

Introducing managerialism into national educational contexts through pseudo-conflict: A discursive institutionalist analysis

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Abstract

This article provides a fresh perspective on the introduction of global ideas, particularly managerialism, into national educational settings, based on insights of the discursive institutionalism approach. We argue that this introduction may occur as various policy actors promote different versions of managerialism, leading to a debate between education policy actors holding common managerialist assumptions and beliefs, in other words, a pseudo-conflict. The result is a conflict over education policy that is strictly bounded by shared assumptions and beliefs. We analyze the discourse of leading policy actors during two consecutive tenures of Israeli Education Ministers (2009-2013, 2013-2015), using parliamentary protocols and press interviews.

Keywords: discourse, Israel, managerialism, policy, conflict, trust, performance

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discussion on the diffusion of global ideas in education, particularly their introduction into national settings. Our research question is: How the global idea of managerialism is introduced into national education systems? Similarly to other frameworks of education administration, managerialism was formed and developed in “core” countries, particularly Anglophone ones, later assuming the position of a global framework (e.g., Deem, 1998; Kickert, 1997; Lynch et al., 2012; Newman & Clarke, 1994; O’Reilly & Reed, 2011). It was then transferred to non-core countries, such as Israel, and at the beginning of the 21st century spread worldwide, with the formation of a supportive Global Education Reform Movement (GERM, see Sahlberg, 2006) and the rise of the global testing culture (Smith, 2016).

Managerialism is treated in educational research as a key policy agenda driving governance transition in public education from classic bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic governance. This transition has been commonly analyzed through the neo-institutional approach of sociological or cultural institutionalism, focusing on the mechanism of isomorphism (Bromley, 2016; Maroy, 2009). Global ideas and frameworks are introduced into national educational contexts because they allow policymakers to attend to problems of uncertainty and of policy legitimization. Yet, this perspective does not take into consideration the possibility that global ideas may come in multiple versions, containing notable differences and at the same time sharing a common core. Furthermore, from this perspective, local policymakers are passive recipients of global ideas, who at times are pressured by local actors and circumstances to adjust these ideas to local idiosyncrasies.

The present study offers a different perspective for studying the introduction of managerialism into national contexts, which relies on the discursive institutionalist approach (Schmidt 2008; 2010; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018). According to this approach, ideas are developed and diffused through discourse by actors with “forward discursive abilities” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 4). Although they are embedded in an institutional context, these actors are able to think beyond institutions, that is, reflect critically on them. Moreover, because the discursive process is interactive and reflective (Schmidt, 2008, 2010), the approach allows identifying the articulation of various versions of a common idea or a set of ideas.

Our main argument is that the introduction of managerialism into national educational contexts may occur as various policy actors promote different versions of it. We further argue that this produces a pseudo-conflict between policy actors holding a common set of assumptions and beliefs, while clashing over rival versions. The result is a conflict over education policy that is strictly bounded by common (managerialist) assumptions and beliefs.

We understand managerialism as an ideational framework envisioning a system of government designed to enhance performance, constructed through particular relations of accountability between superiors and subordinates, based on the measurement of performance (Dixon et al., 1998; Knafo et al., 2018; Ranson, 2003; Shepherd, 2018; Stevenson & Wood, 2014). Following Hoyle and Wallace (2005), we identify two versions of managerialism: neo-Taylorism and culture management.

We use the Israeli case to examine our arguments because it is an instructive example of a non-core country that went through a protracted period of centralized education, typical of bureaucratic governance. The Israeli system maintained this

form until the 21st century, despite some experimentation with privatization and decentralization that remained peripheral and limited in scope (Addi-Raccah, 2015; Berkovich, 2014). With the introduction of national testing, at the beginning of the 21st century, it moved toward a post-bureaucratic governance model (Berkovich, 2014; Feniger et al., 2016).

In accordance with discursive institutionalism, we study the policy discourse of leading Israeli education policymakers. We compare the policy discourse of the Minister of Education and his Directors General during the tenure of Minister Gideon Saar (2009-2013) with that of Minister Shai Piron (2013-2015),¹ using content and discourse analysis of parliamentary protocols and interviews. Consistent with discursive institutionalism, we focus on the content of ideas and the ways in which they are conveyed in an institutional context, as part of the dynamic of institutional change (Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018). Our empirical findings suggest that although during these two tenures the policy discourses were presented by the ministers and their directors general as opposing each other, they effectively amount to two versions of managerialism: the discourse during Saar's tenure was neo-Taylorist, whereas that during Piron's tenure amounted to culture management.

