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Historical Trends in Educational Decentralization in the United States and Developing Countries: A Periodization and Comparison in the Post-WWII Context

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Abstract: In the present work, we fill a gap in the writing on the decentralization of educational governance by periodizing and comparing trends that have fallen under this label in both the United States and developing countries in the post-WWII period (1945-present). The findings are informed by a review of 127 decentralization-related studies from seven leading, peer-reviewed journals in comparative and international education, in addition to the *Journal of Education Policy*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, and *Harvard Education Review*. We combine this review with works that address larger political and economic shifts. One key finding is that the application of community-level decentralization in developing countries has not been as widespread as global rhetoric during the 1990s and 2000s would imply. A second key finding is that there has been a relatively recent shift away from decentralization towards other forms of accountability-based reforms in both the United States and developing countries.

Keywords: Decentralization, School-Based Management, Education Governance, Community Control, United States, Developing Countries, Accountability, Neoliberalism

Tendencias históricas en los procesos de descentralización educativa en los Estados Unidos y en los países en desarrollo en el contexto posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Resumen: Este trabajo, completa una brecha en la literatura sobre la descentralización de la gestión educativa con la periodización y la comparación de los procesos descentralizadores tanto en Estados Unidos como en los países en desarrollo en el período posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial (1945-presente). Los resultados provienen de una revisión de 127 estudios sobre descentralización publicados en siete de las principales revistas en educación comparada e internacional, además de *Journal of Education Policy*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, and *Harvard Education Review*.

Combinamos esta revisión con análisis de trabajos que abordan grandes cambios políticos y económicos para delinear dos dinámicas que impulsaron la descentralización. Un hallazgo clave es que la aplicación de la descentralización al nivel de las comunidades locales en los países en desarrollo no ha sido tan generalizada como la retórica mundial durante los años 1990 y 2000 implicaría. Un segundo hallazgo clave es que ha habido un cambio relativamente reciente que abandona los modelos de descentralización hacia otras formas de reformas basadas en la rendición de cuentas, tanto en los Estados Unidos y los países en desarrollo.

Palabras clave: Descentralización; gestión basada en la escuela; gobernabilidad control comunitario de la Educación; Estados Unidos; países en desarrollo; Neoliberalismo

As tendências históricas nos processos de descentralização educacional nos Estados Unidos e em países em desenvolvimento no contexto pós-Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Resumo: Este trabalho completa uma lacuna na literatura sobre a descentralização da gestão da educação, com a periodização e comparação das tendências descentralizadores, tanto nos Estados Unidos como em os países em desenvolvimento no período após a II Guerra Mundial (1945-presente). Os resultados vêm de uma revisão de 127 estudos sobre descentralização publicados em sete dos principais periódicos em educação comparada e internacional, e *Journal of Education Policy*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, e *Harvard Education Review*. Nós combinamos esta revisão com análise de obras que abordam as principais mudanças políticas e econômicas para delinear duas dinâmicas que levaram à descentralização. A principal conclusão é que a implementação da descentralização ao nível das comunidades locais nos países em desenvolvimento não tem sido tão difundido como retórica global durante o 1990 e 2000 média. A segunda constatação importante é que tem havido uma relativamente recentes modelos de mudança deixando a outras formas de reformas de descentralização com base na prestação de contas, tanto em os EUA e os países em desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Descentralização; gestão baseada nas escolas; governança; controle comunitário da educação; Estados Unidos; países em desenvolvimento; Neoliberalismo

Introduction¹

As a topic for scholarly writing, decentralization—or the transference of control from the central to lower levels of a system—has received immense attention from education researchers within and outside the United States. Indeed, academics have written widely on a number of considerations related to this phenomenon, including: the range of concepts and rationales that

¹ We appreciate comments on earlier versions of this paper from Steven Klees, Nelly Stromquist, Frances Vavrus, Mark Ginsburg, and the three reviewers.

justify it (Carnoy, 1999; Lauglo, 1995), the numerous forms it can take (Rondinelli, Nellis, & Cheema 1983), the myriad issues to consider in designing policies for it (McGinn & Welsh 1999), frameworks for evaluating it (Gershberg, 1998; Cohen & Peterson, 1997), reflections on its implementation in practice (Hanson 1997), the effects produced in implementation (Barrera-Osorio, Fasih, Patrinos, & Santibáñez, 2009; Edwards, 2012), the varied orientations of its advocates (Gorostiaga & Paulston, 2004), and the experiences of various world regions as they have experimented with it.² Despite this impressive body of work, gaps remain in our understanding of decentralization's trajectory—or the reforms that have occurred under this label—and how the thinking behind it has changed over time.

This present article addresses this gap by characterizing broad trends in educational decentralization in the United States³ and developing countries⁴ in the post-WWII period, a period during which studies of, and literature on, the governance and administration of education expanded greatly and moved through a number of distinct periods. One purpose of our overarching objective is to come to a more nuanced understanding of the meanings and practices of decentralization across time and space. In so doing, we hope to shed light on the extent to which education trends (in this case, decentralization) in politically and economically influential countries such as the United States are reflected in more peripheral countries (or vice versa). Furthermore, the hope is that this mapping of meanings and practices can set the stage for long-term case studies of individual countries and the ways in which decentralization reforms in those countries have changed over time. It would be particularly interesting to complement the present article with future studies that trace not only the evolution of notable exemplars but also the way that those exemplars may impacted the global reform agenda around education.

The theoretical lens that informs our review and commentary is political economic in nature. The trends highlighted are thus discussed in relation to changing conceptions of the preferred role of the nation-state and the ways in which various forces and groups have either pressured governments (in the United States and developing countries) or worked in and through them to

² A number of publications have overviewed the trends in and effects of decentralization in various world regions. For Asia, see Adams (2002), and Bjork (2006); for Africa, see Winkler and Gershberg (2003) and Naidoo (2002, 2005); for Latin America, see Schiefelbein (2004) and Winkler and Gershberg (2000); and for Central America, see Di Gropello (2006).

³ While we focus on the United States in this paper, we recognize that it is not the only Western country to reflect the trends discussed herein. Rather, it has been selected because it is often seen as a leader in—and barometer for—social policy reform trends globally. For literature on other Western countries relating to the decentralization trends we discuss here, refer to the Appendix. More specifically, for a good discussion of decentralization trends in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, see Gamage and Sookcomchitra (2004).

⁴ Consensus is lacking with regard to how to define countries as developed or developing. The World Bank classifies countries according to gross national income per capita, while the United Nations Development Programme uses the Human Development Index (based on population longevity, education, and income) and the International Monetary Fund, for its part, uses a classification scheme for which the criteria are not clear (Nielsen, 2011). For the purpose of the present article, we use membership in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as of May 2014 as a way to classify countries as developed (member) or developing (non-member). Although there are currently 34 member countries, at the organization's founding in 1961, there were 20 members, the majority of which were in North America and Europe, thereby representing countries at the core of the world economy. We have selected this criteria based on one of the primary purposes of the paper, which is to assess the extent to which education reform trends in more (e.g., United States) and less (e.g., developing countries) politically and economically influential countries reflect each other. See the appendix for further notes on how countries included in this literature are classified.

bring about modifications to the way education governance is practiced (Bonal, 2003; Lipman, 2011). Given the international dimension of the present paper, the application of a political economic lens also means being attentive to how the acceleration of neoliberal globalization since the 1980s has affected decentralization trends (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Carnoy, 1999; Harvey, 2005; Peck & Tickell, 2002).⁵

Going forward, this paper has a particular structure. We begin, first, by commenting on the literature collected and analyzed. Next, we discuss the two waves of decentralization that were evident in the United States (beginning in the late 1960s and the mid 1980s, respectively). Subsequently, we draw on the work of Cohen and Peterson (1999) to discern three periods of decentralization: from the 1950s to the mid 1970s, then from mid 1970s to the early 1980s, and finally beginning in the early 1980s and continuing into the 2000s. Within these periods, we contextualize and discuss the thinking behind decentralization in education in developing countries more specifically. Importantly, while we rely on Cohen and Peterson's (1999) work to identify and characterize these three overarching periods, we also use the literature reviewed to offer some observations that nuance their general characterizations. In the penultimate section, in addition to comparing and discussing the governance trends delineated in the preceding sections, we also reflect on developments in the most recent period, especially with regard to the prominence of accountability as a guiding reform principle. The final section includes a few final thoughts.

