ANNENBERG
BROWN UNIVERSITY

EdWorkingPaper No. 20-283

Design Philanthropy: Challenges and Opportunities in the Evolution of Philanthropic Giving

Melissa Arnold Lyon
Brown University

Shani S. Bretas
Teachers College, Columbia University

Douglas D. Ready
Teachers College, Columbia University

Philanthropic investment in education has evolved considerably over the past several decades. This paper provides early evidence of another distinct adaptation, which we dub *design philanthropy*. In contrast to the macro-level structural reforms recently supported by large foundations, design philanthropy seeks to directly influence the instructional core. We describe the broad contours and characteristics of design philanthropy, which employs a *centralized* management and design system to support a *decentralized* approach to implementation. Through a case study of one design philanthropy's reform initiative, we explore how participants experience this emergent process and manage a series of tensions inherent in the approach.

VERSION: September 2020

Suggested citation: Lyon, Melissa Arnold, Shani S. Bretas, and Douglas D. Ready. (2020). Design Philanthropy: Challenges and Opportunities in the Evolution of Philanthropic Giving . (EdWorkingPaper: 20-283). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: https://doi.org/10.26300/qyab-pz32

Design Philanthropy: Challenges and Opportunities in the Evolution of Philanthropic Giving

Melissa Arnold Lyon
Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University

Shani S. Bretas
Douglas D. Ready
Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract

Philanthropic investment in education has evolved considerably over the past several decades. This paper provides early evidence of another distinct adaptation, which we dub *design philanthropy*. In contrast to the macro-level structural reforms recently supported by large foundations, design philanthropy seeks to directly influence the instructional core. We describe the broad contours and characteristics of design philanthropy, which employs a *centralized* management and design system to support a *decentralized* approach to implementation. Through a case study of one design philanthropy's reform initiative, we explore how participants experience this emergent process and manage a series of tensions inherent in the approach.

Introduction

Philanthropic investment in education has evolved considerably over the past hundred years with each new era developing in response to perceived limitations of the previous generation (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Following this long tradition, philanthropies that came to prominence in the early 2000s, including the Gates and Broad Foundations, responded to the supposed ineffectiveness of prior philanthropic efforts by adopting a more aggressive approach to educational advocacy and policymaking termed *venture philanthropy* (Scott, 2009). These initiatives focused on macro changes to the education landscape, borrowing techniques and terminology from the world of venture capital investing, including an intense focus on rapid prototyping, short-term scalability, and a demonstrated return on investment.

However, as described below, venture philanthropy has not produced all of the intended effects, particularly those related to student achievement, and has generated new concerns that education philanthropy is placing too much control in the hands a few, very wealthy, white men (Ravitch, 2016; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016). As a result, many foundations have recently become convinced that market forces and macro-level policymaking alone cannot sufficiently drive educational improvement, particularly in areas related to classroom teaching and learning. In response to the challenges associated with venture philanthropy, foundations have begun to design their own instructional reform initiatives, identify providers to execute the interventions, and organize schools and districts in which the reforms will be implemented. This approach combines a *centralized* management structure for designing school improvement initiatives with a *decentralized* approach to implementation. This paper interprets these recent efforts as early evidence of another distinct adaptation in the evolving role of philanthropies, which we dub *design philanthropy*.

Ultimately, the story we uncover is one of promising approaches coexisting with inherent tensions and contradictions. We find that design philanthropy has the capacity to nimbly respond to contextual needs and increase democratic engagement in implementation. This localization, however, can conflict with demands for coherence and consistency across multiple partner organizations and school contexts. Further, design philanthropy's deep interest in instruction might prove more effective in transforming classroom processes compared to previous systemic and structural reforms, but it must balance its desire for experimentation and adaptation with its focus on short term, quantifiable results and scalability. We turn first to the historical development of philanthropic involvement in education reform, and describe how reactions to this development set the stage for the emergence of design philanthropy.

Historical Context for the Evolution of Philanthropic Giving in Education

Large philanthropies have played major roles in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education over the past 150 years (Greene, 2005; Lagemann & de Forest, 2007; Scott, 2009, Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Despite important shifts during this long history, the core purpose of philanthropic giving has retained a consistent focus on building capacity and sustainable systems to improve education rather than providing direct charity (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Evolutions in education philanthropy have therefore tended to represent strategic modifications in response to perceived faults of prior generations to attain this core goal, as opposed to dramatic transformations of philanthropic giving.

Lagemann and de Forest (2007) trace the first few eras of the evolution of philanthropic giving in education in the US, beginning in the late 1800s with the period known as "Scientific Philanthropy." Early philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller were prime proponents of a broader focus on the pursuit of empirical rather than religious truths, as

evidenced by their support for scientific research at colleges and universities. However, in response to the Great Depression and World War II, the activities of large philanthropies shifted from the 1930s through 1945. Lagemann and de Forest (2007) characterize this period as "Philanthropic Scatteration" because large foundations attempted to remain focused on long term cultural and educational institutions through "practical, perhaps opportunistic responses to fundamental challenges" that, even in this time of great need, attempted to avoid "alms to the poor" (p. 56). There was a "fear of cultural decline and chaos," that the masses of people would no longer follow the culture of the elite, leading philanthropists to invest in cultural institutions such as museums and performing arts organizations. Critics charged that this circuitous giving did little to address the nation's immense suffering.

In response, philanthropies such as the Ford Foundation began to engage in "Strategic Philanthropy" from roughly 1945 to the 1960s in another attempt to make grantmaking more effective (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Although philanthropists became more actively engaged in social movements and progressive political activities during this period, some of these initiatives, such as the "urban renewal" efforts funded by the Ford Foundation, sparked backlash when they did not reflect the values and the interests of those they were purporting to serve (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Then, beginning in the 1970s, conservative organizations like the Olin and Bradley Foundations became increasingly concerned with the social activism of the 1960s. They therefore conducted what is likely the sharpest shift in the locus of philanthropic giving by focusing efforts on preserving free market values and free enterprise via "Movement Philanthropy" (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Importantly, this transformation was less of a pragmatic adaptation in response to learning, and more of a reactive political counter-mobilization in response to what was perceived as a liberal bias among large philanthropies. This

resulted in the development and support of institutions such as the Cato Institute and Hoover Institution.

Despite these persistent attempts, little evidence suggests that these shifts in strategic approaches actually made American philanthropies more effective (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Rather than promoting transformative change, philanthropic efforts to improve education in the 20th century may have instead reinforced an inequitable status quo. Jay Greene (2005) leveled a particularly influential criticism, equating philanthropic dollars in education to throwing "buckets into the sea." He argued that philanthropies were ineffective because they spent substantial funds on "lower-leverage" activities that could neither redirect nor compete with the vast governmental expenditures in education. Greene therefore encouraged foundations to target their resources toward macro level policy changes or "higher-leverage" practices such as research and advocacy or policy areas such as small schools and charter schools. In theory, investing in "higher-leverage" strategies would be more sustainable and scalable because this approach used philanthropy's relatively small financial muscle to affect the much larger system of public expenditures. Large foundations, particularly newer ones like Gates and Broad, heeded his call[1] by adopting a more aggressive approach to educational advocacy and policymaking termed *venture philanthropy* (Scott, 2009; Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

During the era of venture philanthropy, the voice and influence of the largest foundations grew due to dramatic increases in giving and other strategic shifts (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). In the context of venture philanthropy these included macro structural and systemic changes to the education landscape; research and advocacy; and the empowerment of "jurisdictional

[1] Megan Tompkins-Stange (2016) documents how a number of different individuals at two large venture philanthropes "independently cited Jay Greene's chapter in Rick Hess's 2005 volume on education philanthropy as seminal work that helped inspire both foundations interest in policy advocacy as a 'higher leverage' strategy" (p. 59-60).

challengers" (Mehta & Teles, 2012; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Scott, 2009). Although the concept of jurisdictional challengers was originally developed to explain how the federal government influenced education by helping reformers challenge the educational (jurisdictional) status quo, foundations have also supported jurisdictional challengers over the past decade. In contrast to the traditional compliance focus of many federal programs (e.g., No Child Left Behind), more recent federal actions such as Race to the Top have directly and indirectly supported jurisdictional challengers who have helped the federal government to connect with, encourage, and support people and organizations that were already focused on its policy priorities at the state and local level (Mehta & Teles, 2012). Thus, in contrast to the sanctions and "sticks" of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top leveraged incentives and "carrots" to organizations with the potential capacity to implement the desired reforms. Empowering jurisdictional challengers was a somewhat risky strategy, in part because it placed substantial trust in organizations with their own goals and motivations that did not always align with those of the federal government. Nevertheless, the strategy of funding jurisdictional challengers as opposed to mandating reform of a reluctant educational establishment had inherent appeal to venture philanthropists who hoped to influence policy but lacked access to the same "sticks" as the federal government (Mehta & Teles, 2012; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Scott & Jabbar, 2014).

