, pedagogical issues, which are so critical to the quality of the educational system, received almost no mention in the articles in our corpus).
References
Davidson, R. (2007), "Just a few rotten apples? The social construction of corporate scandals in France and the United States", PhD, University of Michigan, MI.

Silova, I. and Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2008), How NGOs React: Globalization and Education Reform in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Mongolia, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT.


Further reading

Corresponding author
Miri Yemini can be contacted at: miriy@tauex.tau.ac.il

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Opportunities and challenges for NGOs amid competing institutional logics

Joshua L. Glazer and Laura Groth
Graduate School of Education and Human Development,
George Washington University, Washington, District of Columbia, USA, and
Blair Beuche
School of Education,
University of Michigan College of Literature Science and the Arts, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Abstract
Purpose – This paper considers the implications of reform efforts that rely on charter management organizations to assume operational control of underperforming neighborhood schools. The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which changes to the education sector place enormous pressure on these organizations to both manage instruction and their social environments.

Design/methodology/approach – The research presents the results from a longitudinal case study of two organizations operating within the Tennessee Achievement School District (ASD). Interviews, observations and document analysis provided insight into the perspectives of school operators, state officials and community leaders. The study design allowed researchers to observe the influence of the environment on school operators over a four-year period.

Findings – Results show that the environment that included a muscular state, market pressures, NGOs and local communities placed an extreme and contradictory set of demands on organizations operating schools, pressing them to develop robust systems of instruction, leadership and teacher development while actively working to ensure social legitimacy in the community. Neither a national network nor a small local startup began with a strategy aligned to these environmental demands, and both needed to make substantial revisions.

Research limitations/implications – Research into contemporary educational reform should account for rapidly evolving environments that feature a complex mix of resources and incentives. Careful examination of the consequences of these environments for educational organizations will further our understanding of how markets, communities and governments are shaping the education sector.

Practical implications – The extraordinary challenges that confront organizations that operate in crowded and contested environments preclude fast or dramatic results. Policymakers and the public should assume an incremental process of organizational learning and improvement. Setting unrealistic expectations and focusing exclusively on impact risks delegitimizing organizations and policy initiatives before they have time to adapt.

Originality/value – This research reported here is among the few studies that have explored the experiences and implications of NGOs that have attempted to assume operational control of underperforming neighborhood schools. The popularity of this approach among a growing number of states highlights the importance of this topic.

Keywords Governance, Organizational learning, Policy, Market forces, Educational policy, Charter schools

Paper type Research paper

Over the last several decades, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken a significant role in the national effort to turn around the most chronically underperforming schools. For example, organizations like Success for All, Reading Recovery and Core Knowledge gained national attention by demonstrating
effectiveness in raising student outcomes and building networks of hundreds and even thousands of schools (Kolleck, 2019; Trujillo and Woulfin, 2014). The last several years, however, have witnessed a new development in this trend. Spurred by pressure from the federal government (Peurach and Neumerski, 2015), and consistent with larger global trends that value an enhanced NGO role in public education (Kolleck and Yemini, 2019; Tamir et al., 2019), an increasing number of states are turning to NGOs – frequently charter management organizations – to assume operational control of existing schools (Glazer et al., 2019). Unlike typical charter schools that operate schools of choice and unlike the above-mentioned NGOs that collaborate with schools, these private organizations have assumed operational control of traditional neighborhood schools.

The political and social significance of this trend raises important questions. One regards the capacity of these organizations to deliver the expected improvements in student outcomes. A primary motivation for legislators and state officials that construct and oversee these governance changes is to generate gains in student learning outcomes in schools that traditional districts have struggled to improve. Yet is it reasonable to expect that organizations with little experience in managing traditional neighborhood schools can design and implement improvement models that engender meaningful changes in learning outcomes in these more uncertain and challenging environments? A second question is whether these organizations can generate and maintain social legitimacy in the eyes of the communities they serve. While state authorities and funders emphasize learning outcomes, communities may prioritize other values that rest on a more expansive vision of public schooling (Eyal and Berkovich, 2019; Strike, 2003; Trujillo and Renee, 2015; Yemini and Sagie, 2015). For example, in some communities, schools are seen as institutional repositories of community history, culture and traditions that they are expected to maintain. New organizations (particularly those not perceived as local) that upend local traditions and impose a narrower definition of schooling, can quickly find that their legitimacy is openly contested and their presence resisted (Glazer and Egan, 2018; Henig and Bulkeley, 2010).

In this sense, NGOs that operate neighborhood schools must respond to divergent “institutional logics” (Thornton et al., 2012) that demand technical effectiveness, on the one hand, and conformity to local conceptions of schools on the other (we elaborate on institutional logics below). This leads to a third question: how do these organizations manage these complex environments and their competing value systems, and what are the implications for their strategy and viability?

The remainder of this paper addresses these questions by reporting on the results of a comparative case study of two organizations that operated neighborhood high schools in the Tennessee Achievement School District (ASD). The results of this comparative case study shed light on the extreme demands that confront organizations operating in complex and contested environments, and the extraordinary capabilities required to meet them.

Literature review

Traditional institutional analyses of US education posited that a combination of a weak technical environment (i.e. a tenuous connection between teaching and learning), a dense but incoherent regulatory environment and deeply embedded cultural norms about schooling contributed to educational organizations whose structure mirrored the social environment but was loosely connected to the technical work of instruction. Schools obtained legitimacy from practices that resonated with cultural norms – certified teachers, subject areas, textbooks, report cards, graduation – while evading public inspection of their technical performance, and delegating the management of instruction to individual teachers (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Meyer and Scott, 1983).
However, a combination of societal shifts and changes to the education sector have disrupted these dynamics and upended the traditional stability of US schooling (Meyer, 2006; Rowan, 2006). A few key examples include the following:

- Decades of standards-based reform have enhanced political and public interest in educational outcomes, while simultaneously fostering advances in the technical capability to measure student learning. Schools are under considerable accountability pressure to realize gains in learning outcomes (Rowan, 2006).

- The diversification of providers has broken local governments’ once near-total monopoly on the delivery of educational services, and in doing so has rendered the concept of “one-best-system” obsolete. NGOs, though always prominent in US education, now play an even more central role in service delivery (Cohen et al., 2018).

- An unprecedented degree of competition has been introduced into the education sector such that traditional public schools, charter operators, for profit providers, and private schools compete for students, financial resources and social legitimacy (Henig, 2009).

- States exert increasing control over educational issues that were once the province of localities, cover a greater portion of schooling expenditures, and have weakened the power of localities (Henig, 2009).

- Some schools are designing structures and management systems that are more tightly aligned with instruction than the “loosely coupled” organizational structure that once characterized American schools (Spillane and Burch, 2006).

Despite these changes in the US education sector, previous structures, practices and norms have not disappeared. Deeply institutionalized notions of schooling may be fraying but they are still present aside emergent models and ideas. Thus, new systems are coming into view, but they are doing so in interaction with the one they seek to replace (Cohen et al., 2018).

The clash between competing systems is also a source of intellectual debate. While some commentators applaud the pressure to increase technical efficiency, others see the shift away from local control as attenuating public deliberation about educational ends and means. These analysts see local control less as a barrier to coherence and professionalism and more as a means to encourage healthy public discourse among competing perspectives. From this viewpoint, standards and accountability are seen as undermining participatory democracy by designating state governments as the arbiters of educational goals (Trujillo and Renee, 2015). As Strike puts it, “Fair participation is important […] and is at odds with standards based reform” (42).

One implication of this analysis is that the current structure of US education defies any singular classification or ideal type. Categorizations of market, regulatory, community or professional control are useful theoretical tools, but do not capture the array of forces operating in US education environments nor the way in which they interact and differ across contexts. For researchers, then, the challenge is to investigate the way in which constellations of control structures, and their concomitant institutional logics, shape educational organizations, their practices and survival strategies. The subsequent discussion contributes to this agenda by examining one particular context that involves a distinctly twenty-first century mix of non-government actors, a muscular state, new and ambitious performance standards, market pressures and local communities.

**Institutional logic**

The institutional logic framework is well suited for highlighting the multiple ideologies and ideas vying for influence in contemporary educational environments, uncovering their
underlying value systems and showing the implications for organizations that operate within their mix. Institutional logic depicts society as comprised of multiple, socially constructed institutions, referred to as the “interinstitutional system,” that constitute the cultural and material context for differing patterns of organizational and individual behavior (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012). The interinstitutional system includes the major social pillars of contemporary society: state, family, religion, market, community, profession and corporation. Each pillar, or institution, consists of its own cultural symbols, material practices, control mechanisms, conception of rationality and sources of legitimacy. Friedland and Alford (1991), widely credited with ushering in this perspective, offer the following definition:

Each of the most important institutional orders of contemporary Western societies has a central logic […]. The institutional logic of capitalism is accumulation and commodification of human activity. That of the state is rationalization and the regulation of human activity by legal and bureaucratic hierarchies. That of democracy is participation and the extension of popular control over human activity. That of the family is the motivation of human activity by unconditional loyalty to its members and their reproductive needs (pp. 247–248).

Organizational practices, identity and legitimacy are interdependent with institutional logics (Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Jha and Beckman, 2017; Thornton et al., 2012). What constitutes a recognizable problem, a culturally legitimate practice, or a viable outcome depends on the institutional logic in which an organization is embedded. For example, repentance may be an accepted remedy for theological ailments, but it is a less legitimate practice in the business sector.

Institutional logics also have implications for organizational legitimacy. Organizations gain legitimacy from their capacity to solve technical problems for which they claim responsibility and through practices and behavior that resonate with dominant social values. Suchman’s (1995) definition is useful: “Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (1995, p. 574). Similarly, Meyer and Scott (1983) asserted that a legitimate organization must offer an ‘acceptable theory’ of itself (p. 202).

The norms, values and theories that underlie organizational legitimacy, however, vary across the interinstitutional system. From the perspective of the state, legitimacy is legally sanctioned, rooted in adherence to legal and political processes and granted by agents of the state such as courts and regulatory bodies. Professions, on the contrary, accrue and grant legitimacy based on congruence with the tenets of science and through social mechanisms such as peer review and publication (Abbott, 1988; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). In other words, that which is considered legitimate varies according to the environment in which goals and behavior are interpreted and assessed (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). The point extends beyond legitimacy, rationality, efficiency and participation are inherently value laden, and their meaning varies across institutional contexts (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008).

Organizations frequently operate in environments defined by multiple institutional logics that are often (though not always) in tension with each other (Greenwood et al., 2011). Examples include differences over the definition of “quality care” in the medical field (Pache and Santos, 2010), the tension between the corporate and professional logics in the management of hospitals (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008), and conflict between university accreditation and non-professional indicators of academic quality (e.g. media rankings) (Trank and Washington, 2009). The way in which organizations interpret and act on differing messages can lead to shifts in organizational identity, reallocation of resources, the formation of new structures and internal battles for power (Gersick, 1991; Greenwood et al., 2011).
The ensuing discussion examines the efforts of two organizations to operate neighborhood schools in an environment of extraordinary institutional complexity in which multiple logics exerted competing demands on organizational identity, structure and practice. The cases are theoretically and practically compelling in that they allow insight into how a rapidly transforming education sector is placing new demands on educational organizations, the implications of those demands and the capacities needed to cope with them.

Study context

The Tennessee ASD represents a mix of regulation, competition, NGOs, performance standards and aggressive state policy that would have been unimaginable only a few decades ago. Indeed, the ASD’s very existence is compelling evidence that the “one best system” is no longer an apt metaphor by which to describe US education. It also provides a potent opportunity to examine the interdependence between divergent and contested institutional environments and the educational organizations that operate within them.

In January 2010, Tennessee passed the First to the Top Act, a sweeping reform of the state’s education policy that was the cornerstone of its successful Race to the Top application. The legislation empowered the State Commissioner of Education to identify and intervene on the state’s lowest achieving 5 percent of Title I schools, referred to as “priority schools.” Priority schools were then eligible for one of several interventions, including placement in the newly formed state-run ASD (Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Request, 2012). The Act granted the state commissioner the authority to remove schools from local districts and place them in the jurisdiction of the ASD, authorize NGOs to manage these schools, and establish a limited system of parental choice. The ASD’s first superintendent declared that operators would be judged by their ability to move schools to the top quartile in the state within five years. Virtually all ASD schools are in Memphis where most priority schools are located, and where social and economic conditions are particularly difficult.

NGOs applying to operate schools in the ASD (primarily but not exclusively CMOs) were initially vetted by ASD officials, and then paired with a specific school by a matching process that involved input and deliberation from a community advisory council established by the ASD. Once matched, school operators were granted autonomy to determine most educational matters, hire and dismiss teachers and principals and allocate internal budgets. Operators were not obligated to retain any of the school’s previous teachers, principal, or administrative staff. Financially, ASD operators received the per pupil funding for each school they operated, though many relied on private donations to fund start-up and operating costs. The ASD and its schools were free from the oversight of school boards or any other locally elected body, and the ASD superintendent was accountable only to the State Commissioner of Education (Glazer et al., 2019).

Despite its leaders’ strong ideological commitments to market-based theories of schooling, the law establishing the ASD imposed several important regulatory constraints on school operators. ASD schools were to remain neighborhood schools open to all students within the designated enrollment zone. School operators were not permitted to impose any enrollment restrictions, and were thus responsible for every student within the school’s neighborhood boundaries. Early registration requirements, behavior agreements, mandatory parent participation and other such restrictions were not permitted. Thus, the ASD included a curious mix of non-government providers, parental choice, ambitious and uncompromising outcome targets, stringent accountability and operator-level autonomy. In the language of institutional logics, the ASD was a constellation of market, state and community control systems.

The 12 organizations that operated 29 ASD schools (as of 2019) brought varying degrees of experience, expertise and background. They included national, local, experienced and
new organizations. Yet neither the most seasoned operators nor those intimately familiar with the local context could possibly grasp the implications of an environment that offered them no control over student enrollment, provided meager technical support, imposed ambitious expectations for results, confronted them with deep and severe student needs, and embedded them in a community suspicious of their intentions and resentful of the loss of local control. Indeed, many members of the community saw the ASD through the prism of historic oppression and violence toward the local African American population, and thus considered it a thinly veiled effort to strip the city of resources and power (Glazer and Egan, 2018).

Methods[1]
The data that inform this paper come from a longitudinal case study of the Tennessee ASD spanning across four of the ASD’s five first years of operations. The study’s overarching research questions focused on the ASD’s strategies and underlying belief system, the roles of social actors and institutions in the ASD’s environment and the different ways that ASD operators interpreted and reacted to the mix of influences and incentives. A primary focus was the way in which operators’ theories of improvement and design strategies evolved over time. 181 interviews were conducted with 93 individuals, including ASD leaders and staff, leaders of six ASD operators, local and state officials, neighborhood residents and leaders of community organizations. Interview and observation protocols were developed to guide and standardize data collection among a six-person research team. An extensive coding system was devised iteratively over the first year of the project, and then used to code the more than 1,000 pages of transcripts generated by interviews and observations. An iterative process of memo writing, discussion and revision guided the analytic process.

The two operators featured in the current discussion were selected due to their differing backgrounds, and because they represented they both operated secondary schools in the ASD during the period of the study. One is a small, new organization with personnel heavily drawn from the local community, whereas the other is a large, national organization with years of experience operating schools in other high-poverty urban contexts, including conversion and transformation schools.

