NGO involvement in education policy: principals' voices

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Abstract

Purpose – Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been involved in academic programs in many Western countries, actively participating and reshaping policy implementation. This tremendous growth in external voluntary and philanthropic organizations in schools is associated with a global trend toward decentralization, commodification, privatization, neoliberalism and governmental budget cuts. NGOs have become very popular partners in attempts to meet education goals set by the government and are increasingly involved both in policy formation and implementation. And arise questions regarding the special challenges facing school principals. This study explored the perceptions of school principals regarding the NGO involvement in designing and implementing education policy in Israel.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors applied a qualitative research method, conducting in-depth interviews with primary school principals of schools with low socioeconomic student populations, where NGOs operate at the national level to promote educational achievement programs. This research approach acknowledges the existence of structured, fluid, subjective, flexible and dynamic realities that are attributed different meanings and interpretations and are shaped within political, cultural and social contexts. Thus, this study aims to reflect the perceptions of school principals regarding the involvement of NGOs in design and implementation of education policies. The authors utilized an inductive process of condensing, encoding, categorizing, and theorizing to analyze the data.

Findings – Data analysis revealed the following three major themes evident in the perceptions of school principals: intersectoral partnership policies in education; a policy of re-examining mutual responsibility for education; and the benefit of NGO engagement in education. Inter-sectoral partnership policy is the emergence of alternative models, defined as different political and institutional ways of organizing collective action is an effective way to organize and benefit, and is a way of introducing new ideas, actors and resources into public education systems. However, this new model is a complex, ongoing and dynamic process with school principals at the helm of these new relationships.

Research limitations/implications – This study includes new information on how school principals see NGOs involvement in planning and implementation of education policy. However, it was conducted with various limitations. First, participants and their input all relate specifically to education in Israel. Any generalizations that may be drawn from them to shed light on similar processes around the world would require the study also be conducted in diverse sociocultural contexts. Second, interviews with principals were held through the 2016–2017 school year. A longitudinal study would be required to examine whether and how principals feel after years of working with NGOs on various projects. Finally, this study only focused on the opinions of principals, representing only one involved party. This cannot be a comprehensive perspective on the partnership and collaboration between formal education systems and NGOs. Thus, further research is necessary to examine the perceptions of NGOs managers, policymakers, supervisors, teachers, pupils and parents. Based on the authors' study's findings, they recommend investigating whether, how, and under what conditions principals can nurture partnerships with NGOs as a platform for initiative, particularly the vigorous leadership needed to carry out the policy.

Practical implications – The establishment and support of intersectoral partnerships between the Education Ministry and NGOs is a complex, ongoing and dynamic process with school principals at the helm of these new relationships. Principals have been given more independence, autonomy and clout as they maintain the external networks now contributing to improved outcomes and addressing unique community needs. Consequently, the more external factors become involved in education, the more principals are required to manage and implement the partnership. As such, policymakers (main office and district supervisors), implementers (NGO managers, school principals, teachers) and recipients (parents and teachers) must stay attentive to each other, adjust expectations as to the limits of responsibility, and primary to recognize the needs to keep making improvements to the partnership that are based on reciprocal assessment. More, all involved parties must continue to be active in developing, deepening and maintaining the employed mechanisms, normalizing them to become the standard in intersectoral partnerships in education.

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Originality/value – This study provides theoretical contributions and practical implications of NGO involvement in designing and implementing education policies from the perspective and function of school principals in this era of ever-changing economic and social reality. Establishment and support of intersectoral partnerships between the Education Ministry and NGOs is a complex ongoing and dynamic process with school principals at the helm of these new relationships. The principals have been given more independence autonomy and clout as they maintain the external networks now contributing to improved outcomes and addressing unique community needs and more principals are required to manage and implement the partnership.

Introduction

Over the last several decades, the Western world has witnessed increasing involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from third sector and civil society in education programs. This tremendous growth in external voluntary and philanthropic organizations in schools is associated with a global trend toward decentralization, commodification, privatization, neoliberalism and governmental budget cuts. NGOs have become key players possessing economic, social and political power (Bulkley and Burch, 2011), and reshaping the nature and content of the education field (Shiffer *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, NGOs have become very popular partners in attempts to meet education goals set by the government (Ball, 2017), and are increasingly involved both in policy formation and implementation (Ball and Youdell, 2008). Such activities are based on their worldview to improve the quality of public education, primarily with the aim of providing education opportunities for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Verger *et al.*, 2016).

Along with the potential contribution of NGOs involvement in education, significant questions arise regarding the special challenges facing *school principals*: Who is responsible for formulating education policy in schools? How do NGOs influence principals in their decision-making process? What power should they get? Who exerts power over whom and with what results? Who should schools' principals account for? What is the benefit of NGO influence on school principals, staff, students, and parents? How do principals manage the gap between market-oriented reforms and in-school processes? How will external involvement in policy implementation affect the ways in which 21st-century principals manage schools? What implications will there be on leadership of democratic processes in the public education system?

