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

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Abstract

Over the past several decades large philanthropies have adopted aggressive approaches to education reform that scholars have labeled *venture philanthropy*. These efforts focused on broad changes to schooling and education policy, borrowing techniques from the venture capital world. But many foundations have recently become convinced that market forces and macro-level policymaking alone cannot drive educational improvement, particularly in areas related to classroom teaching and learning. In response, foundations have begun to design their own instructional innovations and identify providers to implement them. This paper interprets these recent efforts as early evidence of a distinct adaptation in the evolving role of philanthropies, which we dub *design philanthropy*. 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 coherence, scalability, and sustainability in education policymaking.

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Introduction

In 2020, private foundations in the U.S. donated over $64 billion to education initiatives, a 60% increase relative to 2010 (Giving USA, 2020). This growth in philanthropic investment over the past several decades has been particularly pronounced among large foundations such as Gates and Broad, who adopted an aggressive approach to educational advocacy and policymaking termed *venture philanthropy* (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Scott, 2009). These initiatives focused on macro changes to the education landscape, borrowing techniques from the venture capital world, including an intense focus on rapid prototyping, short-term scalability, and returns on investments.

However, as described below, scholars have debated venture philanthropy's effectiveness and have raised concerns that education philanthropy places too much control in the hands of a few, very wealthy, white men (Ravitch, 2016; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Moreover, 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 innovations, identify providers to execute related interventions, and organize schools and districts in which the interventions will be implemented. This paper interprets these recent efforts as early evidence of a distinct adaptation in the evolving role of philanthropies, which we dub *design philanthropy*.

Purpose

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 four key dimensions of philanthropic norms described by Tompkins-Stange (2016). We then use a longitudinal case study of one design philanthropy's initiative in a large, urban school district to describe how participants experience this nascent 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?

Ultimately, the story we uncover is one of promising approaches coexisting with inherent contradictions. Design philanthropy has the capacity to nimbly respond to contextual needs and increase democratic engagement. This localization, however, can conflict with demands for coherence and consistency across multiple partner organizations and school contexts. Further, design philanthropy focuses deeply on instruction, a strategy that might prove more effective in transforming classroom processes relative to previous systemic and structural reforms, but this depth complicates its goal of large-scale impacts. Finally, design philanthropy must balance a broad desire for experimentation and adaptation with its narrow demand for short-term, quantifiable results. It is our aim that the theoretical and empirical research in this article can catalyze and support community dialogs regarding the bounds and goals of philanthropic engagement in education within their contexts.

Relevant Literature

Historical 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). Philanthropic investment in education has evolved considerably during this time with each new era developing in response to perceived limitations of the previous generation, but philanthropic giving has consistently focused on building sustainable systems to improve education rather than providing direct charity (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Evolutions in education philanthropy typically represent strategic modifications in response to perceived faults of prior generations, as opposed to dramatic transformations of philanthropic giving. These evolutions tend to be most prominent in new philanthropies that emerge within each era, though older philanthropies sometimes also adopt new processes and structures in response to paradigm shifts. Not *all* foundations act the same within a given era, and some may continue to prioritize the processes and structures of prior eras (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007; Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

Early efforts. Lagemann and de Forest (2007) chronicle the many eras of philanthropic giving in education, beginning with "Scientific Philanthropy."

During this period, late-19th Century donors such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller[1] promoted the pursuit of empirical (rather than religious) truths, as evidenced by their support for scientific research at colleges, universities, and libraries. Lagemann and de Forest then characterize the era of diffuse philanthropic responses to the social and economic needs stemming from the Great Depression and World War II as one of "Philanthropic Scatteration" in which large foundations often made many small, opportunistic grants without clear planning or end goals.

During the post-war era many philanthropies began to engage in "Strategic Philanthropy" in an attempt to increase grantmaking effectiveness. Although donors 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 (O'Connor, 1999; Tompkins-Stange, 2016). The 1970s witnessed the emergence of politically more-conservative philanthropies, such as the Olin and Bradley Foundations, which were increasingly concerned with the social activism of the 1960s and focused efforts on preserving free market values via "Movement Philanthropy" (Lagemann & de Forest, 2007). Importantly, this shift was less a pragmatic adaptation to lessons learned, and more a reactive counter-mobilization in response to a perceived liberal bias among large philanthropies.

Despite these persistent attempts, little evidence suggests that these strategic shifts 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. For example, critics of the 1993 Annenberg Challenge, a $500 million school reform effort, charged that the funds were spread too thin; were often used to support what schools were already doing;[2] and as a result, produced few measurable changes to educational processes or outcomes (Colvin, 2005). Echoing these critiques more broadly, Greene (2005) equated 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. Instead, Greene 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, targeting philanthropy's relatively smaller financial resources at the more expansive system of public expenditures. Large foundations, particularly newer ones like Gates and Broad, heeded

his call[3] by adopting a more aggressive approach to educational advocacy and policymaking termed *venture philanthropy* (Scott, 2009; Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

Venture philanthropy. During the era of venture philanthropy, the voice and influence of the largest foundations grew due to dramatic increases in giving and a shift toward higher-leverage strategies (Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). As noted above, venture philanthropies conceptualized themselves as social investors, leveraging business-like strategies for the social good (Scott, 2009). Some have labeled the growing role of private sector actors employing market logic to address global challenges "philanthrocapitalism" (Bishop & Green, 2008). In this process, philanthrocapitalists have attempted to make philanthropy more cost-effective, impact-oriented, and financially profitable, while at times simultaneously justifying income inequality and their own wealth accumulations (Giridharadas, 2018; McGoey, 2012).

