

**Does Everyone Want Social Justice?**

**Conflicting School Governance Perspectives regarding Social Justice**

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Spring 2013

**Introduction**

The theoretical grounds underlying this paper are the variety of governance perspectives, which represent different political and economic ideologies (Green, 2005; Manzer, 2003). The coexistence of these often clashing attitudes is one of the reasons for policy ambiguity and policy implementation gaps (Malen, 2006). It can also expose disputing social justice agendas of different governing actors (Glatter, 2002; Manzer, 2005). This study diagnoses governance perspectives of two major governing actors in the educational regime (Manzer, 2005): the central government and the Local Education Authorities (LEAs), in order to expose their social justice agendas.

The case we have examined was the pre-K voucher policy in Israel. This policy was designated to address 2011 summer's social protest. This social protest, which emerged during the summer months of 2011 in Israel, has greatly resembled the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, which formally began a few months later on September 2011. Like the Israeli movement, the U.S. OWS was also the most significant social movement since the Seventies (Gillhama, Edwardsb, & Noakesc 2012; Yonah & Spivak, 2012). The people that gathered in Manhattan protested against many things, including "corporate influence in American politics; the inadequate federal response to issues stemming from the 2008 financial crisis; and the growing income inequality gap" (Gillhama et al., 2012, p. 1).

Similarly, the crowd who put up its tents at the beginning of the social protest in Tel Aviv, the city known as the secular culture capital of Israel, protested against the social-economic conditions. The Israeli demonstrators' main claims were an opposition to the growing process of reducing state's responsibility for protecting basic human and civic rights, and instead exchanging this responsibility for a "free market" conduct. This kind of conduct focuses on individuals' contribution, rather than individuals' right, as a premise and a basis of social equality (Yonah & Spivak, 2012). We should mention that during these months in Israel, the protest has spread all around the country, and tent campsites and demonstrations could be spotted in most cities. The protesters demands, formulated by a joint committee of action, have been presented to the government's representatives in various methods.

The protest claim for "social justice" yielded a significant reform in Israeli public education policy. On January 2012, merely three months after a special government committee that investigated the social protest had submitted its report, the Israeli central government has decided, unprecedentedly, to allocate vouchers for pre-K education in private kindergartens; this alongside the delivery of state's "classic" Boydian institutions (Boyd, 2003). Its resolution, titled "2012 budget priority changes and the implementation of the economic and social reform – committee's report", was stated as follows: "To deliver, as from August 2012 (beginning of the 2012-2013 school year), free pre-K education for children in public kindergartens... thus, parents would be exempted of tuition". In this resolution, public kindergartens are defined as either corporate kindergartens or LEA (Local Education Authority) official kindergartens.

The reformative governing method of vouchers for the private sector, adopted by the Israeli government in acknowledgment of the demand for social justice, without any normative policy nor law established framework, has made this an interesting case and an opportunity to explore social justice agendas held by the different governing bodies.

### **Different roles of governance**

Governance, as indicated by Dowling, Dunleavy, King, Margetts, and Rydin (2000, p. 109), “implies interconnectedness and mutual dependency between a **variety** of organizations”, both in the local authority level and in the state government level. This interconnectedness constructs the core governance actions in the public sphere: decisions regarding the political **values** underlying political and economic actions (Glatter, 2002; Manzer, 2005), the **commission** procedures, structures and regulations, and the ways actual **delivery** is taking place (Glatter, 2002; Green, 2005; Levin, 2005; Manzer, 2005).

Among the variety of governing organizations, the traditional governing role of LEAs, on whose perspectives of governance this research is focused, is mostly a ‘delivery’ one, namely supply and allocation of schooling (Blank, 2006; Green, 2005). Until the early 1990’s, centralized education policy in Israel had led to a state in which, much like in the U.K., the “central government is seen as the repository of all wisdom, with other parts of the public services regarded as instruments to achieve central policy objectives.” (Jones, 2001, p. 68) The decentralization processes of the last few decades have enabled more diverse, sometimes contradictory voices and opinions to emerge.

