School–Nongovernmental Organization Engagement as an Entrepreneurial Venture: A Case Study of Sunlight’s Engagement With Israeli Schools

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the objectives, nature, and perceived outcomes of school–nongovernmental organization (school-NGO) engagements in the Israeli education system, focusing on a single case study of a school-NGO interaction. We aim to characterize the conflicting motivations of each stakeholder involved in the creation and formulation of such engagement and to capture the process of interaction—from its initiation through the decision to continue, expand, or abolish these relations.

Research Design: We employ a case study approach based on in-depth interviews with school principals, the NGO’s CEO, representatives of the local education authority and Ministry of Education, and the Israeli parliament’s Education Committee director, in addition to publication analysis, to provide a comprehensive view of the interaction from the stakeholders’ perspectives.

Findings: We find that school-NGO interaction results from multidimensional relations, wherein each involved entity holds a set of aims and motivations that

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intermingle with those of other entities to create and form the engagement. School-NGO interaction can be considered a form of entrepreneurship within the education system, with each stakeholder acting entrepreneurially to gain value, attain resources, and mitigate risks in a proactive and innovative matter. All stakeholders employ this initiative to address their own, sometimes conflicting, goals and to benefit according to their own agendas. **Conclusions:** We conclude by discussing possible theoretical and practical implications involving school principals’ agency and NGO-school engagements in the local and global context.

**Keywords**
school–nongovernmental organization interaction, entrepreneurship, school principals, autonomy, power relations

My aim is to see Sunlight as one of the compulsory subjects in every school. Just like you see “math” and “sciences” in the weekly schedule.

—CEO of Sunlight (nongovernmental organization), in interview

**Introduction**

In many countries, including the United Kingdom, United States, and Israel, schools are exposed to increasing external pressures for high achievement and performance, along with demands to align with governmental standards and top-down policies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Gibton, 2011). Concurrently, decentralization processes result in school principals and teachers gaining more de facto power and autonomy regarding internal processes and decision making in schools, affording the formulation of bottom-up policies (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Nir, 2009). These two prominent trends expose school staff to complex pressures that affect their actions and practices. In some cases, teachers and school principals enjoy a high degree of autonomy as long as they advance and improve students’ achievements (as do charter schools, for example). This situation provides school staff with opportunities to promote new initiatives and to lead changes in their schools and communities. Indeed, among other changes, decentralization with increased performance pressures enabled the entrance of new actors into the school arena, including the business sector and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The State of Israel was founded on a welfare model that combined economic principles and a commitment to provide social services to its citizens (Berkovich & Foldes, 2012). The majority of schools in Israel belong to the “national formal” stream, governed and financed by the Ministry of Education (MOE;
After several decades of education governed mainly by a centralized “one size fits all” model, Israel had de facto discarded the idea of public education (Gibton, 2011). In the mid-1970s, shortly after the neoliberal state model emerged as an alternative to the welfare state model, Israel embraced this new approach without changing its former legislation (Berkovich & Foldes, 2012). As in many European countries in recent decades, pressure has grown on Israel to decentralize its administration of public education and provide greater autonomy to local communities and schools over educational matters. The state responded by allowing certain school choice for parents, thus leading schools to embrace semicompetitive governance (Resh & Benavot, 2009).

Several institutions are involved in the education system in Israel: the Education Committee of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), which discusses law proposals regarding educational issues and which is authorized to initiate legislation on educational issues; the MOE, which is responsible for educational institutions including schools and which focuses on the planning and legislation of education; and the local education authorities (LEAs), which are municipal agencies charged with local educational issues (Gibton, 2011). In recent years, LEAs have become major players in the provision of education, especially because of their influence over, and funding of, extracurricular activities in schools; thus, they have been accused of widening the gap between rich and poor schools based on their respective locations within the different LEA regions (Addi-Raccah & Gavish, 2010).

This study aims to follow one specific school-NGO interaction within the Israeli education system. The NGO chosen for the study, “Sunlight,” operates a program for students within Israeli schools. Its program aims to inspire and motivate students to succeed. Sunlight is a relatively young organization, acting extensively in the Israeli education system in the last 3 years. Its program was approved by the MOE through a semiformal process and has been offered at more than 30 schools in 10 LEAs. This study examines the school-NGO interaction from five perspectives based on eight in-depth interviews and on content analysis of documents and publications of the involved stakeholders—the principals of schools that engage with the NGO, the NGO, the MOE, the LEA, and the Knesset Education Committee director—to reveal the motivations of each partner and to uncover the nature of such interactions and their impact on the current educational arena.

Theoretical Framework

Twenty-First-Century Schools

Educational policy is highly vulnerable to political pressures. In the last two decades in particular, education has come to be viewed as a crucial factor in
ensuring national economic productivity and competitiveness in the context of globalization. Indeed, two key terms have frequently emerged in recent public debate: the privatization and commercialization of education (Ball, 2013). The debate surrounding these issues is an ideological one, with scholars typically resisting these phenomena and sometimes referring to them as different manifestations of the same process, forming part of neoliberal capitalistic policy.

Privatization emerged as a policy agenda in the early 1980s, following the election of conservative governments in the United Kingdom and the United States, initiated in part as a reaction to the inefficiencies associated with state-led development. Historically, publicly operated schools were considered a primary social mechanism for ensuring that all members of society received an education that would enable them to take their place as citizens in a complex democratic society. Privatization, however, delegates school governance and control of civic education in public schools to external agents. It heralds the wholesale handing over of the education system to those representing organizations whose chief interests lie in something other than the advancement of education for the good of society and an active democratic citizenry (Yonah, Dahan, & Markovich, 2008).

Educational privatization can be pictured on a scale starting with the outsourcing of “noncore” school activities—such as facility cleaning services, transportation, meals, extracurricular activities, library maintenance, and other such services—to the introduction of private suppliers for “core” activities, such as teachers training, curriculum development, and school governance, through full privatization of schools as “for profit” privately held entities. One of the major outcomes of privatization is competition as a key drive for improved efficiency, ideally translated into improved service delivery, lower consumer costs, and ability of the private owner/operator to invest in further improvements and expansion of services.