These complex issues result from NGOs playing a stronger role in education governance, providing education services, and formulating and implementing policies. This new role has influenced the institutional landscape, already transitioning from a monolithic world to a pluralistic one (Meyer, 2006). Given increasing institutional diversity, schools are confronted with opposing trends and dilemmas that re-examine the implications of institutional theory on leadership in public institutions (Ball and Youdell, 2008). Therefore, the need to develop studies that help understand the role and place of school principals in driving dynamics with NGOs involved in implementing education policy is important to education infrastructure that supports management improvement, training, and organizational effectiveness (Rowan, 2006).

Hence, the underlying question of this research is: How do school principals perceive NGO involvement in education policy design, implementation and evaluation? This study is an attempt to provide an inside look into how principals react to this involvement through in-depth interviews, learning about their beliefs, views and conduct as they navigate an uncertain work environment. In doing so, the study may provide an important resource for public education practitioners, policymakers and school principals on the opportunities and challenges facing public education organizations with the involvement of voluntary and philanthropic organizations in schools. This paper begins with a review of the literature for

our study, presents the research design and the findings and concludes with a discussion of the findings, as well as implications and further research avenues.

Theoretical background
The privatization of education systems
Private funding of education is certainly not a new phenomenon in human history. Even through the recent centuries, with modern governments operating systemized forms of education, allocating funding and shaping education curricula, private institutions and philanthropic organizations have always been involved in the field and played an important role in its funding and governance. Global privatization of education constitutes the next step in this development, a process influenced by far-reaching global changes in the economic, political and social environment, transforming the relations between private and public powers in social systems in general, and in education particularly.

This privatization has multiple manifestations but can be defined broadly as a process through which private organizations and individuals increasingly and actively participate in a range of education activities and responsibilities traditionally reserved for the state (Verger *et al.*, 2016). The existence of privatization policy processes prompted the transition from a collective and national system of values to a focus on individual and personal interests. This enables quasi-market mechanisms to replace state institutions responsibility for providing resources to public education (Ball, 2017), reflecting values that favor the reduction of government provision of social services, replacement of bureaucratic arrangements with market mechanisms and utilitarian motives, and adoption of free market economic principles in education (Ozga and Lingard, 2007).

However, the privatization of education occurring in many countries across the world does not necessarily mean a drastic transfer of ownership of public education services from public hands to private hands (Lubienski, 2016). Privatization is often a process that unfolds primarily at the level of service provision (with higher prevalence in private schools), or through funding (when families and other private actors pay for a greater portion of education expenses) than at the level of true ownership (Verger *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, privatization reform calls for a reorganization of education systems that increases reliance on private infrastructure to improve efficiency, promote innovation and enhance education services (Kessides, 2004).

Studies show that NGOs play a variety of roles in supporting education service delivery. First, NGOs focus primarily on advocacy, pressuring governments to fulfill their commitment to education for all (Bulkley and Burch, 2011). Second, NGOs aim to improve the quality of public education through "school adoption" programs (Ozga and Lingard, 2007). Third, NGOs become directly involved in education provision, mainly hoping to provide education opportunities to those students excluded from formal government schooling (Verger *et al.*, 2016).

Studies examining NGO views on their participation in education reveal a clear commitment to promoting social-educational issues, realizing economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic goals aimed at impacting education decision-makers, encouraging initiatives and increasing accountability (Momin and Parker, 2013). NGOs are more inclined to use their financial leverage to impose their education preferences to schools operating in poor environments than to those operating in less vulnerable contexts (Yemini and Sagie, 2015). Therefore, education initiatives, discourses, and agendas of NGOs vary substantially according to their ideological tendencies, but also to the extent that ideology drives their mission, goals and actions (Ball, 2017).

The role of NGOs in a reality of privatization in education
This shift of responsibilities and resources for education from the state to the private sector relies on the belief that NGOs can provide services of higher efficiency than government

institutions (Bryson *et al.*, 2006). NGOs are simply defined by way of negation: organizations not included among governmental institutions and not controlled by them (HM Treasury, and Cabinet Office, 2007). Therefore, the rules of public administration do not apply to them. NGOs are often associated with individuals and organizations acting as a framework of corporate activity in a range of non-profit issues (Gidron and Hall, 2017). They do not divide their assets into a private company (nonprofit distribution) but act independently (as self-governing entities) for the public good. They are often established to promote social values, such as volunteering, building products and services for the wellbeing of the population, or other causes aimed at improving conditions for the public in a wide variety of social services including welfare, health and education, and are essentially "value driven" and directed to community and social activities. Despite these definitions, a review of relevant literature provides little consistency in the characterization of NGOs, particularly with the increasing involvement of business organizations in education endeavors (Ichilov, 2010). As those new actors become 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 (Evangelinos *et al.*, 2015).

The functioning of school principals in the era of privatization

The dramatic changes and sweeping reforms occurring currently in many countries (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2008) have also changed the nature of school management. Principals function amid decentralization and privatization processes predicated on the transfer of authority from central government to lower organizational echelons, increasing school autonomy. Consequently, principals are arguably becoming even more significant factors, as their position within schools provides them a better understanding of local needs and thus also the ways to promote efficient and diverse education services (Felouzis and Charmillot, 2013).

However, decentralization and privatization reforms also expose schools to complex and contradictory pressures that impact their actions, habits and leadership (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). Such reforms have led to a view of schools as "open systems" allowing non-governmental actors, non-profits and private citizens to infiltrate schools, influence how they function, and reconfigure the social dynamic in and around schools. This "infiltration" further complicates the role of principals as they are expected to meet high standards, diversifying educational endeavors, streamlining existing processes, and implementing education practices – all while keeping pace with social and political influences in their local environment (Goldring and Schuermann, 2009).