Operator background and strategies
Keller Schools
Keller Schools was authorized by the ASD in 2014, and then it began operating its first school. The founder had been recruited from the local public district and he, in turn, recruited a small leadership team largely from the local area. Organization leaders believed their knowledge of the local context would compensate for a lack of experience in turnaround work or charter school management. The school-level model emphasized high expectations, robust social supports and standards-aligned instruction delivered by accomplished teachers from the local community. The model did not define specific instructional practices for teachers to implement in the class. Keller’s leaders reasoned that a combination of experienced educators, a positive climate and an array of partnerships with external organizations would garner community trust and drive improvement in teaching and learning. The strategy reflected Keller’s commitment to functioning as a neighborhood school that would partner with local churches and nonprofit organizations, serve families and neighbors as well as students and graduate young adults with the skills and commitments needed to serve their community. Implicit in this strategy was that Keller did not need a complex instructional model, extensive capacity-building processes or far-reaching organizational expertise; the experienced teachers they intended to attract would handle these matters individually.

In sum, Keller planned to use local knowledge and credibility to realize academic gains and to offset the lack of a refined and highly developed model. Leaders posited that their
personal reputations could translate into organizational legitimacy, which, in turn, could
leverage the community resources and goodwill that would facilitate the challenging work
of school turnaround. Keller was the organization in charge of improving the school, but the
work would be done in partnership with the community.

Empowerment Prep
A large, national CMO, Empowerment Prep (EP) began operating its first school in the ASD
in 2014, embarking on what was then the organization’s first major expansion outside its
original region. EP brought to the work a different set of resources from Keller that included
an established approach to school improvement, over 15 years of experience operating more
than 20 schools, and a regional and national office to support the effort. EP’s strategy was to
create schools with a small, personalized learning environment where students, teachers and
families would engage in the learning process to prepare all students for college and career.
EP’s multifaceted approach to building effective schools rested on the simultaneous
enactment of five pillars.

The first of these was providing high-quality instruction. EP provided a blueprint for
instruction that included, among other things, a teaching rubric, curricular maps and
sample unit plans. While offering more instructional guidance and materials than Keller, the
EP model still provided teachers with only general guidance for what to teach and only a
high-level vision of how to teach it. The second pillar focused on strong school leaders
directing the school change process, managing implementation of the school model and
serving as instructional leaders. A third pillar centered on providing supports to eliminate
barriers to student learning. This called on school leaders to provide reading and math
intervention classes for struggling students, targeted interventions, a safe, positive school
culture and wraparound services for students. The fourth pillar focused on creating a
college preparatory culture, where schools would build students’ college awareness, while
developing their skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for post-secondary success
through a college preparatory course sequence. The final pillar, community and parent
engagement, entailed direct engagement with parents, as well as community building efforts
designed to engender local support and increase student enrollment.

While these pillars provided vision, support and a degree of guidance, it was left to
school leaders to turn the vision into a concrete plan and to teachers to implement that plan.
Network offices were responsible for providing essential school supports to schools,
including instructional coaching, professional development, curriculum development and
non-academic services (e.g. operations).

EP’s strategy relied heavily on their organization’s pre-existing model, experience and
national and regional offices. This would be complemented by steady efforts to build local
relationships to incrementally garner support and recruit students and teachers to their
schools. Implied by this strategy was that EP could quickly leverage its established school
model, experience and hub-level resources to implement key structures and processes to
begin the school transformation process. In time, they hoped to build deeper knowledge of
the context and local support of families and community members that would, in turn,
deepen and improve their implementation of the model.

Challenges
After the first few years in the ASD, both operators had experienced growth and setbacks.
EP had succeeded in expanding its operations to multiple school campuses, while Keller
continued to manage a single high school. Both organizations, and many of the others
operating in the ASD, experienced challenges common to any high-needs urban school
whereas others were more tied to the high-stakes and contentious environment of the
ASD. Two key types of challenges included “inward-facing” challenges of designing a
system that could meet the performance demands of the state and “outward-facing” demands of community engagement, building trust, establishing relationships and securing broad-based support[2].

Inward-facing challenges
The ASD’s expectation that operators move schools from the bottom 5 percent to the top 25 percent on the State’s standardized assessment placed immense pressure on the organizations to rapidly transform schools with long histories of poor academic performance. In practice, this meant that operators had to build robust infrastructures to support school culture, school leadership, instruction, student interventions and family engagement. Moreover, operators would have to do that in a dynamic, contested environment marked by changing state standards and assessments, a small, competitive hiring market for teachers and pressure from the community and district, but without many of the supports and feedback structures common in traditional LEAs.

Not surprisingly, then, the early years were marked by difficulty and inconsistent results. Both organizations struggled to adapt their support systems to meet the needs of teachers and students, to align materials and processes with changing state standards and assessments and to recruit teachers with the necessary skill set. Further, both operators wrestled with adequately gauging progress in ways that would allow them to identify and remedy weakness in their strategy.

For Keller, the failure to attract a highly experienced and capable cadre of teachers quickly exposed the organization’s modest system of support and development. The organization’s theory of change held that concerted efforts to improve school climate and community trust would create an environment in which experienced teachers could thrive and student learning accelerate. One leader described a strategy in which culture was seen as driving improvements in teaching and learning: “Before you can really dive into the instruction, you have to make sure that students feel safe and that they’re in a setting or a climate that allows for learning […] If we give them high expectations, they’ll rise to the occasion.”

While Keller leaders reported marked improvements in culture and community engagement, the assumed changes to teaching and learning failed to materialize. The strategy to delegate extensive responsibility for curriculum and instruction to teachers left the organization vulnerable to variability in teacher knowledge and expertise. This resulting inconsistency was revealed by common assessments that leaders instituted in an effort to understand disappointing results on state assessments. Leaders eventually concluded that the teacher autonomy meant to facilitate expert practice was in fact a source of isolation and variable instructional quality. As one leader stated: “We allowed the teachers autonomy […] (but) then when it was time to analyze the (results), it was so skewed. Each teacher did their own thing.”

As was the case with Keller, EP leaders encountered several fundamental challenges to their core strategy. Foremost, EP struggled to establish high-quality instruction aligned with the state standards and consistent with the organization’s pedagogical principles. As lackluster results persisted over time, leaders determined that their instructional model, despite its success in other contexts, provided insufficient guidance to teachers, many of whom were struggling with the day-to-day demands of the classroom. One leader explained the burden on teachers:

[Y]ou […] had to figure out what to teach, how do I design my lesson, what do I do to start, what type of practice questions am I giving my students, what type of assessment am I giving my students? There were so many variables that teachers had to determine on their own when it came to the quality and the nuances of implementing those plans.

Although EP’s model provided more guidance than that of Keller’s, it too delegated critical and fundamental instructional decisions to teachers in an environment where the demands
on instructional practice were both extraordinary and rapidly evolving in line with new state standards[3]. In other words, a system of curriculum, instruction and professional support that had proven effective elsewhere, in the ASD was found to be inadequately elaborated, insufficiently tied to state standards and exceedingly challenging for teachers to translate into quality instruction. One leader put it this way:

Based on the demands of TN Core (Tennessee’s new state standards) and how it’s affected the TNReady assessments, we realized through observation [and] student data that we really weren’t meeting the demands of the rigor [and] that it was a big leap for teachers to internalize and implement the curriculum map [and] the lessons [...]. We definitely had inconsistent results across schools, within schools.

These challenges were further exacerbated by the struggle to recruit and develop a teaching force with the capabilities that EP sought. The implications were that EP would have to do more to rapidly develop teachers’ capacity to meet the demands of the ASD, relying heavily on their regional professional learning and support systems.

In sum, Keller’s and EP’s school-level models proved insufficient to meet the demands of an environment that featured extraordinary expectations for rapid growth coupled with high-need student populations. This, in turn, pressed each organization to develop the capacity to identify and assess challenges and limitations of their models. And of course, all of this work had to be done alongside the myriad tasks that accompany school operations, in general and turnaround processes, specifically (e.g. staffing schools, complying with federal regulation, maintaining the physical plant). Taken together, the inward-facing challenges were extraordinary, resource-intensive and multi-faceted in nature.

Outward-facing challenges

While ASD officials pressed for technical efficiency and results, the local context presented “outward-facing” demands that were tied to a different institutional logic. These demands emanated, in part, from local communities that held a more expansive view of the purposes of education and the role of neighborhood schools, as well as from the angry response of residents to what many saw as an illegitimate and aggressive state takeover of neighborhood schools. The consequences of this were that both organizations had to deliberately build a broad base of local support and work assiduously with community leaders in an environment where trust was a scarce resource (Glazer and Egan, 2018).

The backgrounds and local reputations of Keller’s founders undoubtedly contributed to the organization’s social legitimacy. For example, one leader observed that Keller was rarely the topic of critical press or community protests that challenged other ASD operators. But even if Keller could more easily disassociate itself from the unpopular ASD, it still invested considerable resources in establishing partnerships with local organizations. Indeed, a combination of local nonprofits, churches and community organizations provided Keller students, families and staff with critical services including tutoring, career and technical courses, teacher development and health services. Keller’s founder described these partnerships as “the cost of doing business” when serving high-poverty communities for whom such services were a prerequisite for academic success:

I’ve always thought you need all the partners in order to serve the needs of the students so they won’t have these barriers that keep them from learning. Just small things, vision, psycho, social, emotional needs, and those things. Having partners (makes a difference).

But such inter-organizational partnerships need to be established and managed. For example, a broad network of diverse partners created a need for integrated data systems that could streamline information relating to the provision of services, facilitate information exchange between partners and students and generally enhance overall coordination.
Thus, while Keller leaders succeeded in establishing a broad network of community partners, and while this network provided a wider array of services that Keller could have on its own, the management of the network further taxed an already lean organization.

Absent deep connections and local legitimacy, EP expended substantial resources to build broad-based public support in the local neighborhoods. On the one hand, community engagement was a longstanding pillar of EP’s overall approach for school turnaround, and EP leaders in Tennessee increasingly described the necessity of building trust, support, and awareness amidst the competitive and, at times, inimical environment in which they worked. To this end, EP retained many school traditions for their new schools, including school colors and sports teams, and they reached out to families, local community members, and community-based organizations. Multiple leaders reported that important progress had been made, particularly in building a coalition of supporters among community members most directly connected to their schools.

On the other hand, challenges loomed as leaders struggled to secure broad based support among a community unfamiliar with them and increasingly averse to the ASD. Particularly worrisome, schools remained under enrolled and leaders reported a need to build a more positive public perception. A combination of outsider status, lack of name recognition, and association with the ASD presented challenges in its effort to bolster local support. One leader put it this way: ‘So we’re sometimes seen as outsiders. You’ll hear people say, ‘Those people are coming in here and taking our schools.’ People have this negative connotation around the work that we do.” Consequently, EP increased its investment in building community support. One leader explained: “We have to really engage people more than [the local school district] does, even more so than I would say [another local school operator] does.”

Though resource intensive, this outward-facing work was perceived to be critical for not only establishing credibility and legitimacy in the community, but also to support EP’s effort to create high performing schools and for the organization’s financial viability. Still, as was the case with Keller, this critical work diverted time, attention and money from pressing technical demands for which the organization was accountable.

Adaptations
Both Keller and EP leaders reported areas of success and concern in the early years of operating their schools. Keller leaders pointed to an improved school climate and increases in graduation and college-going rates, but admitted to struggles in translating those changes to improved state assessment scores. EP leaders similarly noted areas of improvement, such as declining expulsion and suspension rates, and positive parent feedback, yet lagging standardized test scores from the 2015–2016 school year, under enrollment, and an ongoing need to bolster public awareness and support revealed areas of concern. In response to these challenges, both organizations made extensive adaptations to their models and organizational strategies that better aligned them to the ASD’s ambitious achievement goals and the demands of the local community. Among the array of changes the organizations made, two key types of adaptations emerged: modifications to their instructional and professional learning systems and to their external outreach strategies.

Modifying the instructional and professional learning systems
Keller’s leadership recognized the need to allocate extensive resources to enhance the school’s instructional model and teaching capacity. The struggles of young, early-career teachers had exposed weaknesses in the organization’s instructional model and the lack of processes that enhanced teachers’ knowledge and skill. In response, Keller’s leaders began to shift from focusing on teacher recruitment and autonomy to emphasizing shared tools and capacity building. For example, while teacher autonomy had been a central operating principle, leaders now established common structures and routines that
supported teacher collaboration, frequent observations and feedback. One leader described the philosophical shift:

(When) you have specific data to show a teacher that “here’s where we need to help you. Here’s where you need to grow.” That right there is so different from the old way. When I was a principal, you let people teach. You’d go in there, you evaluate them once or twice or three times a year, you give them your rating and you move on.

In Keller’s new system, autonomy was replaced by a shared system of practice. One leader put it this way: “We’re going to utilize what works, and we’re going to come from a decentralized school to a centralized school district, identifying best practices. We’re not going to entertain too much of, ‘Let me do what I want to do.’” In the case of math, for example, the emphasis on collaboration and shared practice was buttressed by the adoption of a complete curriculum, shared lesson plans, and common assessments. A leader explained the importance of a common set of instructional materials:

Every teacher used to come with what they’re used to doing, and we provided them the autonomy to be […] the CEOs of your classroom. The change is we’re going to utilize a vetted curriculum that’s used across the nation, that’s used in (the local district), that’s closely aligned to all of the assessment platforms that we’re utilizing to ensure that it’s all merged together.

Similarly, EP made a series of substantial changes to their instructional and professional learning. One leader explained it this way: “We saw those test scores, [and] we were like, ‘We’ve got to do something now. This is not good.’” Much like Keller, changes aimed to provide more concrete curricular guidance and aligned supports to teachers. This resulted in the adoption of a new, externally created, standards-aligned common curriculum for ELA and math; a revised, internally created curriculum for other content areas to provide more elaborated guidance; new common assessments to drive instruction; and more aligned supports and learning opportunities for teachers. One leader explained the underlying rationale:

An external curriculum eliminates the question of what to teach and it puts the focus on how to teach […] When I take away the variable of what is that I’m going to teach today, you can really focus on […] how do I teach this and how is this lesson implemented, what type of questions am I going to ask students to get them to mastery of this particular standard? Once you have that in place, it allows you to support teachers in a more precise way.

In sum, these far-reaching changes sought to enable teachers to focus on how to teach the curriculum, promote greater collaboration based on shared experience, enable more consistent practice and allow instructional leaders to provide more tailored and focused professional support. Leaders hoped that more consistent standard-aligned instruction and better student outcomes would be the end result.

Non-instructional adaptations
In addition to the revising their instructional systems, both Keller and EP attended to the outward facing challenges of meeting community sensibilities and needs. This encompassed a wide array of activity which neither organization entirely anticipated. Even founding members of the Keller team, with deep community roots and local experience, expressed surprise at the extent of student and family need and the exigencies of providing that support:

Our kids need wraparound services. Our kids need our school to adapt to their day-to-day needs outside of the school. They need food. They need shelter. Their parents need classes that afford the students the opportunity to be social agents for their community, because their parents lack that. Coming in, we didn’t know that. We know that now.