Conceptual Framework: Four Dimensions of Philanthropic Norms

Megan Tompkins-Stange (2016) provides a useful framework for comparing the outcomes-orientation of venture philanthropy with the more traditional, field-orientation of prior eras. She suggests four key comparative dimensions: selecting partners, managing grantees, framing problems, and evaluating results. In selecting partners, field-oriented philanthropies tend to work with grassroots community-based organizations while outcomes-oriented philanthropies

tend to fund grasstops experts and political elites. Once grantees are selected, philanthropies also differ in their approach to management, ranging from a centralized approach with a great deal of oversight and accountability (outcomes-oriented) to a decentralized approach with more discretion left to grantee organizations (field-oriented). Field-oriented philanthropies also tend to frame the problems they address as adaptive, nuanced, and multifaceted, as opposed to the outcomes-oriented technical approach to framing problems as having a clear causal link between problem and solution. This technical approach in turn leads outcomes-oriented philanthropies towards a preference for quantifiable means of evaluating results while their field-oriented counterparts take a more integrated approach, valuing both qualitative and quantitative assessment tools.

According to Tompkins-Stange (2016), over the last two decades, philanthropies have increasingly adopted the venture, outcomes-oriented approach as "common-sensical" because of its supposed efficiency, effectiveness, and return on investment (p. 144). However, the outcomes-oriented framework also has limitations, namely, the tenuous causal chains linking "higher-leverage strategies" to improved student outcomes. While some activities like research and advocacy are considered "higher-leverage," measuring the impact of that work on standardized test scores, as suggested by the outcomes-driven philosophy, is clearly a challenge. Moreover, although in theory "higher-leverage" strategies could shift the distribution of public resources toward a given goal, implementation fidelity and sustainability of that goal are rarely guaranteed.

The evolving work of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation illustrates the challenges inherent in outcomes-oriented venture philanthropy. Shortly after its founding in the early 2000s, the Gates Foundation focused substantial financial and political resources in the "small schools"

initiative, a theoretically "higher-leverage" reform strategy that sought to create new administrative structures for schools (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). However, the foundation was disappointed when that investment in small schools did not quickly move the needle on student achievement and as a result began to believe that "focusing on structure" alone may be insufficient to shift instruction (Tompkins-Stange, p. 22). In response, Gates turned to another "higher-leverage" strategy: systemic reform. This pivot is best represented by Gates's instrumental support for the Common Core State Standards and associated common systems for assessment and evaluation. However, results from the Common Core have also been mixed and challenging to disentangle from a host of associated policies (Bleiberg, 2020; Gao & Lafortune, 2019; Song, Yang, & Garet, 2019; Xu & Cepa, 2018).

Moreover, by investing in grasstops organizations and "higher-leverage" policy areas, foundations may have inadvertently increased the organizational distance between themselves and the classrooms that they aimed to impact, which in turn limited their ability to establish the effects of their funding. Tomkins-Stange (2016) suggests that this top-down vision of philanthropic-driven reform has presented a potential threat to democratic decision making in education. By narrowly defining who has access to funds and for what purposes, outcomes-oriented philanthropies may have lost touch with the needs and wants of the individuals that they were trying to serve. Indeed, the critiques leveled against philanthropic involvement in education over the past decade have increasingly moved away from Greene's (2005) criticism of philanthropic impotence to resurgent concerns that philanthropists have wielded too much power and have been trying to privatize education (Ravitch, 2016; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

Perhaps due to these challenges and corresponding critiques, educational philanthropy appears ripe for another strategic modification. Extant research suggests that foundations have begun to heed the criticism about a lack of democratic engagement and instructional expertise. Tompkins-Stange's informants noted that in recent years Gates has begun to incorporate more "grassroots" partnerships with communities and advocacy groups into its traditionally "grasstops" strategy, as part of an effort to become more responsive to grantees and communities (p. 83). Similarly, philanthropies have recognized the importance of incorporating the professional expertise, contextual knowledge, and buy-in from the teachers and school leaders responsible for instruction. For example, in New York City foundations have been "actively working to support their grantees beyond simply providing funding" by acting as "thought partners" and organizing communities of practice among grantee organizations (Hatch, et al., 2019, p. 21). Certain actors in the field may be turning away from macro policy influence and towards efforts to more directly influence classroom practice through new mechanisms and structures; however, little is known about this emergent process and the potential opportunities and challenges that accompany it.

Research Focus

In this paper we describe design philanthropy through both theoretical and empirical lenses. We begin by contrasting this emerging philanthropic trend with prior eras of philanthropic giving in education using the four key dimensions described by Tompkins-Stange (2016). We then use the case of one design philanthropy's ongoing initiative in a large, urban school district to further examine how participants experience this emergent philanthropic process and its associated structures. Specifically, in this paper we address the following research questions:

1. What is design philanthropy and how is it related to previous philanthropic approaches?
2. How does this emergent philanthropic process and its associated structures influence participants' everyday experiences?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with design philanthropy in education? What are the implications for school reform more broadly?

Data and Methods

Data for this paper were gathered as part of an ongoing, mixed-methods study of a recent reform effort (the Initiative) of one design philanthropy (the Foundation).[2] The Initiative involved grants to 10 external support providers in one large, urban school district in which the Foundation had worked for thirty years. The grants provided funding for these organizations to modify and implement the philanthropy's programmatic innovation, stressing the integration of High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and personalized learning leveraging technology. Our qualitative data were derived from 73 semi-structured interviews with external support providers, school leaders, and teachers. We supplement these data with document analyses of foundation-generated resources and tools, progress reports from external support providers, and school-level instructional materials. We also conducted observations of classroom instruction, professional development sessions, and communities of practice organized by the Foundation. These qualitative data were then triangulated with surveys of all teachers and school administrators participating in the Initiative. Each of these sources—the interviews, documents, observations, and survey data—work together in a mutually reinforcing process that allows us to undertake a robust analysis of the design and implementation of the Initiative (Ivankova et al., 2006).

[2] We have defined the Foundation as a "design philanthropy." Although they have not used this term to define themselves or their work, they did not express objections to this classification.

For our first and third research questions, we conceptualize the study as a single, illustrative case of one design philanthropy's reform effort. For our second research question, we use an embedded, multiple-case design to drive our case study data collection and analysis (Yin, 2016). For each external support provider, we selected one illustrative case that would allow us to examine the components of the organizational approach while also maximizing variation in case study schools across external support providers based on the following characteristics: grade level; enrollment size; demographics; student achievement prior to participation; school leadership and culture ratings from a district survey; prior experience with the components of the Initiative; and responsiveness to initial contacts.

Each case study is inherently longitudinal, following the timing of the individual grant for that support provider (typically two years). Because the study is on-going and involves a staggered implementation structure across different support providers, data in the current paper are derived from the schools and support providers associated with the first six grants. To maintain confidentiality we have given each external support provider a pseudonym: Constant Changers (CC), Human Capital Builders (HCB), Curriculum Masters (CM), Standard Bearers (SB), Blended Entrepreneurs (BE), and Teacher Cultivators (TC). Interview and observational data are based on case study schools for the first four grantee organizations (CC, HCB, CM, and SB), whereas survey data are derived from all schools working with all six of the external support providers.