These processes require principals to be competitive, ensuring their school ranks highly in school selection, while still meeting national goals (Yemini and Addi-Raccah, 2013), and while still dealing with ongoing public funding cuts. Budget reductions are a constant problem for principals, as resources are always insufficient. This is one of the reasons for the perception of NGO managers as responsible for making schools and their principals "greatly reliant on a huge number of non-governmental actors" (Marinetto, 2005, p. 372), meaning NGOs may change and decide how schools are run, even obstructing official education policy (Yemini and Addi-Raccah, 2013) and creating inequality that may deepen social gaps through the uneven geographic distribution of NGOs active in education (Berkovich and Foldes, 2012).

With privatization now widespread, these pressures prove to be significant intellectual challenges with several key advantages. One challenge stem from a fundamental shift in how principals perceive and lead their schools. While their traditional role was primarily pedagogical, today's principals are expected to demonstrate leadership, values and professionalism beyond school perimeters, to show particular awareness to the community around them (Addi-Raccah, 2015). They maintain contacts with other schools in the area,

local authorities, additional education and culture institutions, NGOs, and suppliers, seeing in them a source of power and their involvement in schools as completely legitimate. This provides a new measure of autonomy to develop relations with NGOs to recruit resources, funds and expertise (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2004), to run unique, innovative and attractive programs that offset cuts in government funding, as well as establishing alternatives to existing mechanisms that do not allow any expansion of services to pupils (Weinheber *et al.*, 2008).

Furthermore, business and efficiency-oriented principals may be in a better position to modernize their schools (Eyal and Berkovich, 2010). This mentality may also help in dealing with the appropriation of policy and resources while promoting innovation, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and creativity (Sagie *et al.*, 2016). Studies show that legitimizing NGO participation in determining education goals galvanizes principals to think critically, tackle complex problems and take risks, or alternatively attempt to stabilize and balance between school autonomy and reliance on others (Addi-Raccah, 2015). Developing ties to NGOs helps principals save time and money, enabling them to focus their administrative attention on core issues and thus improve and renew school systems.

In this respect, the role of principals as public leaders is crucial as they serve as the gatekeepers of the school. They are the ones that determine the manner of communication, nature of interaction and involvement, and the education content. On the one hand, they are responsible for preventing NGOs from sponsoring unsuitable agendas and interests in their schools (Petterway, 2010). On the other, principals are the vanguard for all school changes and innovations, representing their schools to outside factors, including them in determining policy, consolidating school image, and establishing branding on the basis of its unique features (Goldring and Schuermann, 2009).

Analytical framework

The fact that NGO presence is increasingly evident in the formulation and implementation of education policy around the world has influenced the institutional landscape, one transitioning from monolithic to more pluralistic views (Meyer, 2006). Given the huge diversity of NGOs, there is a growing need to understand the "institutional" context of this phenomenon, specifically the institutional aspects of school organizational dynamics in national or regional contexts.

Institutional theory deals with an organizational framework of institutional systems that have formal arrangements and mechanisms of management, filtering, policymaking, decision-making, guidance and oversight (Lundin, 2007). This approach clarifies how factors in the organizational environment shape organizations' structure, performance and the changes that occur in them. Furthermore, it is based on the assumption that each organization has different cultural characteristics, including values, myths and symbols, and these determine its structure and behavior (Salamon and Dewees, 2002).

Institutional analysis studies have shown that systemic reforms and tightening accountability requirements have produced complex patterns between the various dimensions of the technical core and the institutional environment (Spillane and Burch, 2006). Studies demonstrate that routines and structure in schools are vital in strengthening or loosening ties with the broader institutional environment (Spillane *et al.*, 2011). These relationships may support field-level changes and deeper changes in management and training (Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

The challenge is to investigate the dynamics between schools and NGOs and how these relationships shape the role of management and training, considering the broader institutional system in which NGOs are embedded in schools (Spillane and Burch, 2006). By applying institutional perspective, research on NGO involvement in schools should move

beyond the dichotomy between institutional and technical environments and the idea of loose coupling (or disconnection) as a key mechanism through which schools deal with various environmental pressures (Rowan, 2006; Yurkofsky, 2017). The way school administrators behave as leaders of public institutions is undergoing transformation, a shift compatible with changes in the public sector (Salamon and Dewees, 2002). Administrators in education are now seen as "change agents" (Yemini and Sagi, 2015, p. 24), expected to adopt resource management strategies, improve maintenance, and adapt to their institutional environment (Askeland and Heir, 2014), while also dealing with conflict management, legislative activity, institutional placement and education partnerships in learning processes.