2. Theoretical Considerations

2.1 From Isomorphism to Discourse

Ideas tend to diffuse or move from one educational context to another, shaping institutional continuity and change. The leading neo-institutional approach in education research for analyzing such movements points at isomorphism as the central mechanism. Institutions of a similar kind in different systems tend to become

¹ Piron resigned from office in December 2014, when his party withdrew from the governing coalition, but he had no effective replacement until after the elections of March 2015.

more similar to one another over time, as a certain institutional form spreads across systems. Criticizing rationalist accounts, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argued that this dynamic stems from difficulties actors have in acting rationally. Institutional formations operating in other systems are adopted to solve endemic problems of uncertainty about the future effects of institutional reform (Beckert, 2010; Carney et al., 2012). These formations also allow some basis for determining what is right and appropriate, i.e., they legitimize potential policy solutions. The underlying logic is a “logic of confidence” (Ramirez, 2012, p. 429), constructed by confidence-ensuring resources, such as the past experience of others (i.e., tested solutions) and authoritative knowledge (renowned professionals, scientific models, ‘best practices’, etc. (Beckert, 2010; Ramirez, 2012; Ramirez et al., 2016)). World society is a prominent theory that follows this approach and takes these assertions one step forward, arguing that common (essentially, Western) global models, frameworks, goals, and practices in educational systems have been on the rise (Astiz et al., 2002; Beckert, 2010; Bromley, 2016; Ramirez et al., 2016).

This approach has two limitations, however, in accounting for the introduction of global ideas into national settings. First, it perceives ideational structures as rather static (Schmidt, 2010). There is theoretical room for only one version of global ideas to enter local settings (per case). This overlooks the possible entry of multiple versions of a broad idea or set of ideas. Moreover, it focuses only on vertical conflicts in the diffusion process between the global and the national-local spheres, which arguably stem from the incongruence of global ideas with local settings shaped by history, tradition, culture, and existing institutional structures (Astiz et al., 2002, Beckert, 2010; Philips & Ochs, 2003; Ramirez, 2012; Verger et al., 2018). Critiques of isomorphism have tended to reproduce this limitation, arguing

that global-local conflicts lead to institutional divergence rather than convergence (Amaral et al., 2003; Ball, 1998).

The second limitation is that the approach perceives national-local policymakers as passive recipients of global scripts, who adopt external ideas because of uncertainty and legitimacy considerations. If changes are made, they are the result of pressure emanating from the global-local tension. In some accounts, actors are active and resist global ideas (Ball, 1998), but these are low-ranking social and political actors, outside the policymaking forums. Alternatively, policymakers may use global ideas instrumentally to legitimize their authority or their own ideas, or to avoid blame (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012; Verger et al., 2018), but this introduces some rationalist connotations that do not rest comfortably with the assumptions of this approach.

The two limitations, vertical conflict and passive actors, can be addressed by using the discursive institutionalism approach, which suggests analyzing institutional continuity and change through a logic of communication. Institutions are founded, preserved, and reformed based on shared understandings about what they are and how they should function. These understandings are formed through discourse in an interactive process that includes multiple actors in an institutional context. During the process, ideas are generated, considered, deliberated, and legitimized (Schmidt, 2010).

Together with vertical conflict, the approach allows observing “horizontal” conflict between different versions of global ideas. During the discursive process taking place between policymakers, various ideas and their constituting elements are articulated to produce multiple formations and versions (Carstensen, 2011). Actors may create different formations originating in common core principles. Moreover,

based on the concept of “forward discursive abilities,” discursive institutionalism perceives policymakers as active. Policymakers are capable of thinking beyond institutions, whether operating in their immediate environment or in other systems, through reflection and critical communication, opening the way for institutional change that does not necessarily subscribe to existing models (Schmidt, 2010; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018). Policy actors then seek to persuade others to align with their conception of the institutional environment, and with what can and should be done about it. The result is a process in which various ideational formations and versions are deliberated and contested, while actors practice consensus building (Schmidt, 2008, 2010).

Schmidt’s work on discursive institutionalism has also addressed the relations between ideas and power. Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) argued that actors in powerful institutional positions may have the ability to “resist even considering alternative ideas” (p. 326). By closing epistemic lines, these actors may be able to “ignore alternative idea sets and thus keep them from receiving serious consideration by elites and the public alike” (p. 328). According to Schmidt and Carstensen, this comes about as actors use their scientific expertise as a source of legitimacy, but we suggest another form, based on pseudo-conflict.