We carried out over 20 school-based site visits to the four case study schools to observe classroom instruction, attend professional development sessions, and conduct interviews. In each school we interviewed principals, teachers, curriculum coordinators, and other personnel participating in the effort. We also interviewed staff members and leaders of the external support

providers either during site visits or online via Zoom. During these interviews, we focused on respondents' experiences and perceptions of the design, implementation, impact, and sustainability of the Initiative. We also probed to understand the extent to which the interview results matched, explained, conflicted with, and/or extended the survey results. Our first set of interviews focused primarily on the design, and as time passed, we moved to questions related to implementation, and then impact and sustainability. In these interviews, we also asked for relevant documents including design and implementation plans; charts or notes outlining the strategies, challenges, and successes; curricular materials; and other instructional resources. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

During the site visits, we also conducted over 50 classroom observations in which we closely documented teacher practice using an observation protocol aligned with the Foundation's framework for the initiative. We also attended 12 professional development sessions held by the external support providers. As noted above, we gathered documents directly from the Foundation that were relevant to our research questions and observed eight communities of practice organized by the foundation.

Additionally, we conducted a series of surveys with a sampling frame that included all individuals involved in the design or implementation of the Initiative in all participating schools. The first set of baseline surveys were administered to the first cohort of schools beginning in August, 2018 with follow up surveys administered in May, 2019 and May, 2020. Another round of baseline surveys were administered to the second cohort of schools beginning in August of 2019 with follow up surveys administered in May, 2020. As of August, 2020, 428 of 484 total surveys were completed across 14 schools for an overall response rate of 88%.

Qualitative data from interviews, documents, and survey comments were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis program Dedoose, which also facilitated the coding process. We used the DIVE (describe, integrate, visualize, and expand) method for multiple case study analysis proposed by Bush-Mecenas and Marsh (2018). We began with within-case analyses in which we read through documents and transcripts with first-pass coding and constructed memos for each case. Preliminary codes were general and included: Background, Design, Implementation, Impact, Sustainability, Scalability. As the interviews progressed, we also developed a series of codes to respond to emergent findings. In our coding process the research team achieved an inter-rater reliability of .90 (Cohen's kappa; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

We then moved into several rounds of cross-case analyses with a second round of coding to identify patterns across cases. We identified and grouped data through the use of a matrix with cases as rows and coding categories as columns. Throughout this process, we integrated and analyzed quantitative data from the surveys to provide additional insights and generalize from the case study schools to the entire population of schools involved in the Initiative. We also developed a series of iterative memos to describe emergent trends and focus the analysis. As patterns and relationships between categories and cases surfaced, we translated these into themes and visualizations, where appropriate.

Results

We begin by defining design philanthropy, using the Foundation's reform initiative as an illustrative example. We then describe how teachers, principals, and external support providers have experienced design philanthropy in their everyday practice.

Design Philanthropy Defined

We find that the design philanthropy approach leverages elements from both the

outcomes-oriented and field-oriented approaches, but may represent the beginning of a distinct phase in philanthropic engagement in education. In particular, design philanthropy makes an effort to combine elements of the "democratic engagement of broad populations in decision-making processes" characteristic of a field-oriented approach with a focus on "efficient and effective outcomes" characteristic of an outcomes-oriented approach (Tompkins-Stange, p. 56). Like their field-oriented forebearers, design philanthropists envision themselves as facilitators of a community of practice. At the same time, design philanthropists borrow the focus on innovation, scalability, and demonstrated returns on investment from outcomes-oriented venture philanthropy. We therefore situate design philanthropy between the outcomes-oriented and field-oriented approaches across the key dimensions described by Tompkins-Stange (2016): selecting partners, managing grantees, framing problems, and evaluating results. However, design philanthropy also infuses a new approach that involves directly redesigning the instructional core (a theoretically lower-leverage reform) through higher-leverage strategies. We use evidence from our case to illustrate how the Foundation attempted to reconcile both sides of the spectrum, while introducing this novel approach that blurs the line between policy and practice.

The Foundation's approach to the first key dimension, selecting partners, straddled the outcomes-oriented and field-oriented approach in a manner that evolved over time. Although the original intent of the Initiative was to take a ground-level approach by investing directly in schools, the strategy quickly shifted to investing in external support providers who could more nimbly implement innovative strategies and bring them to scale. These external support providers were not the government elites favored by the outcomes-oriented approach, but they also were not entirely grassroots community groups. Instead, the grantee organizations occupied a middle ground of external support providers who operated as "jurisdictional challengers" to the

traditional district central office (Mehta & Teles, 2012). At the same time, the Foundation has acted as a facilitator and convener of a community of practice, in line with the field-oriented approach (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Throughout the Initiative, they have convened regular meetings among participating organizations, schools, and research partners with the aim of fostering collective learning and sharing.

In terms of the second dimension, managing grantees, the Foundation adopted a centralized, outcomes-oriented approach during the *design* phase of the Initiative, crafting a specific, detailed initiative with the aim of shifting instruction in schools. They provided highly focused artifacts to grantee organizations in the form of a concept paper, framework, and rubrics detailing the goals of the Initiative. The Foundation also held grantee organizations accountable to agreed-upon outcomes by requiring quarterly updates and actively engaged with the organizations on an on-going basis, similar to the outcomes-oriented foundations detailed by Tomkins-Stange. However, the Foundation adopted a more field-oriented, decentralized approach to the management of actual *implementation*. While they provided considerable guidance regarding the goals of the Initiative, they did not dictate how their artifacts should be used outside of the design phase nor how the goals should actually be achieved, leaving considerable leeway for individual organizations to interpret and carry out the vision as they saw fit. Finally, the Foundation was hesitant to use their own brand capital to promote the work, preferring to lift up the brands of their partner organizations. In these ways, the Foundation's reform effort incorporated more room for teacher voices in implementation. Even though teachers, school leaders, and support providers were not participants in the initial vision-setting, leaving critical implementation decisions up to these ground-level actors created an opportunity for them to insert their own values and goals into the initiative as they made sense of it.

In terms of the third and fourth key dimensions, framing problems and evaluating results, the Foundation was focused on demonstrating quantifiable impacts on student outcomes, while also encouraging experimentation and adaptation. The Foundation took a somewhat outcomes-oriented, technical approach to framing problems by defining a solution and specifying anticipated results in advance. At the same time, they supported a variety of different providers and encouraged adaptation and experimentation from each, tacitly acknowledging the unclear link between problem and solution. Likewise, while they expected grantee organizations to demonstrate a meaningful quantifiable impact, they also accepted some qualitative evidence of results, recognizing the tension between adaptive problems and establishing a clear chain of causality. The focus on experimentation and adaption extended to the Foundation itself, which adapted over the course of the granting period in response to challenges, changing contexts, and new knowledge. Notably, at the outset, the Foundation focused its efforts on finding partners that were focused on leveraging technology to personalize, and then, with time, decided to also emphasize HQIM, as they evolved to see HQIM as increasingly important.

As one example of design philanthropy at work, the case study Foundation clearly sought to straddle the grasstops/grassroots, centralized/decentralized, technical/adaptive, and quantifiable/integrated dimensions described by Tompkins-Stange. However, the result was more than simply a policy-influencing approach that fell in the middle of the spectrum on all four dimensions. The processes of design philanthropy involved a private foundation designing their own instructional initiative and hiring private external support providers to carry out their vision in public schools. This represents a new and distinct structure for philanthropic engagement that bypassed typical democratic mechanisms for designing policies entirely. Rather than lobbying public institutions to enact particular policies, the Foundation *designed its own instructional*

policy and contracted directly with other nongovernmental organizations to enact that policy. While the outcomes- and field-oriented foundations in Tompkins-Sange's (2016) typology engaged in distinct types of advocacy for policymaking, the process of design philanthropy enabled our case study Foundation to circumvent the immediate need for advocacy. Instead, the Foundation partnered directly with private organizations to implement their own, self-designed instructional innovation. In the sections that follow, we explore how participants reacted to and interacted with these processes of design philanthropy in practice.