As one of the central fields of governmental spending, education continues to be subject to privatization efforts alongside health services, social services, and other governmental activities. Governments consider privatization of education for two main reasons. First, internationalization tendencies and the growing importance of international testing scores, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Program for International Student Assessment, place reform pressures on governments to increase efficiency in ways usually attributed to the private sector. Second, economic crises and the unwillingness of taxpayers to invest more in education cause a continuous shortage in public funds for school governance, creating a need for alternative funding models, including privatization.

The neoliberal state encourages privatization of education, developing high-stakes accountability measures that create the standards and establish
the central values of the education system (Bulkley & Bursh, 2011; Eden, 2012). Therefore, under neoliberal ideology, schools have been forced into a competitive educational quasi-market with increased emphasis on accountability, high achievements, and performance (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009). An obvious consequence of the privatization of social services is the delivery of such services by various organizations outside the public sector. Corporations are attracted to the field of education inter alia due to the fact that a marketing presence within school walls enables them to influence a very large target audience—not only the students but also their parents (Feuerstein, 2001). Yet, NGOs have come to play the most salient role in the provision of educational services in both developed and developing countries (Katan & Lowenstein, 2009).

Increasing Power and Autonomy of Schools and School Principals

Theorists following the institutional perspective have traditionally regarded schools as being influenced by strong institutional pressures (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1994) and compelled to conform to practices and norms imposed by the formal central authorities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores, & Scribner, 2003; Scott, 1994). However, decentralization shifted the level of schools’ decision-making authority from the central government to LEAs and ultimately down to individual schools. This process significantly challenged school management, placing strains of high expectations. Under decentralization policies, schools are expected to gain power and autonomy (Nir, 2009), afford more diversity in school governance (Gibton, 2011; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009), and increase their dependency on their local environment (Addi-Raccah, 2006). As Moos and Møller (2003) have argued, schools function in a hypercomplex society in which they have to act as

self directed organizations that must manage their own affairs within the frames provided by authorities and they must be accountable to authorities. The way in which management and the “production of output” is exercised is up to each individual organization (p. 357).

Nowadays, schools are exposed to complex and contradictory pressures that affect their actions and practices. They are viewed as “open systems” that, following decentralization reforms, currently exist at the hub of complex networks of groups, agencies, and individuals. They engage in boundary-spanning tasks and are pressured to seek new partnerships with various
agencies and stakeholders in the community at large (e.g., LEAs, parents, the business community, social services, NGOs; Bradshaw, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & McElheron-Hopkins, 2006). Similar to for-profit organizations, schools have begun to aspire for efficiency to increase their product’s quality and value to society. Moreover, consistent cuts in public funding, in addition to this greater autonomy that schools now enjoy, have led to increasing involvement of diverse nongovernmental agents in education. Ultimately, public schools are increasingly turning to external partners as a mechanism for securing facilities, financial resources, and expertise (Wohlstetter, Malloy, Smith, & Hentschke, 2004).

A dramatic change in the school principal’s role emerged from these processes. Whereas in the past the role of the principal was mainly pedagogical, in recent years principals are expected to demonstrate professional and ethical school leadership while offering effective business-oriented management (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). Goldring and Schuermann (2009) identify various new needs affecting the role of school management, whereby principals must cope with enhanced accountability demands, competition and school choice, and expectations for systemwide community engagement, while applying a learner-centered leadership focus and analytical skills (including research evidence gathering and data-based decision making). Furthermore, school principals presently act as the focal point of more complex networks, agencies, and individuals, as compared to those before educational decentralization, and they are accordingly pressured into seeking new partnerships with various agencies and stakeholders in the community (e.g., LEAs, parents, the business community). As a result, as public schools strive to meet government regulations and standardization of outcomes following increasing governmental attempts to affect classrooms and student experiences (Louis, Thomas, Gordon, & Febey, 2008), principals today are able to influence policy and resource appropriation while responding to calls for innovation, critical thinking, and creativity.

In seeking to meet these dual objectives, principals take risks inside the school and beyond. They must investigate those resources whose activities promote new initiatives, and they must find the funds required for school development. In doing so, they establish commercial and entrepreneurial relations with various external agencies. Through this process, principals were assigned a new role of engagement in innovative and entrepreneurial activities, which may at times alter and even interfere with educational policy and establish new school arrangements (Yemini & Addi-Raccah, 2013). These expectations from school principals to engage in innovative and entrepreneurial activities require that principals take on several entrepreneurial characteristics. Despite the continuous debate over the definition and core
concept of entrepreneurship (e.g., Fernald, Solomon, & Tarabishy, 2005; Hentschke, 2010), research has indicated that entrepreneurs can be depicted as risk takers, high achievers, and creative types in their abilities to produce unique goods and services (Fernald et al., 2005). Entrepreneurship can be regarded as one feature of extraordinary leaders whose innovations or solutions to pressing problems carry some economic or other benefits (Sheingate, 2003). Traditionally, entrepreneurship was associated with the private sector and for-profit business organizations, with entrepreneurial innovations considered to be those directed toward the marketplace. Therefore, the phenomenon initially received marginal attention in public educational settings (Borasi & Finnigan, 2010). Furthermore, schools are frequently perceived as being resistant to educational change, as expressed in their reliance on institutional regulations and norms, which hardly leave room for entrepreneurship (Levin, 2006). In the school settings, leadership innovation usually takes on an aspect of social entrepreneurship composed of innovative activities with a social objective (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). In this regard, Selman (2002) indicated that innovation is undertaken to bring about new tools, products, or processes that can be sustained and that bring some value or utility, enabling people to accomplish something that they were previously unable to. Indeed, innovation yields expectations for change and improvement. Therefore, these complicated new expectations present challenging multidimensional responsibilities for the principal (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010).