Pseudo-conflict denotes a dynamic in which debate develops in policymaking forums between more than one version of an idea, or a set of ideas. Actors holding one version may be critical of rival versions, but all share some core assumptions or beliefs. The result is a lively debate whose boundaries are strictly delimited by the common beliefs that define what is (un)doable and (in)appropriate in education administration. Although it may seem contradictory at first, the presence of debate itself serves to keep out policy ideas that diverge from the common core. It excludes

debate on this core, pushing it into the background (Schmidt, 2016). At the same time, it portrays the education policy field as open to more than one dominant discourse. Other actors may be attracted to the debate, but as they take sides, they accept the implicit boundaries.

2.2 Managerialism

Managerialism can be defined as a result-oriented system of government or administration designed to enhance, or “optimize” performance (Dixon et al., 1998; Knafo et al., 2018; Ranson, 2003; Shepherd, 2018; Stevenson & Wood, 2014). It originally developed as an ideational framework of business administration in the 1960s and 1970s in core Anglophone countries such as the US and the UK and later diffused to the global periphery and semi-periphery and to other fields of administration (Knafo et al., 2018; Newman & Clarke, 1994). In recent decades, it has dominated the discourse and practice of higher education and of K-12 education (e.g., Deem, 1998; Lynch et al., 2012) as part and parcel of the much-discussed shift from a bureaucratic to a post-bureaucratic regime of regulation (Berkovich, 2014; Dixon et al., 1998; Maroy, 2009). Particularly, since the beginning of the 21st century, the GERM agenda and the global testing culture permeated the numerous national systems and became part of the mainstream policy agenda (Sahlberg, 2006; Smith, 2016).

Managerialism disrupts existing social relations between educational actors, only to reconstruct them in a new system of control (Berkovich, 2014; Dixon et al., 1998; Goodwin, 2015; Lingard et al., 2017; Ranson, 2003). Output is emphasized over input; equity is substituted by ‘quality’, which is essentially efficiency; and hierarchical relations are reshaped to favor inspection over professional judgment.

The social relations that managerialism seeks to construct can be described best through Ranson's (2003) performative accountability (see also Dixon et al., 1998; Goodwin, 2015; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005). Superior ranks set measurable goals or standards to lower ranks, while providing them autonomy in using the means they find appropriate to achieve these goals and standards. Subordinates are then held accountable by their superiors for the degree to which they had achieved the goals set or the standards determined. In educational administration, schools are held accountable for their performance based on national guidelines, standards, or benchmarks determined by the Ministry of Education, or by an official national measurement and assessment organization (e.g., OFSTED in the UK). Performative accountability stands in contrast to "reflexive accountability" where subordinates give an account to their superiors to receive assistance in making sense of their previous actions (Ranson, 2003).

Performative accountability involves high levels of regulation, monitoring, inspection, audit, and surveillance (Ranson, 2003). This improves superiors' ability to construct incentives, make evaluations, and impose sanctions (Berkovich, 2014; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Malloy, 2009; Page, 2017). Although managerialism promotes a discourse of greater autonomy, discretion, and agency for subordinates, it sets firm restrictions and boundaries for them, so that they become tightly channeled and limited. This and other characteristics serve to achieve a fundamental managerial ambition: to control all aspect of organizational activity from the top down (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Pocklington & Wallace, 2014; Shepherd, 2018).

The main tool in this reconstruction of social relations is measurement of performance. The underlying assumptions for using measurement are that all relevant aspects of organizations and social relations can and should be quantified and

measured, and that performance means quality (Lingard et al., 2017). Measurement is deemed crucial for managers' ability to assess performance and to make decisions. Extensive measurement creates a wealth of data about organizational operation, which flows upward and arguably allows managers of all ranks to make informed decisions about organizational conduct and to evaluate the performance of organizational units (Knafo et al., 2018; Ozga, 2009). A central practice in the evaluation process is setting standards that units are required to achieve (Brehony, 2005; Ozga, 2009). The most prominent expression of the diffusion of measurement of performance in education administration is the rise of national and international tests (Feniger & Lefstein, 2014; Stevenson & Wood, 2014).

Hoyle and Wallace (2005) proposed three versions of managerialism that manifest three different systems of control. Two of these, which are relevant for the present study, are neo-Taylorism and culture management.² They differ in the level of trust underlying the establishment of control, more specifically, in their answer to the question: To what extent should school educational actors (principal, teachers, and students) be trusted to pursue the goals or standards set by the Ministry of Education? A neo-Taylorist response would be that they should not be trusted, and therefore, educational actors should be motivated by external discipline. The culture management response would be that they should be trusted, and that, if granted broader autonomy, schools would be able to better achieve the goals or standards set by the Ministry (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Pocklington & Wallace, 2014; Ozga, 2009).