Methods

Data for the present work has been drawn from 127 studies compiled through a systematic search of seven leading, peer-reviewed journals in comparative and international education,⁶ along with the *Journal of Education Policy*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, and *Harvard Educational Review*, each of which has often published articles on decentralization. Drawing on these 10 journals is strategic not only in that they have published numerous studies related to decentralization, but also in that their aims and scope ensure that we analyze a broad cross-section of experiences with which to work when discussing the character of educational decentralization since WWII (1945-present) in

⁵ For all that has been written on neoliberal globalization, Mundy (1999) provides one of the best statements on its emergence and what it has meant in recent decades. It is worth quoting at length: "The years between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s were ones of fundamental transition in both domestic and international orders. A period of major economic restructuring, often now termed 'globalization' could be seen in a series of shifts in the world economy, including the displacement of Fordist patterns of production and accumulation, an escalation of international financial capital flows, the rise of new economies in the south and east, and the emergence of increasingly transnational patterns of production controlled by multinational corporations (Harvey, 1989; Lipeitz, 1987; Stubbs and Underhill, 1994; Castells, 1997). A few 'developing' countries, mainly in Asia, succeeded in this new economy, but for most countries in the South the new world economy contributed to declining raw material prices, an increasing inability to compete in the emergent global economy, and mounting, often seemingly insurmountable levels of international debt. Thrown into economic crisis, the Third World bloc of the 1970s rapidly disintegrated (Marchand, 1994). At the same time many OECD countries abandoned Keynesian economic policies and replaced them with monetarist and neo-liberal approaches aimed at adjusting national economies to the globalizing world economy. These policies and the rise of neoconservative political regimes in the West steadily eroded the welfare and social security provisions which were the hallmarks of the societal compromises of the postwar era (Colclough and Manor, 1993) (Mundy, 1999, p. 40)."

⁶ In alphabetical order, these journals are: *Compare*; *Comparative Education*; *Comparative Education Review*; *Globalisation, Societies & Education*; *International Journal of Educational Development*; *International Review of Education*, and *Prospects*.

the geographic areas of interest. Put differently, these journals have—for many decades—been at the forefront of scholarship on current educational trends in the United States and developing countries. In combining this review with works that address the nature of—and changes to—larger political and economic contexts and, we are able to delineate and nuance multiple periods of decentralization in both the United States and developing countries.

Our search for literature centered on the term *decentralization*, although articles that use other terms to describe this phenomenon were also gathered. For example, some authors invoke the language of *community participation* (e.g., Rose, 2003; Suzuki, 2002) or *local management* (e.g., Levacic, 1993).⁷ To establish the larger context, we supplemented these sources with additional works that address larger political economic shifts.

It should be noted, however, that not all literature reviewed is cited below. In line with the purpose set out above, scholarship is cited to the extent necessary to discuss reform trends around educational decentralization and the reasons for which prevalent approaches have been altered. Concomitantly, outside the scope of this study are the articles and publications that discuss other dimensions of decentralization, but particularly the outcomes or effects of these policies in practice.⁸ For a complete listing of the literature collected, see the Appendix to this paper, which organizes by region and country all the studies identified through the literature search for this article.

Educational Decentralization in the United States

The provision of education in the United States has always been decentralized (McGinn & Pereira, 1992). At present, while education policy is legally the responsibility of each state, in practice each of the nation's approximately 13,800 school districts handles the day-to-day provision of public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This is not to say, however, that the state and federal levels have no bearing on how education is provided locally. These levels can—and have more recently—attached strings to the increasing level of funding they provide for education, for example, through federal initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind legislation or the more recent Race to the Top program. Moreover, while schools have traditionally been funded through local property taxes, as of 2010 the federal level accounted for 13 percent of total public elementary and secondary funding, while the state level's portion was 43 percent—with the local level accounting for the remaining 44 percent (New America Foundation, 2014).⁹ In contrast, for much of the first half of the 20th century, local school districts operated relatively autonomously. Consider, for example, that as of 1940 the division of funding for public elementary and secondary schools among local, state, and federal sources was 68, 30, and 2 percent, respectively (New America Foundation, 2014).

Since the political, economic, and cultural revolutions of the 1960s, however, not only have both the state and federal levels been more active in education policy at the local level, but so too have the dynamics of governing local districts changed (Fusarelli & Cooper, 2009; Kirst & Edelstein, 2006; Malen, 2003; McGlynn, 2010). While the power of states and individual school districts (as

⁷ For more on the relationship between decentralization and participation (as well as the multiple meanings of participation in international development and education governance), see Edwards and Klees (2012).

⁸ For literature on the effects of decentralization, see, e.g., Barrera-Osorio, Fasih, Patrinos and Santibáñez, (2009), Edwards (2012), Galiani and Schargrotsky (2010), Hannaway and Carnoy (1993), Prawda (1993), and Nielsen (2007).

⁹ It should be noted, however, that the federal share of funding varies widely. For example, in 2009, while South Dakota received 16.4 percent of its public elementary and secondary funding from the federal government, this figure for New Jersey was 4.1 percent (New America Foundation, 2014).

opposed to federal power alone) has been a constant feature of education governance in the United States, the literature reviewed demonstrates that changes in thinking around decentralization have related primarily to school- and community-level management of education, especially in cities.¹⁰ As such, before proceeding, it should be noted that the following discussion of school- and community-level decentralization in the United States refers primarily to trends in large urban areas, which have long served as barometers of, and testing grounds for, the reform trends of the day (Lipman, 2004; Reed, 1991; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Wave 1: Late 1960s, Decentralization as Reordering Community Political and Economic Systems

The push for community-level decentralization in education surged twice in major U.S. cities, each time for different reasons. The first instance, which came about in the late 1960s in major metropolitan areas, was an effort at local control that went beyond the decentralization of administrative responsibilities from district headquarters to the schools (Katz, 1971; Stein, 1971). Many important political and economic factors combined in the preceding years to yield attention to this issue, such as: (a) the professionalization of education and the subsequent alienation of parents and community members from central offices; (b) the civil rights movement, the failure of racial integration of black and white students, and a serious concern with the poor quality of education received by minority students in city schools; (c) the disappearance of blue-collar jobs for students upon graduation; and (d) the development of federally-supported “inner-city programs in which citizens would participate in the reordering of local community political and economic systems no longer serving the interests of inner-city inhabitants” (Kloman, 1972, p. 403; see also, DeFelippis, 2008; Fantini, 1969; Gittell, 1972; Lopate, Flaxman, Bynum, & Gordon, 1970; Strange, 1972), such as in Philadelphia, New York, Detroit, San Francisco, and Seattle, among others.