**NGOs’ Involvement in Schools**

No consensus exists in the literature over the specific definition of NGOs. Ichilov (2012) indicates that NGOs represent a network of interest groups lacking a formal representative structure. NGOs are often associated with philanthropic, nonprofit purposes, yet some of the major business conglomerates act through NGOs in the public sphere—including that of education. NGOs can be driven by various motivations. Frequently, they are established specifically as a means to acquire donor resources. While NGOs’ legal status prevents them from official profit distribution, those working for the organizations are often the main beneficiaries of donated resources. Hence, NGO motivations can be not only philanthropic but also financial (Rose, 2009).

In the last decades, NGOs have become a central social power in Western countries. Many of them function within the field of education (Berkovich & Foldes, 2012), and in recent years they have become significant players in public education (Bulkley & Burch, 2011). The growing involvement of NGOs within education derives mainly from such organizations’ ability to address the state’s failure to effectively and efficiently deliver services
NGOs play a variety of roles in supporting education service delivery. Some NGOs 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 (Rose, 2009). In any case, in recent years, various NGOs’ roles in education have shifted in significant ways, as they have become more closely intertwined with the daily operations of public education (Bulkley & Burch, 2011).

Many NGOs operate under a problem model or a deficit model, whereby in cases of a real or perceived failure of the public sector, the government mandates relations with a private sector partner in an attempt to improve performance and standards. Yet, NGOs also operate by identifying opportunities. For example, an LEA can contract with an NGO of its own accord, without governmental intervention, to elevate its educational service resources and to enhance performance (Davies & Hentschke, 2006).

The perceived comparative advantage of NGO involvement in education is grounded in NGOs’ ability to better understand organizational forms, agendas, and practices. Nonstate providers tend to be seen as less hierarchical, more democratic and flexible, committed to serving the poor, and less motivated by profit seeking; hence, their delivery of services is considered more cost-effective. Their more flexible organizational structure and dedicated agendas lead to a public image as one more innovative, accountable, and effective in terms of cost and delivery, with greater knowledge of community needs than what state providers have (Callet, 2010; DeStefano & Moore, 2010).

Yet, among these advantages, the growing involvement of nongovernmental actors in the provision of public service also presents disadvantages. Politicians and public officials perceive a threat of reduced governmental control inherent in nongovernmental 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 that 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 (Rose, 2010). In addition, involvement of nongovernmental players may face resistance from certain stakeholders. For instance, teachers and other employees may see such external actors as threatening the stability of their jobs (Patrinos, Osorio,
& Guáqueta, 2009). Nevertheless, a lack of empirical data exists 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 (Callet, 2010).

**NGOs’ Engagement in the Israeli Education System**

Various external organizations operate in the Israeli educational system in addition to the MOE. These organizations include, inter alia, nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations and foundations, business groups, and individual volunteers (Israeli State Comptroller, 2011). Such agencies are driven by different motivations: classic philanthropy, socially minded business, the quest to improve services, and social agendas that aspire to affect education (Weinheber, Ben Nun, & Shiffman, 2008). Through their presence and direct influence within school grounds, these organizations redesign the educational field (Shiffer, Berkovich, Bar-Yehuda, & Almog-Bareket, 2010).

According to 2011 Israeli State Comptroller report, an external organization may be integrated into the educational system in various ways. Generally, the MOE contracts with an external organization to operate a program that the organization has developed at schools; otherwise, the MOE and an external organization may engage in a joint venture. Additionally, as previously noted, external organizations may be integrated into educational activities, not through contact or permission of the MOE, but rather through direct contact with the LEA or the school itself.

In recent years, NGOs’ involvement in the Israeli education system has increased dramatically (Weinheber et al., 2008), in part as a consequence of the state’s withdrawal from operating or funding social services. NGOs’ provision of social services in the educational field primarily targets public schools managed and operated by the state (Berkovich & Foldes, 2012). NGOs offer programs focusing largely on student achievement, curriculum enrichment, development of life skills, and education for values (Weinheber et al., 2008).

In December 2010, the MOE published a director general’s circular detailing the process of permitting external programs at schools (mainly operated by NGOs). The circular discusses the prerequisites for approving an external program, the process of request and approval, and the publication of the programs in a database designed for the school staff. This circular was distributed to school principals but has not yet been adopted by the MOE (Israeli State Comptroller, 2011).

Despite the growing involvement of NGOs in the Israeli education system, their relationships with the system have not been thoroughly researched.
The present study examines the objectives and nature of school-NGO engagements in Israel, focusing on one specific NGO and its interactions with schools. We investigate this engagement from five perspectives—those of the school principals, the NGO, the MOE, the LEA, and the Knesset Education Committee—to reveal the motivations and nature of such interactions and their influence on the educational arena.

Method

Our primary purpose was to document the process of initiation, development, and functioning of interaction between schools and an NGO in the Israeli education system. Through a case study analysis, we investigated how the formal education system formed relations with one external agent (the Sunlight NGO); we uncovered the motivations and strategies of each stakeholder in such an engagement (the school principals, the LEA, the MOE, the director of the Knesset Education Committee, and the CEO of the NGO); and we assessed how such engagements are becoming increasingly common within the education system. We selected this qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2003) to facilitate exploration of a phenomenon through a variety of data sources, thereby enabling us to capture a multitude of perspectives that enable consideration of many facets of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). We examined how the engagement is formed and developed from the perceptions of each involved stakeholder. Through such exploration, we present the establishment and maintenance of the interaction pathway between the external entity and schools. One of the advantages of this approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participants, as the latter told their stories and provided their perspectives, enabling us to better understand their actions.

Data for this study were collected between December 2012 and June 2013. Two methods of data collection were applied: interviews and documents’ analysis. The interviews were scheduled with stakeholders independently and were performed at their offices or in coffee shops in various locations according to the interviewees’ convenience. The interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. In total, we based our study on eight interviews, detailed in Table 1. We performed the analysis in two stages: We undertook the analysis separately and then repeated all stages of analysis jointly so that points of contention were verified and cleared until we achieved agreement (per Mirriam, 1998). In several cases, additional experts were consulted regarding the interpretation of the results.