Perceptions, Experiences, and Interpretations

Selecting partners and managing grantees. As noted above, the Foundation selected private grantees who were expected to operate as jurisdictional challengers to the traditional educational establishment. Indeed, because of this private sector orientation, these support providers were quite accustomed to pitching their services to schools as unique and different from their competitor organizations. Because of the centralized structure of the design and selection processes, the support providers were largely aligned on the vision for the Initiative; however, they brought somewhat different perspectives on the best pathway to achieve that vision resulting from their own unique backgrounds, missions, and motivations to the Initiative. This was in part by design, as the Foundation had purposefully selected a decentralized approach to implementation in order to leverage the variation across support providers—a key feature differentiating design philanthropy from venture philanthropy. However, support providers' varying origins and internal goals informed the way they conceptualized the new program in unanticipated ways, and the decentralized nature of implementation meant that these various interpretations compounded as they filtered down through layers of implementation.

Support providers. From the beginning of the Initiative, support providers varied in how they saw the Initiative aligning with their current practices and long-term goals. For example, the organization that we've termed "Human Capital Builders" (HCB) saw the Initiative as complementing their own interest in building capacity around innovative models generally, but were not particularly focused on leveraging technology to personalize HQIM. As one HCB staff member explained,

> Our team is focusing on school systems and schools that are implementing innovative models. It looks a lot of different ways... The [Foundation's] initiative was a natural fit for the sorts of projects that we came to take on and to help schools and systems out with. Part of what was attractive about it was our theory that a technical assistance partnership like ourselves can provide some support with design, but also should be responsible for building capacity to implement successfully. We believe it takes multiple years to do it in a really high-quality way that builds capacity at the teacher level and leader level to effectively actualize whatever the model may be.

This support provider originally interpreted the Initiative as a simultaneous reform of curriculum and instruction, with a strong focus on personalization and student choice. They targeted much of their initial efforts on developing an instructional model that would allow teachers to use technology to personalize the student experience. However, after the first year of implementation, results did not manifest as they had expected. As a result, they shifted their approach to more explicitly focus on supporting teachers' abilities to develop High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). This reflected the Foundation's own shift in their funding strategy that, as noted above, also increasingly emphasized HQIM.

In contrast, Curriculum Masters (CM), another participating support provider, had direct experience with the type of HQIM envisioned by the philanthropy and latched on to the opportunity for additional funding to infuse technology into their existing curriculum. CM's leaders emphasized their prior experience with the curricular approach favored by the Foundation and explained that they were drawn to the Initiative because they saw the funder as

"similarly minded." They viewed the grant as an opportunity to cover the expenses for the work they were already doing with HQIM and begin exploring technological integration "in meaningful ways." They developed a four-year strategy to incrementally redesign their core curriculum offering with the intention of garnering additional financial support outside of the two-year grant funded by the Foundation. As such, at the outset they decided to focus most heavily on building teachers' capacity in their pre-existing curricular approach, a decision enabled by the decentralized approach that the Foundation took to managing implementation.

Representatives from Curriculum Masters explained the rationale behind this sequential implementation, stating "before anyone can actually use technology and use it to enhance things, everybody has to get a much better understanding of the curriculum." Despite this apparent intentionality, there were additional, more practical factors that likely also led to the heavy focus on the curriculum. First, the grant supported a continuation of their prior work; it was largely a matter of doing what they had already been doing. Second, it took substantial time for Curriculum Masters to hire a specialist in the integration of technology. Third, the individual that they hired had much more experience with HQIM than with technology, and therefore needed to develop additional partnerships with external consultants to bolster the organization's technological capacity. Regardless of intentionality, their selection of a sequential implementation strategy meant that they did not train teachers in integrating technology during the first year of implementation, and when they ultimately did incorporate technology, it represented a relatively small shift.

Other organizations were less clear on the exact rationale behind their participation, but for these organizations, the additional funding was a primary motivator. One organization, "Standard Bearers" (SB), began as a professional development support group for teachers

focused on standards-based instruction. Leaders in the organization reported seeing some potential areas for overlap between the types of technology-infused instructional models that they use for *teacher* learning and the integration of technology that the Foundation had envisioned for *student* learning. When asked why they were participating in the Initiative, its leader responded, "I actually don't know the exact answer. There's a lot of foundations in this work, in this business, we're all in this, and we've been talking to lots of them." External support providers are typically funded through school budgets but often subsidize their costs through direct support from foundations (Hatch et al., 2019), so the additional funding without tight strings attached afforded more flexibility and control in their work regarding the schools they chose to work with and the type of work they would engage with them.

Schools. These different interpretations of the Initiative's goals and mechanisms were magnified when they reached schools. As with the support providers, school leaders had their own diffuse motivations for participating, which flourished under the Foundation's decentralized approach to managing implementation. The program had already been reinterpreted by support providers, and school leaders and teachers also fell back on their own past experiences and understandings to determine how the associated materials and practices would help them reach their own goals. School leaders and staff reported that they participated in the Initiative to improve instruction generally, but the focus on technology and personalization featured even less prominently in their motivations than it did among support providers. School leaders also cited securing additional funding and building or continuing relationships with the support providers as primary motivators, and it was each of these motivations that framed how they made sense of the Initiative.

Not surprisingly, according to our survey results, the broad goal of improving instruction was a major driver. Across all participating schools, 90% of administrators reported that "improving literacy instruction" was a motivation for participating in the Initiative, and, as shown in Figure 1, roughly 60% included it in their top two motivations. In interviews, school leaders expressed that they thought instruction would improve through the use of HQIM, and some were also interested in the potential development of non-cognitive skills through technological integration and personalization. One school leader at an already exceptionally well-performing school explained that they were participating to give their students a broader set of non-cognitive skills,

> The staff and everyone was like, "This is working, why [change] if it's not broken?" But I knew that we had a, I don't know if it's a global responsibility or I don't know what the word is. But I just knew that we had a responsibility to the children, to allow them another way to learn...The children were very compliant, because they're really good kids. But that was not what I wanted, ultimately. When I started learning about what was blended learning and the various models to blended learning, I became really excited about the possibilities. One of the things that I want to give our kids is, if they could learn at an early age, how to manage their time, then they will be so successful.

This interpretation was largely in line with the Foundation's vision of the Initiative and represented exactly the change that the Foundation was hoping to effectuate.

However, schools did not always plan to improve instruction through the channels the Foundation had envisioned, and these school-level plans were particularly critical to the overall Initiative given the decentralized nature of implementation. Some school leaders saw the Initiative primarily as an opportunity to provide additional resources and support to help them with their most critical day-to-day challenges. On the survey, roughly 90% of administrators said that acquiring additional resources and support was a motivation for participating in the Initiative, and around 40% included it in their top two motivations.

In interviews, principals echoed these findings, explaining that, while they might have some interest in HQIM and technological integration, implementation of these reforms was secondary to other needs and challenges. For example, one principal claimed that *time* was the biggest challenge in their school, and saw the grant as providing the opportunity to pay teachers to come to school after hours, on weekends, and over the summer to plan collaboratively. The principal explained,

> I think, honestly, the only challenge is time; there's never enough time. And so this year, another aspect of why the implementation process was so successful is because I allocated funding to plan... you know, before-school hours, after-school hours, on the weekends and so it wasn't like we were tied into this time period of 45 minutes, get everything done, but we were able to really sit collectively and collaboratively and really spend hours at a time really discussing what our goals were, discussing the modules, discussing the successes, the things that didn't work so well, how this can be better the second time around. And so throughout the entire year, we had that ability to really meet without the stress of being time constrained and I'm hoping next year I have funding to do that as well because I feel that if I don't have the funding, then time's going to be a very big negative factor in the work.

In many of these planning sessions, this principal and the school's teachers worked directly with their support provider, Standard Bearers. However, because the support and materials were not always focused on HQIM or leveraging technology for personalization, the activities undertaken during this planning time were only tangentially related to the goals of the Initiative.

One of the primary methods through which Standard Bearers (SB) remained focused on the Initiative's vision was by supporting teachers in using HQIM that were on grade level and focused on grade level standards. However, the decentralized approach to the implementation of the Initiative enabled teachers to have the autonomy to further adjust the materials after these sessions, tailoring the plans and materials to fit with their past experiences, existing comfort levels, and students' perceived needs. These adjustments continued to diffuse the content of the materials, making the implementation of the Initiative increasingly unrelated to HQIM or

technological integration. One Spanish-English bilingual teacher noted that they did not use SB's instructional materials because they were not in Spanish or at the appropriate level of rigor for their students. Instead, to find texts they fell back on old practices and easily accessible materials. They explained,

> Because of the students that we have, normally we use very minimal of those [SB suggested] texts. Because, we need to either use ones with the Spanish or one with the level of lexile that the students are able to read. Also, we try to accommodate those students that are low readers… We use anything. Yeah, we use the internet. We use TLA, or those programs that are free that provide articles that are related to the topic that we are trying to address. We also find videos that we [use] to make the teaching interactive and also give the students different entry points.