In this context, the movement for local control of big city schools emerged. This movement sought to bring a level of autonomy and decision-making power to the community and away from distant education managers. Central to the thinking behind this push was the predicament of African-American parents in large urban areas. As Gittell (1972) explains:

If they were to be denied integration, they should at least control their own schools and develop the means to quality education. Although dissatisfaction with the schools was based in educational failure, these demands also reflected a general and continuing alienation by the black community from those who ran the system, and a heightened frustration with their ability to influence those institutions which shaped their lives and the lives of their children (pp. 672-673).

Subsequently, the latter half of the 1960s was characterized by a drive for the transformation of school control in a handful of large U.S. cities, including Boston, Detroit, Newark, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Perhaps the most successful example was New York City, which “created 32 elementary school districts governed by community school boards selected in local popular elections” (Hess, 1999, p. 218; see also, Gittell, 1972; Katz, 1971; Stein, 1971). It is important to note that, ultimately, the goals of these reforms were legitimacy, equity, quality, and empowerment (Lewis & Nakagawa, 1995). Additionally of note is the fact that, unlike today, efficiency was not a preoccupation, much less even mentioned in the literature at the time (Zimet, 1973). Despite the significant amount of attention such reform efforts garnered, however, the momentum was not sustained for long, for reasons discussed below (DeFilippis, 2012; O’Connor, 2012).

¹⁰ This is not to suggest that non-urban districts have not also engaged in school-level decentralization. See Rodriguez and Slate (2005) for more.

Important alterations in the political and economic landscape took place in the 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, this time period saw the end of the War on Poverty,¹¹ policies that catered instead to the middle class, drastic reduction of federal support to the poor, slow economic growth, anti-government sentiment, elimination and/or reduction of an array of welfare programs, and a broad reorientation of public policy towards privatization, free-market ideology, and neoclassical economics (O'Connor, 2012). The net effect on cities was “devastating,” as O'Connor (2012) explains: “In addition to the withdrawal of federal aid, the communities suffered from...increased income inequality, capital flight, labor setbacks, and crippling budgetary deficits that resulted from Reagan-era policies” (p. 26). The predominant application of such a perspective—i.e., free-market ideology and neoclassical economics—on public policy began in the early 1980s in the United States under President Ronald Reagan and, during the same time, in the United Kingdom under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Harvey, 2005). The shift in thinking described here with regard to (a) public policy broadly (and economic policy, specifically), as well as (b) the role of the state in public and economic affairs, is known internationally as the Washington Consensus and represents the core of what has come to be termed neoliberalism (Peck & Tickell, 2002). In the realm of education, neoliberalism has, over time, led to an “odd combination of marketized individualism and control through constant and comparative public assessment,” for example, in the form of school choice schemes (e.g., vouchers, charter schools), high-stakes testing, and merit-based teacher pay, and school reconstitution (i.e., school takeover by the state where it is found to be failing) (Apple, 2004, p. 21).

Wave 2: Mid 1980s–Mid 1990s, Decentralization as Local Decision Making

Thus, by the time the second instance of decentralization in education occurred in the United States, the dynamics were very different. Many large cities across the country were re-segregated, broke, lacking jobs, and had lost their tax base due to white flight, de-industrialization, and the liberalization macroeconomic policy (DeFilippis, 2012; O'Connor, 2012). Furthermore, after 1983, with the publication of *A Nation At Risk*,¹² urban cities also became the scapegoat for a crisis in education as the country's attention turned to mediocre test scores and the achievement gap between white and black students (McGinn & Pereira, 1992). With the federal-state-local educational bureaucracy to blame, decentralization again received attention, this time in cities such as Chicago, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Miami, Memphis, New York, Rochester, and San Diego (Hess, 1999; Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007). However, while well-known reforms were attempted in cities, Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) also note that, “by the mid-1990s, mandates...were in place statewide in

¹¹ The War on Poverty was both symbolically and practically important. It began at a time when the issue of poverty and urban reform received significant attention in the United States. Specifically, the War on Poverty was declared by President Lyndon Johnson and referred to: “The full legislative agenda laid out in the 1964 State of the Union and in the eleven goals contained in chapter 2 of the 1964 Economic Report of the President, titled 'Strategy against Poverty'... These goals include maintaining high employment, accelerating economic growth, fighting discrimination, improving regional economies, rehabilitating urban and rural communities, improving labor markets, expanding educational opportunities, enlarging opportunities for youth, improving the Nation's health, promoting adult education and training, and assisting the aged and disabled (Bailey & Danziger, 2013, p. 7).”

Although there is disagreement around when to say that the War on Poverty ended, it is clear that, by the late 1970s, with the election of President Jimmy Carter, federal-level support for the War on Poverty had disappeared (O'Connor, 2012).

¹² The full title of this report was *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. It was produced in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (created by President Ronald Reagan) and was one of the most high-profile assertions regarding the failing status of American schools.

Kentucky, Hawaii, Texas, Colorado, and North Carolina” (pp. 588-589) as part of this second wave of decentralization. The spread and high profile nature of the second wave of decentralization should not come as a surprise, for as Hanson (1990) writes, as the 1990s began, even the U.S. Secretary of Education, Lauro F. Cavazos, was “traveling the nation extolling its merits to audiences of eager governors, legislators, and educators who were searching for something that would make a difference” (p. 523).

The example of Chicago—where school-level decentralization came about due to a “grass-roots rebellion” of dissatisfied “parent activists, community leaders, and local business officials”—has received much attention as the most extreme form of decentralization in the country (Hanson, 1990, p. 528; see also, Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007). In 1988, each school in Chicago had an 11-member Local School Council (LSC) made up of parents, community representatives, teachers, the principal, and one student. The LSC could hire and fire the principal, allocate discretionary funds in the school budget, and develop school improvement plans (Edwards, 2010; Hanson, 1990). The principal, however, was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school, while the LSC primarily served to monitor progress (Fung, 2003). Thus, the role of LSCs was drastically different from the role of the community in the 1960s. In the words of Hess (1999):

As school reform was implemented in Chicago, it looked less like community control and more like local decision making. In some schools, LSCs played a critically important role in shaping the direction of reform; in others, LSCs were little more than ‘rubber stamps’ for decisions made by principals acting alone or by coordinated decisions made by principals and groups of teachers (p. 221).

Compounding this issue was the fact that Chicago’s leadership—particularly after 1994—was only committed to decentralization insofar as it would improve test scores (Edwards, 2010; Lipman, 2002). Those schools that did not improve their scores were sanctioned with “disciplinary mechanisms such as increased scrutiny, active intervention to modify sub-par elements of the school’s plan or its personnel, or complete ‘reconstitution’ and receivership for cases of extreme failure” (Fung, 2003, p. 112).¹³ Since that time, the emphasis on such accountability mechanisms has only grown in the United States (Apple, 2004).

Indeed, it is important to note that the accountability and standards movements gained steam during the second wave of decentralization (Wirt & Kirst, 2009). Cooper and Fusarelli (2009) note that attention to accountability and standards steadily increased—particularly among governors—during the 1980s, a time which not only witnessed lawsuits that sought additional and more equitable funding from states to fulfill their legal obligation around the provision of education but which also saw the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, as already mentioned. Furthermore, across the country, public officials at a range of levels became frustrated with what they perceived as the failure of school-level decentralization within large urban school districts (Kirst & Edelstein, 2006; Wong, 2006). It is not surprising, then, that in reaction to the perceived failures of decentralization (and public education more generally), we have more recently witnessed the rise of mayoral control (and, across the country, of increasing state and federal government intervention) as a corrective to the inability of communities and democratically-elected district boards of education to produce results on standardized tests (Malen, 2003; McGlynn, 2010; Wirt & Kirst, 2009). The trend of centralizing control for education in the hands of mayors and their appointed superintendents has played out, for example, in cities such Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C (Carl, 2009; Hess, 2008; Kirst & Edelstein, 2006; McGlynn, 2010; Wong, 2006).