Since actors cannot be trusted to comply voluntarily, Neo-Taylorism aims to discipline them. External imposition of targets and standards is perceived as the best way of enhancing school performance (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Pocklington &

² A third model, entrepreneurship, is less relevant for the Israeli case as a whole.

Wallace, 2014; Ranson, 2003). Discipline is enhanced by increasing the direct control of the Ministry through monitoring, surveillance, and heavy regulation. National and international tests, used to assess school performance and progress are a key instrument for disciplining principals, teachers, and students feeding back as positive or negative incentives (Stevenson & Wood, 2014).

By contrast, the culture management model argues that performance can be increased by encouraging staff and students to find the ways, perspectives, and methods that best work for them for improving their achievements (Ranson, 2003). An important supportive argument is that the “new knowledge economy” requires cultivating creativity, innovation and risk-taking among educational actors (Brehony, 2005; Dixon et al., 1998). Granting trust is expected to establish relatively stable relations of performative accountability, making a test-driven approach seem undesirable (Brehony, 2005; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Pocklington & Wallace, 2014; O'Reilly & Reed, 2011; Ranson, 2003). But far from being set aside, tests are still perceived as indispensable means of assessing performance.

Under culture management, schools are awarded autonomy to conduct internal evaluation, while the Ministry reduces the tightness of direct, overt control. Schools are encouraged to assess their own conduct using data from national and international tests, although they are still used by the Ministry as well (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Ozga, 2009; Sammons, 2008). Nonetheless, the extension of autonomy is effectively enjoyed by principals-as-managers, that is the decrease in national regulation and the new managerial practices expected of principals increase principals' power to shape the organizational environment of teachers, as well as their conduct in class (Pocklington & Wallace, 2014; Stevenson & Wood, 2014). Yet, even the autonomy of principals is in reality a limited one: they are perpetually held accountable for the

performance of their schools according to Ministry standards (Goodwin, 2015; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005). Table 1 summarizes the above discussion by comparing the two managerialist versions.

Table 1. Comparison of neo-Taylorism and culture management

	Neo-Taylorism	Culture Management
<i>Main objective</i>	Performance enhancement	
<i>Accountability</i>	Schools to national guidelines	
<i>Measurement of performance</i>	Standards, test scores, achievements, etc.	
<i>Trust</i>	Low. Disciplining principals and teachers	High. Effectively, in principals
<i>Form of control</i>	Direct. Surveillance, external incentives	Indirect. Internal evaluation, light-touch inspection, <i>enforced</i> self-regulation

3. Context and cases

During the 1950s, Israel was organized as a quasi-social democratic state. The policy discourse of state-building and nation-building in which the state plays a leading role underlay the construction of a centralized bureaucracy (Shafir & Peled, 2002). For the public education system, this translated into a tight control by the Ministry of Education over setting goals and budgets, defining the curriculum, staffing and employment, and testing (Addi-Raccah, 2015). In the course of severe cutbacks in public spending during the 1980s, marketization and privatization ideas imported from Anglophone countries reconstructed the discourse on public education (Eyal

& Berkovich, 2011). Consequently, bureaucratic administration was relaxed, and policies such as autonomous schools, parental choice, and school-based management were introduced (Berkovich, 2014). Although these policies were limited in scope and evident mainly in metropolitan areas, their discursive prominence sent institutional shockwaves throughout the system (Sagie & Yemini, 2017).

The beginning of the 21st century saw another significant period of changes. Another round of drastic cutbacks in the public education budget was accompanied by growing influence of the global education reform movement discourse (Addi-Raccah, 2015; Berkovich, 2014; Feniger et al., 2016). International testing and ranking were introduced in a political and public atmosphere that was increasingly hospitable to managerial ideas: policymakers publicly promoted the introduction of international testing (Pizmony-Levy, 2018); business people and philanthropic associations pressed for an increased global orientation of education because of the requirements of the liberalized economy (Resnik, 2011); and academics and the business media used test achievements to criticize the local public education system and blame teachers for the disappointing ranking in the global "league tables" (Yemini & Gordon, 2017). One of the most vivid expressions of the change in policy discourse toward managerial ideas was the nomination of the Dovrat Committee for education reform, headed by businessman Shlomo Dovrat, by the Ministry of Education, in 2004 (Resnik, 2011).