EP, on the other hand, gradually made refinements to increase their capabilities to address the broad scope of work that was necessary to build a new regional network of schools.
Leaders refined their approach to secure and deepen neighborhood and community support, and, in turn, strengthen teacher and student recruitment. Examples include reorganizing the community engagement team at EP’s central office to better build community partnerships and recruit students; heightening their focus on bolstering public awareness about EP; building relationships and trust with local community members; and, as one leader put it “being very present in the community.” This, in turn, involved various endeavors, ranging from radio advertisements, community events, to one-on-one interactions with neighborhood residents and community leaders. Through these efforts, they sought to build the EP brand in the local community while de-emphasizing the association with the ASD. Said one leader:

We just keep pushing forward and continue […] building the EP brand, and not so much worrying about our authorizer. Not to say that we discredit their authority […] but it’s just most important for us to help people understand that we’re working in a (school) transformation setting. We’re not here to take over. We really want to partner with the community, and we want to partner with the parents.

Discussion
Both Keller and EP arrived at the ASD with significant, albeit different, organizational resources and experiences that seemingly positioned them for success. Keller leaders had years of hands-on experience in local schools, a deep knowledge of the community and its needs, and a network of connections and potential partners. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine an operator with greater local knowledge than Keller. EP lacked the same degree of local knowledge but it brought more than a decade of hard-earned experienced in working with high poverty schools, and a school-level model that had evolved over that time and proven effective elsewhere.

Yet the requirement to meet lofty outcome targets coupled with the expectations of a community whose ideas about schooling went well beyond achievement gains, whose needs were not limited to academics, and whose trust had to be earned (at least in one case) forced each organization to make significant modifications. Neither the resources and experience of a national network nor the connections and local knowledge of a homegrown enterprise precluded an arduous, multi-year process of learning and adaptation. It would be difficult to overstate the extraordinary breadth of knowledge and resources these organizations marshaled in revising their models and core strategies. Their adaptations demanded that they strengthen their knowledge of curriculum, assessment and teacher learning to devise more interdependent, high-functioning instructional systems tailored to the local context.

Both organizations also made substantial investments in the local community, though in different ways. EP, relatively unknown entity associated with the state’s takeover of local schools, had to start from scratch in building name recognition, interpersonal relations and trust. Their efforts went far beyond the typical “parent night” or standard engagement activities, but instead included outreach to an array of community organizations and stakeholders. Keller, though lacking neither trust nor recognition, expended considerable resources to establish and manage a network of community partners that provided essential services to their students. As of this writing, both organizations continue to operate ASD schools, having persevered despite the obstacles described here and myriad others. At the same time, they are testimony to the extraordinary challenges that awaits any organization that engage in a similar undertaking.

Conclusion
In some ways, the ASD is a highly unusual, perhaps unique environment within the larger US education system. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find this precise combination
of state, market, community and non-profit forces anywhere else. At the same time, the ASD brings to the fore several key characteristics of the current era in US education, and in doing so sheds light on the role and dynamics of non-government organizations operating and improving traditional neighborhood schools. Toward this end, we offer three observations.

First, the ASD embodies the intense pressure on educational organizations to design tightly constructed, robust systems of teaching, learning and leadership that lead to improvements in student learning outcomes. Both organizations discussed here were pressed to significantly bolster their systems of support and more tightly align organizational processes to practice. Those that see the purpose of ASD-like initiatives to spur the development of more tightly constructed, instructionally focused organizations can find encouragement in the evidence presented here. We concur with other researchers that see shifting educational environments as challenging traditional depictions of US schools as loosely coupled and instruction as largely unmanaged (e.g. Spillane et al., 2011).

Second, evident from this analysis is that new environments are not replacing old ones, but are emerging alongside and in interaction with them. The institutional logic motivating a press for greater technical efficiency and results-based accountability co-exists with a logic that values schools as community institutions, interpersonal trust and repositories of local history (Eyal and Berkovich, 2019). Past institutional analysis described schools’ attention to cultural norms and values in terms of myth and ceremony (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), but we see them as a “community logic” that values and legitimizes differing practices and outcomes. In this sense, the requirements that confront educational organizations for maintaining social legitimacy have not so much been replaced as they have become a more complex and multifaceted.

Third, the coexistence of new and old institutional logics with their multiple and competing definitions of legitimacy, makes contemporary educational environments crowded, confusing and contested spaces. The technical and social demands on organizations operating in their midst are accordingly extensive and profound. They must play by multiple sets of rules each of which demand time, attention and resources, and that correspond to differing values. The pressure on organizational leaders is immense, and the threats to their legitimacy real. Greenwood et al.’s (2011) depiction of the exigencies of organizational management in contested institutional environments captures this point well:

> [C]onflicting external pressures highlight the need for leaders who are able to understand, and are sensitive to the expectations and requirements of constituencies of multiple logics, and can consequently make both symbolic offerings and substantive claims about the organization’s rightful membership of multiple institutional categories. (Greenwood et al., 2011)

Changes to the education sector have forced the leaders of educational organizations to turn their gaze inward to more assiduously manage the work of teaching and learning; but as we have shown here, to maintain social legitimacy these leaders must also actively manage what can be complex, contested and contradictory environments.

Can non-government organizations rise to the challenge that these types of environments present? Perhaps, but expectations for results should be tempered. NGOs vary in their experience and know-how, but coping with the demands of rigorous state standards, stringent accountability, a vocal community, and a student body with significant needs will test the experience and stretch the capacities of most organizations. Incremental changes and gradual improvements are likely to be the best case scenario.

We also note that despite contemporary discourse that depicts NGOs, and charter organizations in particular, as lean and nimble organizations unburdened by bureaucracy and hierarchy (Lubienski and Perry, 2019), in reality, institutionally complex
environments demand highly capable, multi-faceted organizations. It is no coincidence that both Keller and EP were forced to add staff and capability to their organizations to cope with the demands they confronted. Indeed, while the experience of Keller and EP have enabled them to persist, it seems unrealistic to expect small or inexperienced organizations lacking design and management expertise to marshal the capabilities that ASD-like environments demand. New organizations entering into this domain may benefit from cutting their teeth in less demanding environments before tackling those defined by extreme institutional complexity.

Finally, the demands of organizational learning and adaptation that ASD-like environments place on organizations requires a commensurate system of evaluation. An exclusive focus on measures of student learning absent indicators that gauge the gradual development of organizational infrastructure risks delegitimizing organizations and policy initiatives before they have had time to adapt. A system of “developmental evaluation” that assumes conditions of uncertainty and complexity, and that legitimizes learning and gradual improvement is better aligned with the experiences of organizations like Keller and EP, and that likely await other organizations operating in similar contexts. The following argument in favor of developmental evaluation seems well suited for organizations that operate in ASD-like environments:

A disconnect between the conditions that would support success on widely required impact evaluations (on one hand) and the complex and uncertain conditions under which these networks actually operate (on the other) warrant commensurate support for developmental evaluation aimed at building a foundation for continuous learning and improvement within these networks. (Peurach et al., 2016)

One reason we stress the salience of an evaluation systems aligned with complex institutional environments is that without them, the remarkable adaptations that Keller and EP made to their organizations and school-level models go unnoticed. In the face of immense challenges, both made substantial strides in developing systems that support ambitious teaching and learning, and that engage deeply with a local community that presents its own array of challenges. These accomplishments speak to their organizational dexterity, intelligence and commitment. Given the immense challenge of improving the most underperforming and needy schools and the overall lack of wide-scale success, organizations like EP and Keller can be important contributors to the larger improvement effort.

Notes
1. Due to space constraints we provide an abbreviated depiction of our methods. For a full description, including a representation of the entire codebook, see Glazer et al.
2. The challenges and adaptations depicted in the following section represent the perspectives of organization leaders. It is beyond the scope of this study to validate or corroborate their claims.
3. In 2011 Tennessee began a three-year transition to the Common Core State Standards; in 2014, Gov. Haslam ordered a review after Common Core and delayed the transition to PARCC; in 2017, Common Core standards were replaced by TNReady standards and assessments that were marginally different from the Common Core.

References


Further reading


About the authors
Joshua L. Glazer is Associate Professor of education policy at George Washington University. His research and teaching examine multiple approaches to improving underperforming schools in high-poverty, urban environments; the political dynamics of state takeovers; and the design of
research practice partnerships. He is a coeditor of the recently released *Choosing Charters: Better Schools or More Segregation?* Joshua L. Glazer is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: jglazer@gwu.edu

Laura Groth is Doctoral Candidate at George Washington University. Her research interests include school leadership, turnaround work and charter schools. She also works with the National Center on Education and the Economy as a field research analyst and project manager. Prior to joining NCEE, she worked in higher education focusing on student services and career counseling.

Blair Beuche is Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education at the University of Michigan. Her research interests include education policy and reform, particularly with regard to systemic reform efforts for school improvement.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Governments, markets, and instruction: considerations for cross-national research

Donald J. Peurach and David K. Cohen
School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, and
James P. Spillane
School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine relationships among governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the organization and management of instruction in US public education, with the aim of raising issues for cross-national research among countries in which the involvement of non-governmental organizations is increasing.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is structured in four parts: an historical analysis of the architecture and dynamics of US public education; an analysis of contemporary reform efforts seeking to improve quality and reduce inequities; an analysis of ways that legacy and reform dynamics manifest in two US public school districts; and a discussion of considerations for cross-national research.

Findings – In US public education, dependence on non-governmental organizations for instructional resources and services is anchored in deeply institutionalized social, political and economic values dating to the country’s founding and that continue to function as constraints on educational reform, such that new solutions always emerge in-and-from the same problematic conditions that they seek to redress. The consequence is that reform takes on an evolutionary (vs transformative) character.

Research limitations/implications – The US case provides a foundation for framing issues for cross-national research comparing among macro-level educational infrastructures, patterns of instructional organization and classroom instruction.

Originality/value – Such research would move beyond reductionist approaches to cross-national research toward new approaches that examine how histories, legacy architectures, contemporary reforms and patterns of instructional organization and management interact to shape students’ day-to-day lives in classrooms.

Keywords Instructional improvement, Education governance, Education markets, Education systems, Educational infrastructure, Instructional organization and management

Paper type Research paper

Increasing involvement of non-governmental organizations in public education in many countries has raised many questions for researchers about possible implications for students’ educational experiences in classrooms (Kolleck, 2017; Yemini, 2017). The broad scope of these questions is made clear in this special issue on “Understanding Third Sector Participation in Public Schooling through Partnerships, Collaborations, Alliances, and Entrepreneurialism” (e.g. Eyal and Berkovich, 2019; Kolleck, 2019; Tamir et al., 2019).

While on the rise globally, deep involvement of non-governmental organizations in public education has long been the status quo in the USA. The purpose of this paper is to examine relationships among governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the organization and management of instruction in US public education, with the aim of raising issues for cross-national research among countries in which the involvement of non-governmental organizations is increasing[1]. The paper is structured in four parts:

- an historical analysis of the architecture and dynamics of US public education, focusing on relationships among governments, markets and instructional organization and management;
• an analysis of contemporary reform efforts advanced within the established architecture that aim to improve educational quality and reduce disparities;
• an analysis illustrating ways that both legacy and reform dynamics manifest in efforts to organize and manage instruction in two different types of US public school districts; and
• a discussion of considerations for cross-national research examining the involvement of non-governmental organizations in public education.

Historical context: the architecture and dynamics of US public education
A distinguishing feature of US public education is its dependence on non-governmental organizations as primary providers of resources and services supporting its core educational activity: classroom instruction. This dependence has historical roots in social, political and economic values that drove the establishment and growth of the US as a country, and, consequently, US public education. By the mid-1900s, this dependence was also bound up in a dominant pattern of instructional organization and management that contributed to low-quality and inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes for many students.

Architecture of the US public education enterprise
From the colonial era through the mid-1900s, US public schooling grew from a niche enterprise for white boys to a mass enterprise that assured universal access to children from ages 5 to 18 (Katznelson and Weir, 1985). While the rise of mass public schooling was tied to the establishment of a functional democracy, industrialization, urbanization and mass immigration, it was tied especially tightly to the association of public education with social equality (Peurach et al., 2019). In the mid-1800s, this association drove a “common school movement” that sought equal access for boys and girls and comparable quality among urban and rural schools (Kaestle, 1983). In the mid-1900s, this association drove social movements, policy movements and court decisions that established as a national priority the assurance of access to public schooling for all students regardless of gender, religion, race, ethnicity, social class and/or disability[2].

Yet ambitions for universal access to public schooling emerged and evolved in a country borne of revolution against a strong central government fueled by mercantilism. With that, the USA was established on a design for limited central government at the federal and state levels, with power distributed among legislative, administrative and judicial branches and with formidable responsibility for public affairs left to regional and municipal governments. It was also established with a dependence on entrepreneurship, firms, markets and competition as drivers of both wealth and social progress.

This fundamental government–market architecture was mirrored in the emergence and evolution of mass public schooling. Dating to the colonial era, public education emerged as the province of communities (and not central governments), in the form of individual schools supported by local funding. In the early 1800s, responsibility for public education began shifting to local, geographically defined units of government called public school districts. Operating under elected boards and supported by local taxes, district central offices were responsible for creating and operating local schools in accord with local values, aspirations and funding commitments (Gamson and Hodge, 2016; Tyack, 2002). With the expansion of mass public schooling, local public school districts evolved to take a conventional form, with neighborhood elementary schools feeding area middle schools that then fed comprehensive high schools. Schools were differentiated internally by age grades and (in middle and high schools) academic subjects; by
supplemental programs for students with special needs and learning disabilities; and (in high schools) by general, vocational and college preparatory tracks.

As states were established, and as they incorporated educational priorities into their constitutions, state governments focused primarily on establishing macro-level financial, administrative, legal and policy infrastructures further supporting local public school districts. States’ attention to educational matters was often limited to broad guidance (e.g. curriculum scope-and-sequence documents and textbook approvals), with deference to districts in coordinating state guidance with local educational values and aspirations.

Absent constitutional authority, federal engagement in public education was slower to emerge: for example, in the late 1800s, with efforts to collect and disseminate statistics detailing the growth of public schooling; and in the early 1900s, with funding to states to support vocational education (as via the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917). Federal engagement accelerated in the mid-1900s with the association of public education and issues of civil rights, national defense and economic security. As detailed above, federal action came primarily through court decisions, legislation and policies ensuring both access to public schooling for all students and the more equitable distribution of resources among public schools, with supplemental federal funding aiming to reduce disparities that resulted from a primary dependence on local educational funding and the uneven distribution of wealth among local communities. It also included development of a macro-level “innovation infrastructure” that used grants and contracts to drive the development and diffusion of research, materials, programs and other educational resources aimed at improving educational quality (Peurach, 2016; Peurach et al., 2018).

Rather than falling under the control of state or federal governments, the work of establishing macro-level educational infrastructure – that is, the work of generating the primary material, knowledge and social resources essential for classroom instruction – became the province of non-governmental organizations. As early as the colonial era, local districts and schools turned to publishers for material resources for instruction: e.g., the Bible, classic texts and textbooks designed for classroom use (e.g. Webster’s Blue Back Spellers and New England Primer, the McGuffy Readers and Ray’s Arithmetic). Beginning in the mid-1800s, they turned to normal schools and, later, colleges and universities for the primary social resources: teachers.

Into the 1990s, this array of non-governmental organizations had evolved into a multi-billion dollar “school improvement industry” featuring for-profit firms (e.g. commercial publishers, vendors and service providers), membership organizations (e.g. professional associations, professional networks, accrediting bodies and advocacy groups), and non-profit organizations (e.g. university-based projects, granted-funded program and service providers and research enterprises), all providing resources and services supporting classroom instruction (Rowan, 2002). This growth was driven in no small measure both by federal grants and contracts to non-governmental and quasi-governmental resource and service providers (thus fueling the supply side of the market) and federal grants to states and to local public school districts for categorical and discretionary spending (thus fueling the demand side of the market).