Standard Bearers staff expressed concern that this tailoring slowed their process of integrating HQIM and technology, but ultimately did not have the authority to prevent it. In short, the decentralized structure for managing grantees allowed school leaders to allocate funding toward additional planning time and materials that were not present previously; however, these resources have not necessarily furthered the Initiative's vision of leveraging technology to personalize HQIM.

School leaders also participated in the Initiative, in part, to continue or begin a relationship with their external support provider. Three quarters of school leaders reported participating in the Initiative to continue or begin a relationship with their support provider, and over one quarter counted it among their top two motivations. One principal working with Curriculum Masters (CM) was particularly interested in forming a relationship with that organization. They had been using CM's instructional materials for a number of years, and teachers and administrators liked the curriculum but were looking for additional support. Leaders in this school wanted to increase consistency in curriculum and instruction within grade levels, support teachers' use and ownership of the CM curriculum, and have more student independence

and less teacher talk. Moreover, they believed that strengthening the implementation of the CM materials would most efficiently increase their students' scores on state assessments. Therefore, they reached out to CM to inquire about obtaining additional support, and CM then decided to use the funding opportunity associated with the Initiative to pay for the costs of providing support to this school, a decision enabled by the decentralized approach to implementation. Indeed, the principal's explanation of what they hoped to get out of the experience of working with CM through the Initiative was only slightly related to the Foundation's vision of leveraging technology to personalize HQIM and was instead very focused on quantitative results This principal explained,

> The teachers feel tremendous stress. I have great staff, they feel tremendous stress because they know that the test scores matter, and because they matter to everybody else outside of the school. And if they become better at teaching, the art and craft of teaching, then my test scores will go up...So that's where our efforts are now in professional development of teachers, and this is a perfect opportunity...The scores have to go up. That's really what it is. I mean whether they were... my scores this year were flat, better than decreasing… But still flat, they have to go up. I don't care if they even went up five points, five percent, I don't care. They have to go up.

In sum, the support providers were aligned on the broad vision associated with the Initiative, that of leveraging technology to personalize HQIM. However, they brought different perspectives about what they should do to make that happen because each had a variety of missions, competing goals, and other motivations that drove them to participate in the Initiative. These competing motivations affected how they interpreted their role in the Initiative as well as their responsibilities associated with the grant. These goals became even more diffuse at the school level, where leaders held an even wider variety of motivations and background experiences.

As noted above, the Foundation did not choose a particular structure for accomplishing its vision because it sought to understand which elements of the Initiative were most promising.

However, sharing a broad vision with the support providers and partner schools was not enough to maintain consistency. Instead, the lack of clearly defined processes and mechanisms for achieving the vision allowed the external support providers to fall back on their own experiences and areas of expertise, which did not always align with the Foundation's original design. None of the organizations dramatically changed their mission or core activities to fit with the goals of the Initiative. Instead, each organization continued to employ familiar strategies and programs with some iterative adjustments. When the missions and experiences of external support providers did not directly align with the core components of the vision, the work that the Foundation funded was sometimes only tangentially related to the vision of the Initiative. Thus, the decentralized implementation structure exacerbated variability in support organization and school interpretations of the Initiative, their views on how it ought to be implemented, and potentially, the outcomes associated with the reform.

Framing problems and evaluating results. Just as design philanthropy's norms for selecting partners and managing grantees produced a diffuse and decentralized implementation of the Initiative, the approach to framing problems and evaluating results left room for interpretation and reinterpretation by implementing agents. Support providers recognized the Foundation's interest in producing quantifiable results, but had somewhat contradictory perspectives on their ability to increase student test scores in both the short and long term. The support providers were willing to take credit when their partner schools saw increases in literacy scores, but expressed concerns about sustaining these gains and realistically attributing them to their work together. Despite qualms about their ability to demonstrate quantifiable impact, each support provider committed to producing and sharing evidence of impact using standardized test scores with the Foundation twice yearly.

One external support provider, for example, attributed score increases in certain grades to their professional development approach, but then attempted to dial back expectations for future years. They explained this hesitancy because both of their partner schools were engaging in a number of different initiatives, and so staff at the support organization admitted that "it's hard to distinguish in their data what's actually having an *input*. It's hard for them to distinguish what's actually having an *impact*." They also feared that gains would not be sustained or replicated in future years. Despite these concerns, they continued to attribute past increases in test scores to the work that they did with the school.

At the school level, leaders acutely felt the need to increase student achievement, and, as noted above, increasing standardized test scores was a primary motivator for participating in the Initiative. The principals therefore expected that their work with the support provider would result in increased student achievement measurable even in the first year of implementation. One principal noted that she hoped the HQIM would "play out tremendously, in a big way" for student test scores because,

> If you're focusing on a specific reading standard that can be measured, that can be transferred to social studies and science...If you connect everything in a manner where your reading skills are supporting your content area work, then students get less tortured and more time for the real learning.

Although the belief here that the Initiative would increase test scores rested mostly on the implementation of HQIM, other school administrators expressed similar expectations from the technological focus of the Initiative. One administrator explained on the survey,

> I believe purposeful and intentional use of technology can enhance and enrich strong instructional practices and opportunities for students to apply learning in a variety of situations. More focused, targeted and strategic time on task should result in greater student achievement.

Some teachers also expected that the test scores would increase as a result of their work with support providers. One teacher explained that they expected that their work with Standard Bearers was "going to help [students] with the state tests, where they have to answer very specific questions that are aligned to those standards too." The teacher noted that the SB instructional materials were aligned to grade level standards, whereas the school's regular curriculum was more personalized. Because the SB approach focused on teacher professional development related to standards, this teacher expected that test scores would increase more than if they were using their school's regular curriculum. Somewhat ironically, however, personalization was a main goal of the integration of technology in the broader vision for the Initiative, suggesting two important takeaways. First, the mechanism by which this teacher expected to see test scores increase was counter to parts of the broader aim of the grant. Second, there may be an inherent tension between personalization through technology and increasing achievement on grade-level standardized tests (Daruwala, Bretas, & Ready, in press*)*.

Teachers did report some shifts to their instructional practices in accordance with the vision of the Initiative. These changes tended to involve increasing personalization and convergence toward a station-based instructional model across support providers. Several participants indicated that adoption of stations was the main shift to facilitate personalization via technology. This station-based approach typically involved small groups working on a variety of distinct tasks, with one or two of the stations often involving teacher-led instruction, at least one leveraging technology, and others focused on independent or group work. Across all schools, teacher reports of instructional practices on surveys at the beginning and end of the first year of the grant tended to shift in ways consistent with the adoption of stations or a similar instructional model.

Teachers were pleased with the changes that they had made as a result of the grant-provided support and reported positive outcomes; however, the types of outcomes they discussed were not in terms of state test scores and were not necessarily related to the broader vision of leveraging technology to personalize HQIM. Many teachers in surveys and interviews reported that the work with their support provider was improving their ability to differentiate instruction and increase student engagement and confidence. One teacher shared an anecdote in which their external support provider helped them differentiate instruction for English Language Learners. This teacher had students draw pictures as the teacher read the article with them and then used sentence starters with the pictures to meet the "compare and contrast" objective. The teacher explained,

> The outcomes have been very, very good...I'll give you an example. I have three students that could not read and write in any language, either in English or Spanish, and they're in third grade. So, it was very hard for me, having students like that producing, right now, essays… those students, in this last month, we, together, read the article and, in every paragraph, we stopped and they made a picture of what that meant for them... they wrote the essay using sentence starters, and their pictures, and compare and contrast. And, they wrote it... I feel so happy. I couldn't believe it.