¹³ For more on the process and effects of reconstitution, see Malen, Croninger, Muncey and Redmon-Jones (2002).

These mayors, and their appointees, in addition to reversing community-level decentralization policies and centralizing power in themselves, have not only favored the test-based accountability movement, but have also applied business logic to school problems and, in accordance with that, have implemented a number of reforms based in market ideology such as vouchers, charter schools, and merit pay schemes for teachers, for example (e.g., Carl, 2009; Lipman, 2002; Lytle, 2013; Traver, 2006). By virtue of being premised on market mechanisms, such lines of reform tend inherently to militate against community control of schools as well as progressive community empowerment more generally (Edwards & Klees, 2012).

Discussion of Two Waves of Decentralization in the United States

On the whole, the context and purpose of the second wave of community-level decentralization contrasts sharply with those of the first wave. For example, the focus in the 1960s was complete community control of education as part of local desires—and direct federal support—for the reordering of political and economic systems more generally. Since the mid 1980s, however, school-level decentralization was often—though not exclusively—initiated or promoted from outside the community and tended to focus on the participation of parents and teachers in administrative decisions. Additionally, while the first wave was about education quality (and particularly the gap between black and white students) as well as empowerment and equality, the second wave ultimately tended to reflect, at least on a discursive level, the larger foci of education reform—student achievement, accountability, and efficiency (Edwards, 2010; Lipman, 2002; Wirt & Kirst, 2009). Even in the case of Chicago, where these principles were not priorities at the outset of the move to school-level decentralization in the late 1980s, they were layered upon it by the mid-1990s, when mayoral control was initiated (Lipman, 2004).

Furthermore, during neither wave was community-level decentralization given a chance to succeed. The ability of communities to control their own public services in the first wave was quickly curtailed by mayors who were threatened by the possibility of autonomous communities (the funding for the first wave of decentralization came from the federal government) (Gittell, 1972; Strange, 1972). Likewise, since the beginning of the second wave, decentralization has fallen out of favor, as mayors have tended to focus instead on recentralizing power. This is due in part to the perceived failure of decentralization to produce the necessary improvement in student achievement,¹⁴ which has consistently been the focus of education reform since the release of *A Nation At Risk*. Instead, forms of decentralization which might fall under the label of privatization—in that decision-making is transferred further, e.g., to parents through school choice arrangements (with charter schools and voucher programs being the main examples)—have begun to be seen as favorable alternatives (Buras, 2011; Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Lipman, 2011; Payne & Knowles, 2009). The larger politics of education in urban areas of the United States have thus trumped attempts at empowered or progressive forms of participation through community-level decentralization (Edwards & Klees, 2012).

Trends in Decentralization in Developing Countries

While communities within large cities in the United States were struggling for local control in the years following WWII, so too were many newly independent countries and former colonies.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, as Edwards (2010) notes, there was some evidence that school dynamics were becoming more democratic in Chicago, for example.

Along with the movement for independence came efforts at nation-building and “development.”¹⁵ In ways that will be explained below, these efforts had implications for the organization of government generally and education systems specifically. Over time, three more or less distinct periods of decentralization can be identified—the first being from the end of WWII to the mid 1970s, the second from the mid 1970s to the early 1980s, and the third from the mid-1980s to the present (Cohen & Peterson, 1999).

Period 1: 1950s–Mid 1970s, Nation-Building and Diverse Decentralization-Related Concerns

In the post-WWII period, advocates of decentralization thought of it in the context of entire countries. Cohen and Peterson (1999) explain: “In the early 1960s proponents of decentralization focused on using the intervention to assist colonies in beginning a transition to independence, achieving political equity, and responding to rising demand for public goods and services” (p. 1).¹⁶ National development and—relatedly—the establishment of national education systems were two of the main foci of developing countries. Indeed, the creation of the latter was seen as a hallmark of a modern nation (Boli, Ramirez, & Meyer, 1985; Hanson, 1970). To some extent, even rural village schools were understood to play a role in the modernization process (Nash, 1965).

In the international education literature of this era, few discussions of decentralization exist, particularly in relation to developing countries. What literature does exist, however, was written within the context of nation building and, concomitantly, expanding school systems. For example, scholars discuss decentralization in relation to the following: The desirability of local curriculum control in China (Lauwerys, 1957); the establishment of community schools in Ethiopia to increase access, to “counteract the overacademic nature of the country’s educational system,” and to protect the community from “the danger of being dominated by the central government” (Wodajo, 1959, 29); the inculcation of democratic and individualistic principles in South Korea¹⁷ and Japan,¹⁸ along with decentralized control of the education system (Adams, 1960a, 1960b); and the expansion of both government oversight and educational provision at the sub-national level in Malawi and Tanzania (Dodd, 1968; Rimmington, 1966). The literature thus reflects many tensions that persist today: The protection of community schools from central government intervention, the promotion of locally-determined curricula, and the institutionalization of both centrally directed programs and monitoring at the local (or sub-national) level.

Overall, however, this period was about official educational provision and the modernization of school systems. Additionally, in the context of post-WWII intervention and Cold War ideological battles, it is not surprising that the literature reflects tensions around the incorporation of democratic and individualistic values in countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China. Only towards the end of this period do we begin to see the development of, and preoccupation with,

¹⁵ Despite our reservations about this term, we use it for lack of a suitable alternative. See Esteva (2010) for a critical discussion of its meanings.

¹⁶ In addition to the Appendix to the present paper, see Cohen and Peterson (1996) and McGinn and Street (1986) for extensive citations on decentralization in development generally in the 1960s.

¹⁷ While we use the commonly employed label of South Korea, the official name of the country which occupies the southern half of the Korean Peninsula is the Republic of Korea.

¹⁸ Interestingly, while both South Korea and Japan became members of the OECD later (on December 12th, 1996, and April 28th, 1964, respectively) they were not members when decentralization reforms were being pursued in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time when South Korea and Japan were experiencing pressure from agencies and advisors of the United States (Adams 1960a, 1960b). For more on decentralization in Japan, see Duke (1976); for more on decentralization in South Korea, see Ho (2006).

administrative theories of decentralization (Chapman, 1973; Hanson, 1970, 1972)—a focus on which would continue and intensify.

Period 2: Mid 1970s–Early 1980s, Decentralization and Administrative Development

Throughout the mid 1970s and into the early 1980s, aid agencies pressed decentralization reforms for a variety of related reasons. As Cohen and Peterson (1999) explain, this was done “in order to promote...improved management and sustainability of funded programs and projects, equitable distribution of economic growth, and facilitation of grassroots participation in development processes” (p. 1). The United Nations report, *Rural Cooperatives and Planned Change in Africa* (Apthorpe, 1972), provides one concrete example of the thinking around decentralization in development generally at this time. This document, and others, reveal that decentralization in various parts of Africa (e.g., Tanzania) and China was conceived of as social and economic transformation through the centrally initiated projects of rural land reform, worker-owned farm cooperatives, and local development committees (Apthorpe, 1972; Rodinelli, Nellis, & Cheema, 1983; Samoff, 1979). Broadly speaking, there was attention to the ways in which the poor could be agents in their own development, as had been the focus in U.S. cities in the years prior (i.e., late 1960s–mid 1970s). Mundy (1998) summarizes the thrust of the times: “The poverty-alleviation approaches to international development and education that emerged in the 1970s could be considered an attempt to construct ‘an international welfare program to be carried out as far as possible by the poor themselves’” (p. 467). Though these approaches were not without their own challenges and shortcomings, they demonstrate a very different approach to decentralization than that which has predominated since the beginning of the third phase, as will be shown in the following sections.