### **Different voices of governance for social justice**

“The ideology of the governance of public schools is deeply committed to a belief in a democratic system of “common” public schools, *operated* as well as *financed* by the government, that provides standardized curriculum, treats everyone equally (irrespective of social class, culture, race or religion) and is accountable to a publicly elected school board”. (Boyd, 2003, p. 5)

A central voice regarding governance of public schools, as expressed in the words of William Boyd (Ibid.), holds that the state has a central, active governing role of amending social, economic and cultural malformations. These barriers hinder the right for equal self fulfillment of all the citizens of the state (Barry, 2005; Gibton, 2003, 2004; Manzer, 2003; Miron & Nelson, 2002). This governance attitude represents a social-democratic egalitarian perception of justice (Barry, 2005; Miron & Nelson, 2002).

As from the late 1970’s, the above public governance attitude has been interweaved with another significant force in the public governance arenas in the Western world, including Israel – the neoliberal social-economic moral approach (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Harvey, 2005; Ichilov, 2009). This approach is manifested, among other things, in the global privatization trend (Berends, Springer & Walberg, 2007; Boyd, 2003), where services once offered primarily by the state are now provided also by private bodies and organizations (Ibid.). The aforementioned government’s decision to provide pre-K education also via vouchers represent this trend, which allows individuals to purchase education from private suppliers.

The reformative governing method of vouchers for the private sector, established by the Israeli government in acknowledgment of the demand for social justice, takes an advantage on the social-democratic as well as the neo-liberal concepts of social justice, altogether. It was justified

as a policy tool designated to promote education equality, originated in Milton Friedman's concept of vouchers, as maximizing disadvantaged children's social and economic freedom via educational choice (Friedman, 1962). It also derives from Coleman's concept of vouchers as promoting social mobility for minority groups (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). Contextualized in a fashionable, up-to-date manner of policy discourse, the central government's act exhibited recruitment of private sector institutions and its market logic in support of the public system reform. Thus, the use of vouchers is targeted to overcome the "organized interests" of the public education coalition that obstruct social change (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Viteritty, 2009).

Neoliberal morality is evident in a different ethos of social justice and equality, which revolves around the freedom of possibilities allowing each citizen to succeed on his own, under the free market rules of the game (Gibton, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Ichilov, 2009). Accordingly, the governing bodies' responsibilities are reduced to merely a regulatory role, aimed at regularizing the legal framework of the free market; it is also rarely aimed at amending severe injustices created by the market, but this too under economic cost-benefit considerations (Gibton, 2010; Harvey, 2005). Supporters of this social justice ethos believe it is the solution for the education system's malfunctioning; its opponents, on the other hand, who stand for the social justice ethos in its Boydian sense, believe it is a death sentence for public education in general (Apple, 2001; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Gibton, 2003; Ichilov, 2009).

### Data Sources

The sample includes senior officials in 90 LEAs in Israel (i.e. a response rate of 35%). As can be seen in table 1 about half of the local authorities are located in the center of Israel, and half in Israel's geographic periphery (47% and 53%, respectively).

Table 1

Characteristics of the final sample, numbers and percentages

	n	%
<u>Geographic location:</u>		
In the centre of the country <sup>1</sup>	42	46.7%
In the outer areas of the country	48	53.3%
<u>Nationality:</u>		
Jewish	72	82.8%
Arab	11	12.6%
Mixed	4	4.6%
<u>Socioeconomic status:</u>		
High	26	29.2%
Medium	55	61.9%
Low	8	8.9%
Total	90	100%

<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem, Central and Tel-Aviv regions.

<sup>2</sup> That is, North and South regions, Haifa, and Judea and Samaria.

The survey was distributed to senior officials in all 254 of Israel's LEAs during January-February 2012. The questionnaire addressed LEAs officers' opinions, attitudes and perceptions regarding the government resolution for pre-K education voucher allocation. This study analyzes their answers to questions regarding the eligibility of their LEA to keep commission on the vouchers' implementation policy on various issues. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, that is a frequency check of all the possible answers.

