

Policy-influence as Core Business

Synthesizing Private Actors' Strategies in the Promotion of Education Reforms

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Overview

1. Introduction

- Context and purpose of the research
- Methodological and conceptual considerations

2. Toward a categorization of policy influence strategies

- Knowledge mobilization
- Networking
- Supporting grassroots advocacy
- Sponsorship of pilot experiences

3. Concluding remarks

Context and purpose of the research

- Growing attention to the role of the **private sector in education policy-making**, frequently in connection with the advancement of a pro-market educational reform agenda.
- Corporate influence conventionally equated to **lobbying activity**

Limited understanding of less formalized strategies

Limited use of lobbying in countries without a pluralist tradition

- Need to better understand the specific channels, mechanisms and **strategies** that endow corporate actors with authority and legitimacy in a context of network governance



Main purpose of the paper:

Systematization of a broader variety of **strategies** deployed by the **philanthropic and corporate sectors** to promote education reforms

Methodological considerations

Systematic literature review (SLR) with a focus on the **political economy of education privatization** >> **227** research pieces

Sources

- **Electronic databases**
- **Grey literature**
- Hand-searching of **specialized journals**
- Recommendations from **key informants**

Publication date: 1999- 2015

Language: English; Spanish, French, Portuguese

Education level: primary and secondary education



Identification of 4 different policy influence strategies

(inductive process, informed by mainstream theories of policy change)

1. **Knowledge mobilization**
2. **Networking and brokerage**
3. **Supporting grassroots advocacy**
4. **Sponsorship of pilot experiences**

PREVALENT CONTEXTS:

- **Anglo-saxon countries**
- **Post-conflict**
- **Low-income countries**

Working definitions:

Corporate sector:

- A wide range of actors/organizations that **operate as, or are closely connected to, for-profit organizations** (cf. Bull & McNeill, 2007).
- Broad understanding >> Includes:
 - **Philanthropic foundations**, which might not be, but are usually aligned with the commercial priorities of their funders,
 - **Edu-businesses** directly involved in the production of educational goods and services
 - **Advocacy networks** and **policy entrepreneurs**, committed to the advancement of educational reforms

Strategies defined:

- Range of repertoires to which corporate actors **purposively** and **strategically** resort to exert some form of **policy influence** in the education reform domain.
- **Unlikely** to be observed in an isolated or **pure form** in real education settings.

1. Knowledge mobilization

- Education policy debate increasingly framed and informed by **scientific knowledge**

... but **no longer** occurring exclusively in **academic settings or traditional research agents**



- New and privileged role for the **philanthropic sector** knowledge in the **management and production** of policy-making-oriented knowledge:

- >> Key **fund**ers and promoters of intermediary organizations able to frame the debate
- >> Ability to target a **variety of audiences** (policy circles + general public)

Financial +
political
resources

1. Knowledge mobilization

- **Departure from (conventional) forms of scientific philanthropy**
 - More explicit or intentional search for some form of **ideological alignment**.
 - Increasingly **blurring boundaries** between research and advocacy
 - Instrumental or **tactical use of evidence** —
 - Cherry-picking practices
 - Echo-chamber effect

Legitimation and expansion of the **low-fee private school** model on the basis of a limited body of evidence

(e.g. diffusion of J. Tooley more journalistic material among high-level policy circles)

Key role of philanthropy-backed **think tanks + foundations** in the popularization of pro-market reforms in the **US**

(e.g. Broad, Dell, Bill and Melinda Gates, Heritage, Hewlett)

- **Repositioning of the media as a new locus of debate**
 - Venture philanthropists increasingly visible in public debates as commentators or specialists.
 - Substantive efforts to achieve “media impact” when supporting research.

2. Networking and brokerage

- Growing attention to the **relational dimension of power** informed by a social network analysis research agenda



Particularly fruitful in the education policy studies field and in relation to a marketization agenda

- Varying degrees of **formality, stability** and **coordination** >> different modalities of *networking labour*.