Education systems themselves continued to modernize and expand around the world during this second phase of decentralization. The overarching concern was with “administrative development” (not decentralization specifically); planners approached education systems as complex organizations and created reform strategies for their improvement based on rational and technical logic (McGinn, Schiefelbein, & Warwick, 1979; Zadjia, 2002). At the same time, many educational systems experienced challenges—problems that one would expect to accompany a period of rapid expansion of education. For example, many school systems were described as disorganized, in disarray, and unwieldy (Bray, 1985; Eliou, 1978; Hanson, 1983, 1984).

In this context, decentralization of administrative responsibility to the sub-national level emerged in some countries as an attractive policy option to improve the quality of the education system (Hanson, 1983, 1984). In a number of cases, where some form of administrative decentralization either already existed or was then being implemented, matters of both politics and organizational capacity altered or hampered the reform as designed. This was the case in parts of Africa and Latin America, as well as Papua New Guinea (Bray, 1985; Hanson, 1983, 1984, 1989; McGinn & Street, 1986). In contrast to later forms of decentralization in developing countries, which would concentrate on the community level, these policies focused on provincial-, regional-, or state-level administration (Bray, 1985; Hanson, 1983, 1984). Moreover, they highlighted the fact that decentralization to these levels was a process inescapably bound up in politics and complex organizational dynamics, despite the best efforts of central planners at rational planning.

Period 3: Mid 1980s–Mid 2000s, Decentralization as Efficient and Effective Provision of Public Services

This third phase began in the mid-1980s and has been characterized by the promotion of decentralization policies by international development organizations in order, in the words of Cohen and Peterson (1999), to “facilitate more efficient and effective production and provision of public

goods and services and to establish market-oriented economies in which public sector tasks can be privatized” (p. 2). Certain features of the broad reform context have facilitated the predominance of such a focus in the third period. As noted previously, the economic and political landscape changed internationally with the election of Prime Minister Thatcher in the United Kingdom and President Reagan in the United States—terms beginning in 1979 and 1981, respectively—both of whom privileged neoliberal policy prescriptions across all areas of government and society. The Reagan and Thatcher governments reflected and embodied a neoliberal perspective on education reform that had been gaining momentum for many years (Easton & Klees, 1992; Harvey, 2005; Whitty & Edwards, 1998). Their elections, thus, had the effect of shifting the dominant global discourse around the role of the state and the provision of public services such that neoliberal policy prescriptions were elevated.¹⁹

Importantly for our purposes, the emergence and predominance of neoliberalism has had long-term consequences. Fundamentally, as the United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO) (2005) has noted: “The legitimacy of the State’s action has changed, as has its approach... first in the sphere of the economy, and then in that of services regarded hitherto as public” (p. 8). Though countries are variously able to reject or mitigate neoliberal discourse and associated policies, it must be recognized that neoliberal frameworks have become the default lens through which to understand and analyze the reform of government and, by extension, education (Moutsios, 2010). This is particularly concerning to the extent that this shift came about in the absence of evidence (Schiefelbein, 2004). According to Schiefelbein (2004), the idea that (a) government was inherently inefficient and ineffective and that (b) the introduction of market mechanisms in public service provision would improve both efficiency and quality was “based on a set of ideal [neoclassical economic] constructs and assumptions not tested in the real world” (p. 361).

In education, the idea of decentralization, as Schiefelbein (2004) puts it, “was transformed into a simple and appealing message: *devolving responsibilities to local schools would increase their performance, technical capacity might be retrieved, and corruption would disappear*” (p. 362, italics in original).²⁰ Because of the pre-existing push during this time for fundamental institutional reform of governments along neoliberal lines (Whitty & Edwards, 1998), decentralization often prevailed over a range of other education reform strategies as the primary intervention of choice, at least discursively (Schiefelbein, 2004). Some nevertheless assert that decentralization—for example, in Latin America—resulted in part from consensus among Ministers of Education in 1989 around the fact that educational quality had been deteriorating (Schiefelbein, 2004). As with other world regions, this justification for the emergence of decentralization in Latin America must be balanced by the fact that funding to education in many countries in the region, pursuant to the recommendations and loan conditionalities of donor organizations, had decreased precipitously beginning in the late 1970s (Carnoy, 1995; Reimers, 1991). Thus, the argument that poor educational quality in Latin America, as in the United States, was the fault of the school systems alone is not self-evident and must be considered within the larger economic and political events of the time. That is, given the rapid expansion of school systems during the post-WWII period in developing countries, followed by a period of acute de-funding of education in the 1980s, it is to be expected that national education systems would face a number of challenges (Newland, 1995). Community-level decentralization

¹⁹ The way this shift affected education in the United States has already been discussed above; for more on the spread and application of this thinking in other Western countries, the reader should consult the references in the Appendix.

²⁰ See Edwards (2012) for a more detailed explanation of how this thinking developed, particularly within the World Bank.

based on relations of accountability between the community and the school, and for reasons of efficiency, was an option that resonated with the international funders of the time; the decision to preference this education reform was an ideological one made as part of the wider shift in thinking on the role of the state described earlier (Carnoy, 1995; Reimers, 1991).

Central America is perhaps the region that adopted decentralization reforms that most closely mirrored the trend described by Cohen and Peterson (1999). During this time, in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua there were common features in practice. In each country, legally responsible councils at the community level (with membership of between 5 to 15 parents, along with the principal and one or two teachers in Nicaragua) volunteered their time to manage the school. The primary responsibility of these councils was to hire, fire, and motivate (i.e., “hold accountable”) teachers through the application of pressure and the threat of being terminated (teachers worked on one-year contracts²¹). At times, the school councils were also able to purchase necessary educational materials with government-provided funds and could spend a discretionary portion of the money allotted to them on those items most needed by their schools, if there were any additional funds. Where this was not the case, and where the initial funds provided by the central government were insufficient, communities were expected either to raise additional funds from external sources or else to provide the contributions themselves (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003; Gershberg, Meade, & Andersson, 2009; Nielsen, 2007; Poppema, 2009; Rivarola & Fuller, 1999; for an analysis of all four countries, see Di Gropello, 2006).

Such arrangements were thought to be more efficient and cost-effective for central Ministries of Education for a number of reasons: because they relied on voluntary councils to manage schools, because they gave the government a way to reduce the need for intermediate levels of bureaucracy, because they incentivized the school councils to spend the allotted funds on the most efficacious mix of inputs, because traditional schools would have to compete with schools under decentralized management, and because community contributions (either in cash or in kind) would increase. The school council arrangement was also thought to be more effective because it addressed the principal-agent problem²² by relocating the management of teachers to the community level, thereby incentivizing the teachers to reduce absenteeism and perform better (Edwards, 2012). Decentralization in these Central American countries thus reflected the principles of neoliberalism in that it was pursued primarily for its ability to enhance efficiency and effectiveness through market-based mechanisms of accountability, the reduction of central government bureaucracy, and (to a lesser extent) competition between schools with and without school councils (Edwards & Klees, 2012).