We chose to focus our study on the actions of one NGO, known as Sunlight—an organization seeking to inspire and increase motivation for
success among youth. Sunlight’s program is a type of “group coaching” that the organization’s tutors provide to classes. Students participating in Sunlight’s program undergo a process whereby they learn to get to know their strengths, weaknesses, personal values, and what “success” means to them. During the process, they learn how to achieve success without succumbing to fear and how to identify barriers to success and ways of coping with them. Sunlight’s program includes a meeting in which students’ parents and other relevant educational stakeholders are exposed to the organization’s methodology; 10 workshop meetings with the students; and one follow-up meeting that takes place a year after the end of the program to monitor how students benefited.

We selected this particular NGO due to its high visibility in recent years within the education system and because of our access to Sunlight’s CEO. We followed the lead of the Sunlight CEO and started our snowball-based procedure by contacting the school principals recommended by the CEO. Later, we continued with additional school principals; then, we approached an LEA that the NGO is working with. Other interviewees were identified by a snowball method as well, where each participant provided a link to the next one (Creswell, 2008). In addition, several stakeholders were approached independently (e.g., the former director of the Knesset Education Committee and the head of one LEA), due to their relevance to the decision-making path in the engagement.

One of the goals of the interviews was to identify the relevant stakeholders involved in the creation and formulation of the school–Sunlight NGO engagement. The former director of the Knesset Education Committee mentioned in

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**Table 1. Details of the Interviewed Stakeholders in the Present School: Nongovernmental Organization Engagement Case Study.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Approximate Age, Years</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Sunlight” CEO</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of LEA Education Section 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of LEA Education Section 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principal 1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principal 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principal 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former director of Knesset (Israeli parliament) Education Committee</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education official</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. LEA = local education authority.*
The interview that the teachers are feeling useless due to the increasing involvement of NGOs within schools, especially when the NGO program is provided to students directly by the NGO itself and not by the teachers. Indeed, the interviews with the Sunlight NGO’s CEO and the school principals, as well as with the LEA and MOE representatives, uncovered that the teachers are not involved in the creation and formulation of such engagement.

In addition, we asked the school principals interviewed to discuss the role of parents in the creation and formulation of the school-NGO engagement. Their answers revealed that parents do not participate in this process—although, as mentioned previously, the program itself does include one meeting with parents that introduces them to the program. The explanation that stakeholders provided for the lack of parental involvement in the creation and formulation of the school-NGO engagement involved the program’s categorization as a “bonus” for students and the fact that parents do not fund Sunlight’s program. Therefore, given their exclusion from the creation, formulation, and application of the Sunlight program, we considered neither teachers nor parents to be relevant stakeholders regarding this study.

We based our study’s reliability on the use of different data sources, as suggested by Patton (1990). First, we interviewed diverse stakeholders who provided us with their perceptions of engagement formation and development from different angles. In addition, we performed a comprehensive analysis of the relevant documents available online from each interviewed stakeholder: school websites, LEA and MOE websites, and the public media. Each data source was treated as one piece of the puzzle, contributing to our understanding of the entire phenomenon. This convergence added strength to the findings, as the various strands of data have been braided to promote a greater understanding of the overall situation. We created a software (based on MS Word with Hebrew accessibility) to compile a joint database of all data, enabling us to search and categorize the information yielded. All additional data were collected and managed through an advanced MS Word template with color coding for each source. This information was analyzed in the same way as the interviews. Visual data found online (i.e., movies from the NGOs’ campaign and filmed meetings), as well as observations made during NGO conferences and events, were also transcribed and analyzed.

The data were analyzed concurrently during all stages of the study. Each interview was transcribed in the same week that it took place and analyzed independently by each of us. Three times during the research, the accumulated data were reanalyzed and research questions refined. The literature survey was also updated as new queries emerged during the preliminary stages of analysis.

We tried to describe the patterns, linkages, and plausible explanations through inductive analysis, conjointly seeking rival or competing themes and
explanations. We employed inductive and logical analysis techniques. Inductively, we investigated the various ways of organizing the data that might lead to different findings. Logically, we searched for competing possibilities and then checked if those possibilities could be supported by the data (Patton, 1990).

The analysis started with identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as “open coding” (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). During open coding, we identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the phenomena of creating and managing partnerships were observed and grouped.

As the raw data were broken down into manageable themes, we continued our analysis by identifying these themes according to their speaker and context. The next stage of analysis involved reexamination of the categories identified to determine linkages—a complex process coined “axial coding” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Through this process, the discrete categories that were identified in open coding were compared and combined in new ways to present the “big picture.” Finally, a coherent story line emerged, which we assume can be generalized and further developed in future studies.

We gathered secondary materials from the following sources: a screening of the NGO, MOE, schools, and LEAs’ websites; the official documents published by the LEAs and the MOE regarding NGO-school engagement; a screening of the main Israeli newspapers (Ha’aretz and Yediot) in the last year regarding occasions of such engagements; and promotional materials provided by the NGO. These materials provided us with source triangulation possibilities.

Results and Discussion

The following section is organized according to the main themes that emerged from all interviews with the above-described stakeholders. We identified two major themes in the interviews. First, all interviewees except for the former director of the Knesset Education Committee perceived the engagement in a similar way, through the lens of an entrepreneurial venture. The stakeholders addressed all the main domains of entrepreneurship, which we present here as subthemes that emerged throughout the data collection process, including proactivity, innovation, risk taking, and resource mitigation. The second theme that emerged related to the power relations in such engagement—namely, the impact that each participant gains from it and the mode of relations between different partners. We revealed that the major tension in this engagement involves the perceived power of each stakeholder to influence the nature, structure, and meanings of the engagement. We map the findings
according to the emergent scheme and then proceed to discuss each theme in the broader context of the Israeli education system, as well as through a global perspective.

