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

- 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)

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

  - Working in coalitions
  - Meetingness
## 2. Networking and brokerage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal coalitions</th>
<th>Meetingness</th>
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<tr>
<td>Formalized, cultivated&lt;br&gt;Goal-oriented&lt;br&gt;Organized around a specific/explicit issue&lt;br&gt;Public profile&lt;br&gt;Durable?</td>
<td>Informal&lt;br&gt;Built on pre-existing relationships, regular and casual encounters&lt;br&gt;Low profile&lt;br&gt;Increasingly a deliberate strategy?</td>
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*Todos Pela Educação (Brazil)*
- 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

*Promotion of low-fee private schools (Global South)*
- International organizations, consultants, private foundations and *edubusinesses* meeting regularly at 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 Shokraii 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.

- 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?