Although these students were working on a grade-level standard and ultimately the teacher was pleased with the instructional strategy, the nature of outcomes that the teacher observed may not be picked up by a grade-level test and did not necessarily involve the integration of technology with HQIM, though it did broadly relate to the goal of personalization.

Moreover, some expressed concern that using HQIM might *decrease* test scores. One Standard Bearers staff member explained that teachers at several schools had a difficult time understanding why they should focus on building broader knowledge around topics of study as opposed to the skills, which are the focus of the assessments.[3] The staff member reported,

[3] SB was selected as a grantee early in the timing of the Initiative, before the Foundation had decided to explicitly focus on HQIM.

> When kids go take an assessment, they're not necessarily going to be assessed on the same exact book that you read to them. They're going to be assessed on the skills that you're teaching them through a particular set of texts or question styles.

A teacher from another school similarly reported concerns about the ability of the HQIM to raise test scores. In a free response question on the baseline survey, this teacher wrote,

> This school has always had [HQIM]. However, the practices and other curriculum aspects have failed to meet the students' needs. I'm teaching 5th grade students who read at a first [to] early third grade [level] (probably at least 50%). When I look at the classroom data, available to see on our Google Drive from 2016 forward, many of these students are reading at the same level since first and second grade.

Thus, some teachers expressed concerns that the rigorous HQIM would not adequately reflect skill-based objectives on the standardized assessments.

Support providers, school leaders, and teachers also responded to their own results on standardized tests in varied ways. One school and their partner, Human Capital Builders, was concerned that standardized test scores decreased after the pilot year of implementation. They attributed this apparent decline to decreased rigor of the student-directed and personalized components associated with the integration of technology. In response they decided to "pull back" and shift course in their work together on the Initiative to ensure that they were prioritizing rigor over technology. This school was accustomed to using "data for learning," and therefore made sense of the programmatic successes through the observed, quantitative data (Riehl et al., 2018).

However, individuals at other schools engaged in "data for sensemaking," interpreting the data through the lens of what they already believed about good teaching and values. Teachers and school leaders that used this approach tended to focus on the results that best fit with their own prior conceptions of good teaching, even when those results were not systematically reflected in the quantitative data. In one example, this meant that the support provider, school

leader, and teachers simply focused their conversations about impact on particular grades where scores did increase, even while scores had decreased in other grades that had also participated in the Initiative. While this may seem like a sleight of hand, it can also be interpreted as a rational response to the perhaps unrealistic expectation that an innovative approach would produce measurable gains on standardized test scores in its first year.

Discussion

The example of design philanthropy that we described above involved a centralized approach to developing a vision of instructional reform directly designed by a private foundation, but a decentralized approach to implementation carried out through nongovernmental external support providers. The Foundation carefully selected partner organizations, tightly controlled the original design of the Initiative, and expected organizations to achieve quantifiable results. At the same time, the Foundation encouraged adaptive problem solving from its partners and envisioned a decentralized implementation structure whereby the original goals of the Initiative would flow through support providers, down to school leadership and teachers, eventually impacting students largely through channels identified during the design phase. This structure provided substantial autonomy to external support providers, school leaders, and teachers, while at the same time bypassing typical public policymaking structures. As such, the Foundation anticipated from the outset that the exact activities would vary across organizations and schools but expected that the core goals of the Initiative would remain intact.

However, those responsible for implementation engaged in sensemaking at each level. As depicted in the dissolution of color density in Figure 2, each level of program implementation acted like a porous prism, as participants reinterpreted and redirected the Initiative the way a prism refracts light. These reinterpretations then shone down to the next level of implementation,

becoming further refracted with each step. The Initiative's vision was thus filtered through many layers of reinterpretations.

Although Figure 2 is meant to represent the slow diffusion of the original vision, there was considerable variability across contexts in the degree of diffusion at each level. As noted above, support providers with goals, expertise, and past experiences that were already aligned with the vision of the Initiative were able to avoid some of the diffusion that occurred with support providers who needed to quickly build capacity and willingness within their own organizations. This was true at the school level as well, where school leader motivation played a critical role in retaining proximity to the original vision. Moreover, teachers who had stronger instructional capacity and higher motivation to integrate technology were much more likely to articulate and carry out the vision of the Initiative. Thus, the degree to which reinterpretations in implementation led programmatic approaches away from the original vision varied across support providers, school leaders, and teachers.

In sum, although the Foundation designed a program to avoid the missteps that often plague policy implementation, the decentralized implementation structure brought its own set of challenges. The Foundation designed a clear *what* without a clear *how*, instead allowing support providers the freedom to carry out the Initiative with somewhat flexible expectations for implementation and demonstrating results. Although this structure involved a programmatic approach that made a real attempt at engaging multiple stakeholders, it nonetheless faced long-standing implementation challenges related to ground-level sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002) and street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1971, 1980).

Conclusion and Implications

Philanthropic giving in education has evolved considerably over the past century but has maintained a consistent focus on sustainably improving education systems. New eras have represented shifts in the strategic approaches used in service of that goal and new attempts at solving the perceived problems of the prior periods (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). As criticism of the less democratic components of the dominant venture philanthropy paradigm has mounted (Ravitch, 2016; Reckhow & Synder, 2014), design philanthropy represents an attempt to balance the newer outcomes-oriented, venture approach with practices associated with the more traditional field-oriented approach. At the same time, by designing and enacting an instructional reform without engaging in the typical public policymaking process, design philanthropy marks a new strategic shift that blurs the line between program and policy.

In contrast to venture philanthropy, which often focused on macro-level structural (e.g. small schools; individual charter schools) or systemic policy changes (e.g. district choice policies; standards and assessment alignment), design philanthropy seeks to penetrate deeper into the instructional core through direct programmatic interventions. These efforts include designing and directly supporting reforms aimed at teacher practice and curriculum redesign, what Jay Greene (2005) characterized as "lower-leverage" strategies. However, design philanthropy combines this focus on "lower-leverage" activities with a "higher-leverage" strategy for scale that provides jurisdictional challengers the resources to carry out the work, combined with related funding for research and advocacy. By targeting lower-leverage aims through "higher-leverage" actors, design philanthropy attempts to minimize the organizational distance that has thwarted past efforts at instructional improvement, while building in avenues for scale and return on investment. This process presents both challenges and opportunities which can be understood

as three core tensions: democracy versus consistency, depth versus scale, and experimentation versus expectations of short-term impact.

Democracy versus Consistency

Although initiatives may originate with individual design philanthropies, the decentralized nature of the implementation process still requires partnerships with existing external support providers, school leaders, and teachers. This structure therefore explicitly allows participating stakeholders to determine how initiatives are executed. This approach has the potential to be more democratic, generate more participant buy-in, and promote sustainability in individual schools. Processes built into the design philanthropy approach involve broader engagement from participants because they intentionally open up decisions about implementation to the implementers on the ground. Moreover, this structure may be more politically feasible because it avoids controversial decisions about the changes that actually need to take place on the ground and how those changes should come about. In that sense, it incubates a process of "successive limited comparisons" in which support providers, school leaders, and teachers are able to make a series of adjustments to the policy to fit their own values and contexts (Lindblom, 1959). Because of this, implementation within schools theoretically incorporates the preferences and values of the target population. This approach may therefore be more sustainable in the long term because it is intrinsically linked to the teachers and students that it affects.

Design philanthropy affords more leeway to teacher and principal "street level bureaucrats," who interpret the demands of their positions within their own varied contexts and subsequently develop their own strategies to deal with these competing demands (Lipsky, 1971, 1980). The broad vision and allowance for a variety of voices in implementation therefore facilitates local adaptations, but these adaptations may steer stakeholder efforts further away

from the intended aims (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1974). To the extent that goals, backgrounds, and strategies vary across participating organizations and individuals, reforms are less likely to be implemented consistently and coherently (Hatch et al., 2019).

Although the implications of those inconsistencies remain unclear, history has shown that participant leeway does not automatically improve a given reform (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). Indeed, autonomy can render programs more vulnerable to individual sense-making and ground-level filtering, particularly as the monetary support attached to foundation-designed initiatives further complicates implementation and promotes goal diffusion at both the support provider and individual school levels. Efforts at increasing democratic decision making therefore create new challenges for maintaining consistency across support providers and schools.