**Entrepreneurship**

The Sunlight CEO, the interviewed school principals, and the LEA and MOE representatives referred to the school-NGO engagement as an entrepreneurial, novel, and proactive action initiated to provide the institutionalized education system with a necessary change. Notably, each interviewee perceived the entrepreneurial venture as his or her own initiative, thus crediting himself or herself as an entrepreneur functioning within the static, institutionalized education system. Given the regular education system’s reputation as operating in a traditional, bureaucratic, and institutionalized way, the entrance of a new initiative is widely perceived as a change maker, a catalyzer of reform in the system. As the Sunlight CEO claimed, “I bring to the system something totally new and different. I used to work with the Prime Minister’s Office and the private market. But now it is time for change [in schools].”

School Principal 1 described NGOs as “usually bringing a very high commitment and ideology to yield change and to help the school. . . . I must initiate and ignite processes here . . . to bring new resources . . . to explore collaborations.”

LEA Official 1 also mentioned the entrepreneurial nature of NGOs that choose to approach schools: “They usually have dreams of changing the system. . . . We need to see if these initiatives fit well with our local municipal agenda.”

The school-NGO engagement is a multifaceted process with different parties involved. Through the interviews, we traced the references to different aspects of the entrepreneurial process. Although all parties presented the engagement as an entrepreneurial act, huge differences emerged in the perception of the act itself and the meaning and importance of its ingredients. In the following subthemes, we present and discuss those findings.

**Proactivity.** Proactivity is defined as the active search for new opportunities (Eyal & Inbar, 2003), thus differing from more passive modes of behavior, such as reacting to the change or ignoring the change that is occurring. The LEA representative described NGOs as “shooting to all directions to penetrate the system. They approach the LEA, the MOE, school principals. . . . They initiate actions whenever they can . . . personal relations, official proposals, anything goes.” The MOE official noted, “We see the increase in such entrepreneurship. [NGOs] are very proactive, and on the other hand school principals are under a lot of pressure to succeed, thus they also
initiate and seek projects [with NGO involvement].” In describing school activities, School Principal 1 added, “We need to be active in gaining our own resources. . . . Of course, we are entrepreneurial.” The Sunlight CEO also claimed proactivity: “We need to be the first and the best . . . before the others.” School Principal 3 noted,

Nothing would have happened here [in the school] if I were not able to recruit partners who helped me make this school physically attractive, but mainly in terms of its content, to transform it into an interesting school: fascinating, thrilling, exciting and touching for all populations.7

Not only the direct partners in the engagement (school principals and the NGO) demonstrated a proactive approach; the LEA applied a similar approach. As the LEA representative noted, “I am responsible to actively find the right partnership for my city.” The MOE representative argued the same:

I heard from someone about Sunlight and I wanted to bring them to our classes. I met [the CEO] and her team. . . . I worked to bring her here. . . . I’ve asked for an additional budget for next year. . . . I want to expose [the NGO] to more groups.

Risk taking. All stakeholders defined the school-NGO engagement as a high-risk venture. The Sunlight CEO stated,

I understood that the most important thing is to become an integral part of the system [through the MOE]. When I started to say this, people thought that I am crazy. . . . Even my husband didn’t believe in the idea and we divorced back then. . . . My board of directors thought that the risk is enormous.

The Sunlight CEO also stated that the NGO’s tutors and she herself worked on the project for a long time pro bono.

The former director of the Knesset Education Committee also perceived the engagement to be a risky venture—“Those partnerships are high risk. The regulator can’t control what is going on within such a partnership”—as did the LEA representative: “Education is our responsibility. When residents don’t like something that’s going on in schools, they come directly to my office. I am taking a risk by allowing such a partnership.” The LEA representative also noted, “You cannot ignore the fundamental economic aspects. . . . We saw what happened after Madoff, for example, with the collapse of many organizations. . . . There is danger in excessive reliance on the business sector and NGOs.”

The second LEA representative expressed similar concerns regarding personal responsibility for the engagement:
The risk is, what happens when [the NGOs] suddenly leave the school? If you are prepared for this possibility in the annual plan, and you realize that [the NGO] may actually leave at some point, then it’s fine. It’s important not to rely on [the NGO], otherwise if they leave, the school can collapse.

School principals also experience risk as an important factor in school-NGO engagement. School Principal 1, for example, shared his experience with what he considered to be a fraudulent NGO:

Once there was a famous NGO called “The Way to Happiness in the Middle East,” something like that; it had publications, workshops, presentations, joy and happiness. . . . Every day they called, very impressive. Ultimately, they only came here once through the boarding school; they turned out to be Scientologists who had set up an NGO and went to schools to preach Scientology content . . . but they do not talk about the cult. . . . It is very dangerous.

The Knesset Education Committee and the MOE were also concerned about the risk involved in such engagement and suggested stricter regulation to mitigate the risks. The former director of the Knesset Education Committee said, “The NGO can have different goals and agendas, but we must clearly say that the authority and the regulation should be nationalized. . . . We must control the risk of such partnerships.”

**Utilizing opportunities.** Risk was perceived as one side of the coin, while the gain and the outcome of the engagement were perceived as the other side. All those involved expected to gain something from the engagement that they could not attain otherwise: Schools wanted to improve their outcomes, and they searched for innovative ways to do so; the NGO was in search of resources from the MOE and the LEA; the MOE sought to engage with the NGO, as the latter can provide a required service that the former cannot; and the LEA was interested in gaining a more attractive local education system.8 In other words, alongside the risks of such engagement, each stakeholder mentioned one’s own and the other stakeholders’ gains from it.

School Principal 2 noted,

The MOE is very ambivalent regarding nonprofit operation within schools. On the one hand, [external organizations] are doing [the ministry’s] job, while on the other hand [the ministry] sees how well [the NGO] serves its goals. . . . [The NGO] makes possible what the MOE does not provide.