The school improvement industry included innovative, niche operators responding to changing policy agendas. However, it was dominated by a small number of conservative commercial publishers that operated nationally; that produced the textbooks and assessments that had long served as the primary resources for classroom instruction; and that either resisted or slowly engaged new, costly production cycles (Rowan, 2002). Indeed, the incentives for commercial publishers was to leverage (rather than revise or reinvent) their core assets, given the high fixed costs of producing new editions of textbooks and assessments and the comparatively low marginal costs of printing and distributing them.
Thus, US public education emerged and evolved as something of a hybrid. It was a democratic enterprise that was a near-perfect representation of the founders’ aims for limited and distributed government: a powerful local role in public education, with a modest state role and an even more modest federal role. It was a market enterprise in which local public schools districts transacted routinely with non-governmental organizations for the resources and services needed to enact their core educational activity, within affordances and constraints established by state and federal governments. Interactions between governments and markets, in turn, fueled the pursuit of social equality through mass public schooling.

While responsive to some of the country’s most fundamental values, this architecture of local responsibility, limited and distributed government and market dependence functioned as a sort of “deep structure”: an institutionalized, ubiquitous, often taken-for-granted system of structural relationships, values and practices that contributed to a pattern of instructional organizational management in local public school districts that complicated the pursuit of excellence and equity in students’ educational experiences and outcomes.

Much as local public school districts evolved to take a conventional structural form, so, too, did they evolve to feature a conventional approach to organizing and managing their core educational activity: classroom instruction (Peurach and Yurkofsky, 2018; Peurach et al., 2019). This conventional approach began with the tracking of students between districts, schools and instructional opportunities within schools (Gamoran and Mare, 1989; Oakes, 1985; Powell et al., 1985). Indeed, the American default had district central offices sorting students into neighborhood schools, and schools sorting students into classes, remedial/compensatory programs and academic tracks. Central offices and schools then resourced those instructional venues (e.g. general education, special education, college preparatory education and vocational education) with teachers, curriculum frameworks, textbooks and other instructional materials, some developed locally, some developed by state governments and many developed by the school improvement industry. Individual teachers were delegated primary responsibility for (and considerable autonomy in) organizing and managing day-to-day instruction for the students assigned to them using the resources afforded them.

This pattern of sorting-resourcing-and-delegating was, in many ways, a microcosm of broader, macro-level values that drove the establishment and growth of the USA as a country: distrust of central government and, thus, weak district offices with modest direct engagement with instruction; the distribution of formidable educational responsibility to neighborhood schools; and, ultimately, trust in the initiative and entrepreneurship of individual teachers. But this pattern of sorting-resourcing-and-delegating was also problematic, in that it reinforced a pattern of generally low-level educational experiences and outcomes, especially among poor and minority students. For example:

- Many poor and minority students were sorted into neighborhood schools segregated by race, ethnicity and class; into low-level academic and vocational tracks; and into low-level remedial programs (Gamoran and Mare, 1989; Oakes, 1985; Powell et al., 1985). Thus segregated, social biases linking academic potential with race, ethnicity, class and gender often lowered expectations and responsibility for their success.

- Mirroring the incoherence of their environments, many classrooms were resourced with incoherent collections of guidance, texts and other instructional materials often selected by central offices and schools more in response to shifting fads and policy agendas and less in response to students’ specific educational needs, many lacking in specific guidance or support for their effective use in classrooms (Bryk et al., 1999; Cohen and Spillane, 1992; Powell et al., 1985).
Isolated in their own, private classrooms, many teachers struggled to learn to use these resources effectively in their own practice. Instead, they often depended most heavily on the most familiar resources (i.e. conservative commercial textbooks), refashioned innovative resources to support their existing practice (rather than change their practice) and carried on largely as they, themselves, were taught: by focusing on basic facts and skills using didactic, teacher-centered instructional approaches (Cohen, 1989; Cuban, 1993; Lortie, 1975). With that, the most salient influence on day-to-day classroom work was the “hand of history”: the social reproduction of traditional instruction over generations of teachers (Lortie, 1975).

This deep structure and its associated problems emerged over the course of three centuries, and it evolved quickly with increasing federal engagement in public education in the mid-1900s that drove many (and more diverse) students and more (and often uncoordinated) resources and services into public schools. Understandings of (and concerns with) this deep structure emerged and evolved in kind. Through the late 1800s into the mid-1900s, these concerns were expressed through a “progressive education movement” that challenged public schools as sorting mechanisms serving economic purposes and sought to reform them as egalitarian foundations for democratic participation (Cremin, 1964). Beginning in the mid-1900s, concerns rose with seminal research that identified problematic relationships among the institutionalized architecture of mass public schooling, instructional practice and students’ educational experiences and outcomes (e.g. Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972; Lortie, 1975; Meyer and Rowan, 1978).

**Contemporary context: reforming the US public education enterprise**

The second half of 1900s to the present has featured efforts to reform the US public education enterprise by maintaining universal access for all students while also pursuing excellence and equity in their educational experiences and outcomes. These efforts have not sought to reform the established architecture of US public education. Rather, these efforts have been advanced within the established architecture, with reforms in governments and markets aiming to affect new patterns of instructional organization and management in districts and schools.

**Reforms in governments and markets**

The press for excellence and equity in US public schooling has roots in increased federal engagement in public education dating to 1950s through the 1970s, with the same court decisions, legislation and policies detailed above as pressing for universal access also pressing to reduce disparities in educational opportunities through the equitable distribution of resources. Increased federal engagement in the 1970s and 1980s catalyzed national-level debate among states, professional associations, researchers and others that went further, by associating weaknesses and inequities in public education with instruction, its organization and its management (e.g. Peurach et al., 2019).

From the late 1980s into the early 2000s, interdependent federal and state policy activity maintained a keen focus on improving the quality of (and reducing disparities in) students’ educational experiences and outcomes. For example, in 1989 and 1990, leaders of the executive branches of the federal and state governments collaborated to develop and endorse a set of National Education Goals that established a national reform agenda focused on (among other things) improving instructional quality and outcomes in literacy, mathematics and science (Vinovskis, 1999). From the mid-1990s into the 2000s, the federal and state governments worked in interaction to pursue this agenda by establishing components of macro-level educational infrastructure common among leading national
Indeed, state-level standards and assessments have been a linchpin of contemporary reform efforts in the USA, due in large measure to their in-principle potential to effect coherent, interdependent improvements throughout the public education enterprise (Smith and O'Day, 1991). Most fundamentally, high-quality standards and assessments have potential to shift the focus of classroom instruction beyond basic facts and skills and rote, teacher-centered pedagogies toward ambitious, cognitively demanding content and complex, student-centered pedagogies. Further, they have potential to motivate and guide a local focus on excellence and equity aimed at reducing differences in education quality associated with tracking, especially when used to hold districts and schools accountable for improving student achievement on average and for reducing achievement disparities among sub-groups of historically marginalized students. Still further, they have potential to function as government mechanisms for reforming markets: on the supply side, by serving as an organizing framework aimed at bringing some level of coherence to resources and services provided by non-governmental organizations; and, on the demand side, by creating incentives for districts and schools to appropriate coordinated resources and services aligned with state standards and assessments.

Continuing to the present, federal and state policy activity presssing for excellence and equity has gone well beyond standards and assessments to include both the elaboration and reform of macro-level infrastructures bearing on the work of local public school districts. Examples include:

- Establishing requirements for evaluating teaching and its value added to students’ learning; and developing platforms for generating, managing and publicly reporting evidence of district and school quality.
- Reforming governance and financial infrastructures to create alternative categories of public school districts, e.g., “turnaround” districts that gather chronically underperforming schools under the jurisdiction of newly created public authorities and “charter school networks” that allow non-profit organizations to open public schools.
- Reforming financial infrastructure to shift primary funding for public schools from local to state governments (thus reducing funding disparities); and to provide families opportunities to use public funding to attend districts and schools of their choice (thus creating competition among districts and schools).
- Reforming federal-level innovation infrastructure to create additional leverage on markets, e.g., by establishing priorities in federal grant programs favoring comprehensive, large scale interventions that are anchored in research and yield rigorous evidence of positive impact on student outcomes.

Yet, even with increased federal and state engagement, federal and state education agencies are not evolving to resemble the comprehensive ministries and institutes of more centralized national education enterprises. Their historical role as administrative agencies of government has them with weak capabilities to provide educational support to districts and schools, and the continued press for limited government among political conservatives works against developing such capabilities.

Rather, the increased engagement of federal and state governments has been matched by increased federal and philanthropic investment in markets, via grant programs and funding streams for both non-governmental organizations (to support the development of resources and services) and to districts and schools (to support their adoption and use). These resources and services include standards-aligned curriculum materials; new instructional designs; assessments for benchmarking student progress; data and information systems;
approaches to evaluating and improving instructional practice; strategies for re-culturing
schools to value and support historically marginalized students; teacher and leader
pre-professional and in-service training; and enterprises and networks that can produce,
manage and support all of the preceding.

The dependence on non-governmental organizations actually goes further. As detailed
elsewhere in this special issue, federal, state and philanthropic policies and investments
have expanded markets beyond component resources and services as educational inputs to
public school districts. With a focus on expanding school choice for students and families,
these markets now include new types of publicly chartered/publicly funded school districts
managed by non-governmental organizations that operate as alternatives to – and in competition with –
conventional public school districts.

The dependence on non-governmental organizations goes still further, to include
collaborations between states and both non-governmental and quasi-governmental
enterprises to develop the very policy instruments intended to discipline and organize
markets: state-level standards and assessments (Cavanaugh, 2014; Doorey and Polikoff,
2016). Notable among these is the Common Core State Standards Initiative and its
associated assessments, Smarter Balanced and PARCC.

Efforts to reform governments and markets in pursuit of excellence and equity are very
much works in progress. This is, in part, due to a sort of “two steps forward, one step back”
phenomenon, with reform efforts within the existing architecture of US public education
evoking many of the very problems that those efforts seek to solve (Peurach et al., 2019). For
example, increasing federal and state engagement has not reduced dependence on the school
improvement industry (a key source of faddism, incoherence and conservativism in districts
and schools) but, instead, increased it[4]. Further, linchpin mechanisms for bringing
coherence and quality to the school improvement industry (i.e. state-level standards and
assessments) have been emerging and evolving over a 20+ year period across 50 states,
multiple content areas and multiple grade levels alongside other federal and state policy
initiatives pressing for excellence and equity, thus exacerbating macro-level incoherence.

Moreover, whether these reform efforts will maintain public and political support is an open
question. For example, the increased engagement of federal and state governments and of
philanthropists has evoked concerns about the weakening of local democratic control over
public schooling and the weakening of professional control over the work of instruction
(McGuinn, 2006; Ravitch, 2010). Further, the increased engagement of non-governmental
organizations in the educational experiences of students has evoked concerns about the
non-public control of public schooling and the application of corporate managerial approaches
in education (Burch, 2009; Molnar and Garcia, 2007; Reckhow, 2013; Tompkins-Stange, 2016)[5].

Reforms in public school districts

Thus, efforts to work within the established architecture of US public education to
reform governments and markets have new solutions emerging among-and-from legacy
problems. On the one hand, these efforts have yielded sustained attention to excellence and
equity in the national policy agenda, along with deeper engagement among both
governmental and non-governmental organizations in the core educational activity of public
schooling – classroom instruction. On the other hand, these efforts have exacerbated
macro-level incoherence among both governmental and non-governmental organizations
that has long complicated local efforts to organize and manage instruction.

Yet, within the established architecture, public school districts remain the level of
government responsible for creating and operating local schools not only in accord with
local values and aspirations, but also in interaction with reform and legacy dynamics in
governments and markets. As has been the case historically, local dynamics parallel
macro-level dynamics, with legacy dysfunction running alongside emerging solutions.
For example, there is evidence of public school districts engaging the national reform agenda symbolically and ritualistically (Peurach et al., 2018). These districts appropriate new resources and espouse new values that signal a responsiveness to the pursuit of excellence and equity (e.g. standards-aligned curriculum, culturally relevant pedagogies and benchmark assessments) while continuing to track students among districts, schools and instructional opportunities; and to delegate to teachers primary responsibility for making effective use of those resources in classroom instruction.

Yet there is also evidence of large numbers of public school districts taking up new domains of work, with central offices and schools going well beyond sorting-resourcing-and-delegating to actively organizing and managing classroom instruction to improve educational quality and to reduce disparities (Peurach et al., 2019). These include:

- Managing environmental relationships to reconcile among variably coordinated, evolving and dynamic influences in communities, policy environments and the school improvement industry bearing on the pursuit of excellence and equity.
- Building educational infrastructure that coordinates visions for instruction, formal resources (e.g. instructional models, curricula and assessments) and social resources (e.g. understandings, norms and relationships among teachers, leaders and students).
- Supporting the use of educational infrastructure in practice by developing teachers’ professional knowledge and capabilities.
- Managing performance both for continuous improvement and for accountability.
- Distributing instructional leadership among new leadership roles and teams responsible for performing, coordinating and managing all of the preceding.

Research suggests that more attention to (and coordination among) these emerging domains of work, the farther districts move toward functioning as coherent, instructional-focused education systems able to support all teachers and students in working together in new, more effective ways (Bryk et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2014). Moreover, a comprehensive review of the literature on the redesign of public school districts suggests that this work is being distributed and coordinated among central offices and schools in different ways in different districts, in accord with four primary types of education systems (Peurach et al., 2019). They are as follows:

- Managerial education systems characterized by a standard educational approach developed by the central office and administered with fidelity, district-wide.
- Market-driven education systems characterized both by limited central office engagement and responsibility in schools for devising differentiated educational approaches, with families and communities choosing among schools that are aligned with their educational values and aspirations.
- Federated education systems characterized by efforts to balanced standardization and differentiation, with the central office establishing common components of educational infrastructure, district-wide; and schools then adapting, extending and using these centrally established components to respond to the educational aspirations, values and needs of their particular students, families and communities.
- Networked education systems characterized by the central office and schools collaborating to develop, use, adapt and refine a conventional, district-wide educational approach.

None of these system types is necessarily more or less dependent on markets for the resources and services needed to organize and manage instruction. Rather, in each
systems type, central offices and schools face “make or buy” decisions centered either on developing internal capacity to devise, use, evaluate and refine essential resources and services; or outsourcing such work, by managing environmental relationships in ways that have them identifying and leveraging organizations, resources and services in the school improvement industry (Peurach et al., 2012).

Exploring variability in instructional organization and management: dynamics in two public school districts
The preceding analysis suggests variability among US public school districts as they organize and manage instruction in response to a contemporary press for excellence and equity. To explore this variability, we have been leading a comparative study of six education enterprises whose work includes serving poor and minority children, with a specific focus on how these enterprises organize and manage elementary literacy instruction[6]. Our sample includes:

- a conventional urban public school district;
- a conventional suburban public school district (SPSD) increasing in its socio-economic and racial diversity;
- a charter school network as an alternative public school district serving high poverty communities;
- the International Baccalaureate, a non-profit enterprise increasingly supporting high poverty districts and schools in the USA in organizing and managing instruction;
- Association Montessori International, a non-profit educational enterprise with historical roots serving children of poverty; and
- an urban, diocesan Catholic education enterprise with a commitment to serving children of poverty.