Research context

NGO involvement in the Israeli education system is complex and multifaceted, and therefore of interest to Israeli researchers who examine the causes and extent of the phenomenon, its interventions and its characteristics (Paz-Fuchs *et al.*, 2014). Significant growth of NGO numbers in the Israeli education system has also motivated education leaders and other state bodies to thoroughly examine the nature of this involvement and formulate practical positions and recommendations for coping with the phenomenon. Despite the growing dominance of the third sector in various areas of education work (Schiffer *et al.*, 2010), local education is still primarily based on public infrastructure and funds supplied by the government. The relative measure of non-governmental sources penetrating the system in different ways is still relatively small when considering overall education, and the majority of study hours and system funding are public (Dagan-Buzaglo, 2010). Moreover, NGOs operating in Israeli education do so from a wide range of motives, ranging from traditional philanthropy of organizations and private individuals from Israel and abroad, to corporate-social initiatives, to the activities of foundations and associations with a social agenda that seek to participate in education. They support pedagogical programs for academic reinforcement, and the cultivation of basic skills in mathematics, Hebrew, science and foreign languages. NGOs also support areas that the Education Ministry does not adequately address, such as arts, music and life skills development (Weinheber *et al.*, 2008).

The interaction between the Israeli Education Ministry and NGOs can be defined as a dynamic movement across two intersecting axes: first, the axis of control, reflected in the degree of supervision ranging from total government involvement in partnerships to no involvement or supervision. Second, the axis of interest, categorizing NGOs according to their character and areas of interest, ranging from purely philanthropic focus on providing economic contribution to meet social needs to philanthropy driven by ideological or business motives (Shiffer *et al.*, 2010).

Research design

We have chosen a qualitative methodology to allow for the collection of rich textual descriptions. In particular, this study is a narrative inquiry into meaning, highly attentive to what school principals are experiencing (Patton, 2002). This research approach acknowledges the existence of structured, fluid, subjective, flexible and dynamic realities that are attributed different meanings and interpretations and are shaped within political, cultural and social contexts (Ben-Yehoshua, 2016). Thus, this study aims to reflect the perceptions, views and beliefs of school principals regarding the involvement of NGOs in design and implementation of education policies.

In an attempt to maximize the depth and richness of our data, we used maximal difference sampling (Creswell, 2002), also known as heterogeneous sampling. The study population included ten principals of primary schools with low socioeconomic populations, where NGOs

operate at the national level to promote educational achievement programs. The schools belong to five geographical districts of the Israeli Education Ministry: Jerusalem, Central, South, Haifa North. In each district, two primary schools rated high according to the Ministry's "Cultivation Strauss" index were selected as having low socioeconomic backgrounds (a measure calculated by: authority, locality, neighborhood, parental education, income level, peripherality and country of origin). All principals have held their positions for at least 10–25 years and were selected for their diverse range of characteristics to reflect the widest possible spectrum (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

The present study was limited to non-religious Jewish primary schools due to the great variation in structural and organizational characteristics among primary schools, and the middle and high schools in the Israeli education system. The large variance between different systems did not allow them to be tested in one study. Another consideration for selecting Jewish state primary schools is based on results of the "Survey of External Involvement in the Ministry of Education," which indicates that the highest percentage of out-of-state involvement is found in state-controlled schools (46%) (Weinheber *et al.*, 2008).

Data for this study were collected during the first semester of the 2016–2017 academic year and are comprised of ten in-depth interviews with schools' principals. The interviews were coordinated independently in their offices, in schools, or in different venues and lasted 60–90 min. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were translated from Hebrew to English by a specialist in both languages. All participants were fully informed on the purpose of the study and were promised complete confidentiality as well as full retreat options and all names were encoded and provided a pseudonym to prevent identification and preserve privacy. Additionally, school principals that were interviewed were sent the transcription of their responses and they were asked to review them, providing them the opportunity to amend, clarify, or add remarks and details they forgot to include.

The interview began with a general introductory question: "Tell me about your professional career." This gained us demographic information about the interviewee and created a sense of trust and openness. Then, as part of a more comprehensive interview, principals were asked regarding the purpose of the current study, for example: "What is your opinion on how NGOs are involved in the education system? What is your role as a principal in the context of NGO involvement in your school? How do you see their contribution to the education system in general, and to your school in particular? What are the unique elements that exist in extracurricular programs that influence, change, and contribute to the improvement of scholastic and social achievements?" These interview questions addressed the main research focus.

Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously in an ongoing process throughout the inquiry, grounded in the various perspectives articulated by participants (Rallis and Rossman, 2012). Data analysis was comprised of a three-stage process that included condensing, coding, and categorizing. In the first stage of analysis (condensing), we sought those portions of data that related to the purpose of the study. In the second stage (coding), we coded each segment of relevant data (utterance) according to the aspect of the perception it expressed (Gibbs, 2018). After capturing the essence of the utterances in the second stage, we clustered similar utterances to generalize their meanings and derive categories in the third stage (categorizing). At this point, we reworked categories to reconcile disconfirming data with the emerging findings of the analysis (Richards and Morse, 2012).

Findings
Data analysis indicates three main themes expressed by school principals: intersectoral partnership policies in education; mutual responsibility for education; and the benefit of NGO engagement. These themes are interrelated and impact the design and implementation of education policy.

Intersectoral partnership policies in education

Intersectoral partnerships are defined as ongoing organizational frameworks for interactions and exchanges between representatives of the public, business and third sectors. Such frameworks are designed to attain public goals through joint allocation of resources. As evident in this study, principals see this Education Ministry policy of intersectoral partnerships as founded on the belief that shared decision-making and mutual responsibilities will translate into two systems of human and financial resources working to further values and goals in education. Cattie, a school principal, described this sentiment: "The Education Ministry is leading a process of intersectoral partnerships with representatives of the various sectors involved in education...combining forces, knowledge, and resources...to achieve education goals."