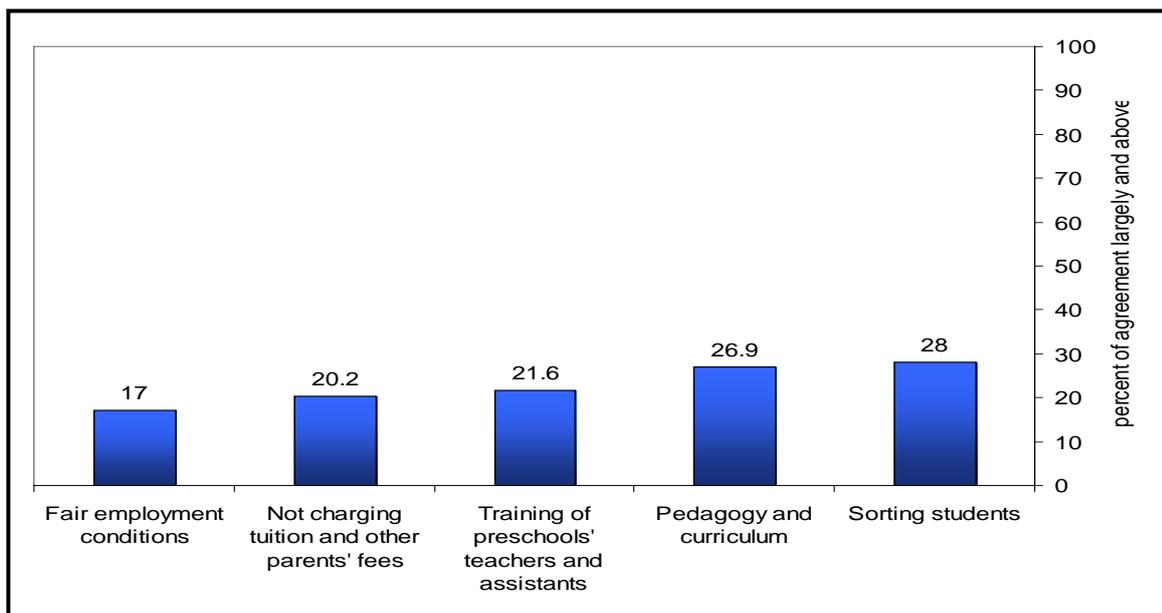
## Findings and discussion

The first finding is that a substantial portion (77%) of senior officials in LEAs in Israel who responded to the survey believes that free pre-K education for children aged 3-4 promotes social justice, in line with the protesters' demand.

From here on, the findings unfold a gap between the central government's governance attitudes and the justice perceptions they reflect, and the LEAs officials' ones. The vast majority of senior LEAs officials (93%) agree (largely and above) that governing authorities must be fully committed and competent to do public *and* private preschools commission, thus representing a social democratic egalitarian justice agenda. Stating so, LEAs officers clearly diverse from the central government, which merely defines minimal supervision over private voucher contractors, following a neoliberal justice agenda, as portrayed above. A closer look at some of the findings regarding commission and supervision issues emphasizes this point: LEAs officers were cautious regarding their competence to govern private preschools. Only 28% believe (largely and above) that they could prevent student sorting; only 26.9% believe they can commit to adequate curriculum; only 21.6% believe they would be able to guarantee certified preschool teachers; merely 20.2% assert that they can prevent extra tuition; and only 17% of them believe that they can supervise fair employment in private preschools.

Figure 1

Perceptions of senior LEAs officials regarding governing private preschools in which vouchers are allocated (agreement percentage 'largely' and above)



Finally, another interesting finding refers to the delivery aspect of governance and the justice perceptions it reflects: 65% of LEAs officials agree (largely and above) that allocating vouchers via private contractors, privatizes public education and hence is socially unjust. This finding illustrates the shift from the central government's neoliberal justice agenda, reflected in its governing method of delivering education through voucher allocation in the free market.

We wish to begin the discussion with a reference to the resemblance between central and local governance, as shown by the research findings. As Schweinhart & Fulcher-Dawson's claimed, "The idea of programs serving all 4-year-olds, for example, derives from the egalitarian principles of education" (Schweinhart & Fulcher-Dawson, 2009, p. 880). Correspondingly, both levels of governance perceive responding to the protesters' claim for free pre-K education as an instance of social justice. Yet using the governability tool chosen by the central governance in order to implement social justice policy, i.e. vouchers allocation, gives rise to criticism by local governance. The gap created between central and local governance views, as shown by the research findings, focuses on the chosen governability tool, and deals mainly with the egalitarian public pre-K education policy standards: "fairly paid teachers who are prepared to, and actually do, contribute to children's development", combined with the use of "validated child development curriculum" and the ongoing public effort to "assess program implementation and child outcomes" (Ibid., p. 885). These evidence-based early childhood education policy standards are interwoven into a comprehensive public pre-K education system, which enrolls 100% of the age group.