Research has shown that global ideas have also reached schools, and many principals adopted global ideas as school goals and practices (Mizrahi-Shtelman & Drori, 2016; Yemini & Dvir, 2016). This process of diffusion has generated conflicts between influential stakeholders that have (or consider themselves as having) an opposing agenda (Yemini & Dvir, 2016). Yet, research has so far addressed conflicts

between actors of different types (e.g., teachers vs. policymakers), and has not examined conflict between actors at the same level, to which we now turn.

3.1 The cases

The present study focuses on two periods of policymaking in Israel: the tenure of Minister of Education Gideon Saar (2009-2013) and the tenure of Minister of Education Shai Piron (2013-2015). Saar is a prominent political figure in the right-wing Likud party. During his tenure, the Ministry embraced a conservative approach and expedited the transition to post-bureaucratic governance (Berkovich, 2014; 2017). The most prominent examples are the introduction of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests and making national and school improvement on these tests a key policy priority. Replacing Saar, Piron, a leading figure in the centrist Yesh Atid party, led a more liberal agenda (Author, 2017). Upon entering office, he announced that his goal was to transform the education system, primarily its pedagogical aspects, and challenge the policies of his predecessor under the banner of the Meaningful Learning Program (Berkovich, 2017).

4. Methodology

The study compares the discourses of leading policymakers (ministers and directors general) during the tenures of Saar and Piron as Ministers of Education (Table 2). We use content and discourse analysis of protocols of Knesset (Israeli parliament) plenary sessions and of meetings of the Knesset Education, Culture and Sports Committee during 2009-2015. Protocols serve as a direct source of information on how policymakers act to shape policy discourse and promote policy ideas (Gavriely-Nuri, 2010). Plenary sessions and committees of the Knesset are the main spheres in which

Israeli policy discourse is shaped and where policymakers defend or reject policies and explain their rationale.

Table 2. Leading Policymakers in the Ministry of Education, 2009-2015

	Saar's Tenure (2009-2013)	Piron's Tenure (2013-2015)
<i>Minister of Education</i>	Gideon Saar	Shai Piron
<i>Directors General</i>	Shimshon Shoshani (4/2009-10/2011)	Dalit Stauber (3/2011- 10/2013)
	Dalit Stauber (10/2011- 10/2013)	Michal Cohen (11/2013- 3/2017)

We collected all expressions by the ministers and their directors general in the Education, Culture, and Sports Committee, and in plenary sessions, through the online Knesset archive (available at <http://www.knesset.gov.il>), using their names as keywords, with time parameters adjusted to the ministers' tenures. The collection consists of a total of 76 documents (55 protocols of the Committee, and 21 plenary protocols). We read all the statements by ministers and directors general in all protocols, searching for expressions about policy initiatives regarding the structure of the education system, about the general aims that the Ministry set for the system, and about their worldview, beliefs, and guiding principles in policymaking. A total of 22 protocols included such expressions (Appendix 1). To improve the validity of the analysis, after discovering that the number of relevant texts from Saar's tenure was low, we supplemented the protocols with press interviews conducted with Saar and Shoshani (Harpaz, 2009, 2011).

We coded the expressions using the categories listed in Table 1. Some protocols turned out to be more meaningful than others because speakers provided

elaborate discussions of their worldview (e.g., #1, #12, #22 in Appendix 1). Others, not cited in the analysis below, echoed expressions found in cited protocols. Overall, we analyzed dozens of statements and found the relevant statements made during Piron's tenure to be consistent with the culture management version of managerialism, and the relevant statements made during Saar's tenure to be consistent with the neo-Taylorist version. The two authors conducted the analysis jointly, and submitted the analysis to critical review by colleagues.

5. Different versions, common core

During both tenures, the heads of the Ministry of Education discursively promoted the global framework of managerialism. Apparent differences indeed emerged, at times materializing into an explicit critique by Piron of the approach of his predecessor, Saar, as evident below, and vice versa.³ But as we show below, they are manifest only in degrees of trust in educational actors and forms of control of the education system; while there is agreement on the issues at the core of managerialism: performance enhancement, subordinates' accountability, and the centrality of measurement. We first address the differences between the two policy discourses, then turn to the agreement over core managerialist ideas.