Mechanisms for implementing the intersectoral partnership policies. Additionally, as principals see it, this policy is not restricted to pooling resources of multiple sectors–the Ministry has also established innovative, technological, and "pioneering" mechanisms that provide the platform for ingraining such partnerships in the system. In the principals' view, the computerized database of programs allows all involved actors to be active partners capable of sharing what they know about programs, content, methods of communication, and measure of satisfaction. Thus, principals believe that an intersectoral work environment is being built based on partner experiences. This helps all parties engaged in schools make more educated, professional, and authentic decisions. Lena described the process as follows:

> The nice thing about the policy is that it's not just a statement of intentions...but actions...and advanced technological means...pioneering...the program database allows me to see the entire picture on all external programs...the information is accessible, updated by all partners...they report online about satisfaction measures...principals can log in and see what they should choose...the knowledge of partners helps us decide.

For principals, the policy is applicable because it is founded on practical, accessible, technological and advanced mechanisms that can be actively supervised, defines responsibilities, and maintain accountability. Furthermore, principals explained that apart from the means used to manage the partnership, the policy clearly defines their role, officially determining that they have the primary authority to lead and disseminate the partnership. These findings make it clear that the stated purpose of organizational change processes is to promote organizational efficiency while endeavoring to integrate the organization into the social environment in which it operates.

Leadership in the intersectoral partnership policies. Consequently, the policy establishes them as public or community leaders, as Clara described:

> The policy....provides schools and principals with a "road map"...for intersectoral partnerships of schools and external organizations...de facto, this means principals are also leaders...a responsibility they must fulfill...in implementing the partnership values...findings and recruiting resources, establishing trust...and also the actual work...planning, overseeing, and assessing.

Principals related that the policy and all its elements go beyond merely establishing the partnership; it is an open and binding declaration elucidating their leadership of it, responsible for practical implementation in schools and their environments. So, they interpret the policy as a deliberate encouragement and empowerment of their status in two key axes. First, the axis of partnership, meaning ensuring that parties of interest are identified and recruited by nurturing relations founded on trust and a balance of powers and interests. Second, the goal, meaning clarifying the milestones on the way to education goals in ways congruous to school curricula. In this regard, growing involvement of NGOs in Israeli education has been associated with expanding privatization and decentralization processes.

Thus, one may conclude that principals see intersectoral partnerships in education as catalysts to a positive reform, a step towards a new form of governance signifying innovation, initiative, and intelligent utilization of existing potential for a better, more diverse education system. Also, in contrast to the traditional bureaucratic, and institutionalized roles of formal education, the policy mechanisms are regarded as efficient, innovative, technological and applicable, furthering the partnership, providing support and reinforcement, and maintaining principals' positions as system gatekeepers. For them, the policy constitutes the promotion of collective actions in the public sphere through decentralization of authorities, strengthening their role as leaders of intersectoral collaboration and its implementation in education. However, their designation as "gatekeepers" and "leaders" also poses many challenges, as described in the following sections.

Mutual responsibility for education

Intersectoral partnerships in education stem from the desire to promote cooperation while dividing responsibilities and authorities among partners to attain mutual goals, advance initiatives, or solve problems (Gidron and Hall, 2017). Principals describe the challenges posed when having to resolve problems of mutual accountability.

The gap between the requirements and the limited resources. First, the requirement to meet Education Ministry demands to close academic and social gaps with the scant teaching hours at their disposal. This tension is central to both content and expected outcomes of any partnership, as described by Bell: "The Education Ministry piles on the pressure to close gaps. . .as for the outcomes, there is a crucial lack of teaching quotas. . .despite the many needs. . .this inevitably impacts the partnership." As they see the situation, the shortage of teaching hours forces them to look outside the system for partners capable of sharing the responsibility to reduce risks while providing complementary services.

School principals are facing pressures and demands on the national and local levels. From the point of view of some school principals, the desire of local authorities to provide additional resources to reduce educational and social disparities is driven by political considerations, boosting visibility, marketing, and public relations. As Clara testified: ". . . The philanthropy is run under the auspices of the municipality . . . the programs are placed on the schools to create visibility, marketing, and improve the image of community education . . . a forced partnership that fosters foreign considerations that do not fit the needs of the schools." In their view, implementing the "local authority" programs not only violates the principle of mutual responsibility in the inter-sectoral partnership, but also increases the conflicts in the partnership, forcing them to have partnerships incongruent with school agenda.

Developing external financing dependency. At the same time, school administrators testified that they constantly search for outside support, even though the choice of outside philanthropy programs and resources does not always match the school's educational vision and goals. As Yulia described: "I find myself under pressure. . .looking for external resources to meet student needs. . .often compromising on the educational principles of the program."

Principals explain that in order to resolve budgetary problems they are driven to move away from the core values of their organizations, hoping for partnerships that contribute philanthropically but without intervening. So, the "partnership" often stems from compromise, constraints, dependence, and the allure of funding, but no deliberate, genuine and mutually compatible association of common strengths and interests.