The MOE representative expressed the situation similarly:
This was a great opportunity for our students to benefit from. . . . The reason why we take on more NGOs is that we do not have enough resources to provide the needs. So if professional, creative, sensitive, and devoted agencies take part in this, we gladly cooperate for the benefit of the children.

The former director of the Knesset Education Committee noted additional benefits:

Each school needs to show its uniqueness. There is a crazy competition, so often . . . schools compete by boasting that they have robotics, they have nature and environment classes, and then around these issues they also bring in various philanthropic organizations. . . . This is a quick way to generate a sense of progress and renewal in the school.

*Innovation*. Entrepreneurship is considered to be a driving force of change and innovation, introducing opportunities to achieve efficient and effective performance in sectors both public and private (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). We found that the engagement was perceived as an innovative act, differing from the regular school methods. The Sunlight CEO claimed,

I thought a lot about the concept of this venture. This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing for me. I wanted to come with something so innovate that no one could compete with it. . . . There are plenty of NGOs out there, but only one Sunlight.

During the interview, the Sunlight CEO presented us with a book written by the NGO, describing the innovative method that Sunlight developed. The book is distributed to schools participating in the Sunlight’s program. Clearly, a quest to innovate lies at the heart of the aim, methodology, and marketing of the program.

The school principals also rationalized their choices as innovative. School Principal 2 said, “I will always make efforts to find innovative solution. You must be entrepreneurial, otherwise you will not be considered significant in the system.”

The MOE and LEA also consider such innovation to be necessary. The LEA representative claimed,

I think that there are many NGOs that bring a lot of added value beyond money. They can bring a lot of professional knowledge, lots of experience, lots of angles and new observation points that are fresh and challenging. . . . I really believe in collaboration, I think it’s a blessing; also in terms of resources, but not only. . . . It’s refreshing, an entrance of new things.
The MOE representative stated,

[The NGO] actually has never entered before into the system; this was its first entry, and by nature I love to initiate and create. This issue is very significant for our population, and when I met a partner like her [the Sunlight CEO], who is a true partner with a willingness to learn, hear, repair, and modify.

Generally, the education system is widely acknowledged as obsolete, and the NGOs are considered innovative agents that bring innovation inside the system.

**Access to resources.** Organizational entrepreneurship is sometimes characterized by severe resource constraints (Baker & Nelson, 2005). One of the most prominent components of entrepreneurship is the innovative ability to manage and promote activities within a context of limited resources (Eyal & Inbar, 2003; Jarillo, 1989; Schumpeter, 1934). Baker and Nelson (2005) studied entrepreneurial firms working under resource constrains. In their words, entrepreneurs were able to “use things that for others are useless to create valuable resources” (p. 330). They found managers to be entrepreneurial when they succeeded in “bricolage,” meaning that they refused to succumb to circumstantial limitations and were able to create something from nothing. All stakeholders noted the need for additional resources to be raised to fund the collaboration. Indeed, the Sunlight NGO does not function in a purely philanthropic way but rather exploits its capabilities to raise resources from within the education system to gain more influence in terms of broader penetration and impact within the system. Thus, although the NGO began the engagement by playing a purely philanthropic role and bringing along external resources of its own, its expectations to raise the needed resources emerged later, upon successive experiences within the schools. In the words of its CEO, “we try to act independently. Once we receive a first engagement, we will try to persuade the principal to raise resources for this, whether from LEA or the MOE. We want to be active in this.” The NGO’s website also mentions,

In order to continue increasing our activity throughout the country, we seek additional partners—partners with vision and faith who consider it important to help and to influence in regards to these important goals, including through grants or budgets that enable us to expand our activities among youth.

The school principals react to the environment and understand that they are supposed to take on the role of proactive fund-raisers; as the School
Principal 1 explained, “I am raising money constantly.” School Principal 2 added, “Because [Sunlight] was here for two years, I don’t know if we’ll also get it [funded] next year and I’ll have to see where I can get the funding from.” LEA Representative 2 also referred to the school principals’ need to take part in the search for resources:

Nowadays, a school principal is no longer a principal who stands in the ring to welcome the students. He needs to know to deal with philanthropy; he needs to know how to build a business plan. He is now becoming a very significant point of contact in the process of raising money.

**Autonomy**

In the era of decentralization and accountability, schools in most developed countries gain increasing control over their internal matters, including those of finance and the pedagogy. Nevertheless, fund-raising responsibility is accompanied by responsibility for schools’ outcomes, thus, as some claim, actually decreasing school principals’ autonomy, given the accompanying high load of new regulations and procedures to comply with.

Within this high-pressure environment, the involvement of NGOs may provide the school principals with additional resources and freedom, thereby increasing their perceived and actual autonomy. Other actors in these interactions also possess a varying degree of autonomy, employing it to foster value creation (each according to its own goals and aims).

School Principal 1 explained, “You feel that you must engage with [the NGO], otherwise the resources will go someplace else.”

During the interview, School Principal 2 presented us with brochures that she received directly from NGOs, inviting her to engage with them:

I don’t have formal autonomy, as the school’s budget comes from the MOE and the NGO, but in fact I can make some decisions. . . . The resources can be found, and [the NGOs] allow me to decide. . . . I check to see the value the kids get.

All those involved used their autonomy to create value, and it seems that each of them understands the value that such interaction provides to the other stakeholders. Hence, in School Principal 3’s words, “nonprofits tend to connect to places that they can succeed in. . . . They are looking for some optimism, where the direction is positive, because they want to be part of the success.”

The LEA representative noted the
need to take this tremendous resource [the NGO] and use it to leverage other things. . . . We believe this is the right way to maintain our responsibility and authority and still enjoy the great benefits that such sharing can produce. . . . Let’s see how [the NGO’s] programs can serve the municipal vision, the regional vision.