Saar's neo-Taylorist approach was evident first and foremost in the low trust that he and his Director General, Shoshani, had in students, teachers, and schools. They were doubtful that these actors can successfully perform their roles in the system without external discipline. Therefore, they proposed several mechanisms, the first of which was keeping teachers and students in class, according to the hours of study mandated by the Ministry. This was assumed to be crucial for improved

³ A few months after leaving the Ministry of Education, Saar publicized a critique of Piron's policy regarding measurement and testing (Ynet, 2013).

performance: “If [students] don’t study, [they] don’t know. Nothing [else] will help here. If teaching hours are not observed, we cannot expect to improve in any respect” (#2). Complementing this, they proposed a second mechanism based on positive external incentives, according to which schools were to be rewarded for improved performance: “We want to encourage achievements... using an output-based reward program, as we want to check the improvement of [various] aspects of a school based on its past achievements” (#1). A third proposed mechanism was plain and simple enforcement, as Shoshani put it: “He who is required to enforce and be responsible... is the principal... and principals must report to the inspector, and the inspector must report to the district manager [of the Ministry]” (#2).

With its culture management approach, Piron’s term marks a discursive turn toward expressing trust in students, teachers, and principals. Students were no longer suspected of trying to avoid learning, but were encouraged to become individual learners, release their creativity, and develop other “knowledge economy” capabilities (see Brehony, 2005): “We must adapt our study programs to the 21st century. The world today is not dealing with knowledge [but with] creativity, critical thinking, deducing one thing from another” (#9). He noted that Israeli students do not succeed on international tests because these tests “ask questions of understanding... of what is important and unimportant... of analysis” (#12).

Despite advancing creative learning, the trust campaign under Piron was aimed mainly at principals: “I believe that when we choose principals, we choose educational leaders” (#15), and “principals are people who got the job because they are knowledgeable about education” (#14). Unwarranted low levels of trust amount to limited principal authority: “I don’t know if you know, but the operating margin of principals today is very very small. He has too few areas to choose from in which

he can influence and shape study fields by himself” (#12). Therefore, the Ministry should delegate authority more to them:

The other thing that we are speaking about in the pedagogic reform is the empowerment of principals and teachers by expanding self-management... which this time, for the first time doesn't focus on the technical aspects of management but touches upon study programs (#22).

Note that reference to teachers is inconsistent with the second part of the quotation, which relates to management. In other words, and consistent with the managerial logic, principal's authority and power should be increased.

Because schools are trustworthy, micro-management by the Ministry (O'Reilly & Reed, 2011) should be avoided and internal evaluation encouraged, as director general Stauber explained: “The Minister has declared... [that] his intention is to deepen the ability of principals and staff to use tests as a tool for internal improvement” (#10). Her replacer, Cohen, and Piron himself conveyed similar messages:

When we speak of more trust in principals, more trust in teachers, we speak of less external measurement – more internal measurement (#16).

We are moving toward a [nation-wide school] test every three years... During the rest of the time, *there are two years to build an internal strategic plan of the school*, to fix or maximize or improve the results that we found (#22, our emphasis).

The recurring theme of measurement is not accidental, as it forms one of the core characteristics of managerialism, but we begin by discussing the issue of enhancing performance.

Despite the differences above, policy discourse during both tenures made enhancing the performance of the education system its main objective. During his term, Saar defined the improvement of the ranking of Israel on international tests as a strategic objective of the education system (Harpaz, 2009, p. 27): “I have reached the conclusion that if we do not set the next international tests of 2011 as the next landmark [for measuring] improvement, there is no chance for us to achieve this goal [improving achievements]” (#1). When presenting his Meaningful Learning Program, Piron argued that “in recent years, Israel has set itself the goal of advancing in the global ranking of international tests. It invested many resources, it allocated additional hours during the periods anticipating these tests. And let’s face it: we didn’t advance” (#12). This seemingly direct assault on Saar’s policy was a sharp criticism of a certain version of managerialism, one that focuses on tests and on directly preparing for them. Yet, it tacitly accepts the central goal of rising in international tests, i.e., of enhancing measurable performance. During both tenures, performance was associated with learning achievements. Saar argued: “Achievements are an expression of quality. If achievements are unsatisfying, the quality is unsatisfying and we need to aspire to improve quality” (#1). Piron’s Meaningful Learning Program shared this view while offering an arguably better way of improving student performance. Director general Cohen stated it clearly: “The entire approach of advancing meaningful learning is based on how children achieve more, how children learn more, how children reach deeper” (#22).

Another important commonality concerned the promotion of performative accountability as the basis for relations between education actors. Despite the differences in tone and trust, policy discourse during both tenures emphasized the accountability of schools and principals to the Ministry and compliance with its guidelines. Saar demanded that the “assessment must be conducted by the principal as an agent who is accountable [in English] to the district and the ministry for school achievements in all areas” (#5). Shoshani declared that “as we announced earlier this year, the new concept in the education system is accountability [in English]...” (#2). In delineating his approach, Piron argued for a “balance between regulation and autonomy. We will reduce regulation as much as possible but will not give up inspection” (#12). Stauber was more explicit: “Along with trust there is naturally enforcement. If you grant trust and tell people, come, use these tools [internal assessment]... there should be much stricter enforcement attached to it... If you violate this trust, there should be a sanction” (#10). And, Cohen connected trust in principals with accountability: “After all, there are many studies [that show] that self-management, bringing decision-making closer to principal, his staff, showing flexibility on limitations, together with *demands* for achievements results in improvements in international systems [tests]” (#16, our emphasis).