Injury to the reputation of school principals. Additionally, they describe having to function while being "backed into a corner," often damaging their reputation in the eyes of philanthropies, who may see them as "moochers," just out seeking handouts, not genuinely committed to intersectoral partnership, as Betty related: "Principals go looking for external

donations to put that money to good use...but philanthropy sees this as mooching...begging...and not in true partnership." That is to say, principals are forced to turn to NGOs due to the Education Ministry's insufficient and inappropriate services, using this involvement to resolve problems created by system failures. Be that as it may, partnerships founded on stereotypical thinking also create disparate expectations, impeding communication and decision making. Moreover, the damage to the reputation of school principals permeates the educational and organizational image of the entire education system. As Lena stated: "We are at the forefront of the system ... harming our image undermines the reputation of the entire education system in implementing partnership responsibilities." While reputations may be too intangible to clearly evaluate, principals' perception of damage to their reputation has consequences that can undermine trust between partners, reducing investment in partnership building over time.

Duplication of responsibility requirements. Second, principals describe the challenge of meeting NGO demands. Despite this additional burden, principals understand that efforts to advance academic and social measures, along with the terms, procedures, and mechanisms used to measure effectiveness, are all necessary to the partnership's success. As Linda described: "Philanthropy plays according to very clear rules...they aim to promote academic and social goals...that's why they have demands...work plans, reporting scores and achievements and more...very clear...otherwise, how could they measure their success?" Nonetheless, principals admit that accounting for their actions through different reporting channels to meet demands of both the Ministry and NGOs creates redundancy, confusion, and a waste of valuable time, as Lisa explained: "The assessment methods used in the external programs are different from those of the Ministry...this creates duplication, repetition, a mess that takes a long time to deal with." This duality undermines the ideal of mutual accountability, as Steve recounted: "This duality weakens us...on the one hand, the Ministry's authority over schools, and on the other – our commitment to external factors...tons of paperwork...creating overload." For principals, the entrenchment of each side in their institutional patterns to maintain their jurisdiction and exclusivity creates chaos, a "tug of war" that comprises the professionalism, directives, and authority of each, but is also detrimental to the relationship, merely increasing red tape and workload.

Employment of temporary teaching staff. Third, principals address the issue of privatization and the employment of contract or temporary teaching staff to implement NGO programs. In their view, this indirect employment creates doubles their roles as they meet the needs of the employing organizations and also those of teachers, as Bogler explained: "Teachers of NGO programs are stuck in the middle, subject to employer demands and procedures...but also subject to the policy...a delicate situation that forces them and us to deal with dilemmas, double work, and often contradictory requirements." For principals, having to employ external, temporary, and frequently replaced teaching staff, not through the Education Ministry, impedes the consolidation of a dedicated and cohesive faculty, as Linda explained: "Teachers are temporary, then replaced...making it difficult to establish commitment...each year, you're basically starting from scratch...managing the procedures, culture, climate...takes lots of time and effort." Furthermore, ad-hoc programs, specifically initiated to address certain education needs, only worsens conditions when trying to disseminate partnership requirements among staff, and makes it difficult to plan and allocate joint resources intelligently over time to further the school's ongoing objectives: "The external programs are ad-hoc...creating uncertainty when we need to plan common work plans."

In recent years, the Ministry has promoted partnerships between the education sector through mechanisms that seek to bring clearer regulation of privatization mechanisms in Israeli education. Thus, the Israeli government retains its responsibility for financing public education and its accessibility to the general population, while allowing or implementing various privatization measures. These privatization moves are shedding new light on the main

challenge facing school principals – that is, managing mutual responsibilities in education. In their view, this difficulty creates three perspectives that influence the manner and outcomes of the partnership. First, coping with Ministry demands to close gaps with minimal financial resources. Second, coping with separate and unrelated enforcement mechanisms. Third, coping with the impact of privatization and indirect employment. Nonetheless, as will be presented in the following, programs operated through matching funding are more effective and manage to meet the goals of shared accountability in education.

The benefits of NGO engagement
The attitudes of principals as to the benefits, contribution, and success of intersectoral partnerships is made clear in *matched-funded programs* of NGOs and the Education Ministry contributors in the following aspects:

Public-private mixtures: combining forces, resources, and knowledge. In their view, this combination of powers, knowledge, and additional resources constitutes for them and their schools a life-changing means to promote social and education problem solving. As Clara related: "The meaningful partnerships are those founded on matching. . .because they combine forces. . .knowledge, resources. . .this promotes learning that in turn helps solve social issues. . .a winning combination." Furthermore, there exists a belief that partnerships that combine resources succeed in bridging corporate cultural gaps and the different institutional logic of each party, as Alex described: "What a beautiful combination of resources, despite the gaps in educational approaches and perceptions we see and are committed to maintaining each one's unique identity." In their view, it is a partnership that not only fulfills its official goals but also creates educational, social, economic, and other added values that create a different kind of organizational dynamics that creates a synergistic impact on the larger whole of its parts.

The added resources in the form of additional teaching hours, flexible budgeting, and specialized, structured curricula enhance the synergy needed to implement the values and organizational vision of schools, as Daniel explained:

> With partners in the program, you can realize the dream. . .more hours, liquid finances, and teaching materials. . .differences that make for a different kind of learning. . .rich in means. . .contributing to achieving the vision and goal. . .I don't need to expand on that and tell you what that does for students, for their learning and achievements, to the community. . .it trickles down to everybody.