In the context of education, venture philanthropy strategies included funding macro structural and systemic changes to the education landscape; research and advocacy; and the empowerment of "jurisdictional challengers" (Mehta & Teles, 2012; Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Scott, 2009). Structural reforms championed by venture philanthropies included small schools, charter schools, and broader market-based reforms (Scott, 2009; Tompkins-Stange, 2018). Along with financing the reforms themselves, venture philanthropies also funded research and advocacy around these higher-leverage ideas, with a focus on their promotion and wider implementation. Importantly, each of these reform strategies hinged on the belief that changing the organizational conditions, processes, or standards of schooling would spur classroom-level changes and ultimately result in improved student outcomes.

While some venture philanthropy efforts involved direct funding of government elites,[4] most venture philanthropy funding went to jurisdictional challengers. This concept was originally developed to explain how the federal government influenced education by helping reformers challenge the educational (jurisdictional) status quo, but foundations have increasingly supported jurisdictional challengers over the past decade (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). In contrast to the traditional compliance focus of many federal programs (e.g., No Child Left Behind), 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 already focused on its policy priorities at the state and local level (Mehta & Teles, 2012). The strategy of funding jurisdictional

challengers as opposed to mandating reform of a reluctant educational establishment had inherent appeal to venture philanthropists who lacked access to the same "sticks" as the federal government (Mehta & Teles, 2012; Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Scott & Jabbar, 2014) and sought a higher-leverage reform strategy that would reshape the politics of education by empowering a new set of actors (Greene, 2005; Reckhow, 2013).

Dimensions of Philanthropic Norms

Tompkins-Stange (2016) provides a useful analytic framework for comparing the outcomes-orientation of venture philanthropy with the more traditional, field-orientation of foundations that began in prior eras.[5] 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 elite organizations, including jurisdictional challengers. 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 toward 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.

Over the last two decades, new philanthropies increasingly adopted the venture, outcomes-oriented approach as "common-sensical" because of its supposed efficiency, effectiveness, and return on investment (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). However, the outcomes-oriented framework has limitations, namely, the tenuous causal chains linking its efforts to improved student outcomes. Moreover, although higher-leverage strategies could, in theory, shift the distribution of public resources toward a given goal, implementation fidelity and sustainability of that goal are not guaranteed.

The evolving work of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation illustrates the challenges inherent in outcomes-oriented venture philanthropy and philanthrocapitalism more broadly. 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

strategy that sought to create new administrative structures for schools. 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, 2016). In response, Gates turned to deeper systemic reform efforts, best represented by its 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, 2021; Gao & Lafortune, 2019; Song et al., 2019; Xu & Cepa, 2018).

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 has limited their ability to establish the effects of their funding. This top-down vision of philanthropic-driven reform has also presented a potential threat to democratic decision-making in education (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). 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 communities that they have tried to serve. 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). Relatedly, the broader concept of philanthrocapitalism has received increasing criticism regarding its failure to focus on structures of socioeconomic inequality in global capitalism (McGoey, 2012; Sklair & Glucksberg, 2021). Perhaps due to these challenges and corresponding critiques, educational philanthropy appears ripe for another strategic modification.

Design Philanthropy Defined

To address our first research question, we begin by defining design philanthropy in relation to the prior philanthropic efforts discussed above. In short, design philanthropy combines 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, 2016, p. 56). Design philanthropy also adds a direct focus on redesigning the instructional

Table 1. Design Philanthropy in Relation to Field- and Outcomes-Oriented Approaches.

Dimensions	Field-oriented	Design philanthropy	Outcomes-oriented
Selecting partners	Grassroots (community-based organizations)	Jurisdictional challengers; fosters community of practice	Grasstops (elite and/or expert organizations)
Managing grantees	Decentralized approach delegates control to grantees	Centralized design; decentralized implementation	Centralized control of an initiative by the foundation
Framing problems	Adaptive approach with complex, multi-faceted problems	Technical definition of problems and solutions but encourages adaptation and experimentation	Technical problems with a clear line of causality
Evaluating results	Integrated approach uses qualitative and quantitative methods	Quantitative preferred but some qualitative accepted	Quantifiable metrics that prove impact

Note. Dimensions of field- and outcome-oriented philanthropies are from Tompkins-Stange (2016).

core (a theoretically lower-leverage reform) through higher-leverage strategies that do not rely on typical governance structures.

We situate design philanthropy between the outcomes-oriented and field-oriented approaches across the four key dimensions described by Tompkins-Stange (2016); see Table 1). Although venture philanthropists and design philanthropists select partner organizations who are jurisdictional challengers, design philanthropy emphasizes a more field-oriented vision of partnership by acting as a facilitator and convener of communities of practice. Secondly, design philanthropy adopts a centralized approach to managing design, similar to venture philanthropy, but with a more hands-off, decentralized approach to managing implementation. Even though support providers, school leaders, and teachers are typically not participants in the initial vision-setting, providing increased implementation autonomy for these "street-level bureaucrats" can create opportunities to insert their own values and goals into the initiative (Lindblom, 1959; Lipsky, 1971, 1980). Within schools, teachers may experience greater agency in reforms that are engaging and where they feel ownership (although a lack of initial buy-in does not preclude subsequent investment; McLaughlin, 1991). This could be particularly true for design philanthropy, given its optional nature and lack of policy mandates. Conversely, in schools implementing design philanthropy initiatives with little teacher input, teachers may experience the reform as they would any other top-down policy mandate, albeit one with potentially fewer sticks and official sanctions.