Year 1 of the study focused on sampling and securing access. Years 2 and 3 focused on data collection and analysis in the central office and two schools, respectively. Data include semi-structured interviews with central office leaders, school leaders and teachers; observations of professional development activities, meetings and instruction; and documents and artifacts. Analysis includes deductive and inductive coding using both an analytic framework around which the study was originally conceptualized (Cohen et al., 2018) and a parallel framework that emerged from a comprehensive review of the literature on the redesign of public school districts (Peurach et al., 2019).

For an analysis mapping system types onto four of the enterprises in this broader study, see Peurach et al. (in press)[7]. For a comprehensive analysis of ways that all six enterprises engage both governmental and non-governmental organizations, see Spillane, Seelig, Cohen, Peurach and Blaushild (in press).

Here, we provide a complementary account of the SPSD and the charter school network, focusing specifically on their histories, their improvement agendas and their approaches to organizing and managing instruction. The design is to provide brief vignettes illustrating central points that emerged from our historical and contemporary analyses, including variability in their histories, what qualifies as a “public school district” in the USA and approaches to organizing and managing instruction in pursuit of excellence and equity.

We elected to feature the SPSD and the charter school network because they are particularly illustrative of the dependence among US public school districts on non-governmental organizations in organizing and managing instruction in pursuit of excellence and equity.
On the one hand, these two enterprises are very different. Operated as a government enterprise, the SPSD emerged in the era of mass public schooling, is operating consistent with characteristics of federated education systems, and has a lean central office with little “in-house” capacity for educational design activity. Operated by a non-profit organization, the charter school network emerging during the contemporary reform era, is operating consistent with characteristics of networked education system, and has a highly developed central office with extensive “in-house” capacity for educational design activity.

On the other hand, despite these differences, both districts engage extensively with non-governmental organizations as primary providers of resources and services supporting their core educational work.

Vignette 1: Suburban Public School District (SPSD)
Established in the early 1800s, SPSD is a conventional US public school district: a geographically defined enterprise featuring a central office and nearly a dozen schools (an elementary-middle-high school feeder pattern, plus two schools serving students with special needs), all operating under the oversight of a locally elected school board. Through the 1990s, SPSD served a majority white, middle class and upper-middle class community. For the past two decades, shifts in the racial and socio-economic composition of the SPSD community currently have it serving approximately 12,000 students: 25 percent black/African American, 50 percent Hispanic/Latino, 20 percent white and 5 percent from other racial/ethnic groups. In total, 10 percent of the students in SPSD speak English as a second language, 15 percent have learning or physical disabilities and over 55 percent are economically disadvantaged.

The reform agenda in SPSD is set out in a strategic plan developed under the leadership of its chief administrator and approved by the school board. Minutes of school board meetings and references in the document, itself, suggest that the strategic plan not only reflects engagement with leaders, teachers and community members within SPSD, but also engagement with state and federal policy agendas pressing for excellence and equity. Key goals include:

- improving the quality of classroom instruction, student learning and student achievement;
- reducing disparities in student achievement and disciplinary actions as correlated with race, class, disability, native language and neighborhood; and
- doing the preceding in ways responsive not only to state standards and assessments, but also to the diversity of students, families and the community.

As set out in the strategic plan, central to the pursuit of excellence and equity is the development of a coherent, district-wide approach to teaching and learning, with one specific focus being elementary literacy. This coherent district-wide approach includes common instructional strategies, curriculum, assessments, academic interventions and grading practices that are aligned with state standards and that are supportive of student inquiry, project-based learning, and teacher-driven innovation. It also includes the development of “cultural competency” aimed at ensuring that leaders and teachers are knowledgeable of (and responsive to) diverse students, families and communities.

Toward these ends, SPSD is evolving as a federated education system. Where SPSD had, historically, delegated primary responsibility for organizing and managing instruction to individual schools, the SPSD central office is now establishing key components of educational infrastructure (e.g. coordinated visions, materials and values supporting high-quality instruction), along with resources both for supporting the use of infrastructure in practice and for managing performance (e.g. professional development opportunities,
classroom observation routines and assessment reviews). Working within these constraints, schools exercise agency and discretion in leveraging, adapting and extending these component resources in ways responsive to the students, families and neighborhoods that they serve.

Just as SPSD engaged federal and state policy agendas in establishing a local agenda for reform, it is also drawing on resources from the state in building the educational infrastructure needed to pursue its agenda. This includes coordinating the district’s vision for high-quality instruction and student learning with both state-level academic standards and assessments and state-level teacher evaluation policies. It also includes developing a new student code of conduct responsive to state policies encouraging restorative practices for managing student behavior and for supporting their social-emotional learning. The shift to restorative practices is a departure from punitive, “zero tolerance” practices that resulted in disproportionate numbers of disciplinary actions for Black and Latinx students.

At the same time that it is leveraging state resources, SPSD is also establishing and managing relationships with the school improvement industry to secure, leverage and coordinate the resources and services needed to establish a coherent, district-wide approach to teaching and learning in elementary literacy. Indeed, in pursuit of its ambitions for excellence and equity, SPSD is drawing on the support of non-governmental organizations in nearly every domain of work central to a functional education system. As detailed in interviews with central office leaders and as observed in district-wide leadership training sessions, SPSD is drawing on at least nine non-governmental organizations. Consider:

- The work of building educational infrastructure has SPSD drawing on a university-based reading and writing project to operationalize its vision for instruction and to secure formal resources for instruction; on a commercial enterprise for its literacy assessments; on a neighboring public school district with strong early career professional development in this same, university-based reading and writing project as a source from which to recruit more experienced and knowledgeable teachers; and on a university-based center to develop cultural competency as a social resource for instruction.

- The work of supporting the use of educational infrastructure in classroom practice has SPSD drawing on a literacy consultant for external professional development and on a university-based institute for resources to support internal, practice-based professional development.

- The work of managing performance has SPSD drawing on a commercial enterprise for a framework to evaluate instructional practice and on university-based projects for approaches to generating and analyzing both observational and assessment data on instructional practice and outcomes.

The preceding only reflects engagement with non-governmental organizations to organize and manage elementary literacy instruction. Our conjecture is that the SPSD’s engagement with non-governmental organizations goes further, as it works to organize and manage instruction in all academic content areas, all instructional venues (e.g. both general education and special education) and all levels of schooling (elementary, middle and high schools).

This dependence on non-governmental organizations, in turn, reduces the demands on SPSD to develop and distribute instructional leadership, as the staffing, work and costs of developing its essential instructional resources and services are borne by non-governmental organizations. Indeed, in the central office, responsibility for organizing and managing academic instruction district-wide, across all content areas, rests with a chief academic officer and fewer than ten staff members (none exclusively dedicated either to elementary
schools or to primary age reading and writing). In schools, primary responsibility for organizing and managing instruction rests with building principals, who are also responsible for all administrative work in their schools.

Vignette 2: Charter Public School District (CPSD)
Where SPSD had historical roots dating to the early 1800s, CPSD was established in the late 1990s as an alternative public school district that operates in market competition with other public school districts. Its legal authority to operate schools is granted by a state-approved authorizing agency (typically a college or university, a local government agency or a non-profit organization). In contrast to the geographic boundaries and neighborhood attendance zones of conventional public school districts, CPSD operates over 30 total elementary, middle and high schools distributed across multiple states, with a division of its central office operating in each state. CPSD currently serves more than 12,000 students, the large majority of whom are from high poverty communities and from racial and ethnic groups historically marginalized in US public education and society (in some schools, over 90 percent).

Where SPSD is operating as a federated education system with a lean instructional leadership, CPSD identifies and functions as a networked education system with highly developed instructional leadership. The CPSD central office has primary responsibility for building and improving educational infrastructure, devising supports for its use and managing performance, with a hallmark of CPSD being attention to (and coordination of) such work dating to its founding. The central office does this work in close interaction with schools, with school leaders and teachers afforded some discretion in adapting and extending centrally developed designs and approaches in response to local needs and circumstances. School-level adaptations then become resources used by the central office to improve those centrally developed designs and approaches. That, in turn, has multiple senior-level central office leaders managing units, teams and roles in the central office and schools responsible for curriculum and instruction, resource development, professional development and recruiting.

Thus, where SPSD essentially outsources responsibility for designing, managing and improving essential instructional resources and services, CPSD does this work "in house." Indeed, CPSD actually identifies itself as a non-governmental provider of “open source” resources for use in other public school districts.

But to say that CPSD has an in-house approach to organizing and managing instruction is not to say that it functions as a closed system insulated from its environments. Rather, CPSD is deeply engaged with its environments in establishing both its mission and its agenda for improvement. As a market operator, the legitimacy and viability of CPSD depend on its ability to recruit students, and that depends on understanding and responding to the educational aspirations and values of students and families. But, as an alternative public school district operating in the contemporary reform context, the legitimacy and viability of CPSD are also tied tightly to its ability to generate evidence that its students achieve at a higher level than their peers in other public school districts. With that, the core mission of CPSD is closely coordinated with federal and state reform agendas pressing for excellence and equity, and its improvement agenda is centered on bringing its tightly coordinated educational infrastructure into closer alignment with recent changes to standards and assessments among the states in which it operates.

Environmental interactions continue with efforts in CPSD to act on its mission and agenda. As with SPSD, CPSD draws on state resources in organizing and managing instruction. This includes coordinating efforts to build educational infrastructure and to manage performance not only with state standards and assessments, but also with other state-level data and processes for evaluating school quality. Further, even with formidable
in-house development capabilities, CPSD still draws on non-governmental organizations to support nearly every dimension of its work, both from the established school improvement industry and from a “charter eco-system” that has emerged to support the development of charter schools and networks. Consider:

- In developing a vision for students’ instructional opportunities and outcomes, central office leaders in CPSD referenced the Common Core State Standards (which are developed and maintained by a non-profit membership organization, and that serve as a resource for developing state-level academic standards in the states in which CPSD operates); the Advanced Placement program (which is operated by a non-profit organization, and which aims to improve the rigor of academic content to support students’ movement in-and-through college); the SAT and ACT tests (college entrance exams developed and administered by non-profit organizations); and college and university admissions and academic standards.

- Reports of development activity have CPSD drawing on non-governmental organizations (including other districts and schools) for formal resources (e.g. scientifically validated assessments of academic skills, mindsets and outcomes); for “best practices” that are useful and effective in other contexts; and for digital platforms that support the geographically distributed work of developing instructional materials and resources and of using them in large numbers of classrooms.

- In cultivating social resources, central office leaders and annual reports describe efforts to recruit from alternative, non-university-based teacher preparation programs that align with CPSD’s mission and values; to leverage newly established graduate schools established in collaboration with early, leading charter school networks as sources of teacher and leader development; and to collaborate with non-profit organizations established to support the incubation of charter school networks, the development of their senior leaders and the development of network-based design capabilities.

Again, as with our analysis of SPSD, our conjecture is that the extent of engagement with non-governmental organizations actually goes further. For example, the preceding account is drawn from an analysis of instructional organization and management in elementary literacy, and not from a systematic analysis of instructional organization and management across all academic content areas, all instructional venues and all levels of schooling. Moreover, though CPSD publicly recognizes many private donors in its annual reports, the analysis did not systematically probe the relationships between CPSD and the wide array of national and local philanthropists and donors funding the development of charter schools and charter school networks in the USA.

**Discussion and implications: considerations for cross-national research**

Thus, the US public school enterprise has long depended on non-governmental organizations for educational infrastructure beyond the limited resources provided by federal and state governments. Historically, this dependence was instrumental in the emergence of a default pattern of instructional organization and management in local districts that resulted in low-quality and inequitable educational experiences and outcomes for many students, especially those historically marginalized in US schools and society. Currently, this dependence is instrumental in effecting variation in ways that local districts are organizing and managing instruction in responses to a broader policy press for educational excellence and equity.

The dependence of US public education on non-governmental organizations is anchored in deeply institutionalized social, political and economic values dating to the country’s...
founding and that continue to function as constraints on (and not the object of) educational reform. Yet, despite non-governmental organizations being valued as sources of entrepreneurialism and innovation, one result is that US educational reform takes on more of an evolutionary (rather than transformational) character, in that new solutions always emerge in-and-from the same problematic conditions that they seek to redress.

Among countries in which dependence on non-governmental organizations is on the rise, the value of the US case is that it provides a foundation for framing issues for cross-national research exploring relationships among governments, markets and the organization and management of instruction. The preceding analysis suggests four key lines of research.

The first is research comparing legacy architectures of national public education enterprises; contemporary reform efforts driving increased engagement by non-governmental organizations; and the social, political and economic values underlying each of the preceding. Unless historically centralized national education enterprises have also operated as closed systems, then even those enterprises have always engaged with (and depended on) non-governmental organizations in some ways. If so, then contemporary engagement with non-governmental organizations is not completely new, but, instead, a shift. Thus, a key issue for cross-national research is to explain and compare the origins and distribution of educational responsibilities among governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The second is research comparing ways that legacy architectures and contemporary reforms interact to create macro-level educational infrastructure that conditions the work of sub-units responsible for organizing and managing day-to-day instruction. In the US case, contemporary reform efforts advanced within the legacy architecture have reproduced and exacerbated fragmentation and incoherence in macro-level educational infrastructure. Unclear, though, is, whether fragmentation and incoherence are necessary consequences of engaging non-governmental organizations, or whether (and how) more historically centralized, coherent, national education enterprises can reproduce that coherence as they engage non-governmental organizations. Thus, key issues for research are to examine and explain cross-national differences in ways that legacy architectures enable, constrain or complicate contemporary reforms that redistribute educational responsibilities among governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The third is research comparing patterns of instructional organization and management within and between national public education enterprises. In the USA, despite macro-level fragmentation and incoherence, the initial structuration of the public education enterprise yielded a dominant (albeit problematic) pattern of instructional organization and management. While exacerbating macro-level incoherence, contemporary reform efforts do not appear to be driving the emergence of a new, dominant pattern but, instead, variation in the ways that lower-level sub-units organize and manage instruction in pursuit of reform priorities. Thus, key issues for research are to examine and explain ways that legacy architectures and contemporary reforms interact to effect patterns of instructional organization and management among lower-level sub-units responsible for day-to-day instructional activity.

The fourth is research comparing relationships in national public education enterprises among macro-level educational infrastructures; patterns of instructional organization and management; and classroom instruction. On this matter, the account of historical dynamics in the USA is particularly instructive. While incoherence in educational infrastructure and considerable teacher autonomy would predict variation in classroom instruction, the most salient influence on classroom work was the “hand of history”: the social reproduction of traditional instruction over generations of teachers (Lortie, 1975). Thus, key issues for research are to examine and explain ways that contemporary reforms and new approaches to instructional organization and management interact with the hand of history in shaping instruction.
These four lines of research, in turn, are components of a broader proposed agenda for cross-national research that would examine efforts around the globe to develop instructionally focused education systems that advance equity and excellence (Spillane, Peurach and Cohen, in press). Research of this sort would move beyond reductionist approaches to cross-national research that presumes monolithic, homogeneous national education enterprises. Instead, it would move toward approaches that examine variation within and among national education enterprises to explain how their histories, legacy architectures, contemporary reforms and patterns of instructional organization and management interact to shape students’ day-to-day lives in classrooms.