Such significant contributions to school administrators is of great importance to student and parent satisfaction, as Lowell described: "Students love lessons and are eagerly awaiting them, and parents, for their part, give very positive feedback to programs and show that children are very happy to come to schools when programs are running." Satisfaction, joy of end-consumers for learning is the ambition of every school principal.

External teaching staff – innovative, creative and contemporary. Moreover, principals stated that the external teaching staff spearheads the efforts to implement unique programs. In their view, the various teachers provide innovative, creative, diverse, and current teaching methods, a "fresh approach" to teaching. This spreads out to permanent staff, offering inspiration that betters learning and teaching, enriching peer discussions and exchanges. Thus, these combined forces promote learning and synergy, improving overall organizational effectiveness. The partnership grows to exceed the sum of its parts, as Jack explained: "The external teachers. . .come with a young, fresh spirit in their thinking and actions. . .that pushes the permanent staff. . .empowers them. . .creates an adaptation of teaching materials and pedagogical discourse. . .teaching and learning together. . .the school is constantly learning and evolving."

Pedagogical flexibility. Another significant factor generating learning that stems from partnership resources is the pedagogical flexibility that allows principals to navigate the

changes needed to be implemented. Now they have the autonomy to establish a new agenda, one congruent to the social, academic and emotional needs of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. On his own experience of this, Yoel related: "...Our pupils have a difficult profile...30% Ethiopian...40% with financial difficulties...with the program we have flexibility, room to maneuver...to address their basic needs...subsidizing parent payments, lengthening the school day, providing clothing, and often even a missing breakfast."

For principals, pedagogical flexibility constitutes a vital resource that allows them to make independent decisions and fulfill the demands of their position. Consequently, the partnership helps in cutting through institutional and bureaucratic procedures and reducing regulation. It is a testimony of trust, of belief in their professional capabilities, an administrative autonomy enabling them to realize potential and accomplish the outcomes expected of the partnership. Also, they see the partnership as encouraging initiative, innovation and creativity as it hinges on making decisions specific to managing their students, time, and location. As Daniel stated:

> I'm always looking for creative and innovative solutions...such as pooling individual teaching hours allotted by the Ministry and program hours to lengthen the school day...that way, the kids get double the benefit...receiving individual teaching, small study groups, a new learning environment, and a combined internal and external teaching effort designed to leave no child behind...to improve, to maximize what works!

Marketing the school and improving its image. Another aspect described by principals as generating learning through the partnership goes beyond the internal learning process it initiates within all levels of the organization, also enhancing the image and prestige of schools in the eyes of the community. As Jenny explained: "In our town, schools' brand themselves using unique designations...the program allows me to brand the school, to improve visibility...parents say – 'they have a unique and important program at that school'." For principals, NGO programs can be employed as branding tools useful for broadcasting values that enhance school image, providing a significant competitive advantage to draw students and acknowledgement of their school's contribution to better education, as Goni made clear: "Thanks to the program and partnership with the organization, its uniqueness, different learning...we had a huge number of applicants this year...we opened five first-grade classes...the school closest to us barely managed to fill one class...they don't have the program...it gives us an enormous advantage."

In summary, principals maintain that the success, contribution, and benefits of intersectoral partnerships in education are most clearly evident in programs of matching funding. Meaning, they see the Education Ministry's plan of partial privatization to be effective, as the Ministry still provides partial funding while external means enable them to gradually establish the formal directive and conduct intersectoral collaborations. Thus, NGO programs provide two distinct advantages. One the one hand, they combine resources, generating learning in ways that can both realize partnership goals and help realize organizational, educational social and community values – while specifically attuned to the needs of unique populations. On the other hand, such programs empower education leaders, expanding their autonomy, providing administrative flexibility that nurtures initiative, innovation and creativity, a way to realize potential in the public sphere.

Discussion

NGOs constitute powerful players in education, directly influencing the nature, content, interpretation and implementation of education policy as a result, education systems are becoming more diverse, complex and segmented (Robertson *et al.*, 2012). Nonetheless, in their attempt to align non-governmental initiatives with public sector objectives in education,

many governments are establishing inter-sector partnerships with the private sector (Eyal and Berkovich, 2019). Described in the literature is the concept of "New Governance", meaning the emergence of alternative models, defined as different political and institutional ways of organizing collective activity (Peters and Pierre, 2006, p. 27), advocates of non-governmental involvement in education as an efficient way of organizing and capitalizing on the benefits of private sector participation in public education. From this perspective, partnering with nongovernmental organizations is a way of bringing new ideas, actors and resources into public education systems (Patrinos *et al.*, 2009). This is in line with institutional theory, pointing out that although institutions have intrinsic stability, they are increasingly subject to change processes, both cumulative and discontinuous (Rowan, 2006; Yurkofsky, 2017). That is, institutional theory emphasizes the relationship between the organization and its environment. Their mutual influences shape the structure of the organization, the norms and conventions of community and society, the performance and changes that occur in it.