Regarding the third and fourth dimensions, both design and venture philanthropy involve a technical definition of problems and solutions, but design philanthropy also encourages experimentation and adaptation. Likewise, design philanthropists borrow the focus on returns on investments from the outcomes-oriented approach and prefer quantitative proof of results, but they also accept qualitative evidence of *early* indicators of results. This theory of change echoes concepts of "school autonomy with accountability" embedded in some recent district-led reforms. These reforms offered schools wide latitude in matters related to curriculum and instruction, but in turn required participation in high-stakes accountability systems with sanctions that included school closure. For example, the Children First initiative in New York City, implemented in the late 2000s under then-Chancellor Klein, is an oft-cited example of such an "autonomy/accountability exchange" (Childress et al., 2011). As with design philanthropy, the NYC reforms relied on voluntary partnerships between schools and external support organizations, sought to increase the involvement of educators (to both increase buy-in and leverage local educator knowledge), and created school networks designed to facilitate knowledge transfer (O'Day & Bitter, 2011; Talbert, 2011; Wohlstetter et al., 2013).

Design philanthropy also represents something more than a shift away from venture philanthropy back to the field-oriented, philanthropic efforts of the past. A key distinction is design philanthropy's strategic focus on *directly redesigning* the instructional core of teaching and learning. Design philanthropy generates and funds teacher practice and curriculum reforms that Greene (2005) characterized generally as lower-leverage, but encases them within a higher-leverage strategy for scale by empowering jurisdictional challengers and funding research and advocacy. This design and implementation of instructional reforms absent the typical public policymaking process marks a strategic shift that blurs the line between public and private policymaking. While outcomes- and field-oriented foundations engaged in distinct types of policy advocacy, design philanthropy processes circumvent the immediate need for advocacy. An argument can be made that design philanthropy does not entail "policy" at all, given that programs do not stem from traditional legislative processes and participation is, to some extent, voluntary. Local decision makers, depending on where they fall within their particular bureaucratic hierarchy, have the agency to decline a proposed initiative—the "structure" itself is optional.

A Trend Toward Design Philanthropy

Though fully documenting the spread of design philanthropy is beyond the scope of this paper, there are many indications of this larger trend. For

example, several authors have noted that in recent years Gates has begun to involve local educators and community and advocacy groups into its traditionally top-down strategy in an effort to become more responsive to grantees and communities (Barnum, 2021; Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Similarly, philanthropies have recognized the importance of incorporating professional expertise, contextual knowledge, and buy-in from the teachers and school leaders responsible for instruction. 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). These examples provide early evidence of the line-blurring between the outcomes- and field-orientation that is characteristic of design philanthropy.

We also find more widespread evidence of a strategic philanthropic shift away from structural and system reform and toward an explicit focus on instruction. For instance, the Hewlett Deeper Learning Initiative funded research to develop a set of six dimensions of deeper learning, convening 10 school networks whose work exemplified these dimensions (Huberman et al., 2014). Additionally, the Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC), financed largely by the Gates Foundation, involved Breakthrough School Models grants that began by outlining seven design principles, several of which focused on classroom instructional practices. Grants were awarded in several waves to schools, charter operators, networks, and intermediary organizations to develop or redesign schools around these principles (NGLC, 2013). The NGLC grants were a precursor to the broader strategic pivot by the Gates Foundation toward personalized learning (Tompkins-Stange, 2018). These initiatives exemplify the growing interest of large donors in reimagining and directly influencing the instructional core of teaching and learning, a hallmark of design philanthropy.

Finally, the philanthropy highlighted in this study is part of a recently convened funder group organized expressly around promoting high-quality instructional materials. The group, which is comprised of nine large foundations that actively fund educational initiatives across the country, represents both outcomes- and field-oriented philanthropies, providing further evidence suggestive of a broader blurring between these two orientations. Representatives from the funders meet monthly to discuss funding opportunities, strategies related to promoting high-quality instructional materials, and findings from their respective projects. These attempts to directly shape classroom practice through new mechanisms and structures reflect core components of design philanthropy.

Despite this early evidence of a shift away from venture philanthropy, little is known about what comes next. Moreover, few studies have examined

the internal processes of philanthropic giving in education and the ways that key actors experience these processes on the ground. We fill these gaps in the literature with evidence from a longitudinal case study of design philanthropy in action, focusing on both the philanthropy and those responsible for implementing its aims.

Data and Methods

Data for this paper were gathered as part of an ongoing, mixed-methods evaluation of a recent educational reform effort (the Initiative) begun by one design philanthropy (the Foundation) that provided grants to several external support providers in a large, urban school district. The grants provided funding for these organizations to implement the philanthropy's instructional innovation, stressing the integration of High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and leveraging technology to personalize student learning.

Longitudinal Case Study with Multiple Embedded Subunits

We conceptualize the study as a single case of one design philanthropy initiative (first level), which contains multiple embedded subunits, most notably the external support providers (second level). Each support provider then works with multiple schools (third level) to pilot their model, providing support to several teachers within each school (fourth level), and ultimately aiming to shift student experiences within classrooms (fifth level). Given the nature of these layered subunits, we use an "embedded case study design" to drive our data collection and analysis (Yin, 2016, pp. 51–52). This design allows us to generate a comprehensive understanding of our single case of design philanthropy by studying both the Foundation and the embedded subunits involved in the Initiative. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the nesting of support providers and schools within this case study.

Our case study is inherently longitudinal, following the full history of the Initiative and each grant thus far, which are typically for 2 years but may extend up to 7 years. The Initiative is on-going and involves a staggered implementation across the different grants. At the time of writing, the Initiative was in its third year (out of a planned 7 years). The Foundation had made 6 out of a proposed 10 first-round grants. These grants went to six external support providers, which we distinguish using the letters A-F to maintain confidentiality. We summarize key features of the six external support providers in Table 2 below.