Emphasis on the capacity of influence of dense **networks of like-minded** individuals and **organizations**

Policy-shaping capacity associated to **brokerage positions** (org. as boundary-spanners)

Working in coalitions

Meetingness

2. Networking and brokerage

Formal coalitions	Meetingness
<p>Formalized, cultivated Goal-oriented Organized around a specific/explicit issue Public profile Durable?</p>	<p>Informal Built on pre-existing relationships, regular and casual encounters Low profile Increasingly a deliberate strategy?</p>
<p><i>Todos Pela Educaçao (Brazil)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brazilian business coalition enjoying powerful communications strategy, solid technical support, and good connections with the state apparatus ▪ Model for other education coalition in Latin America + regional coalition REDUCA 	<p>Promotion of low-fee private schools (Global South)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ International organizations, consultants, private foundations and <u>edubusinesses</u> meeting regularly a number of international events, conferences and seminars (WISE, GESC...) ▪ Naturalization of the for-profit motive in education development

2. Networking and brokerage

Policy entrepreneurs

- >> Key figure in the articulation and preservation of policy networks + policy influence as a function of **boundary-spanning** capacity
- >> Heavy reliance on **reputation**, contacts and privileged access to a **wide range of policy venues**.

E.g. James Tooley

- Most active individual in the promotion of LFPS
- Simultaneous presence in different realms of activity as a researcher, advocate, speaker, funder, and entrepreneur of private schooling.

Revolving doors

- >> By-product/illustration of the **permeability** between the private and public sector

Flow of privatization advocates between institutions, private advocacy or research organizations

- US: Nina Shokrii Rees >> Heritage Foundations / Bush administration
- UK: Michael Barber >> New Labour policy adviser / McKinsey and Pearson

3. Supporting and instrumenting grassroots advocacy

- Indirect leverage through the **sponsoring** and incentivizing of **grassroots advocacy** as a means to:
 - Exert pressure to the legislative and executive power
 - Create a climate of opinion conducive to reform.

E.g.: US **philanthropic sector** actively supporting interest groups and **civil society organizations** with a pro-market agenda:

- Financial backing of **pro-choice “new civil rights movements”** >> Black Alliance for Educational Options.
- Sponsorship of pro-charter and pro-voucher **advocacy campaigns** >> Gates Foundation support to **Yes On 1240** campaign (Washington).

NB: Unarticulated corpus of literature >> references to *outsider / indirect strategies; outside lobbying; constituency influence, etc.*

4. Direct provision and sponsorship of pilot experiences

Development of **models** and investment in **demonstration projects** to inform policy change



Philanthropic support of **private education initiatives** in order to prove their desirability.

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- In connection with **venture philanthropy** >> donations as investments oriented to **macro-level policy transformations**.
 - Less subject to **public scrutiny** >> more unlikely reaction of opposition
 - Higher levels of **autonomy** vis-à-vis traditional **education stakeholders**
 - Legitimized in terms of innovation and flexibility
 - Evolution of the private sector towards a ***jurisdictional challenger*** likely to replicate, replace and competed with State action

4. Direct provision and sponsorship of pilot experiences

US: philanthropic support as the financial backbone of **charter schools and charter management organizations:**

- Development of *best practices* and *models of excellence* as a means to encourage reform and scaling up dynamics
- Education authorities increasingly willing to serve as pilot sites in exchange for resources.

Brazil: Privately-funded **pilot projects** implemented at a **local scale** and subsequently **validated by the MoE** and adopted at the state level.

>> Key role of the Guide of Educational Technologies (Plan of Education Development) – list of educational solutions

Liberia: key role of **Bridge International Academies** in inspiring and shaping the **Partnership Schools for Liberia** (large-scale, education outsourcing reform)

>> **Persuasive potential** of an already implemented model portrayed as a **proven success**

Concluding remarks

- Contribution of the private sector in the promotion of education privatization beyond **supply-side and lobbying activity**
 - >> Increasingly diverse range of roles and mobilization of **forms of capital other than economic**
 - Symbolic capital >> scholar/scientific authority
 - Social capital >> political capital, privileged access to decision-makers
- Association between the **formal status** of the influencer (insider outsider) and the choice of a particular strategy as increasingly weaker.
 - Indirect out “**outsider**” strategies not necessary a **second-best option**
 - Investment in **multiple venues and roles** as the most effective strategy to appeal different audiences and ensure a broader impact.
- Growing diversification and **hybridization** of roles and strategies >> increasingly blurring boundaries between the public and the private sector.
 - >> Corporate sector: not only an influencer but increasingly *embedded* within the policymaking process.

Concluding remarks

Gaps and possible **research directions**:

- **Structural determinants** and **macro-level enabling variables** impacting in the selection and effectiveness of policy-seeking strategies
- Effect of **institutional features** or available **resources** on the definition of corporate strategies' preferences
- **Ideological, economic** and **political motives** behind corporate sector engagement in educational reform.
- Possible **conflicts of interest** when different roles are carried out by a range of actors closely or organically networked?