The Sunlight CEO shared her understanding that half of this success is based on the system’s desperation . . . . Take the desperation of the system on one hand, and innovation on the other. Moreover, we are very friendly in our approach and we came to be a “dietary supplement” or a “fuel additive.” . . . I’ll continue to initiate inquiries with LEAs. [The LEA] is very important because it lies at a central intersection. It aims to give education in its city the best reputation, so high motivation and budgets are allocated towards that matter . . . and when the head of the municipal Education Department sees you as a worthy partner, then you are set for life.

However, the school principals interviewed expressed enthusiasm regarding the results and outcomes of the engagement and wanted to enhance their participation in such engagement through more classes and more events. School Principal 1 said, “My indicators are the process itself, the meetings, the interest that the children found, the sharing. . . . I would certainly continue [with the NGO’s program] in more classes.” School Principal 1 added that the Sunlight NGO’s program is something universal that everyone should experience. It’s beyond academic skills. The students here never had the opportunity to participate in programs like this. What I like in Sunlight NGO is that it has a structured method. They even have a book.

School Principal 2 agreed with this assessment of an emergent value: “In the first year, [the NGO’s program] was highly successful and therefore I continued to a second year. You say it’s worthwhile to me; I saw what it did to the children.” School Principal 2 also mentioned that she believes that participating in the Sunlight NGO’s program will lead students to improve their academic achievements. School Principal 3 shared this view: “Significant things or things that bring real achievements happen because of the complementary events in school, because of philanthropists.”

In sum, the findings demonstrate an intriguing reality whereby the school-NGO engagement actually provides both parties with needed resources, leading them to seek out further engagement as a way to gain more resources. Yet a certain struggle over autonomy and application of resources seems to
emerge from the stakeholders’ perceptions. The former director of the Knesset Education Committee shared in the interview a conversation that he had with the MOE director general. He claimed that when the director general first took the job, he was astonished by the limited elasticity in the MOE budget: he learned that except for the salaries, much of the budget was predesignated for NGO programs. The Knesset Education Committee director related the director general’s sense that the NGOs first offer to bring the content and match government funding themselves; gradually, however, the MOE funds an increasing proportion of the program until ultimately it is fully funded by the MOE but its content and goals remain controlled by the NGO. In his perspective, this situation is absurd.

**Power Relations**

Israeli education budgets are divided up and transferred through many channels, such as the Finance Ministry, parents’ associations, teachers’ unions, NGOs that function as private initiatives providing schools with special services, and the education units of each local authority and municipality. Therefore, principals’ tasks are very complicated. Principals are occupied mainly with coordinating the different above-mentioned authorities to receive budgets, pressuring suppliers and the service providers to perform, responding to teachers’ and parents’ association demands, and adjusting to the expectations of bureaucrats at the MOE (Kalev, 2006).

The school-NGO interaction is not only a two-directional educational venture but rather a setting that allows access to greater impact. For example, the Sunlight CEO expressed her broader ambitions as follows:

> We came to change the whole system. Our success is partly due to the system’s failure. We came to rescue, to provide the system with the vitamin that I believe is the most important. Our goal is to be recognized elsewhere. Also abroad.

This statement reveals that the real contradiction among the stakeholders involves the kind of engagement that each of them is looking for, as it seems that other stakeholders in this collaboration might not be seeking such a broad and open-ended intervention on the part of the NGO. An LEA representative commented,

> One school principal told me to stop bringing in projects and new NGOs. He called this “projectitis disease.” He said to me—stop dreaming for me. I have my own dreams for the school. You keep bringing me the NGOs’ dream, but I rather prefer my own.
The interviewed LEA official commented on the general status of school-NGO’s interaction: “From my perspective, both the authority and the responsibility must stay with the LEA and the government. We can foster a win-win situation and I welcome such engagements. . . . Nevertheless, I insist on controlling them.” On the same matter, School Principal 1 said, “Sometimes [NGOs] bring their agenda and we are forced to comply. We want to be partners, not just customers.” While school principals and the LEA engaged with the NGO to gain innovation and resources, they seek to maintain their autonomy and form engagement of a certain kind that empowers the system. In contrast, the NGO’s stated goal was to provide the system with its own solution, with little or no impact from within the system. As School Principal 2 explained, “The MOE claims that we have full autonomy . . . but this is not autonomy; I must choose to be engaged, since I need the resources.” LEA Representative 2 also sought to affirm control: “We control the contents, we have our red lines, and we have the guidelines of the MOE.”

All involved stakeholders are seeking an impact. Schools seek to improve their outcomes; the NGOs have their set of specific goals to achieve; and the regulatory agents have their agendas and aspire for impact.

The Sunlight CEO explained her personal ambition for impact and recognition:

My aim is to see Sunlight as one of the compulsory subjects in every school. Just like you see “math” and “sciences” in the weekly schedule. . . . My goal in several years is to get the highest national recognition, marked by twelve people chosen to light up the ceremonial torch in the Independence Day ceremony.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to investigate the school-NGO interaction from the perspective of all involved stakeholders. We applied the case study methodology and followed the motivations and processes of the involved parties, including the school principals, the Sunlight CEO, the MOE official, a national legislator, and the LEA representatives. We interviewed them separately and obtained additional information from the institutions’ websites and official documentation.

All the stakeholders involved perceive the school-NGO engagement as an entrepreneurial venture, except for the Knesset Education Committee representative. Entrepreneurship on the part of the school principals and the NGO is defined by proactivity, striving for innovation, risk-taking behavior, and fund-raising activities. Stakeholders also expressed a strong conflict over the
nature of the engagement (as described by the quest of principals to be “partners” as opposed to “customers”) and by the desirable impact of such engagement for each. It appears that the school-NGO engagement results from a complex set of interactions that shape the power relations within the engagement and between the engagement and the regulatory agencies.