Although Central America stands out, the reach and popularity of neoliberal decentralization has been extensive. Indeed, many countries in other world regions have also pursued community-level education management decentralization since the mid 1980s, and especially during the 1990s. The literature reviewed for this study demonstrates that such policies have been pursued by numerous developing countries around the world, but particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Notably, the trend of neoliberal decentralization has largely been absent from Northern Africa, East Asia, and the Pacific Region (though not Australia and New Zealand). For further evidence of these observations, consult the table in the appendix to this article.

²¹ See Compton and Weiner (2008) for more on the relationship between the World Bank, neoliberal education policies worldwide, and their effects on teachers’ unions.

²² In the context of public service provision, the principal-agent problem has typically referred to relations between the state (principal) and public service providers (agents) (e.g., teachers, principals, etc.), wherein the former has—historically—experienced restrictions with regard to how it could hold the latter accountable (for example, because of tenure systems or other regulations governing employment).

Going forward, we wish to further discuss recent decentralization in these regions and to nuance the broad strokes with which the third period has been characterized.

Discussion of Decentralization in Developing Countries

As we showed in the previous section, the character of decentralization in the selected developing countries was often a reflection of the larger global trends of the time. One implication of this is that a country's allegiance to either capitalist or socialist development influenced the way in which decentralization emerged as an issue, particularly during the first two periods of decentralization. For this reason, it is not surprising that in South Korea, for example—where the United States was influential in the 1950s and 1960s—discussions were being had about how to engender democratic and individualistic values through education (Adams, 1960b), while in socialist countries, such as China and Tanzania, decentralization was spoken about in relation to rural cooperatives and local development committees (Apthorpe, 1972; Rodinelli, Nellis, & Cheema, 1983; Samoff, 1979). That said, across developing countries—whether capitalist or socialist—there was a common interest in creating and extending a national education system (Williams, 1997).

By the time of the second wave, this focus on administrative development had progressed. In many countries, the focus had turned to bureaucratic rationalization and the provision of services for citizens. Governments sought to increase and extend their reach as well as their level of organization (Newland, 1995). Of course, all the while, politics and entrenched interests affected how reforms were received by a variety of educational and political stakeholders, including but not limited to teachers' unions, bureaucrats in sub-national administrative departments, and public officials at each level of political organization (e.g., Hanson, 1983, 1984, 1989; McGinn, Schiefelbein, & Warwick 1979; McGinn & Street, 1986). Despite the documented thrust towards administrative development during the 1970s, it should be noted that evidence is notably—and understandably—absent from those developing countries that suffered during this time from conflict, dictatorial rule, and military control (with one exception to the latter being Peru; see McGinn & Street, 1986).

By the end of the 1970s, a backlash developed against the welfare state and what was perceived as large and ineffective bureaucracies (Harvey, 2005). A certain form of decentralization—i.e., neoliberal decentralization—received increasing attention during the 1980s. In the international arena, but particularly in developing countries, where the World Bank has been especially influential, this institution echoed the rhetoric of the United States and leaders of other Anglo-Saxon countries that the state itself had become the problem (Edwards, 2012; Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004). It was seen as preferable to reduce and devolve responsibilities that had previously been seen as the domain of centrally-directed government organizations.

Importantly, this rhetoric aligned with the shift to democracy in many countries around the world beginning in the 1980s. Decentralization, thus, was additionally promoted as going hand-in-hand with the introduction of democratic politics. As a consequence, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also pushed for the decentralization of state agencies as part of its work during this time, but especially as of the late 1980s, with the fall of the Berlin Wall (Dinnino, 2000).

By the 1990s, numerous international organizations emphasized decentralization. The World Bank sought to decentralize as far as possible, ideally to the community level, and for reasons of efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability, as explained earlier (Edwards, 2012). USAID sought to encourage democratic mechanisms at sub-national levels of government (Dinnino, 2000) while, for its part, UNESCO discussed decentralization in terms of “nuclearization,” which implied increased and strengthened connections among communities, civil society organizations, and the ministry of education (Picón, 1990). Despite the various foci that were evident across international

organizations, the dominant approach was that of the World Bank (Cohen & Peterson, 1999). This approach has subsequently also been upheld by other influential organizations, including the Asian Development Bank (Behrman, Deolalikar, & Soon, 2002) and the OECD (Jutting, Kauffman, McDonnell, Osterrieder, Pinaud, & Wegner, 2004). Although the involvement of such institutions is widespread, the literature reviewed highlighted their engagement in relation to decentralization in Burkina Faso (MacLure, 1994), Cambodia (Pellini, 2005), El Salvador (Cuéllar-Marcheli, 2003), Ethiopia (Swift-Morgan, 2006), Ghana (Pryor, 2005), Guatemala (Poppema, 2009), Indonesia (Bjork, 2004), Malawi (Davies, Harber, & Dzimadzi, 2003; Rose, 2003), Mongolia (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004), Nepal (Carney & Bista, 2009), Nicaragua (Muhr, 2008), and Tanzania (Therkildsen, 2000), to name a few cases.

Given that actors such as the United States, Britain, and the above-mentioned international organizations were promoting, in one form or another, the downward shift of state activity, it is no surprise that the literature reviewed for the present study shows an increase in the prevalence of this phenomenon. It should also not come as a surprise that community-managed models of education decentralization emerged as especially prominent, for during the third wave of decentralization the example, rhetoric, and extensive involvement of both the United States (where school-based management was experiencing popularity) and the World Bank were highly influential. Yet, the studies in our sample suggest that further nuance is warranted. In other words, while our findings do corroborate the characterization by Cohen and Peterson (1999) that the dominant approach to thinking about decentralization reflected the contemporary preoccupation with neoliberal principles, our review of the literature has produced additional findings that temper blanket assertions about this thinking being translated into practice across developing countries.

To begin, it is the case that a number of Central America countries, as noted, widely engaged with community-level decentralization. It is also the case that, during the late 1980s and 1990s, the countries of Central America were under heavy influence from the United States, USAID, and the World Bank (LeoGrande, 2000; Robinson, 2003). Interestingly, by the end of the 1990s, once the community-level decentralization policies of Central America were firmly entrenched, these policies became exemplars that were extensively touted around the world, at first by the World Bank and then by numerous international institutions (Edwards, 2013). But what about other countries and other world regions where these actors may have been less influential and where national politics may have been less receptive to ideas about extreme decentralization to the community level? With regard to these questions, we offer a few key findings.

First, across regions, one sees that larger (non-Western) countries and those with histories of socialism and/or authoritarian rule often do not have decentralized authority in practice, despite engaging in internationally-funded projects or declaring intentions to do so. In these countries, stated intentions to decentralize to sub-national or community levels have been nullified by hierarchical cultures or are abandoned because the central government does not genuinely desire to relinquish its authority. Examples include Argentina (Acedo, Gorostiaga, & Senén-González, 2007; Astiz, 2006; Rhoten, 2000), Cambodia (Pellini, 2005), China (Hawkins, 2000), Ethiopia (Swift-Morgan, 2006), Indonesia (Bjork, 2003, 2004), Malawi (Rose, 2003), Mongolia (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004), Namibia (Angula & Lewis, 1997; see also Edwards & Mbatia, 2013), Nigeria (Ikoya, 2007), the Philippines (Guzman, 2007), Tanzania (Therkildsen, 2000), and Uganda (Suzuki, 2002),²³ as well as the five Central Asia republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (Chapman, Weidman, Cohen, & Mercer, 2005).²⁴

²³ Select citations have been included here; see the appendix for additional references.