Measurement forms the third core commonality of the two policy discourses. As we have seen in the analysis so far, this is a central managerial feature. School conduct is assessed through measurable indices. Recall that Saar set the aim of measurable improvement in Israel’s ranking on international tests as a strategic goal. Following the same logic, he argued with regard to teachers’ performance that “in order for students to get the best, we need to measure and evaluate... Not everything [can depend] on seniority... but on quality and excellence” (#5). Shoshani, on his

part, explained that he had come to the position of director general “to set clear and measurable objectives and goals... measurable outputs are the essence...” (Harpaz, 2011, p. 21). Although critical of his predecessor, Piron adhered to measurement just as strictly. Note how in the following quotation a negative tone about a particular form of measurement obscures a clear adherence to measurement itself:

“When... education is examined like the balance sheet of a high-tech company we get very problematic results, because when education is measured only according to one parameter, which is the percentage of success in matriculation tests, *and not other parameters*... we produce a society that turns its education into a stock-exchange balance sheet, into a company balance sheet” (our emphasis, #22).

6. Pseudo-conflict of managerialism

As is evident from the analysis, both policy discourses strictly adhere to the global managerial coalition promoting school accountability and enhancement of performance in education through measurement (Normand, 2010; Lingard et al., 2015; Smith, 2016). Principals must improve performance in their schools and are held accountable for results (“deliverology,” Goodwin, 2015). This is deemed routine practice, regardless of whether subordinates’ autonomy is channeled to function as a means for achieving managerial goals (of the principal within the school and of the Ministry within the system), as in the Piron-era discourse, or is harshly restricted (but not eliminated), as promoted during the Saar era. Moreover, measurement is central for assessing performance and constructing accountability. Disagreement between the Piron and the Saar discourses is limited to the volume of testing and the diversity of

indicators, rather than to the value of measurement as a crucial means for achieving the agreed-upon goal of enhancing performance (see Ynet, 2013). The common result is a top-down system of control, both in Ministry-schools and in principal-teachers relations, reflecting the managerial prerogative of “the right to manage” (O’Reilly & Reed, 2011; Shepherd, 2018).

To understand how these differences and commonalities act to construct the pseudo-conflict, we return to the issue of the management of class hours. Recall that during Saar’s term class hours were presented as an important resource to improve student achievements, to be inspected by principals, who in turn were to be held accountable by the Ministry for class-hour utilization. On a similar topic, class hour allocation in state-funded religious schools– Piron remarked:

There are principals who prefer to reduce the number of hours in secular studies... and increase the number of hours in religious studies... This is their right... I don’t want to say [i.e., determine] how many hours each one will teach. I think that what needs to be done is to meet the standards and results. If standards and results are met, how each school divides its hours – I have trust in principals and in their abilities (#17).

Piron’s discourse here diverges strongly from Saar’s in the degree of trust shown to managers and on how class-hour utilization should be controlled. Yet, it fully shares the main objective of improving measurable achievements (or meeting standards, at the least), and agrees with the statement that principals are accountable to the Ministry for school results.

In this way, a pseudo-conflict arises. Areas of conflict emerge around issues such as trust and control. This debate is real and may become quite heated, projecting an image of conflict between mutually exclusive alternatives of institutional reform. However, it is waged between actors holding two versions of managerialism that share core assumptions. Therefore, rather than pave the road for qualitatively different ideas and frameworks, this debate serves the development of epistemic understandings between policy elites about what is doable, desirable, and debatable (Schmidt & Carstensen, 2016). Because the debate relies upon core managerialist ideas and is confined by them, some issues are excluded altogether, such as the importance, meaning, and necessity of performance enhancement; the form of accountability between schools and the Ministry, and within schools; and the justification and legitimization of positioning measurement as a central concern of the education system. Hence, the presence of discursive conflict serves to reject alternatives to managerialism in education administration in Israel.

In the long term, if left uncontested, pseudo-conflict may have deep consequences, and turn core managerialist ideas into what discursive institutionalism terms background ideas. Background ideas are deep, taken-for-granted core assumptions that are rarely questioned or contested, which guide action and often drive and shape policy programs (Schmidt, 2016). To the extent that the dynamic presented in the analysis above persists over time, core ideas of managerialism may move into this background position, where they are unlikely to be discussed or contested by educational actors in Israel.