Acknowledgments
Work on this paper was supported by the Spencer Systems Study at Northwestern University and University of Michigan, funded by a research grant from the Spencer Foundation (SP0034639-201600066). The authors gratefully acknowledge those who shared comments on earlier manuscripts and presentations on which the paper draws, as well as the members of the research team: Naomi Blaushild, Kathryn Gabriele, Daniella Hall Sutherland, Whitney Hegseth, Christine M. Neumerski, Melissa Ortiz, Jennifer Seelig and Maxwell Yurkofsky. All opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any funding agency.

Notes
1. The analysis draws from (and extends) a comprehensive review of the literature on public school district redesign in the USA (Peurach et al., 2019) and a paper examining dilemmas endemic to such work (Cohen et al., 2018). Components of the analysis were first presented by the lead author at the 2018 Cooper Annual Leadership for Learning Lecture at the University of Virginia and at the April 2018 Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, and they were further developed in a subsequent policy brief (Peurach and Yurkofsky, 2018).

2. Chief among these were the civil rights and disability rights movements; Méndez v. Westminster School District of Orange County in 1947; Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954; Lau v. Nichols in 1974; the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.


4. One example of this increased dependence lies in districts acquiring new benchmark assessments, data warehouses, diagnostic regimens and instructional resources to support a level of organizational responsiveness to students’ educational needs historically uncommon in US public schools.

5. At the national level, one example of such concerns tempering ongoing reform efforts was the reauthorization of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (which increased federal and state engagement in substantive educational matters) as the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (which both devolves considerable educational authority to states and requires that states give increased discretion to districts in heeding accountability requirements). At the grassroots level, one example of such concerns tempering ongoing reform efforts is an “opt-out movement” in which parents simply withhold their students from government-mandated standardized testing.

6. These are characterized as education “enterprises” because all support the organization, management and improvement of instruction at a large scale, with the aim of increasing quality and reducing disparities. Yet, from an organizational perspective, there is variation among them. Two are conventional public school districts operated by government organizations (the urban and suburban districts). One is an alternative public school district operated by a public-chartered and publicly-accountable non-profit organization (the charter school network). One is a non-profit
organization that supports the organization and management of instruction in both conventional and alternative public school districts (the International Baccalaureate). One is a private, philosophically aligned education enterprise operated by a non-governmental organization (Montessori). And one is a private, religiously aligned enterprise operated by a non-governmental organization (the diocesan Catholic school system). This sample includes the Montessori and Catholic enterprises to examine how shifting societal ambitions for public education (and the reforms driving them) are also playing out in non-public schools.

7. A complementary analysis provides examples of using this system typology to examine the three public school districts in our study and the International Baccalaureate as an enterprise that collaborates with public schools and districts (Peurach et al., in press). Specifically, this complementary analysis examines the urban public school district as a managerial system, the suburban public school district as a federated system and the charter school network as a networked system. To demonstrate the possible complexity of system redesign efforts, it also examines a school in this broader study that is in a public school district pursuing a strategy akin to portfolio management (thus demonstrating characteristics of market-driven systems) and collaborating with the International Baccalaureate as a primary source of educational support (thus demonstrating characteristics of networked systems). The use of this systems typology to compare among public, religious and philosophically aligned education enterprises will be explored in future analyses.

References
Doorey, N. and Polikoff, M. (2016), Evaluating the Content and Quality of Next Generation Assessments, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Washington, DC.


McGuinn, P.J. (2006), *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965-2005*, University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, KS.


**Corresponding author**

Donald J. Peurach can be contacted at: dpeurach@umich.edu
The power of third sector organizations in public education

Nina Kolleck
Department of Educational Research and Social Systems,
Free University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to address school–NGO interactions by analyzing the power of foundations – a specific type of third sector organization or NGO in education.

Design/methodology/approach – Data are collected through a quantitative survey, qualitative interviews, official documents, reports and websites. Social network analysis and grounded theory are used to analyze the data with the aim to develop a theoretical approach.

Findings – The study identifies three dimensions, i.e. relational, structural and discursive dimensions of power. Based on the analysis of an illustrative multi-stakeholder initiative, the paper highlights the role of foundations in framing educational settings, concepts and structures of the education system as such.

Practical implications – The three-dimensional power perspective offered in this paper is particularly useful for scholars investigating school–NGO interactions or multi-stakeholder partnerships in education. Furthermore, it is of crucial importance for practitioners, school principals and education administrators dealing with school–NGO interactions given that foundations seem to be increasingly able to draw on new sources of power in these interactions.

Originality/value – While the number and power of the third sector in education continues to rise worldwide, there is wide consensus that NGO power in education has, to date, hardly been researched. This paper contributes to this dearth of research by uncovering foundations’ different sources of power and by developing a theoretical approach for analyzing the power of third-sector organizations in education.

Keywords Public education, Third sector, Social network analysis, Foundation, Cross-sectoral networks, Power analysis

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The outcomes of international student assessments (such as the Programme for International Student Assessment) have raised questions about the global competitiveness of educational systems in many countries. One of the reactions to these rankings has been a surge of interest in the role of social networks between schools and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in processes of educational improvement (Lewis and Patrinos, 2011). Since 2010, a rising number of cross-sectoral networks have emerged in which formal education actors (e.g. schools) and NGOs (non-profit and for-profit organizations) seek to address current challenges in education worldwide (de Boer et al., 2018; Rowan and Meyer, 2006). NGOs are becoming progressively involved in school improvement initiatives and scholars observe that NGOs are increasingly exerting power on schools and educational systems worldwide (e.g. Berkovich and Foldes, 2012; Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Kolleck, 2016; Verger, 2012; Yemini et al., 2018). At the same time, there is a wide consensus that there is still only little research on the power of private influences in education (Souto-Otero, 2015) and that research has so far neglected the power of NGOs in educational settings and schools (e.g. Berkovich and Foldes, 2012; Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Fahrenwald and Feyerer, 2018; Verger, 2012; Yemini et al., 2018). This is especially true for foundations, which can be characterized as a particular type or legal category of NGO – being established as charitable trusts
This paper seeks to contribute to this research gap by analyzing the power of foundations and by developing a theoretically based empirical approach which may be used in future research to systematically study the power of foundations as a typical form of NGO in education. More specifically, the paper aims to find answers to the main research question as to how foundations wield power in order to shape the education agenda and exert influence on schools.

Although interactions between foundations and schools are not unidirectional but rather reciprocal, the analysis for this paper is focused on the power exerted by foundations. It suggests a systematic approach to understand and analyze foundations’ opportunities for, and limitations on, exerting power in education. This in turn may be extended and used to study reciprocal influences in school–NGO interactions.

While studies highlight the growing importance of the power of private actors in education systems (e.g. Souto-Otero, 2015) and refer to the lack of studies in particular with respect to the role of companies and foundations in schools (e.g. Verger et al., 2016a; Yemini et al., 2018), to date, most scholars in education research have used an intuitive notion of power. Some have focused on a single dimension of power such as structural power (e.g. Menashy, 2018) or discursive power (e.g. Kolleck, 2017). Hence, a systematic power perspective which distinguishes the different sources of power and the varying faces it may embody has been missing so far.

In exploring how foundations wield power in order to shape the education agenda and exert influence on schools, this paper does not consider whether foundations should gain power nor does it intend to make a value judgment about the power of foundations in education. Instead, the purpose of this paper is to systematically analyze the different ways NGOs succeed in exerting power, what sources they can use and what helps them to be successful. Building upon Lukes (2005), it differentiates three dimensions of power: the relational, structural and discursive dimensions of the power of NGOs in education. According to this perspective, relational power stresses that individuals always possess a relative degree of power, which they may make use of in specific situations. Hence, an actor A can influence an actor B if, during a social interaction, he gets what he wants and is successful in influencing actor “B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Dahl, 1957, p. 203). Discursive power relates to the power of words, i.e. the shaping of discourses, perceptions or interpretations. Structural power, finally, can be conceptualized as formal decision-making power which enables actors to control resources, maintain financing arrangements, set rules and keep a superior economic position due to historically constituted, economic or organizational structures.

By following this line of argumentation, the paper avoids a purely rationalist or structuralist assessment and combines different theoretical perspectives on NGO power in education, which allow for operationalizations using different methodological approaches based on actor-centered, structural and discursive methodologies. Hence, the main objective of the paper is twofold: on the one hand, it analyzes how the different sources of power, i.e. the structural, relational and discursive power sources, are used and implemented by foundations. On the other hand, it aims to classify foundation’s sources of power in education and to synthesize empirical findings according to grounded theory to develop a theoretical approach which can be adapted in future studies on power relations in school–NGO interactions worldwide.

The paper is divided into seven sections. Following this introduction, background information on the power of NGOs in education is discussed. The third section provides the theoretical approach of the study. The fourth section introduces the case – a
multi-stakeholder initiative which has been implemented in one of the poorest German regions, the Ruhr area, with the aim to restructure its educational system. Furthermore, the methodology used and the data collected are presented. The subsequent section analyzes how one of the biggest German foundations wields power in education by establishing a large and far-reaching multi-stakeholder network. Empirical results are discussed in the sixth section. Finally, the theoretical approach developed in this paper is synthesized, the strengths of the three-dimensional power perspective are outlined and foundations’ opportunities to use the three sources of power as well as the limitations they face are discussed.

Background

The demand for an involvement of NGOs or foundations is not new but rather has a long tradition (Verger et al., 2016a). As in the past, schools aim at gaining private support for equipment, provisions or school improvement and third-sector organizations such as foundations seek power in schools in an effort to gain legitimacy or to take part in the shaping of norms and social values at the earliest possible moment. The retreat of the state (Strange, 1996), the reconfiguration of power relations between state and non-state actors (Kolleck, 2012), the “rise of policy networks” (Menashy, 2018) as well as the changing role of non-state actors and public pressures have urged NGOs to increasingly try to become involved in education and to take part in debates on school development (Ball, 2012; Verger et al., 2012).

As a result of the global competition between educational systems due to the rise of international comparative studies in education, the number and scope of school–NGO interactions have increased significantly worldwide (Verger et al., 2016b) and foundations have become important players in processes of school improvement (Kolleck and Kulin, 2016). Schools have turned into strategically significant cooperation partners for foundations. This is also reflected in the fact that education belongs to the most relevant fields for foundations in countries such as the USA and Germany as well as in Europe (Thümler et al., 2014). Foundations are increasingly creating partnerships or multi-stakeholder networks that aim to promote equitable participation (Menashy, 2018) and help shape public understanding of the concept of education (Kolleck, Bormann and Höhne, 2015).

On the one hand, scholars argue that although multi-stakeholder partnerships give the impression of equal rights for stakeholders, “the degree to which such partnerships truly reflect equitable participation and power remains uncertain” (Menashy, 2018, p. 13). Actors such as schools often remain weaker in such partnerships than NGOs (e.g. Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Yemini, 2017). On the other hand, studies highlight that a collaborative culture is common in cases where NGOs do not jeopardize the power of state actors (Yemini et al., 2018, p. 257).

In the past, research on the power of NGOs was primarily conducted without specific conceptualizations of power and only a few studies have implemented systematic theoretical approaches to study these power relations. Studies adapting a specific definition of power were explicitly limited to one of the sources of power, such as NGOs’ discursive power (e.g. Kolleck, 2017) or structural power (e.g. Menashy, 2018). Previous research has also elaborated questions of legitimacy and how effectively NGOs have wielded power in schools or educational settings (see e.g. Thümler, 2017). From this point of view, NGOs are treated as interest groups, wielding their power within schools or school systems (e.g. Yemini, 2017). Despite the increasing relevance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in education, there is broad consensus that both the power of NGOs and processes of legitimization, which grant civil society actors the right to wield power, have been neglected by educational and social scientists so far (see e.g. Menashy, 2018).
The current study contributes to the literature on school–NGO interactions and multi-stakeholder partnerships by analyzing how foundations wield power in order to shape the education agenda and exert influence on schools.

**Theoretical orientation**

Power is one of the most controversial concepts in social sciences in general and in education research more specifically. In the past, studies on educational organizations or institutions have often implemented a Weberian understanding of power (Samier, 2002). Weber (1968) represented a very broad, bureaucratic and leadership-oriented perspective on power by defining it as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability exists” (p. 53). This conception of power makes it easy to analyze the way different state actors wield power on the shaping of educational systems. However, against the background of the increasing relevance in recent years of non-state actors, we need a new conceptualization of their power given that NGOs’ sources of power and the ways in which they use it are likely to be at least partly dissimilar to states.

In the current literature the increasing power of NGOs in education is often described as neoliberal (e.g. Verger et al., 2016b) as it is based on a conception of homo oeconomicus. Although the terms “neoliberalism” and “homo oeconomicus” were not in use until the nineteenth century, they are often related to the ideas of Smith who highlights that individuals have sympathy for the well-being of others and claims that the social prosperity granted by the “invisible hand” does not come from self-interest and profit-seeking but rather from “sympathy” for others. Thus, the act of observing others makes people aware of the morality of their own behavior and provides the basis for general social order (Smith, 1761; Kolleck, 2011). This ambiguity among self-interested, rational and profit-driven behavior and individuals’ sympathy for others may also be observed in the literature on civil society involvement in education. On the one hand, scholars highlight that the increasing power of non-state actors in education is associated with sympathy for others, social innovations (Dees, 2005; Thümler, 2017), pluralism and educational equality (Patrinos et al., 2009). On the other hand, critiques are related to the fear of a dominance of neoliberal ideologies as well as self-interested and profit-driven behavior in education systems and schools (Ball, 2012).

However, while the neoliberal notion of power, in contrast to the Weberian understanding, does also consider non-state actors to be powerful, it does not distinguish the different power sources educational actors may use.

In the academic literature, there are only few studies which focus different dimensions of NGO power in education. With the aim to examine power asymmetries within the Global Partnership for Education, Menashy (2018) applied to the educational context a conceptualization of structural power as developed by International Relations Scholars. Structural power is also analyzed by Au and Lubienski (2016) who showed that non-profit organizations, such as the Gates Foundation, are successful in introducing political change and shaping educational systems. Though the Gates Foundation does not seem able to privatize public education, it has been successful in marketizing the educational “system by giving the public sector a more market-like institutional environment” (Au and Lubienski, 2016, p. 39). In other words, while the superior position of the Gates Foundation in economic and political structures has not enabled the organization to introduce a more privatized school system, it has allowed it to privatize the policy process by influencing rules in its favor. The authors conclude that “these private philanthropists are not just influencing public policy, but are private policymakers, unaccountable to the broader public” (Au and Lubienski, 2016, p. 38).
In contrast to this structural perspective on NGO power, other scholars implement a more relational viewpoint and study NGO power by analyzing interactions between NGOs and schools (e.g. Eyal and Yarm, 2018; Kolleck, 2014; Yemini, 2017; Yemini and Sagie, 2015). These studies are more focused on the exploration of collaboration, mutuality, social relations and interactions when studying power relations in education. The relational perspective of power has already been expressed by Dahl (1957) as a phenomenon resulting from relationships among people.

A third group of studies investigates how third-sector organizations make use of discursive power. Scholars arguing along this line focus on the analysis or reconstruction of debates on education to study how NGOs seek to: shape values, traditions and future generations; gain social acceptance as legitimate actors in education; be observed as necessary participants in education policy (Kolleck, Bormann and Höhne, 2015) and foster trust in their capacities and know-how (Kolleck, 2017; Yemini, 2017). These studies often relate to the work of Foucault (2013), who stressed that discourses are always related to the fight for power and fields of knowledge.