²⁴ Although not listed as a developing country due to its membership in the OECD as of May 18th, 1994, Mexico could be included in the group of countries mentioned here. See, for example, Tatto (1999), as well as

This is not to say that, in many cases, the delegation or deconcentration of some administrative responsibilities did not occur.²⁵ Rather, the point is that authority has effectively continued to reside at more central levels, for example, by controlling budgetary resources or by retaining the ability to appoint key officials at lower levels. From a long-term perspective, a common pattern revealed by the literature is that governments would first express general interest in the decentralization of government activity, possibly even shifting some tasks to the regional or departmental level (often during the 1980s, though in some cases during the 1990s); second, governments would more concretely specify what decentralization should look like, frequently expressing a goal to decentralize to more local levels (mostly during the 1990s). Third, governments would, in the 2000s, either declare renewed conviction and commitment to processes of (local-level) decentralization after years of failure, foot dragging, and unfulfilled promises (see citations in previous paragraph), or they would largely abandon the pretense that they were trying to move towards decentralization (as in the case of China [Hawkins, 2000] or Mongolia [Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004]). One implication of this finding is that, despite concerted efforts, international organizations have a rather unfavorable track record (outside Central America and a few other small countries in Asia and Africa, such as Nepal [Carney & Bista, 2009], Ghana (Mfum-Mensah, 2004), and Malawi [Rose, 2003]) when it comes to convincing national politicians and central bureaucrats to devolve their power in practice, especially in countries where the inertia of history (Appadurai, 2013) or the “context of reception” (Dale, 2013) militates against relinquishing authority to sub-national units—as has been the case in Argentina (Rhoten, 2000), Cambodia (Pellini, 2005), and Mongolia (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004), for example. An important exception seems to be when international organizations fund and help implement isolated projects geared towards decentralization (such as was the case in Namibia, for example; Edwards & Mbatia, 2013).

That said, the literature collected indicated that many governments were interested in decentralization for its potential to generate additional financial resources. Ostensibly, governments were frequently interested in the creation of community and school councils in order to encourage increased parental involvement in the education of their children generally or the management of the school specifically, and this was often justified in terms of enhanced democratic engagement (see, e.g., Angula & Lewis, 1997; dos Santos Filho, 1993; Lewis & Naidoo, 2006; Poppema, 2009; Sayed, 1999, 2002; Sayed & Soudien, 2005). In practice, however, numerous studies indicated that these arrangements induced contributions from families, either in cash (e.g., by paying school fees) or in kind (e.g., by donating time, labor and/or materials to carry out administrative duties, construct school houses, and perform maintenance), thereby producing an additional benefit for governments (see, e.g., Carney & Bista, 2009; Chapman et al., 2005; Edwards & Mbatia, 2013; Edwards, 2013; Geo-Jaja, 2006; Gershberg, 2002; Gershberg & Meade, 2005; Gershberg, Meade, & Andersson, 2009; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Maclure, 1994; Pellini, 2005; Poppema, 2009; Rose, 2003; Sayed & Soudien, 2005; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004; Swift-Morgan, 2006; Wankahede & Sengupta,

other literature cited in the appendix. Also see the appendix for additional literature on the countries mentioned here.

²⁵ A common typology for discussing decentralization contains three levels: delegation, deconcentration, and devolution. Hanson (1998) succinctly defines them thus:

- (1) Deconcentration typically involves the transfer of tasks and work, but not authority, to other units in the organization.
- (2) Delegation involves the transfer of decision-making authority from higher to lower hierarchical units, but that authority can be withdrawn at the discretion of the delegating unit.
- (3) Devolution refers to the transfer of authority to an autonomous unit that can act independently, or a unit that can act without first asking permission (p. 112).

2005). The words of Chapman et al. (2005), in their work on the five Central Asian republics, are indicative of governmental sentiment trans-regionally:

Each of the countries sought to shift more responsibility for funding to local communities and individual schools. In public pronouncements, decentralization was often presented as a means of improving the relevance of education by letting those closer to the schools make key decisions. However, as noted above, it was widely understood that decentralization was advocated mostly as a means of encouraging (and forcing) local communities to absorb more of the cost of local schools. In practice, government efforts toward education decentralization tended to devolve financial responsibility without a concomitant devolution of authority (p. 525).

In part, the motivation to pursue community-level decentralization for this reason stemmed from increased international pressure in the 1990s to meet the Education For All goals, which in turn placed additional pressure on governments to increase educational access in a context of limited, or even decreasing, budgets for education (Bonal, 2003; Carnoy, 1999).²⁶ One clear exception to the finance motive was Singapore, where the government had sufficient funding for education but was still interested in the potential of school-level decentralization to engender improved quality and efficiency (Mok, 2003).

In the end, community-management of education along neoliberal lines has tended to be more successfully operationalized in small countries (equivalent to states or departments of large countries) or in certain geographic sub-regions of larger countries. In addition to the countries of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras (discussed previously), other examples of the former include Bhutan (Bray, 1997) and Nepal (Carney & Bista, 2009). A few examples of the latter include Minas Gerais, in Brazil (Meade & Gershberg, 2008); West Bengal, in India (Wankahede & Sengupta, 2005); and the northern Bantu region in Namibia (Edwards & Mbatia, 2013). One commonality shared across many of these cases is the presence and influence of international organizations, ranging from the World Bank, to USAID, to the Department for International Development (of the United Kingdom), to German Technical Cooperation. Furthermore, in the international promotion of community-level decentralization, it stands out that exemplary cases tend to emerge from small states or from departments within larger states. This may be because, in such contexts, it is inherently easier to experiment with reform, or because it is easier for international organizations to manipulate or incentivize their preferred strategies—or some combination thereof. Future research should look more closely at this issue, as well as how the reforms that emerge are then leveraged elsewhere.²⁷

Comparative Analysis of Previous Trends and Recent Developments

Worldwide, since the 1950s, there have been distinct trends in the thinking and implementation of decentralization in both the United States and developing countries. In the United States, in the 1960s and 1970s, in tandem with federal government supported for locally-led economic development, there was a movement in a number of major cities for community control of public school systems. This movement emerged as a backlash against community alienation from and general dissatisfaction with schools—especially on the part of the African-American

²⁶ In many countries, private provision of education was strengthened because the government could not afford to provide education of a sufficient quality for everyone (e.g., Bjork, 2004; Chapman, Weidman, Cohen, & Mercer, 2005).

²⁷ Edwards (2013) has begun this work with regard to the well-known EDUCO program, through which education management was decentralized to the community-level in El Salvador.

community. Decentralization in the form of community control was thus seen as a means to improving quality and responding to the needs of populations which had for many years been ignored and ill-served.

Similarly, during the decades following the end of WWII, developing (and newly independent) countries focused on national development and the establishment of national education systems. Decentralization occurred during this period in developing countries in the sense that official school systems were expanded to offer services to populations farther from the center and/or previously without access to public education. Subsequently, in the 1970s, as the bureaucratic development of school systems continued in developing countries, rational and technocratic planning began to focus on the extension—or decentralization—of administrative responsibilities to the regional, state, and/or provincial levels. The administrative decentralization that went along with system expansion was part and parcel of the growth of state apparatuses generally, and often reflected or were brought about by internal politics.