The apparent gap reflected in our findings between central and local governance viewpoints regarding social justice, might be explained in three ways: (i) their varying notions of education as "commodity" vs. "service" (Ball, 2007; Blank 2004, 2006; Fennel, 2001); (ii) the different governance models of each actor (Glatter, 2002); and (iii) the socio-political difference between these governing organizations (Healey, Cameron, & Davoudiet, 1995; Kearns & Paddison, 2000; Scott, 2004).

Regarding the diverting notions of education as "commodity" and "service", we might presume that the local government would adopt the concept of education as a "service" rather than a "commodity". As argued by Blank (2004), "service" emphasizes the commission and its delivery aspects rather than its consumption practices. Conceiving education as a "commodity", as reflected in our case in the central government's governance viewpoint, might loosen the cohesiveness of social norms and deteriorate people's commitment to the public institutions (Blank, 2004), and so rework social relations to be "measurable, and thus contractable or marketable" (Ball, 2007).

These perceptions of education (as commodity or service) derive further contrary notions which, altogether, articulate very different types of social justice. Perceiving education as a "commodity" plausibly assumes that people are free to choose whether to consume, and how to consume, their education, enjoying their civic freedoms of movement, property and opinion (what Fennel describes as an "exit and voice" mechanism) (Fennel, 2001). However, if local government officers tend to believe that education is a "service", then this reduction of educational relationships into mere economic behavior of the individual would not suffice. Local governments' critical approach to voucher allotment in the private market, as indicated by our findings, might also be explained by their notion of education as "local public goods" (Fennel, 2001). This notion emphasizes that education is beneficial for all members of the community, regardless of the individual's participation or lack of it (Blank 2004). Thus, a policy that promotes private interests in a market-based voucher system, and its subsidiary benefits for the

individual participant is evaluated by the local government as "unjust", due to its disputed privatizing externalities.

The central government's attitude addressed the mere need for immediate economic relief from the educational burden, following quite precisely what Glatter calls "the Competitive Market Model" (Glatter, 2002, pp. 228-231). Hence, the government perceives educational relationships as commercial, educational accountability as a contractual and consumerist matter, and the educational arena as a mere competitive relevant realm (Glatter, 2002; Morgan & Yeung, 2007). Thus, the central government's perception of justice, revealed by its governance attitudes, is accumulative and atomistic, reducing social justice to the accumulation of individuals' righteous interests.

On the other hand, Glatter's Local Empowerment Model is applicable to the local government's critical reflection over the central government's attitude, perceiving the educational accountability as responsive and communal, and the educational arena as the social unit (Glatter, 2002). The local government's notion of justice, as it unfolds from its critical governance viewpoint, is comprehensive rather than accumulative and communitarian rather than individualistic.

As argued by Healey et al. (1995), urban management is a socio-political form of organization that cannot be further described by 'top down' or 'command and control' models of central-local governance, due to the "face-to-face interactions" (Kearns & Paddison, 2000) with the community. The central government, on the other hand, has "an altitude of 20,000 feet" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 10) governance point of view on society, and thus will always be "seeing like a state" (Scott, 2004); it will never be embedded in society's values and expectations, and will remain alienated to their impingement upon its policy (Kearns & Paddison, 2000). The intimate experience shared by the protesters and the local government's officials during the 2011 summer protest, yielded the commitment of the local government to social justice perceptions which seek to strengthen public education rather than privatize it.

We would like to conclude with the research contribution to the understanding of the complex nature of school governance. The findings, mainly those concerning different perspectives of governance and different social justice agendas, which simultaneously exist within the educational regime, are of special significance. These perspectives influence policy decisions regarding resources distribution, impact decision making and conduct the governing behavior. Moreover, analyzing governance viewpoints as a key to clarify governments' approach to social justice has become, due to the common motives of the social protest movement, a universal issue. Furthermore, it contributes to what Ron Glatter (2002) refers to as: "Understand better the impact of common trends on particular settings." (p. 225) Understanding the local Israeli setting sheds some more light on how governance really works, both from a universal point of view and from a local one.

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