To better understand the opportunities available to, but also the limits, NGOs as they seek to influence educational norms, settings, structures or the global educational system as such, this paper proposes a methodological design, which draws on qualitative and quantitative analysis. Building upon Lukes (2005) who differentiated relational, structural and discursive dimensions of power of NGOs in education it uncovers the sources of power foundations may use when interacting with schools by analyzing an illustrative multi-stakeholder initiative established by one of the largest German foundations. The next sections discuss the methodological approach chosen to derive theoretical information from empirical findings.

**Method and justification of the illustrative empirical case**

To empirically analyze the different dimensions of the power of NGOs in education, this paper analyzes the establishment of an illustrative multi-stakeholder or cross-sectoral initiative, which was initiated by one of the largest German foundations in the Ruhr area – one of the poorest regions in Germany.

The case: adapting collective impact in Germany through establishing a multi-stakeholder initiative

In recent years, an increasing number of multi-stakeholder initiatives or cross-sectoral networks have emerged with the aim to foster interactions between schools and foundations or NGOs and to collectively address current challenges in education systems worldwide. With these initiatives, practitioners and researchers also seek to respond to an observed lack of collaboration in education and the postulation that this may result in many of the current educational problems (Bryk et al., 2011, p. 130).

Practitioners and researchers have developed a diverse number of concepts to address these challenges. Examples of such concepts include networked communities (Bryk et al., 2011), professional learning communities (e.g. Stoll et al., 2006), turnaround strategies (e.g. Peurach and Neumerski, 2015) or collective impact approaches.

In Germany, the first effort to implement an educational network (initiative) based on the principles of collective impact was realized in 2013 in the German Ruhr area. One of the largest and most powerful German foundations in the education sector established the multi-stakeholder initiative as a joint educational initiative with the aim to strengthen educational justice in this area. The Ruhr region is the largest metropolitan area in Germany and among the five largest metropolitan areas in Europe. It consists of 53 cities and municipalities and 5m inhabitants (including about a million children/young people). This region is characterized by an increasing social polarization and a large percentage of individuals with migrant backgrounds or refugees, especially among the youth.
Mixed methods approach

This paper implements qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyze the illustrative case and to develop a more general theory on NGO power in education. More specifically, it uses document analyses, qualitative in-depth interviews and a quantitative questionnaire including network analytical items. Hence, the paper applies a mixed method approach. Official documents, reports and website data are used as complementary data sources. Data are analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques of social network analysis as well as grounded theory to study the interactions of the actors involved in implementing the collective impact initiative and the power relations therein. In the following, the methodological approach and the analysis of the collected data are described in more detail.

Qualitative sampling and data collection

In a first step, 21 individuals responsible for establishing the collective impact initiative were interviewed in 2015 using a semi-structured interview guideline and qualitative network maps (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980). The number and the institutional background of the interviewees were determined in advance to ensure that actors from schools and the foundation were involved. Interviewees were asked, in particular, to provide information on the current situation of the collective impact initiative, their motivations and aims concerning their involvement in the initiative, their relationships with other important individuals as well as general opportunities and challenges. Transcribed interviews were evaluated according to the rules of grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin (1996) and with the help of the analysis software MAXQDA.

Quantitative instrumentation, sampling and data analysis

Following the analysis of qualitative data, an online survey was constructed and implemented. In accordance with a snowball approach, individuals known to be involved in the initiative were addressed with this questionnaire and were asked to name their cooperation partners (Kowald et al., 2015).

The questionnaire encompassed questions about socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, age, formal education and training), the respondents’ professional relationship to the initiative, their main affiliation, the length of their collaboration and their professional position within the initiative. Interviewees also provided information concerning the respondents’ identification with the initiative’s five goals. Finally, the questionnaire included network analytical items concerning the social relations and the qualities of the relationships between the individuals involved in establishing the educational initiative. Here, network analytical scales as applied in the General Social Survey (Burt, 1984; Merluzzi and Burt, 2013) were used (Kolleck et al., 2017).

In total, 954 individuals were invited to participate in the online survey, of which 786 took part (response rate: 82.4 percent). Among these respondents, 334 (42.5 percent) stated that they had been working for or collaborating with the initiative and were asked the full range of questions.

Results

Relational power

Relational perspectives are based on assumptions of methodological individualism and explain power following Dahl’s (1957) notion of power, i.e. as a phenomenon resulting from relationships among people. Researchers studying NGO power in education based on this perspective employ an actor-centered approach. Relational power has often been observed in lobbying or advocacy initiatives (e.g. Kolleck, 2009) when NGOs or foundations
undertake media campaigns, commission and publish favorable research results, use social media or facilitate collective action, design teaching materials, directly contact political decision makers on education-specific issues or propose policy solutions. Hence, this aspect of power has links to social network theory in that actors are regarded as being embedded in social configurations and the interactions, social relations and characteristics of the environment are placed at the center of empirical analyses (e.g. Kolleck, Jörgens and Well, 2017; Kolleck et al., 2017).

According to a relational perspective on power, educational challenges are addressed, for instance, through the design of successful collaborations between schools and NGOs. This intention is also expressed in the material collected from interviews with foundation staff:

How can I change something structurally or strategically and who do I have to win as a partner? Who can turn the right screws? (Interview 16)

The interviews analyzed for this paper point out that relational power does not arise solely through predefined roles within the network, but that it is dependent on individuals:

So, of course that’s also [...] a merit of the people who sit there on the central positions, who of course also have a certain professional history and also know people. (Interview 7)

According to this citation, relational power results from the individual positions in the network, the connections and the possibilities for accessing information through social relationships. By improving the cooperation between school and extracurricular educational organizations, the initiative seeks to strengthen educational justice in this area. Special features of this collective impact initiative are its regional approach and that it is funded by a single foundation, which provides financing for the project to the sum of Euro 15m for each of the two phases. Visualizations of the network data collected through surveys show that the backbone organization, which is funded by the foundations, has the most powerful role in the network.

In Figure 1, the nodes represent the respondents. The connections visualize both the cooperation and the transfer of information. The color of the nodes shows the actors’ professional affiliations, and the size of the nodes visualizes their power and centrality. In Figure 1, the larger the node is, the higher its value is according to eigenvector centrality (i.e. the more influential the node is within the network).

Figure 1 shows that centrality and power in the network are unevenly distributed. While the network was characterized by a large number of actors with low centrality values, there were only few large nodes that apparently control the cooperation and information flows. These findings coincide with our assumptions about the relevance of the backbone organization in collective impact initiatives (e.g. Hanleybrown et al., 2012). Moreover, this apparently important role of backbone organizations should be discussed in the context of the short duration of the educational initiative. At the time of the data collection, the initiative had been under way for less than three years. The finding that a few individual actors play a dominant role in the network can be regarded as problematic because of the foundation’s intention to limit the funding period of the project. This raises the question of whether the initiative will survive when the backbone organization and its central nodes disappear. Altogether, however, the findings gathered with social network analysis show the success of the foundation in strategically connecting organizations from different sectors and thereby increasing its relational power.

The backbone organization’s central role shows its central position and its sources of relational power. At the same time, network analytical results demonstrate that the foundation has failed to successfully involve schools. Whereas the backbone organization, which is affiliated with the foundation, has a central role in the implementation process, educational
actors such as schools were found to be hardly integrated (Kappauf and Kolleck, 2018). This lack of integration concurs with qualitative results indicating weak trust and low motivation of these actors to become involved in the cross-sectoral collaboration.

**Discursive power**

In contrast to the conception of relational power, discursive power can be defined as the power of words, i.e. the shaping of discourses, perceptions or interpretations. This second dimension of power is related to norms, ideas and social interactions. It is reflected in discourses, cultural values and communicative practices.

Empirical analyses for this paper show that the foundation is active in debates on restructuring the education system in the Ruhr area in order to increase discursive power. For the foundation, the discursive field of education provides possibilities to bring in its own understanding and to advance social impact. Its former secretary general, for instance, has explicitly referred to educational issues as a chance to influence norms, values and the “young generation” in general:

> It is through education that we pass on our values and traditions, as well as the technical skills needed for building the future. Therefore, it is certainly of the highest relevance for charitable foundations across the globe, and the first issue that needs to be addressed whenever we set out to support the young generation. (Lorentz, 2014, p. x)

This citation is one example of the foundation’s desire to be legitimized as an actor with power in education. This idea was also expressed in the qualitative interviews. For example,
one of the key players involved in establishing the multi-stakeholder initiative emphasized the foundation’s power in setting the agenda:

[...] this foundation as a new controlling actor who also operates in agenda setting and, of course, has a particular interest in placing their themes. (Interview 12)

Or in the initiative’s self-description:

Complex social tasks such as the sustainable change of the education system in the Ruhr Metropolis can only be mastered if all systemically important actors participate in it. For this reason, the work of XY (the multi-stakeholder initiative, author) is based on the approach of “Collective Impact”. The concept developed in the USA focuses on bringing together actors from different areas through networking, motivating them to formulate binding common goals and thus multiplying the impact of their actions. (RuhrFutur, 2018)

These quotes indicate the self-empowerment of the foundation in the education sector in the Ruhr area. The articulated goals express the foundation’s dominant intentions. Education is described as a means of solving societal problems and of taking part in the shaping of societal change.

This orientation is also expressed in the visionary character attributed to the initiative:

These are people who [...] simply have such a vision for themselves where they want to go. [...] This is an important basis for such a joint work. (Interview 18)

The education sector is also regarded as an ideal place for foundations to initiate and implement educational innovations (Kolleck, Bormann and Hurrelmann, 2015). Hence, foundations do not only seek to legitimize their own activities in education but also use the discursive field around education in order to bring in their own reform ideas. It is against this background that we can interpret the foundation’s intention to bring about educational reforms through establishing the educational initiative RuhrFutur:

They asked us burning questions we had not thought about before. They have led us to consider alternatives and to rethink organizational procedures. (Interview 6)

If foundations succeed in being accepted as innovative actors in society, they may also improve their relative position in the public sphere. The initiating and financing foundation plays a special role in the constellation presented here. As the lending institution, it has the final decision-making power over the granting of financial resources:

The foundation is in a position from which it can continuously legitimize our activities [...] It can potentially become dangerous because it decides on our existence. (Interview 4)

Finally, though its financial resources are small compared to what the government invests in education, the foundation is becoming increasingly involved in the shaping of discourses and related values, ideas, norms and concepts.

Structural power

Structural perspectives are based on assumptions of methodological structuralism. In general, structural power can be defined as formal decision-making power which enables actors to control resources, maintain financing arrangements, set rules and keep a superior economic position due to historically constituted, economic or organizational structures.

According to structural power perspectives, actors are embedded in a structural system and confronted with the predetermination of behavioral options due to social positions in the hierarchy, asymmetries, financial advantages or unequivocal material resources. “Deeply embedded in these structures, actors may moreover be unable to recognize their own exercising of power, nor their subordination and oppression” (Menashy, 2018, p. 14).
Arguing from a structural power perspective, foundations possess various possibilities to exert power in education. On the one hand, governments have the control over education systems meaning that public education is an instrument of nation states to strengthen legitimacy of national systems. This structurally superior position of the state is also highlighted by foundation staff in the interview data analyzed for this paper:

Many of our projects can only work if they are supported by the Federal Ministry. So, we need to convince the Ministry that these projects are valuable and important. (Interview 1)

On the other hand, the retreat of the state (Strange, 1996) and the increasing governance without government (Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992) have also affected the education sector worldwide. They have resulted in an increasing privatization and marketization of education systems and a general trend toward an involvement of third-sector organizations such as foundations in education. The structural power of the foundation is also expressed in the interviews analyzed for this paper:

The foundation is the authority. They decide which projects get accepted, they define the content orientation of school improvement [...]. (Interview 2)

While foundations are becoming more prominent and visible within education systems worldwide, there is a gap between different third-sector organizations with respect to the financial means on which their educational activities rely. Many foundations are able to draw on large financial resources in pursuit of their ideational or political interests; some others tend not to have the same capacities at their disposal.

In recent decades, however, the structural power of foundations active in education has grown in both respects: they occupy increasingly influential positions in education systems, they have expanded their rule-setting activities and they have greater financial resources at their disposal, which may be transformed into power. In contrast to foundations’ activities in other societal domains, however, most of these activities are developed with control or input by public authorities. Especially in countries like Germany, school education as a public good is one of the state’s priority tasks, and non-state actors operating in the education sector are faced with preconceptions and a lack of legitimacy. Foundations’ financial resources are still relatively small compared to the state. For instance, in Germany – which has the world’s second largest foundation sector – foundations spend only about as much on education projects each year as is invested by the German government in a single morning (Thümler et al., 2014, p. 7).

The foundation analyzed for this paper belongs to the financially strongest and substantially most influential NGOs in Germany in general and in the Ruhr region in particular. With a budget of more than Euro 37bn the foundation was able to establish various educational programs and initiatives and to substantially shape schools and the education system in general.

Discussion

Against the multi-facetted nature of NGO or foundation power in education, one might want to understand the relative importance of each type of power. How can the different types of power be compared and which of the types is most important to gain influence in education or schools? The results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis demonstrated above already give some indication. While many previous studies highlight the structural power expressed through a high amount of financial resources, we have learned that in countries, such as Germany, foundations spend only about as much on education projects each year as is invested by the government in a single morning (Thümler et al., 2014, p. 7). Thus, compared to the state the power of foundations seems to be rather weak.

Other scholars focus the relevance of foundations’ discursive power (e.g. Kolleck, 2017) and argue that “power is at its most effective when least observable” (Lukes, 2005, p. 64).
However, by analyzing foundations’ discursive power it was shown that the attempts to increase legitimacy are not always successful and that the self-description of foundations as indispensable and competent actors in education are not uncontested.

Surprisingly, the paper demonstrated the central role of the foundation’s relational power, by showing the foundation strategically connected to other important actors. Against the background of these findings, one might further ask how to evaluate the increasing influence of foundations and NGOs in education and in schools. On the one hand, the increasing involvement of foundations is critical to the development of education systems. Fostering a fruitful cooperation between foundations and public schools is a matter of high priority and is coupled with the expectation of quality improvement and successful educational reforms.

On the other hand, the increasing power of foundations in the German education system raises concerns which are unique compared to other countries such as the USA or other European nations. These concerns mostly relate to the transparency and democratic legitimacy of the actions of German foundations. In Germany there is currently no legal framework for the public disclosure of non-profit organizations. Foundations only have to report to the tax office and to the foundation supervisory authority. The information given by foundations is subject to tax secrecy.

Compared to Germany, the USA is much more restrictive. Non-profit organizations that collect more than $50,000 gross are required to make the data submitted to the tax office publicly available and free of charge. Among other things, the reports of the organizations are available via ProPublica’s so-called non-profit explorer. In addition, reporting requirements are much more detailed and aligned with the third sector: information on, for example, the number of employees and full-time employees, the total amount of wages, as well as fundraising and lobbying expenditure.

In view of the lack of debate on transparency and accountability in the German non-profit sector, the question arises as to what distinguishes Germany from other industrialized countries. The lack of relevance of the German third party sector cannot be understated: its contribution to GDP is in line with that of the German automotive industry. In total, 9 percent of German employees work in non-profit organizations and over 23m people volunteer for the non-profit sector. Particularly in the area of social and health services, the third sector – dominated by the major German charitable organizations – forms an irreplaceable pillar of the German welfare state. Although the associations of voluntary welfare, which are very powerful in Germany, or the Federal Association of German Foundations are developing their own public disclosure standards, they rare of a voluntary nature.