Moreover, additional room for street level bureaucrats to redirect and reprioritize does not necessarily mean that they are able to fully and genuinely integrate their own values and goals into an initiative. Big picture decisions determine the parameters for what is possible, and when those are determined centrally, they may limit room for meaningful maneuvering such that reforms do not reflect needs or values on the ground. These observations about design philanthropy resurrect prior questions about how foundations ought to interact with public institutions (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Should foundations shape decision-making processes by promoting the voices of the "experts" and elites within their ranks? Or, is it the responsibility of foundations to prioritize democratic deliberation and attempt to elevate the voices of those less advantaged?

Depth versus Scale

As noted above, design philanthropy focuses directly on the instructional core of teaching and learning by funding professional development, instructional support, and curriculum

building. These on-the-ground strategies differ markedly from previous systemic and structural reforms, and have the potential to develop shared understanding of broader goals and values, which are inherently contextual. As such, participant experiences differ across and within organizations and schools. Because experiences necessarily differ, the end results also have greater propensity to differ. Focusing directly on the instructional core in this manner may be a more fruitful way to change instruction, one that allows for programmatic approaches to directly reflect and respond to local contexts. In this regard, design philanthropy strives for the depth that was perhaps lacking in the macro-level policymaking focus of venture philanthropy.

However, the processes through which design philanthropy seeks to influence teacher practice may actually complicate efforts to scale a particular reform. As noted above, design philanthropy theoretically encourages scalability by funding jurisdictional challengers. In doing so, it represents an attempt at changing public institutions through primarily private mechanisms. This allows design philanthropy to bypass many governmental policymaking structures by directly influencing public schools through privately-designed initiatives enacted through primarily private means (Scott & DiMartino, 2009). However, it is a mistake to assume that programs designed and implemented outside of governmental channels will more efficiently accomplish their goals and achieve impact at scale. Indeed, the need for external support providers to differentiate themselves and clearly pitch their unique value threatens the system-wide coherence of initiatives that involve partnerships with multiple external support providers (Hatch, et al., 2019). Although design philanthropy represents a new attempt at directly affecting the instructional core, it must manage the same relations among aims, instruments, capabilities, and environments that have plagued public sector instructional reform attempts for decades (Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007).

Experimentation versus Expectations of Short-Term Impact

Design philanthropy combines the incubation of deep, experimental changes to practice with venture philanthropy's focus on "moving the needle" and achieving "returns on investment." Although design philanthropists and school leaders expect to produce quantifiable results, the nuanced data needed to quickly measure the impact of innovative school reforms rarely exist. Therefore, schools and their support providers are forced to rely on typical measures of student success that may be unable to capture the effect of an innovative approach within a single nine-month school year. While design philanthropy represents an attempt by foundations to spur educational innovation, it also puts pressure on schools and support providers to demonstrate quantifiable impacts that may be unrealistic in the early phases of implementation.

Producing and identifying short-term effects stemming from innovative instructional reforms has long been a challenging, if not unrealistic, goal of educational philanthropy (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Truly innovative programs, particularly those that involve a series of in-the-moment tweaks and structures for participants to shape implementation, need time to "muddle through" before they can realistically expect to produce causal effects (Lindblom, 1959). We therefore urge philanthropists to heed Lagemann and de Forest's (2007) advice that, "More humble and realistic expectations for what philanthropy can achieve may also encourage philanthropists to realize that the big problems we face in this country and around the world will not be solved easily or overnight" (p. 65). Without this kind of patience, we fear that the experience of working with design philanthropists has the potential to create a new type of foundation-driven policy churn.

Scholarship on education policymaking has long concerned itself with the seemingly never-ending cycle of reform that leaves urban school districts "like car[s] stuck on a muddy

road" (Hess, 1999). Frederick Hess attributed these "spinning wheels" to local governance structures that incentivize school boards to micromanage and superintendents to focus on symbolic rather than substantive reform. Fundamental to his solution was the idea that high stakes accountability and nimble decision making outside of typical governmental bureaucracies could decouple education reform from these unproductive institutional constraints and spur real change. However, we have found that new links between private sector innovation and high stakes, standardized testing threaten to produce a set of structures that similarly inhibit substantive reform.

In sum, design philanthropy straddles the norms of outcome- and field-orientations by engaging in a new process to design instructional programs largely outside of typical government structures. We find that this approach represents an opportunity for increasing responsiveness to the local context but must balance this engagement with coherence across multiple levels. Further, the direct focus on teaching and learning might be a more fruitful way to transform instruction than previous systemic reforms, but it must balance the depth of instructional reform strategies with its attempt to achieve impact at scale. Finally, design philanthropy encourages experimentation and adaptation, but does so in a "high stakes" environment that demands short-term, quantifiable results. Although this approach represents an attempt by foundations to simultaneously increase democratic engagement, directly influence the instructional core, and spur educational innovation, it poses new risks for consistency, scalability, and sustainability.