7. Conclusion

Managerialism has become a dominant discourse in various fields of education administration and policy in a variety of countries (Deem, 1998; Lynch et al., 2012; Smith, 2016). The isomorphism perspective suggests that as a global idea, managerialism is introduced into national settings, as actors try to solve uncertainty and legitimacy problems (Bromley, 2016). Although this article does not reject this perspective, it points at two limitations. Global policy ideas do not necessarily arrive in one version only, and policy actors are active and able to think beyond the institutional infrastructure in which they are embedded. Therefore, the introduction of managerialism may progress in the context of debate between policy actors promoting different versions of it. The culture management policy discourse of Minister Piron's tenure was critical of the neo-Taylorist discourse of Minister Saar's tenure, and *vice versa*, but both adhered to core managerial principles (see Hoyle & Wallace, 2005).

We argued that this debate can be seen as pseudo-conflict. Areas of deliberation and conflict emerge, but they are strictly bounded. Some questions that have to do with differences between versions of managerialism are addressed, but others that contest managerialism itself are excluded. The conflict between versions assists in this exclusion because it presents areas of deliberation as open to more than one discourse. In this way, pseudo-conflict promotes the introduction of managerialism as a global idea into national contexts.

Pseudo-conflict can be useful in further research because it provides an original perspective on politics of policymakers during the process of introduction of global educational ideas, and beyond. The concept accounts for clashes within policymakers' ranks as well as for policymakers' ability to close epistemological

lines over core (managerialist) assumptions and beliefs (Schmidt & Carstensen, 2016). Further research can use this concept to explore the use of other global ideas in education by national policy actors, and to conduct cross-national or comparative analyses. Another fruitful path for future research may be to examine policy legitimization. Whereas isomorphism-based analyses point at the use of external systems and actors for legitimization (Beckert, 2010), research based on pseudo-conflict may identify legitimization in the process of a bounded debate, as certain ideas are legitimized by being taken for granted by debaters (Schmidt, 2016).

Finally, in recent years, education policy researchers have shown increased interest in the role of ideas, particularly in discursive institutionalism (e.g., Resnik, 2011; Verger, 2014; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018). This article joins the effort to situate ideas and discourse as important factors in education policymaking, and consequently, as crucial fields of analysis. The logic of communication promoted by discursive institutionalism provides a fresh perspective on the development of education administration and policies. Actors carrying ideas, the ideas they carry and their discursive engagement in various arenas are crucial for understanding the way in which global ideas are introduced into national educational contexts, particularly the discursive conflicts between actors carrying competing ideas or competing versions of the same global idea.

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Appendix 1. Protocols Used

No.	Date	Venue	Official Title
#1	8.16.2009	Committee	Pedagogical preparation for the opening of the 2009-2010 school year
#2	3.15.2010	Committee	Utilization of teaching hours
#3	5.3.2010	Committee	Wearing of uniforms in schools
#4	6.28.2011	Committee	The Courage to Change Reform
#5	7.5.2011	Plenary	Question Time
#6	2.13.2012	Committee	Implementation of the Free Mandatory Education Law for ages 3-4
#7	6.4.2012	Committee	Five-year plan for the Arab sector
#8	7.23.2012	Committee	Science studies: On their way down or a chance for changing course?
#9	5.20.2013	Committee	Review of the Ministry of Education
#10	7.10.2013	Committee	Education in the Arab sector
#11	10.29.2013	Committee	Farewell to Director General Stauber
#12	1.15.2014	Committee	Reforms in the education system
#13	3.5.2014	Plenary	Summer vacation and the opening of the 2014-2015 school year
#14	3.5.2014	Plenary	Activity of the Amnesty organization within the education system
#15	3.5.2014	Plenary	Basic studies in Judaism and the Jewish heritage in schools
#16	5.20.2014	Committee	Implementation of the New Horizon Reform
#17	5.21.2014	Plenary	The state of mathematics studies

#18	6.2.2014	Plenary	Student strike at a junior high school in Rishon LeZion
#19	6.23.2014	Committee	Parent payments and the splitting of classrooms
#20	7.16.2014	Plenary	Mandatory study of Arabic and Hebrew in high schools
#21	7.21.2014	Committee	Mandatory studies for the 11th and 12th grades
#22	8.11.2014	Committee	Opening of the school year

Source: Knesset.gov.il

Note. All protocols are in Hebrew.