In this study principals expressed the belief that cross-sector partnerships are designed to instigate reforms, injecting the system with innovation and harnessing proactivity as a joint tool to optimize and capitalize on existing potential in the public sphere (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2004). In other words, while the relationship between NGOs and the Israeli education system was often contradictory in the past, they are now more geared towards collaborations. In the principals' viewpoint, this move towards a reform policy founded on shared decision making and responsibility in education will alleviate the estrangement that previously typified this relationship, as well as directing the financial and human capital of two systems to achieve greater synergy – and consequently improving on the uncoordinated and divergent efforts of the Education Ministry and the NGOs (Agranoff, 2003).

Another central theme raised by principals is that they believe the policy officially defines their role, its importance and their authorities and responsibilities as they lead the changes for optimal implementation of the partnership between schools and NGOs; this is a policy that relied on participative leadership as the key to its success (Agranoff, 2003). To them, the policy formally establishes their command in carrying out all aspects of it and leading intersectoral partnerships. They believe the policy to be a deliberate attempt to encourage and empower their leadership in and outside school through decentralizing and top-down delegation of authorities, an explicit statement that they are responsible for implementing partnerships with NGOs.

Consequently, principals' function within multiple axes. First, they manage the partnership, constituting "gatekeepers" tasked with identifying and recruiting interested partners by cultivating ties based on trust, a balance of powers and interests free of negative or questionable agendas or negative educational content (Petterway, 2010). Second, they constitute "community leaders" committed to advancing education goals by adapting school curricula to external input (Addi-Raccah, 2015), delegating responsibilities within the organization, intelligently planning joint platforms for discourse and action, and determining success measures. The policy is a declaration of their leadership of the partnership and legitimate power to best realize the potential for education in the public sphere. Moreover, the policy mandates that partnerships' success is reliant on the strength of principals as gatekeepers and leaders and is therefore already adapted to a state of affairs in which "NGOs are actively involved in formulating Education Ministry directives" (Jessop, 2002, p. 167).

In their view, efficient management of the policy, particularly management of relations with external factors (Bryson *et al.*, 2006) creates the need to reassess the primary challenge they face – overseeing how partners' responsibilities and accountability translates into education content and outcomes. First, they cope with Ministry demands to reduce gaps with dwindling funding. Second, they operate between two separate enforcement mechanisms. Third, they deal with the impact of privatization with the employment of external or contracted teaching staff.

Nevertheless, principals maintain that matched-funded programs are more beneficial and show greater success in meeting the challenges of mutual accountability in education. Meaning, the State's decision to go forward with partial privatization is considered effective as the Ministry continues to provide some funding and also helps in implementing the gradual shift to intersectoral partnerships. Matching uniquely allows for a combination of resources to enhance the impact of dual investment, enabling meaningful and deliberate realization of the partners' vision, achieving organizational, educational, social and community goals, and specifically heeding the voices of unique populations. On the other hand, programs run by the Education Ministry and NGOs are designed to strengthen their leadership, expand their autonomy and administrative flexibility to nurture initiative, innovation and creativity (Sagie *et al.*, 2016), and help them realize the potential for education in the public sphere.

Implications, limitations and future research

Study findings indicate that establishment and support of intersectoral partnerships between the Education Ministry and NGOs is a complex, ongoing and dynamic process with school principals at the helm of these new relationships. Principals have been given more independence, autonomy and clout as they maintain the external networks now contributing to improved outcomes and addressing unique community needs. Consequently, the more external factors become involved in education, the more principals are required to manage and implement the partnership.

According to institutional theory, educational institutions are changeable, and school administrators are entrusted with the management of the school-environment relationship, responsible for effectively utilizing resources, powers, and knowledge in the community to promote educational performance. Current study findings indicate that institutional theory is important in explaining the partnerships that arise to facilitate resource mobilization and leveraging activities that public organizations struggle to implement due to budget and manpower constraints, institutional arrangements and other constraints. Such partnerships can succeed in bridging corporate cultural gaps and different institutional logics, opinions, ideologies and values, helping create an integrative connection of processes, structures, and governance patterns that goes beyond traditional and conservative organizational patterns (Schmid, 2011).

As such, policymakers (main office and district supervisors), implementers (NGO managers, school principals, teachers) and recipients (parents and teachers) must stay attentive to each other, adjust expectations as to the limits of responsibility, and primary to recognize the needs to keep making improvements to the partnership that are based on reciprocal assessment. More, all involved parties must continue to be active in developing, deepening and maintaining the employed mechanisms, normalizing them to become the standard in intersectoral partnerships in education.

This study includes new information on how school principals see NGO involvement in planning and implementation of education policy. However, it was conducted with various limitations. First, participants and their input all relate specifically to education in Israel. Any generalizations that may be drawn from them to shed light on similar processes around the world would require the study also be conducted in diverse sociocultural contexts. Second, interviews with principals were held through the 2016–2017 school year. A longitudinal study would be required to examine whether and how principals feel after years of working with NGOs on various projects. Finally, this study only focused on the opinions of principals, representing only one involved party. This can serve as a comprehensive perspective on the partnership and collaboration between formal education systems and NGOs. Thus, further research is necessary to examine the perceptions of NGO managers, policymakers,

supervisors, teachers, pupils and parents. Based on our study's findings, we recommend investigating whether, how and under what conditions principals can nurture partnerships with NGOs as a platform for initiative, particularly the vigorous leadership needed to carry out the policy.

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