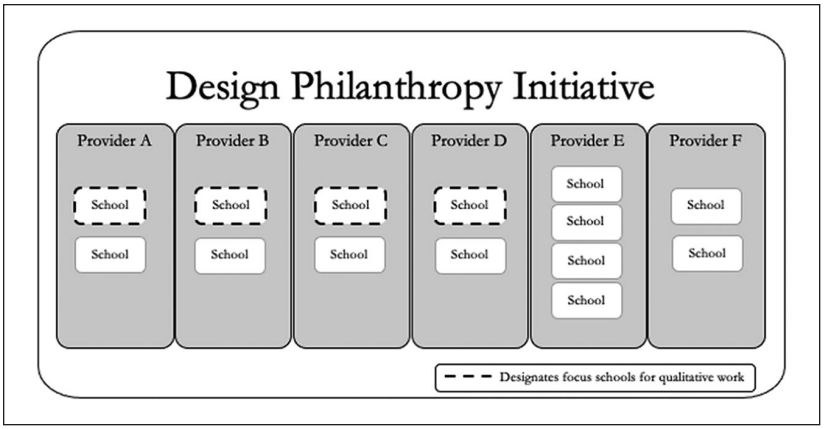

Figure 1. Single case study of design philanthropy with multiple embedded subunits.

Qualitative Data

Our qualitative data were derived from 73 semi-structured interviews with external support providers, school leaders, and teachers. We supplemented 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.

Because of the staggered implementation structure, the qualitative data used for this study are from the first four external support providers (A, B, C, and D). For each external support provider, we engaged in a purposive sampling process to select one illustrative focus school (see Figure 1). We selected these four focus schools with the goal of optimally examining the components of their respective support provider's approach. We maximized school variability to best understand how design philanthropy was implemented in a sample that was as representative as possible of the range of schools involved in the Initiative. Specifically, we selected focus schools 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 contact.

Table 2. Summary of External Support Providers.

Organization pseudonym	Type of organization	Grant period	Number and type of schools	Grade levels	Grant goal
Provider A	Charter Management Organization and Curriculum Provider	2.5 years	2 network charter schools	6–8	Original curriculum design infusing HQIM and tech-enabled personalization
Provider B	Professional Development Provider	3 years	2 schools (1 district and 1 charter)	K–8	Original PD model supporting HQIM and tech-enabled personalization
Provider C	Curriculum and Professional Development Provider	2 years	2 schools (1 district and 1 charter)	K–5	Redesign existing HQIM to infuse tech-enabled personalization
Provider D	Professional Development Provider	2 years	2 district schools	K–5	Redesign existing standards-based PD model to infuse tech-enabled personalization
Provider E	Curriculum Provider	2 years	4 schools (3 district and 1 charter)	6–8	Expanding existing tech-enabled materials into a full curriculum
Provider F	Professional Development Provider	2 years	2 district schools	3–5	Redesign existing HQIM-based PD model to infuse tech-enabled personalization

Interviews. We organized over 20 school-based site visits to the four focus schools to observe classroom instruction, attend professional development sessions, and conduct interviews between July, 2018 and December, 2019. In each focus 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 survey results (described below). Our first set of interviews focused on design, and as time passed, we moved to questions related to implementation, and then impact and sustainability. In these interviews, we also collected relevant documents including design and implementation plans; charts or notes outlining strategies; curricular materials; and instructional resources. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Observations. During the site visits, we 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 or coaching sessions held by the external support providers and observed eight communities of practice organized by the Foundation. During these observations we gathered documents directly from external support providers and the Foundation relevant to our research questions.

Survey Data

We conducted a series of surveys with a sampling frame that included all individuals involved in the design or implementation of the Initiative. The survey sample included teachers and administrators in all 14 participating schools working with each of the six external support providers (A, B, C, D, E, and F). 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 was administered to the second cohort of schools beginning in August of 2019 with follow up surveys administered in May, 2020. At the time of writing, 428 of 484 total surveys were completed for an overall response rate of 88%.

Coding, Analysis, and Integration

Qualitative data from interviews, documents, and observations were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis program Dedoose, which also facilitated the coding process. These qualitative data were then triangulated with the surveys of all teachers and school administrators involved in the Initiative. Each of these sources—the interviews, documents, observations, and survey data—worked together in a mutually reinforcing process that allowed for a robust analysis of the design and implementation of the Initiative (Ivankova et al., 2006).

We used the DIVE (describe, integrate, visualize, and expand) method for multiple case study analysis proposed by Bush-Mecenas and Marsh (2018), focusing first on analyses within external support providers in which we read through documents and transcripts with first-pass coding and constructed memos for each support provider and corresponding focus school. Preliminary codes included: Background, Design, Implementation, Impact, Scalability. As interviews progressed, we also developed a series of codes to respond to emergent findings (e.g., dimensions of philanthropic norms and components of design philanthropy). 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 analyses that focused on trends across external support providers and schools with a second round of coding to identify patterns across support providers. We identified and grouped data through the use of a matrix with external support providers 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 focus 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 external support providers and schools surfaced, we translated these into themes and visualizations, where appropriate.

Design Philanthropy in Practice

To further describe the contours and characteristics of design philanthropy (our first research question), we provide an overview of design philanthropy in the context of the Initiative under study. As we describe, the Foundation sought to straddle the grasstops/grassroots, centralized/decentralized, technical/adaptive, and quantifiable/integrated dimensions

described by Tompkins-Stange (2016). The Initiative also integrated a novel, strategic focus on redesigning the instructional core of teaching and learning.