In the biological world, two organisms that engage with each other are usually characterized according to the nature of their relations: *symbiotic*, where both organisms gain individual benefits from mutual interaction; *commensal*, where only one of the organisms benefits from such interaction while the other is unaffected by it; or *parasitic*, where one benefits while the other is harmed by the interaction. The stakeholders interviewed in this study depicted the relationship between the schools and the NGO in parallel terms. From the NGO’s perspective, these are symbiotic relations characterized by mutual contribution, whereby both entities (the school and the NGO) increase their value. The school gets extra assistance from external stakeholders, which improves its outcomes; the NGO gets the influence, access to resources, and impact that can be translated into public relations or other benefits. We have found that the school principals perceive those relations in the same way as the NGO does, as symbiotic for various reasons. We showed that school principals are pleased with the engagement with the NGO, finding these relations to be beneficial to both the school and the NGO. The LEA and even the MOE officials also perceive such engagements in entrepreneurial terms and seek to gain innovative measures, resources, and competitive advantages over other LEAs or other departments in the ministry.

However, the head of the Knesset Education Committee sees these relations in a more complex way, describing them, for example, as detrimental and maybe in some way parasitical or commensal. Through this perspective, the NGO gains influence and resources, but the schools lose their autonomy and are replaced by outsiders, while national regulations lose influence over each component and phase of this process. Although the regulatory stakeholders positively acknowledged the cooperation between NGOs and schools, they are ultimately more skeptical regarding the nature of those relations.

As schools become more open and thus more engaged with external agents, including NGOs, the question of the nature and educational impact of such relations involves all the stakeholders in this process. We show here a case study of such interaction and reveal the individual motivations and aims of the involved entities. Their diverse motivations create a set of complex multidirectional and multidimensional power relations that affect the nature, extent, and outcome of such partnerships.

The growing involvement of NGOs in public education is not a local phenomenon but rather a global one (Shiffer et al., 2010). This study presents the
internal conflicts of interest and power relations within such school-NGO engagement, involving not only the direct parties (the schools and the NGO) but also the regulatory and governance agents (the LEA, MOE, and Knesset Education Committee). An understanding of these conflicts of interests and power relations within such engagements provides an important input into the fieldwork of educational policy.

In addition, the findings of this study regarding the multidimensional relations of such school-NGO interactions will enable further research regarding educational systems that differ from the Israeli one. Thus, the influence of the education system’s structure on the nature of such interactions and on the power relations within such interactions can be examined by comparing the findings of this study to those of similar studies in countries with different educational structures. Moreover, our findings have global implications as well, providing a better understanding of local education systems in general, in light of the growing influence of the globalization process on local policy (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002). Ultimately, future regulation and legislation in this area should consider and address the conflicting interests that we have identified here.

On a broader scale, this study provides a novel theoretical interpretation of school-NGO engagements through the lens of the entrepreneurship involved, thus enabling further research into the emerging area of entrepreneurialism in educational management. This vantage point provides a promising perspective through which educational management should be studied further.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes
1. In an attempt to label to the study’s subject in a neutral and informative way and to avoid biases often connected to privatization, we decided to apply the terms school-NGO interaction and school-NGO engagement interchangeably, in reference to formal relationships established between schools and the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), through which the latter play a role in education provision services within the former.
2. The State Comptroller is responsible for collecting data on state actions, institutions, and corporations, and it examines them in light of binding norms to ensure
supervision of public funds and accountability. In fulfilling its duties, the State Comptroller has access to accounts of all government bodies under scrutiny, including all their documents and databases (http://www.mevaker.gov.il/serve/site/role.asp).

3. The Ministry of Education (MOE) and the local authorities are the main executive bodies in the Israeli education system. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the MOE has had an overall responsibility for operating a compulsory education system. The MOE is responsible for pedagogical involvements (establishing curricula and supervision), administration (appointment of school principals and teachers for compulsory education), operational and financial management (the MOE provides most of the schools’ funds), and infrastructure (finance of construction of educational institutions). However, local authorities (through the local education authorities) are primarily responsible for construction and maintenance of educational institutions, registration of students to schools in the region, and orderly operation of their respective school systems. In recent decades, despite the dominance of the MOE, the importance of the local education authorities has increased (Ben-Alia, 2000). The MOE’s functioning as both the policy designer and the supervisor of implementation, as well as its operational role in school management, causes an overlap of operations systems between the central government and the local government (Berkovich, 2012). In fact, the division of labor between the central and local governments in terms of limits of authority and responsibility is not adequately clear (Ben-Alia & Cnaani, 1996). The duality between the MOE and the local authorities is not only a matter of coordination but also an issue of effectiveness, as it creates practical difficulties for principals (Berkovich, 2012).

4. One teacher of a class that underwent the Sunlight’s program participated in part of the interview with School Principal 2.

5. Additionally, one of the main themes in the NGO’s website is that the NGO “makes change happen.”

6. School Principal 1 is the head of a youth village that includes the following institutions: a junior high school, a high school, a boarding school, and an educational farm. There are 300 students in the village, 200 of whom are boarders. Most of the students at this school hail from families of low socioeconomic status.

7. School Principal 3 is the head of a secondary school located in Israel’s periphery. It has a diverse student population, including Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Circassians. This situation allows multicultural intermingling and requires tolerance and mutual respect among students. The school won an award for creating successful coexistence. The school focuses on four domains: pedagogy, classes for excelling students alongside special education classes—in addition, the school offers various courses of study; discipline, school social workers accompany the students; social education, the school encourages involvement in extracurricular activities; public relations and collaborations, students are involved in the construction and operation of the school website, school marketing, and community engagements.
8. On its website, the local education authority publishes all the educational and pedagogical programs planned for the following school year. This includes programs for strengthening cooperation with academic institutions, as well as initiating educational programs in technologies, robotics, software engineering, computers, and communication.

9. School Principal 2 is the head of a junior high school and high school whose uniqueness lies in developing and offering students diverse learning pathways and choices (e.g., science, theater, media, art, and soccer). Each student in the junior high school is allowed to choose an individual learning pathway according to his or her own field of interest.

References


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