

Private and non-public actors in Norwegian secondary education

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Public education is in its “purest form” built upon social contracts involving the state or government, citizens, and their surrounding communities. However, research has illuminated several aspects of how public education is privatized. For example, a) the different kinds of public-private relations and partnerships, including how philanthropic foundations, through sharing their wealth, influence education policy in various periods, (b) how global standardization and the increased use of numeric data and qualitative examples of success have opened the doors for private actors in public education policy, and c) how the, often hidden, commercialization of school development and professional development are leading to change in curriculum, the relationship between teachers and management in schools, and segregation in and across schools. Research also shows that despite the global nature of privatization, the variations in this field are nationally determined.

In the face of increasingly significant differences in Norwegian society combined with ever higher skill requirements, expectations of what schools can do concerning inclusion are also increasing. Ambitions for inclusive education are high and with a longstanding history. In this situation, we observe that private and non-public actors influence schools in new ways. This happens even though the public school has an enrolment of 93% and is governed through a national educational act and national curriculum, which is processed in the parliament. Our claim is that private actors get a foothold because the demands for inclusion and other demands are high and seem difficult to face without external resources.

Against this background, the research questions for this paper are: What kind of private and non-public actors are involved in lower and upper secondary schools to meet demands concerning social inclusion and how do they operate? Which impact has the employment of external resources on the public school system?

We are adopting a historical institutionalist approach, focusing on how different actors' behavior is influenced following their institutional context but also external changes and fundamental ideas underpinning the change. We are conducting a case study relying on data from semi-structured interviews with school leaders and teachers, municipality administrators, head of foundations and a commercial

organization that is currently gaining ground in schools' work on social inclusion in the western part of Norway. We are mapping the field for private providers and the possible cooperation between them, analyzing policy documents related to this field, both from state and municipality, the largest teachers-trade union, and foundations.

The paper contributes to current literature with a single case study from Norway, illuminating what kind of private and non-public actors are involved in the schools concerning the work on social inclusion, how they work and which kind of impact it has on the school system. Preliminary findings show that many private actors are involved in public schools and that the relations and partnerships take different forms. The involvement is fragmented, including many small actors with different interests and offers. Private actors are foundations and other private organizations (e.g., corporate companies) financially supported by foundations and public organizations. Foundations approach schools directly and indirectly through other private organizations. Their agenda has at least two sides; on the one hand, it is about showing the foundation or organization as socially responsible. On the other hand, it is about a genuine contribution to the welfare state. Other private actors find their marketplace in schools, create needs through interpreting numbers and showing examples, and offer their services. Schools and municipalities experience a need to do more concerning social inclusion and thus face contributions from private, both as teaching for students and in the form of professional development for teachers, and as help to leaders. While private engagement in public schools may look like a "win-win" situation for all parties, it also challenges the political governance of the school. Some teachers, for example, say that they wish they had the capacity to meet the demands concerning social inclusion themselves, and there seems to be varying control over the schemes from private contributors. In addition, the priorities of the foundations and private actors shy away from political debate and government control.

What we can learn from the single Norwegian case is that there is a great deal of private and non-public involvement in public schools' work on inclusion but that we know relatively little about the scope, what legitimizes the involvement of private actors, how the interaction between the private and public works and what consequences this involvement has for the development of the public school in the long run and how it will affect vulnerable groups of students. So, we have just opened the door to a field where there is a need for more research.