The Foundation's approach to the first key dimension, selecting partners, bridged the outcomes-oriented and field-oriented approaches 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. Though these external support providers were "jurisdictional challengers" (Mehta & Teles, 2012) reminiscent of venture philanthropy, the Foundation also acted as a facilitator and convener of a community of practice, in line with the field-oriented approach. The Foundation convened regular meetings among participating organizations, schools, and research partners with the aim of fostering collective learning and sharing, thus maintaining the reliance on jurisdictional challengers, but with the expectation that they would engage with a broader community of stakeholders.

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 remaining actively engaged with the organizations on an ongoing basis, similar to the outcomes-oriented foundations detailed by Tompkins-Stange (2016) However, the Foundation adopted a more field-oriented, decentralized approach to the management of *implementation*. They did not dictate how their artifacts should be used outside of the design phase nor how the goals should be achieved in practice, leaving considerable agency 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 involved a highly focused and centralized design process but incorporated room for participant voices in implementation.

In terms of the third dimension, 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, it supported a variety of different providers and encouraged adaptation and experimentation from each, tacitly acknowledging the unclear link between

problem and solution. The focus on experimentation 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 instruction, and then, with time, decided to also emphasize HQIM, which they came to see as increasingly important.

On the fourth key dimension, evaluating results, the Foundation accepted both qualitative and quantitative evidence of the returns on their investment. They expected grantee organizations to demonstrate a meaningful quantifiable impact and preferred the use of quantitative results where possible. However, they accepted some qualitative evidence of early results, recognizing the challenge of establishing clear causal chains while engaging in adaptive problem solving.

Design philanthropy is more than simply a policy-influencing approach that falls in the middle of the spectrum on all four dimensions. Rather, our example involved a private foundation designing its own instructional initiative and hiring private external support providers to carry out its vision in public schools. This overarching strategic focus on teaching and learning, combined with the placement of key implementation decisions in the hands of external support providers, distinguishes philanthropic engagement from prior efforts. Rather than lobbying public institutions to enact particular policies, the Foundation designed its own instructional policy and contracted directly with nongovernmental organizations to execute that policy. Instead of policy *advocacy*, the Foundation engaged in policy *design*, and importantly, this allowed them to bypass typical democratic mechanisms of policymaking, at least in the short term.

Participant Perceptions and Experiences

To describe how design philanthropy was experienced by participants on the ground (our second research question), we retain the four dimensions of philanthropic norms proposed by Tompkins-Stange (2016) as our analytic framework. We begin by explaining how individuals at external support providers and schools experienced and perceived the approach to selecting partners and managing grantees, a centralized approach to design with a decentralized method of implementation. We then examine how these participants interpreted design philanthropy's approach to framing problems and evaluating results, an approach that flexibly emphasized increasing scores on standardized assessments through shifts in instructional practices while tacitly acknowledging difficulties of measurement.

Selecting Partners and Managing Grantees

Support providers. The Initiative's centralized design processes, which included partner selection, ensured that providers were broadly aligned with the Initiative's aims. Although all had prior experience working with different aspects of the Initiative, none could claim to be experts in every facet. Indeed, due in part to their entrepreneurial orientations, they were accustomed to pitching their services as unique and different from their competitors—they each had different skills to sell. It is perhaps unsurprising that this diversity in provider backgrounds and missions was accompanied by equally disparate perspectives on *how* to achieve the Initiative's vision.

Provider B, for example, saw the Initiative as complementing its efforts to build capacity around innovative models. However, it was not particularly focused on leveraging technology to personalize HQIM. As one staff member explained,

> Our team is focusing on school systems and schools that are implementing innovative models. . .The [Foundation's] initiative was a natural fit for the sorts of projects that we 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, quantitative results were not what they had expected. As a result, they shifted their approach to more explicitly focus on supporting teachers' abilities to develop HQIM.

In contrast, another participating support provider (Provider C), had direct experience with the type of HQIM envisioned by the philanthropy and leveraged the opportunity for additional funding to infuse technology into its existing curriculum. Its 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." The organization developed a 4-year strategy

to incrementally redesign its core curriculum offering with the intention of garnering additional financial support outside of the 2-year Foundation grant. As such, at the outset they decided to focus on building teacher capacity in their pre-existing curricular approach, a decision enabled by design philanthropy's decentralized approach to implementation. This sequential implementation strategy meant that the support provider 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. However, because of the wide reach of this support provider, the Foundation nevertheless saw this as an important, strategic shift with the potential to affect the field broadly.

Other organizations were less clear on the exact rationale behind their participation, but the additional funding was a primary motivator. One, for example, began as a professional development support group for teachers focused on standards-based instruction. Leaders in the organization saw potential areas for overlap between the types of technology-infused instructional models that they used 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, one 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 a large degree of agency 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 diffuse motivations for participating, which flourished under the 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 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,

> 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, school-level plans did not always include instructional improvements as envisioned by the Foundation—a critical factor given the decentralized nature of implementation. Some school leaders saw the Initiative primarily as an opportunity for additional resources and support to address day-to-day challenges, a factor cited by roughly 90% of survey respondents, around 40% of whom included it in their top two motivations. In interviews, principals explained 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 beyond traditional working hours:

> 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.

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

The decentralized approach to the implementation of the Initiative enabled teachers to have the autonomy to further adjust 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. For example, one Spanish-English bilingual teacher noted that they did not use the provided instructional materials because they were not in Spanish or at the appropriate level of rigor. 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 [support provider] 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. . . 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.

The external support provider's staff expressed concern that this tailoring slowed their process of integrating HQIM and technology, but felt they had no 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 did not necessarily further the Initiative's vision of leveraging technology to personalize HQIM.