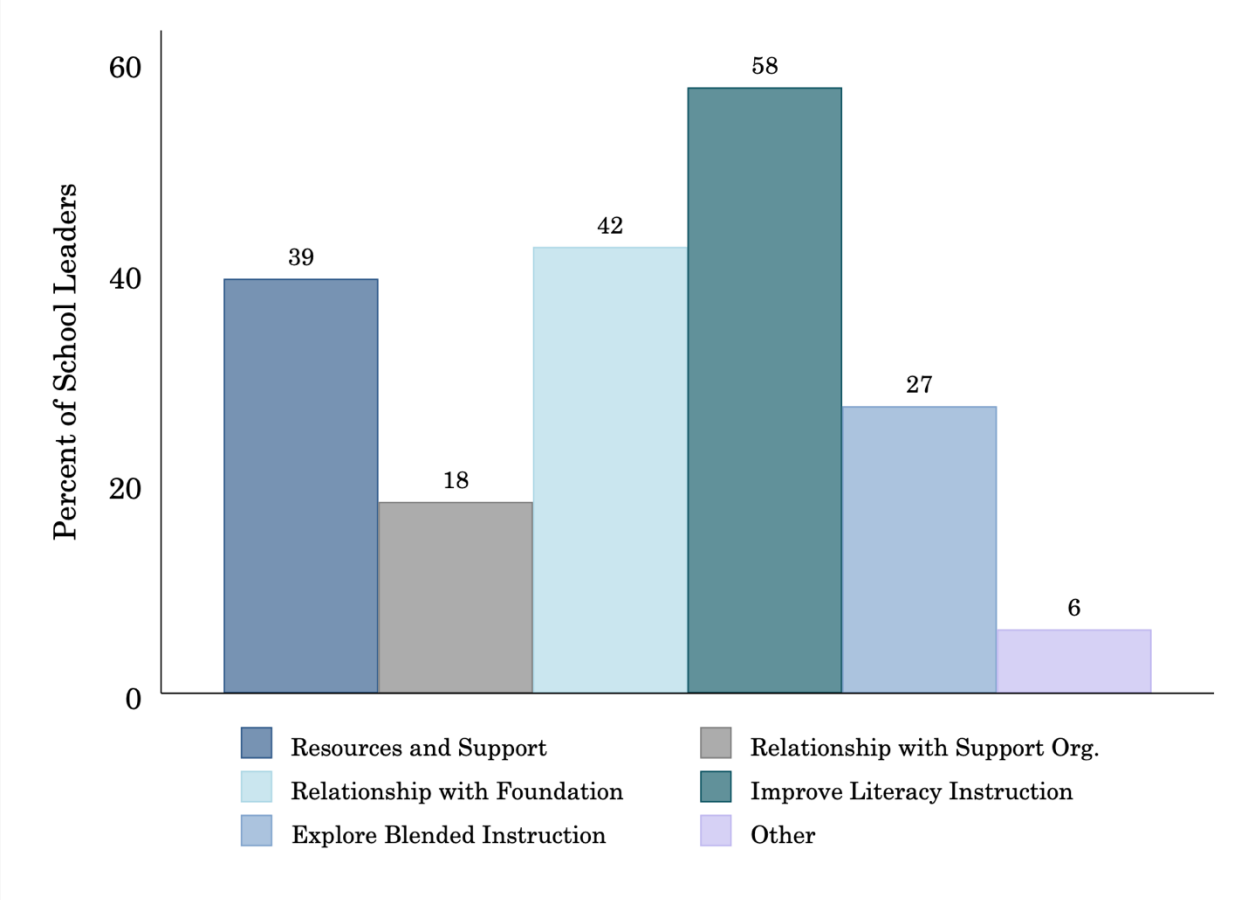

Figure 1. School Leaders Top Two Motivations for Participation in the Initiative

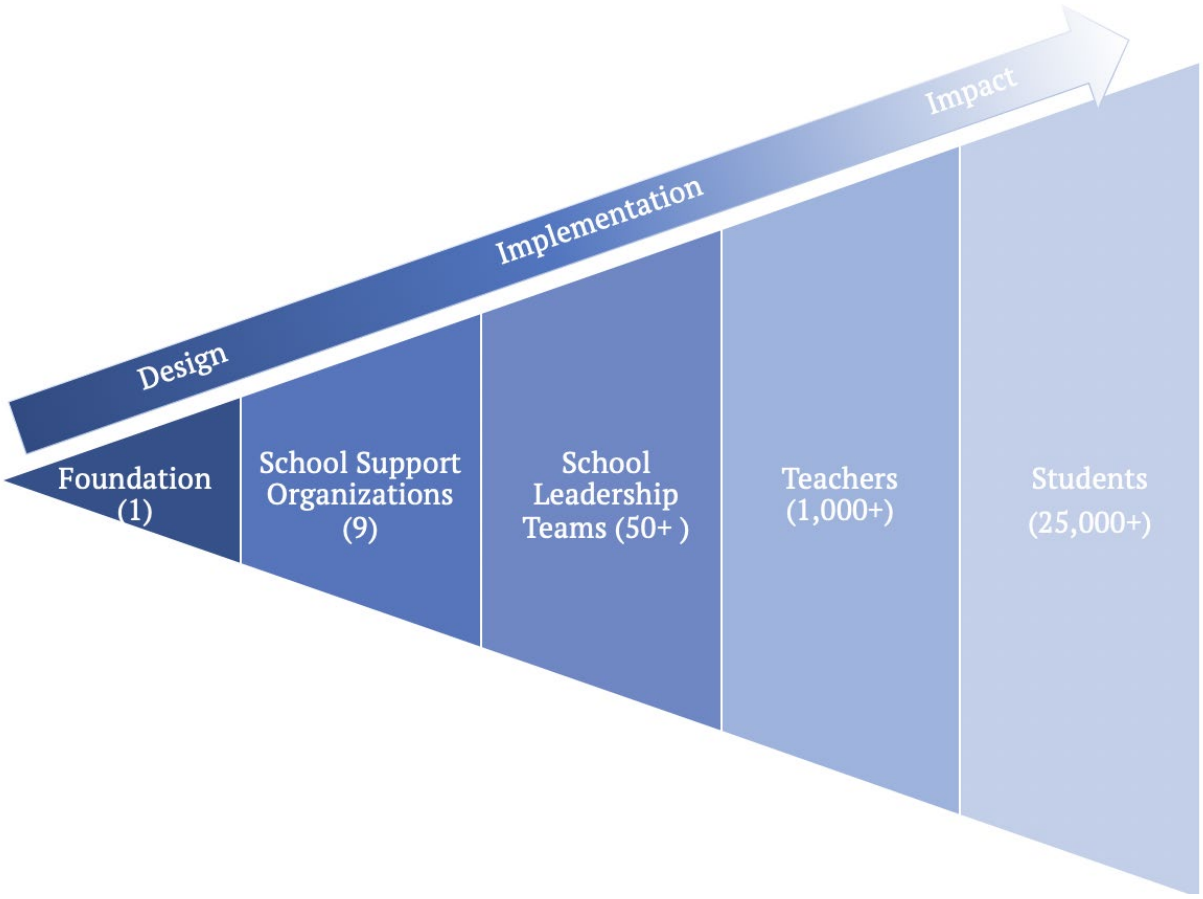

Figure 2. Organizational Structure of Design Philanthropy

References

Bleiberg, Joshua. (2020). Does the Common Core Have a Common Effect?: An Exploration of Effects on Academically Vulnerable Students. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-213). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

Bush-Mecenas, S., & Marsh, J. A. (2018). The DIVE approach: Using case-ordered meta-matrices and theory-based data displays to analyze multiple case study data. In C. R. Lochmiller (Ed.), *Complementary research methods for educational leadership and policy studies* (pp. 33-56). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cohen, David K., Moffitt, S. L., & Goldin, S. (2007). Policy and practice: The dilemma. *American Journal of Education, 113*(4), 515-548.

Daruwala, I., Bretas, S., & Ready, D.D. (in press). The (new) new institutionalism in education: The tension between technology-enabled personalization and accountability regimes. *Educational Researcher.*

Gao, N., & Lafortune, J. (2019). *Common Core State Standards in California: Evaluating Local Implementation and Student Outcomes.* Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved from https://www.ppic.org/publication/common-core-state-standards-in-california-evaluating- local-implementation-and-student-outcomes/

Greene, J. P. (2005). Buckets into the sea: Why philanthropy isn't changing schools, and how it could. In F. M. Hess (Ed.), *With the best of intentions: How philanthropy is reshaping K-12 education*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Hatch, T., Ahn, M., Ferguson, D., & Rumberger, A. The role of external support in improving K-3 reading outcomes in New York City. *Urban Education*.

Hess, F. M. (1999). *Spinning wheels: The politics of urban school reform.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 3-20.

Lagemann, E. C., & de Forest, J. (2007). What might Andrew Carnegie want to tell Bill Gates? Reflections on the hundredth anniversary of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In R. Bacchetti & T. Ehrlich (Eds.), *Reconnecting education & foundations: Turning good intentions into educational capital* (pp. 47-71). San Francisco: Wiley.

Lipsky, M. (1971). Street-level bureaucracy and the analysis of urban reform. *Urban Affairs Quarterly, 6*(4), 391-409.

Lipsky, M. (1980). S*treet level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services.* New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Mehta, J., & Teles, S. (2012). Jurisdictional politics: A new federal role in education. In F. M. Hess & A. P. Kelly (Eds.), *Carrots, sticks, and the bully pulpit: Lessons from a half-century of federal efforts to improve America's schools* (pp. 197-216).

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Pressman, J. L, & Wildavsky, A. B. (1974). *Implementation: how great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland ; or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all: this being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by two sympathetic observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ravitch, D. (2016). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*: Basic Books.

Reckhow, S., & Snyder, J. W. (2014). The expanding role of philanthropy in education politics. *Educational Researcher*.

Riehl, C. J., Earle, H., Nagarajan, P., & Schwitzman, T. E. (2018). Following the path of greatest persistence: Sensemaking, data use, and the everyday practice of teaching. In H. F. Nicole Barnes (Ed.), *Cases of teachers' data use*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group.

Scott, J. (2009). The politics of venture philanthropy in charter school policy and advocacy. *Educational Policy, 23*(1), 106-136.

Scott, J., & DiMartino, C. (2009). Public education under new management: A typology of educational privatization applied to New York City's restructuring. *Peabody Journal of Education, 84*(3), 432-452.

Scott, J., & Jabbar, H. (2014). The hub and the spokes: Foundations, intermediary organizations, incentivist reforms, and the politics of research evidence. *Educational Policy*, 28(2), 233-257.

Song, M., Yang, R., & Garet, M. (2019). *Effects of States' Implementation of College- and Career-Ready Standards on Student Achievement.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research, 72*(3), 387-431.

Tompkins-Stange, M. E. (2016). *Policy patrons: Philanthropy, education reform, and the politics of influence.* In. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Weatherley, R., & Lipsky, M. (1977). Street-level bureaucrats and institutional innovation: Implementing special-education reform. *Harvard Educational Review, 47*(2), 171-197.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Vol. 3). Sage Publications.

Xu, Z., & Cepa, K. (2018). Getting College-Ready during State Transition toward the Common Core State Standards. Teachers College Record, 120(6), n6.

Yin, R. K. (2016). Case study research and applications: Design and methods. In (Sixth edition ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.