Due to these developments and political circumstances, the sources of power have grown tremendously in recent years in line with an increasingly significant impact on education systems in German regions such as the Ruhr area. This growing self-image and self-consciousness is also manifested in the educational initiative in which a single foundation proclaims to restructure the whole education system in a region.

Conclusion
The paper has looked for answers to the overall question as to how foundations wield power in order to shape the education agenda and exert influence on schools. The paper has shown that the foundation 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 different dimensions of power provide this foundation with alternative means to exert power in education, allowing it to pursue multi-dimensional strategies if necessary. In other words, the foundation 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. For instance, it can attempt to rely on increased lobbying or relational power if the structural power is weak. Conversely, it can follow the strategy to foster the shaping of ideas and constructs if opportunities for lobbying are scarce.

Hence, according to this perspective, the power of NGOs in education has three faces and includes relational, discursive and structural dimensions. Relational power occurs when an actor A can influence an actor B (Dahl, 1957, p. 203). In contrast, discursive power is defined as the power of words, i.e. the shaping of discourses, perceptions or interpretations. Finally, structural power was defined as formal decision-making power which enables actors to control resources, maintain financing arrangements, set rules and keep a superior economic position due to historically constituted, economic or organizational structures.

Against the background of the increasing possibilities for the foundation to become involved in educational processes, one would expect stringent regulation of its activities. However, in Germany, such regulations and also transparency of the engagement of foundations in general has in the past been weak. The lack of transparency and regulation of third-sector organizations, such as foundations in Germany as compared to the USA and other European countries, is surprising, given that the German foundation sector – including more than 20,000 foundations with a base in Germany and increasingly large financial resources – is the second largest in the world behind the USA (Kolleck and Brix, 2017).

Hence, foundations have many possibilities to positively influence education systems and also to bring in their own innovative ideas, whereas state actors are hindered by bureaucratic rules and slowness. In the past, foundations have demonstrated their unique capabilities to contribute to valuable reforms in education, e.g. through establishing educational multi-stakeholder networks. “Free of political constraints, foundations have the ability to ignore disciplinary and professional boundaries, consider approaches others say can’t possibly work, and operate independently of passing fashions in the corporate or technological world” (Kolleck, 2017, p. 258). This strength of foundations’ activities and possibilities is fostered by the fact that foundations are hardly affected by the results of democratic elections.

However, despite these strengths for drawing on the sources of all three power dimensions, the successful use of power may also face limits as it highly depends on the legitimacy of the foundation’s activities in education. If, for instance, initiatives are not perceived to be successful, the power of the initiating foundation could decrease. Only if a foundation is perceived as a legitimate player in education does it have the opportunity to effectively use the three dimensions of power and implement the resources related to these.

Overall, this paper demonstrated that a three-dimensional power perspective is valuable for studying school–NGO interactions and the power of NGOs in educational settings. Hence, the theoretical perspective developed through a mix of quantitative and qualitative analyses in this paper may be applied in further research. Understanding the power of foundations in education is particularly useful for practitioners and scholars investigating school–NGO interactions or multi-stakeholder partnerships in education. Furthermore, it is of crucial importance for practitioners, school principals and education administrators dealing with school–NGO interactions given that foundations seem to be increasingly able to draw on new sources of power in these interactions.

References


Power of third sector organizations
Partnering with non-governmental organizations in public education: contributions to an ongoing debate

In the governance era, a broad range of non-governmental actors are interacting with schools and public authorities in the delivery of formal education and, as a result, educational systems are becoming more diverse, complex and segmented. Nonetheless, in an attempt to align non-governmental initiatives with public sector objectives in education, many governments are establishing partnerships with the private sector. These partnerships, which usually adopt the form of legal contracts that are in force for a certain period of time, are known as public-private partnerships (PPPs) (Robertson et al., 2012) or as cross-sectoral partnerships (Eyal and Berkovich, 2019).

Advocates of non-governmental involvement in education consider that PPPs are an efficient way of both organizing and taking advantage of a blooming private sector participation in public education. From this perspective, partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a way of bringing new ideas, actors and resources into public education systems (Patrinos et al., 2009). Nonetheless, there are also more critical and skeptical voices with PPPs. To them, non-governmental participation in education means transferring public assets and responsibilities to the private sector, tends to generate public accountability issues and contributes to deepening (or to triggering new forms of) social inequalities within educational systems (Ball and Youdell, 2007).

Private sector participation in education has generated a passionate debate in both the Global South and the Global North (Ginsburg, 2012; Srivastava, 2010; Waslander et al., 2010). The publication of the special issue “Understanding third sector participation in public schooling through partnerships, collaborations, alliances and entrepreneurialism,” edited by Nina Kolleck and Miri Yemini, introduces complexity and new sources of evidence into this fascinating debate. The articles included in the special issue address the PPPs debate from well-informed theoretical perspectives and solid empirical strategies. The case-studies that conform the issue have been developed by a set of very well-established and upcoming educational scholars in several countries, including the USA, Germany, Israel and England, and have been approached through various methodologies, such as comparative case studies, literature reviews, school ethnographies, social network analysis and media analysis.

As I argue in the following pages, this special issue achieves two main general objectives. First, it contributes to reflect on the complexity and diversity of manifestations of non-governmental participation in education; and, second, it provides the academic and policy communities with new sources of evidence on the pros and cons of this emerging, evolving and challenging phenomenon. I structure my commentary according to these two objectives.

The multiple faces of non-governmental participation in education: from policy influence to educational delivery

The case studies included in the special issue show that the modalities of participation of NGOs in educational systems are wide and multi-level. Broadly speaking, these modalities go from the private sector attempting to influence the production of policies (mainly by lobbying decision makers to introduce new regulations, or advocating educational reform ideas) to the private sector delivering specific services (such as managing public schools, or supporting schools with new educational materials, teaching training resources and so on).

Non-governmental actors are not only increasingly present in public education, but are also becoming increasingly influential. Some contributions to this special issue reflect on the changing sources of power and legitimacy of NGOs in the educational domain. Especially in
contexts of social vulnerability, the main mechanisms of non-governmental influence in education rely on material and economic factors. As shown by Yemini and Sagie (2015), NGOs are more inclined to use their financial leverage to impose their education preferences to schools operating in poor environments than to schools operating in less vulnerable contexts. Nonetheless, increasingly, private actors’ influence also relies on softer forms of power, reason why they invest more and more time and resources in developing their networks and discursive capacities. As Kolleck (2019) shows in this special issue, this is the case of private foundations in Germany. In this country, those foundations that are becoming more influential in the educational domain are those that understand power as three-dimensional phenomenon and, accordingly, activate three main sources of power, namely the material, the relational and the discursive. To put it in Bourdieuan terms, NGOs influence in education increasingly relies on the articulation and mobilization of different forms of capital: economic, social and symbolic (see Fontdevila et al., 2019).

The special issue also reflects on the wide range of non-governmental actors that participate in educational governance structures currently. These include private foundations, NGOs, firms, community organizations, philanthropic organizations and charter management organizations, to name a few. These are non-state actors with very different legal personalities and organizational structures. Non-governmental constituencies also differ greatly in how they do interact with the political and/or the economic spheres. Non-governmental actors are usually conceived as part of a “third sector” that is autonomous from both the state and the market sectors. However, NGOs might also be organically attached to the state or to the market sectors. This is the case of, for instance, semi-public or private foundations that are created and funded by states or by private corporations, whose mission is intrinsically – although not always explicitly – attached to the political and economic agendas of their founders (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Expectedly, for a government, partnering with this type of NGOs will be a very different experience than partnering with more independent NGOs or with NGOs that are more genuinely socially motivated. In real situations, however, the NGO sector combines a broad range of social, economic, religious and/or political motivations and logics. To make things more complex, the political or ideological orientation of NGO actors can differ widely. In most countries, there are both left-leaning NGOs and conservative NGOs operating in the educational domain simultaneously. The educational initiatives, discourses and agendas of non-governmental actors will differ substantially according to their ideological orientation, but also to how much is ideology driving their mission, goals and actions.

This is to say that it is not appropriate to analyze (or reach conclusions about) the participation of the non-governmental sector in education in abstract and absolute terms. The quality of the contribution of the NGO sector to educational systems will depend on many factors: the ethos of the non-governmental actors, their educational capacities, their motivations and interests in educational affairs, or their education policy preferences, to name a few. The organizational structure of non-governmental actors is also a variable at play in this respect. Glazer et al. (2019), in this issue, reflect on the importance of the operational scale of the NGOs contracted by governments to operate neighborhood schools. Their paper shows that a community NGO, which relies on teachers’ autonomy and informal relations with local actors, is inclined to operate schools very differently than a big national NGO with more well-established teaching support procedures, learning materials and instructional strategies, but with weaker links to the community.

Another important variable to understand the “varieties of PPPs” in education concerns the main role that state and non-state actors play within partnership arrangements. An educational PPP is very different in nature when the NGO is the actor that funds educational initiatives than when the NGO is the actor that receives public funding to implement educational initiatives. In other words, public-private mixes can become a drastically different policy according to how the public and the private partners engage with educational funding and
delivering responsibilities. If the private sector is the funder, we are in front of initiatives of so-called “corporate social responsibility,” philanthropy or private donations to public schools. In contrast, when the funder is the state and the non-governmental actor benefits from public funding to, for instance, operate schools, we are in front of the phenomenon of charter schools in the USA or academy schools in England (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). Most of the papers in this special issue refer to this last form of public-private mixes, in which the state finances education and the private sector delivers schooling services.

Non-governmental engagement with public education: desired vs undesired effects

Educational policies are usually assessed from the perspective of their impact on learning outcomes and, in particular, on students’ academic achievement. Nonetheless, the contributions to this special issue go beyond conventional approaches to policy evaluation and reflect on the impact of partnerships with NGOs from different perspectives. Several papers included in this special issue adopt a governance perspective and focus on how non-governmental engagement in public education alters the relationship between and within school actors in terms of cooperation vs competition dynamics, or school engagement with their local environment. Other papers focus on the impact of PPPs in core educational processes, including the promotion of educational innovations and the enactment of organizational changes at the school level.

In general, the conclusions of the studies included in the special issue reveal that, for governments, trying to improve educational systems by partnering with the NGO sector is a challenging enterprise. Promoting ethical behavior among the different parties involved in PPPs is one of the main challenges that derives from NGO engagement in education. On the basis of an extensive literature review, Eyal and Berkovich (2019, in this issue) articulate an original framework to analyze unethical behavior within PPPs in education. Their paper shows that the ethical conduct of the partners is strongly mediated by both environmental factors and the organizational characteristics of the partners. They give examples of how unethical or opportunistic behaviors are more frequent in the context of partnerships with for-profit oriented private actors such as firms, since this type of actors are more inclined to impose their organizational culture to public schools (see also Lubienski and Perry, 2019; Peurach et al., 2019 in this issue). Undesired behaviors, according to Eyal and Berkovich (2019), are also more frequent in contexts of so-called environmental turbulence, understood as junctures in which different forms of political, regulatory and/or economic instability endure in time.

Regulatory factors mediate the capacity of NGOs to operate public schools and, accordingly, the capacity of PPPs to achieve their expected outcomes. Within PPP frameworks, NGOs are usually invited to run public schools under the assumption that this will contribute to promote system diversification and educational innovation in a cost-efficient way. Nonetheless, in a context of highly standardized curriculums and intensive testing regimes, private operators are not always able to bring these expectations about. As Glazer et al. (2019) show in this special issue, the regulatory context of the USA, with all the performative pressure it generates among schools, is more conducive to the educational and organizational practices of large-scale school operators than to the practices of more informal community-based operators. In the end, the regulatory environment pushes the small PPP operators to emulate the processes and organizational styles of more professionalized providers, especially if they want to achieve the demanding learning achievement goals that public authorities establish.

The competitive dynamics, that by design or by default, come with increasing NGO participation in educational systems are, paradoxically, one of the main barriers for PPPs to bring their promises of educational innovation up. Competition between schools for students and/or resources does not generate the right climate for educational innovations to emerge. This is due to the fact that a competitive environment does not encourage schools to learn from each other, to cooperate with other schools from the community, or to exchange good pedagogic and organizational practices among them. As shown by Lubienski and Perry
(2019, in this issue), also on the basis of evidence coming from the US, “in a competitive climate, organizations and individuals may be incentivized to limit the visibility of useful innovations so as not to lose a competitive advantage over rivals, and therefore this may seek to guard innovations as private, proprietary information.”

Several contributions to this special issue raise concerns with the fragmentation of educational systems that results from further NGO participation in public education. As stated by Peurach et al. (2019), fragmentation is a logical and expected consequence of engaging NGOs in the management of schools. Non-governmental engagement in schooling generates more diverse and somehow more incoherent education systems. Nonetheless, under some circumstances, schools’ fragmentation might easily derive into further educational inequalities. This is especially the case when the regulatory frameworks in place do not contemplate equity measures in a decisive way, or when the frameworks are in place but the governmental capacity and/or willingness to enact them is insufficient. Furthermore, in educational environments with relative high levels of school choice and market competition between providers, as is the case with most country cases covered in this special issue, NGO schools are more inclined to discriminate against certain groups of students, and many of them compete to enroll the most academically able students. These opportunistic behaviors, more than horizontal diversification, generate vertical segmentation in education systems (Van Zanten, 2009; Zancajo, 2018). When this happens, the state needs to invest additional resources, time and energies in coordinating, incentivizing and controlling those school actors whose actions deviate from the general public interest.

The promotion of well-informed public debates on PPPs and NGOs engagement in education is key to promote more equitable educational systems, especially in countries where the enrollment in privately managed schools has expanded more significantly. Unfortunately, very important factions of society are excluded from the PPPs debate, or are very poorly informed about it. As argued by Tamir et al. (2019), in this issue, readers of popular newspapers from England and Israel have only the chance of accessing to very anecdotal and isolated information about NGO interactions in education. This information is usually framed in a positive, comforting and sensationalist way. Only more demanding and elite newspapers situate the debate within it broader political, cultural and economic conditioning factors, and reflect on the implications of PPPs for quality and equity in education on the basis of rigorous academic evidence. As the authors conclude, this lack of generalized access to quality information is one of the most important constraints in democratizing current educational reform debates.

In summary, this special issue shows that partnerships between governmental and non-governmental actors are (re-)configuring educational systems in many countries. The special issue compiles new and original studies on the governance and social implications of this phenomenon. When read together, the main results of these studies are a call for caution in the adoption of PPPs in education. The studies reflect on the potential of PPPs in education, and show how, once enacted, PPPs tend to generate issues of educational equity, unethical behaviors and/or resource dependence. Especially when implemented in contexts of school competition and weak governmental oversight, PPPs run the risk of generating education systems fragmentation and further social inequalities in education.

The articles included in the special issue push research on education PPPs in new directions by incorporating new analytic approaches and methodological perspectives. They are an invitation to continue conducting research on NGO engagement in education from an international and comparative perspective. More and new systematic analyses of the phenomenon can contribute to find out what are the socio-economic, regulatory and organizational factors behind the differential effects of PPPs in educational systems. This type of research is urgent at a time when many governments around the world face strong
educational reform pressures and, at the same time, high uncertainties regarding the most appropriate policies to promote quality and equity in education remain.

Antoni Verger
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

References