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 was particularly interested in forming a relationship with Provider C. They had been using Provider C'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 instruction within grade levels; support teachers' use and ownership of the curriculum; and have more student independence. Moreover, they were very focused on increasing student achievement on standardized assessments and believed that strengthening the use of Provider C's instructional materials would most efficiently increase their students' scores. The school leader initially reached out to the external support provider to inquire about obtaining additional support. Provider C 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. Notably, the school's rationale for participation was not related to personalization or the integration of technology, and was related to HQIM only to the extent that HQIM would increase state test scores. This principal explained,

> 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. 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.

This school leader was even more narrowly focused on demonstrating increases on quantitative measures of student achievement than the Foundation itself, in part due to the broader educational environment and other sources of accountability.

Goal diffusion. 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 its Initiative were most promising for changing the instructional core of teaching and learning. The process of design philanthropy was, in part, a

process of research and development for *how* the Foundation's rather abstract vision of instruction could be implemented concretely. However, the lack of clearly defined processes and mechanisms for achieving the vision gave external support providers the agency 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 providers 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.[6]

Framing Problems and Evaluating Results

Student achievement on standardized tests. 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 considerable agency to 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. Despite qualms about their ability to demonstrate quantifiable impact, each support provider committed to sharing evidence of impact using standardized test scores with the Foundation twice yearly.

Support providers were willing to take credit when their partner schools saw increases in literacy scores, but expressed concerns about sustaining these gains and attributing them to their work together. One external support provider credited themselves for score increases in certain grades to their professional development approach, but then dialed back expectations for future years. They were hesitant, in part, because their partner schools were engaged in several different initiatives. Provider staff explained, "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 in future years. Despite these concerns, they continued to credit past increases in test scores to their work 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 of their belief that "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 this principal believed that the Initiative would increase test scores through the cross-curricular focus of HQIM, other school administrators expressed similar expectations from the technological focus of the Initiative. One administrator shared 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 participation. One teacher anticipated that their work with their provider 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 provider's instructional materials were aligned to grade-level standards, whereas the school's regular curriculum was more personalized. Somewhat ironically, personalization was the 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 et al., 2021).[7]

Indeed, some expressed concerns that using HQIM might *decrease* test scores. One provider 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 narrower skills assessed on state tests.[8] The staff member reported,

> 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.

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

Shifts in instructional practice. 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, which some interviewees described as a way to facilitate personalization via technology. Classroom observations suggested that this station-based approach typically entailed small groups working on a variety of distinct tasks, with one or two 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 generally pleased with the changes that they had made as a result of the grant-provided support and many reported positive outcomes for students; 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. Survey and interview data indicate that support providers were improving teachers' abilities 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 worked with their students 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.

Response to results. Support providers, school leaders, and teachers also responded to their own results in varied ways. One school and its partner, Provider B, were concerned that standardized test scores decreased after the pilot year of implementation, which they attributed 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 using this approach tended to focus on the results that best fit 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 focused their conversations about impact on grades where scores did increase, even while scores had decreased in other grades that also participated in the Initiative. While this may seem like a sleight of hand, it could 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.

During the course of implementation, the Foundation recognized this tension between experimentation and short-term results on standardized tests. As an example of their own adaptive framing of problems, they extended the period of the Initiative, which they felt allowed them to focus more heavily on what they called "leading indicators" in the first year. These included changes in teacher practice, teacher mindsets, and student achievement on formative assessments. They remained focused on student achievement on state standardized tests in the long term, but allowed for a holistic evaluation of results from their grantees (support providers) in the short term. This extension and holistic evaluation of results did not guarantee grantees funding beyond the 2 years of the initial grant cycle but did leave open the possibility of extending grant funding to a maximum of 7 years, based on aforementioned leading indicators.

Implications

Design philanthropy represents an attempt to balance some of the practices and values associated with the newer, outcomes-oriented, venture approach with those of the traditional, field-oriented approach, while integrating an

overarching focus on redesigning the instructional core of teaching and learning outside of typical public policymaking arenas. By targeting lower-leverage, instructional aims through higher-leverage, private-sector actors, design philanthropy attempts to minimize the organizational distance that has thwarted past philanthropic efforts at school improvement, while building in avenues for scale and return on investment. Three core tensions characterize the challenges and opportunities associated with this process: democracy versus consistency, depth versus scale, and experimentation versus expectations of short-term impact.

Democracy Versus Consistency

The example of design philanthropy that we described above involved a centralized approach to developing a vision of instruction but a decentralized approach to implementation carried out through external support providers. The Foundation focused heavily on aligning with external support providers on aims, while leaving these providers much of the responsibility for creating instruments, building capabilities, and responding to environments (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007). They designed a clear *what* without a clear *how*, instead allowing support providers the agency to carry out the Initiative with evolving and somewhat flexible expectations for implementation and demonstrating results. This decentralized implementation structure intentionally opened up decision-making to "street-level bureaucrats," therefore facilitating local, contextual adaptations (Lipsky, 1971, 1980). But, as with prior efforts, the integration of multiple decision points diluted the original vision somewhat, and adaptations steered stakeholder efforts further away from the intended aims (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1974; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977).

Design philanthropy's implementation structure expands democratic engagement by explicitly allowing participating stakeholders to determine how initiatives are executed (Elmore, 1979; McLaughlin, 1991). This has the potential to increase participant buy-in and promote sustainability in individual schools. By decentralizing decisions about the concrete changes that need to take place and how those changes should come about, it may also be more politically feasible than a highly centralized approach (Majone & Wildavsky, 1979).[9] In that sense, design philanthropy incubates a process of successive incremental changes 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. These processes may make reforms more sustainable in the long term (Lindblom, 1959).

However, 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 participant voice resurrect prior questions about how foundations and wealthy individuals ought to interact with public institutions and the role of philanthropists vs. (democratically-elected) governments in the provision of public goods (McGoey, 2012; Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

Importantly, efforts at increasing democratic decision making also created new challenges for maintaining consistency across support providers and schools. The broad vision needed to survive through many decision points at multiple organizational levels across institutions with participants who viewed schooling from diverse perspectives. In this process, the policy environments interacted with the decentralized implementation structure in unanticipated ways. Varying goals and capabilities meant that strategies veered away from the original vision when those responsible for implementation engaged in sensemaking at each level (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). As shown 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, depicted in the dissolution of color density in Figure 2, expanded at each level of implementation, becoming further refracted with each step. The Initiative's vision was thus filtered through many layers of reinterpretations from external support providers, school leaders, and teachers before it ultimately reached students.

Authors have deployed sociological structure/agency framings to describe these tensions between the demands of policies and the interests of those responsible for their implementation (see Coburn, 2016; Honig, 2006). Within the confines of policy structures, the question is the extent to which local actors have (or believe they have) the agency to maneuver in ways they feel will best serve their clients. However, an important question often left unasked is how much autonomy and agency one should actually wish local actors to have. We have found that leaving room for agency and autonomy can render programs vulnerable to individual reinterpretation, which clearly may be warranted in certain settings. But the resulting variability in implementation among funders, participating organizations, and individuals then threatens system-wide coherence (Hatch et al., 2019).

We have also found that the degree to which reinterpretations in implementation led programmatic approaches away from the original vision varied depending on how environments interact with stakeholder aims and capabilities (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007). External support providers with goals, expertise, and past experiences that were already aligned with the

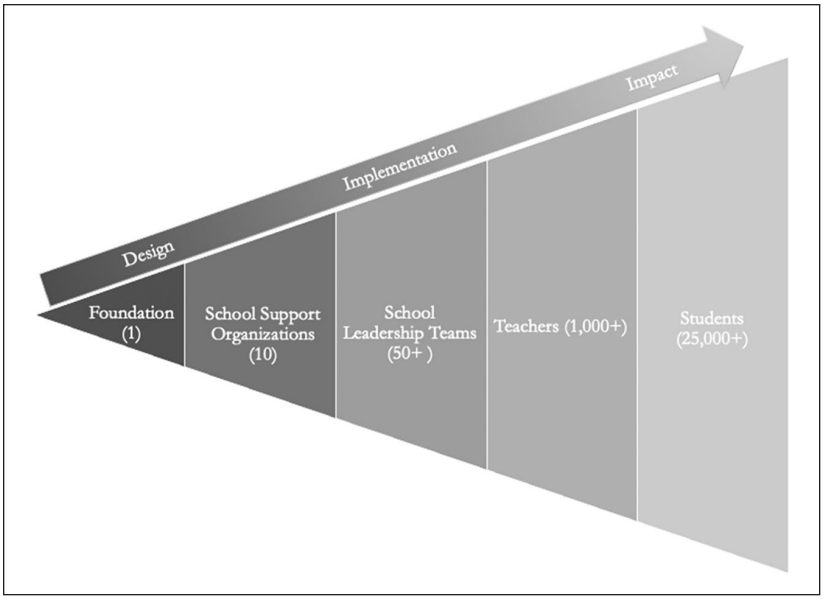

Figure 2. Porous prism of design philanthropy.

vision of the Initiative avoided some of the diffusion that occurred among support providers who needed to quickly build capacity and willingness within their own organizations. This was true at the school level as well, where individual motivation and instructional capacity played critical roles in retaining proximity to the original vision. This all suggests that scholars interested in employing structure/agency frameworks must recognize the multi-level nature of implementation: actors across strata may experience the same policy or program quite differently (Coburn, 2016).

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. Focusing directly on the instructional core in this manner may be a more fruitful way to change instruction (Elmore, 2004). 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 complicate efforts to scale instructional reform because they represent an attempt at changing public institutions through primarily private mechanisms. First, in contrast to foundations studied by Tompkins-Stange (2016), design philanthropies do not need to engage in policy advocacy, as they directly fund implementation of their instructional approach. This permits circumvention of governmental policymaking rules as the efforts involve neither public laws nor funds (Scott & DiMartino, 2009). In this way, design philanthropy rests, to an even greater extent than prior efforts, on the rationale that "Foundations are able to achieve positive policy outcomes in a manner that is far more efficient than the bureaucratic state" (Tompkins-Stange, 2016, p. 7). But, as with prior efforts, there are limitations to the implicit assumption that programs designed and implemented outside of governmental channels will more efficiently accomplish their goals, particularly considering that the goals for impact are on a scale beyond the capacities of individual grantees (or even groups of grantees).

Second, design philanthropy theoretically encourages scalability by funding jurisdictional challengers. The Initiative we have examined involved external support providers who, as private actors, needed to differentiate themselves and clearly pitch their unique value. In turn, participant experiences differed across and within organizational levels, leading to substantial variation in alignment to program goals when initiatives were scaled. This type of variation threatens the system-wide coherence of initiatives that involve partnerships with multiple external support providers (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Hatch et al., 2019; Smith & O'Day, 1990).

Third, the relatively weak sanctions associated with private philanthropy may include only a withdrawal of funding (and thus, in the case of design philanthropy, support for external partnerships). Unlike the *administrative* autonomy that districts and states are able to grant schools, design philanthropy provides only *fiscal* autonomy through resources that allow support providers and their partner schools to accomplish tasks they could not otherwise; participating schools likely remain under some local constraints in matters related to teaching and learning. Thus, the mechanisms by which private actors have, in fully market-based contexts, been able to rapidly scale initiatives do not entirely translate into the design philanthropy theory of action.

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 and implementation strategies 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 not 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). The Foundation's flexible, experimental approach allowed it to shift in response to its realization about the challenge of "moving the needle" on standardized test scores after 1 year of an innovative instructional approach. As noted above, the Foundation expanded its expectations for demonstrating results to incorporate qualitative data and "leading indicators" of instructional change. The relatively flexible processes of design philanthropy therefore have the potential to accommodate shifting expectations regarding impacts.

Prioritizing adaptation at multiple levels can give space for foundations to change course in response to ongoing learning and experiences. 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 due to unrealistic expectations of short-term impacts. Resulting cycles of reform would be notably distinct from past descriptions of "spinning wheels" that leave urban school districts "like car[s] stuck on a muddy road" due to local governance structures that incentivize school boards to micromanage and superintendents to focus on symbolic rather than substantive reform (Hess, 1999). Indeed, Hess (1999) argued 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 environments threaten to produce a set of structures that similarly inhibit substantive reform.

Limitations and Future Research

Although relevant for the growing literature on school support organizations and intermediary organization networks (e.g., Hatch et al., 2019; Newmann & Sconzert, 2000; Scott & DiMartino, 2009; Scott & Jabbar, 2014), the central focus of this research is the evolution of philanthropic giving in education and participant experiences with it. Future research can more directly connect the growing reliance on external support providers to policy implementation, and how external support providers and schools manage the tensions between policy and practice (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009). Does the process of contracting with external support providers alleviate longstanding implementation challenges related to capabilities within schools and school systems? What are the implications for the politics of education, and more specifically, how are foundations using grantmaking to organize new constituencies that can be mobilized around policies of interest?

The Initiative is still in a relatively early phase of implementation, particularly given the Foundation's own extension of the timeline. As such, long-term effects of design philanthropy are largely unknown. Prior research has found that changes in philanthropic giving affected education policy by shaping and expanding the nonprofit sector (Reckhow, 2013), and questions remain about the long-term consequences of empowering a new set of jurisdictional challengers in local education politics. How do these new actors diverge from those that have flourished under prior reform efforts? Have they changed the balance of power within and between school systems and sectors?

Our single case represents a significant contribution by applying and extending current theories of philanthropic giving. Yet, we are limited in our ability to address questions about the prevalence of design philanthropy broadly. Future research should examine the extent to which both pre-existing and new philanthropic organizations are adopting design philanthropy's norms. Quantitative research would be useful for tracing the purpose and source of new grants. Future qualitative research could also consider how participants experience these structures in other contexts, particularly where there are fewer external providers to support implementation.

Conclusion

Design philanthropy straddles the norms of outcome- and field-orientations while engaging in a new process to design instructional programs largely

outside of typical government structures. This approach represents an opportunity for increasing responsiveness to local contexts but must do so while maintaining 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 with its attempt to achieve impact at scale. Finally, design philanthropy encourages experimentation, 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 coherence, scalability, and sustainability.

We believe that this potential juncture in philanthropic norms provides a unique window of opportunity to question the underlying beliefs regarding philanthropic giving. Now is the time for local education stakeholders to reconsider the bounds of how philanthropists *should* engage in education and other social efforts within their own unique contexts and communities. How should we distinguish between public and private domains of policymaking, given the increasing need for non-governmental dollars? As wealth increasingly concentrates in the hands of a few, what responsibility do philanthropists have to prioritize democratic deliberation and elevate the voices of those less advantaged?

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Notes

1. A complete analysis of the key regions, foci, and philanthropies who have been pivotal to philanthropies in education reform is outside of the scope of this paper. See Lagemann and de Forest (2007) for a review including such information historically. For a more recent account, Reckhow and Snyder (2014) also provide a comprehensive analysis of the largest 15 education foundations in 2000, 2005, and 2010 by collecting data from tax forms.
2. Grants were intended to broadly solve education problems. Districts and support organizations had discretion to select their solutions; grant foci varied between small schools, decentralization/school autonomy, professional learning, etc.
3. 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" (pp. 59–60).
4. For example, the Gates Foundation provided funding directly to the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop and promote the Common Core State Standards (Tompkins-Stange, 2018).
5. Tompkins-Stange (2016) uses Gates and Broad as empirical examples of outcomes-oriented venture philanthropies and Kellogg and Ford as empirical examples for the field-orientation.
6. In the period since writing this initial manuscript, the support providers and their partner schools experienced the most tumultuous year of schooling in recent history. Spurred by their experiences with remote and hybrid schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, several partner organizations have undertaken more substantial shifts to their core approaches and practices over the past year. Recent qualitative data suggest that participation in the Initiative and funding from the Foundation may have enabled some of these shifts. Nevertheless, the pandemic provided the catalyst, and it is impossible to determine whether these shifts would have occurred without the pandemic. Moreover, it remains to be seen whether these pandemic-inspired shifts will continue in the post-pandemic period.
7. Foundation representatives acknowledged this tension and indeed designed the Initiative in part to explore it. Its existence may have nevertheless produced additional ambiguity for the teachers and leaders implementing the Initiative.
8. This provider was selected as a grantee early in the timing of the Initiative, before the Foundation had decided to explicitly focus on HQIM.
9. Majone and Wildavsky (1979) note, "In most policies of interest, objectives are characteristically multiple (because we want many things, not just one), conflicting (because we want different things), and vague (because that is how we can agree to proceed without having to agree also on exactly what to do)" (p. 169).

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