In the United States, the backlash against the expansion of government (e.g., in the form of federal support for community development) began in the late 1970s and continued into the 1980s. By this point, the context had changed dramatically. At the same time that conservative and neoliberal thought began to predominate in the making of economic and public policies, public schools systems, but particularly those in metropolitan centers, came under fire for failing to deliver quality education. As a result, the decentralization policies adopted by U.S. states and cities in the late 1980s and 1990s were implemented “in response to the perceived failures of school systems, including lack of accountability, wastage of funds, and inappropriate and outdated curriculum and instructional practices” (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007, p. 588). In application, decentralization during this wave meant the creation of school councils—the makeup of which included community members, teachers, and principals—to manage certain administrative aspects of local schools (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990).

Interestingly, as was shown, developing countries, with encouragement from the World Bank and other international organizations, have pursued decentralization since the 1980s for reasons similar to those found in the United States. As opposed to having the state focus either on reaching farther in the direct provision of services or on sending administrative responsibilities to lower levels, the pursuit of neoliberal decentralization was a reaction against the expansion and perceived failure of government services—just as it was in the United States. More specifically, just as in the United States, the design of decentralization policies during the 1980s and 1990s was focused on the ability of such reforms to engender greater efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of education.

One difference, though, between decentralization reforms in the United States and developing countries has been that the latter often also saw decentralization—at least in the form of community or school councils—as a means to increasing access to education. Governments perceived that, in theory, education could be provided to more students if at least part of the costs of educational provision were shifted to the community level, though the hoped for infusion of resources from communities often did not materialize (Chapman, Weidman, Cohen, & Mercer, 2005).

Since the late 1990s, however, one observes related patterns in both the United States and developing countries, though they have played out in different ways. In the United States, we see a continued and heightened emphasis on accountability in the form of (a) standardized testing (represented by the federal level through the No Child Left Behind Act), (b) takeover and reconstitution of failing schools (a threat made by states, and usually directed at poorly performing urban schools), and (c) the implementation of a range market-based reforms, such as vouchers

systems, charter schools, and merit-based pay (reforms that have been sought by city mayors and urban school system superintendents). Noticeably, decentralization via school councils is no longer at the center of reform rhetoric. At present, in the United States, decentralization remains relevant to a discussion of system reform only to the extent that privatization (e.g., voucher systems and charter schools) is conceived of as an extreme form of decentralization in which decision-making about school management and the allocation of resources occurs through individuals as market mechanisms.

Accountability is also the principle that currently receives the most attention in the international arena in relation to how to reform education in developing countries. Notably, in the late 1990s, at the same time that standardized testing became a national priority in the United States, the World Bank published its *Education Sector Strategy*, in which it underscored the importance of introducing standardized testing in developing countries (World Bank, 1999). Since that time, schemes for standardized testing have become ever more prominent around the world (Williams & Engel, 2013). Today, the major international players in the reform of education globally seek to place accountability at the heart of all relationships within the education sector, as the most current education strategy from the World Bank makes clear (World Bank, 2011). And, as Bray (2007) observes, once the World Bank promotes a particular reform approach, other development organizations have tended to follow suit, though the argument can be made that the OECD is now also one of the primary trend-setters in education reform globally (Bieber & Martens, 2011; Martens & Jakobi, 2010).

Beginning in the late-2000s, the popularity of community-level decentralization began to lessen. While countries are still experimenting with it to some extent (Barrera-Osorio, Fasih, Patrinos, & Santibáñez, 2009; Reimers & Cárdenas, 2007), other strategies have come to the fore. This may have less to do with the inherent desirability of community-level decentralization and more to do with the international development industry and its need to find new solutions that it can sell. In any event, decentralization now shares this attention with a range of other reforms also based in market logic of accountability, such as conditional cash transfers (Bonal, Tarabini, & Rambla, 2012), public-private partnerships (Robertson, Mundy, Verger, & Menashy, 2012), voucher schemes (Berends, Springer, Ballou, & Wallberg, 2009), and merit-based pay (Woessman, 2011). Thus, while decentralization survives, it is seen as only one among a number of possible options for improving the accountability (and, therefore, in theory, the quality) of education systems.

Conclusions

In the end, it is striking to note the trajectory of the concept of decentralization in the post-WWII period. Whereas one could previously speak of decentralization in the United States as community control, and whereas decentralization was at one point associated with the expansion and bureaucratization of developing country school systems, in both geographic areas, dominant thought around decentralization later reconceptualized it to embody and further market mechanisms in the provision of education. Noticeably, this began in the 1980s along with major shifts in the political economic context of the time, both in the United States and, subsequently, in developing countries. Overall, during the past three decades, though there have been differences in terms of timing between the United States and developing countries, we see a common movement towards reform thinking that is centered in accountability via market type relationships.

As our review of the literature reminds us, however, these shifts in thinking tend to manifest in certain spaces rather than others. Urban school districts in the United States have long served as the grounds for testing new models, while in developing countries, reform experiments appear to be

more common in small countries and in individual political units within larger countries, particularly when international organizations fund and provide technical assistance for these reforms. In the United States, a parallel can be drawn with the increasing influence of certain think tanks and philanthropic organizations—such as the Heritage Foundation, StudentsFirst, Broad Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Dell Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and New Schools Venture Fund—that provide the intellectual foundation and financial resources to support, often in urban contexts, the neoliberal policy experiments in education that we have mentioned throughout this article (i.e., vouchers, charter schools, merit-based teacher pay) as being popular in the most recent period, both in the United States and in developing countries.

To that end, while we have discussed the role of the United States in bringing out important changes to the international political economic context, the present article has focused on overall trends and, as such, we have not been able to treat the issue of causality. Put differently, though reforms trends in United States and developing countries have mirrored each other to some extent in recent decades—with the policy of education decentralization being a case in point—we were not able to explain, specifically, how this occurred. Further research is needed in order to understand the dynamics of policy transfer and policy traveling between the United States and developing countries, for indeed it may not always be that the latter are simply copying the former, though this has certainly occurred. Long-term case studies of individual reforms may show that successful policies in developing countries enter the global reform agenda for education and are then adapted by the United States and/or other developed countries. In conducting these long-term case studies, it will be important to focus on the role of and inter-linkages among a range of actors, such as those that have already been mentioned—i.e., think tanks, philanthropic foundations, multi-lateral financial institutions, bi-lateral aid agencies, and, of course, governments. It may be the case that these actors cooperate, coordinate or otherwise impact each other in important ways that ultimately affect education reform trends globally.

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Appendix

Table A1

Results by Region and Country

<u>Country No.</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Literature</u>
AFRICA (SUB-SAHARAN)		
--	N/A—Regional focus	Kendall (2007)
1	Burkina Faso*	Maclure (1994)
2	Ethiopia*	Khan (2006); Swift-Morgan (2006); Wodajo (1959)
3	Ghana*	Chapman, Barcikowski, Sowah, Gyamera, & Woode (2002); Mfun-Mensah (2004); Nielsen (2007); Pryor (2005)
4	Kenya*	Khan (2006)
5	Madagascar*	Khan (2006)
6	Malawi*	Chikoko (2009); Davies, Harber, & Dzimadzi (2003); Rimmington (1966); Rose (2003, 2005)
7	Mali*	Khan (2006); Nielsen (2007)
8	Namibia*	Angula & Lewis (1997)
9	Niger*	Nielsen (2007)
10	Nigeria*	Geo-Jaja (2004, 2006); Ikoya (2007); Ikoya & Ikoya (2005); Khan (2006)
11	South Africa*	Khan (2006); Lewis & Naidoo (2006); Sayed (1999, 2002); Sayed & Crain (2005)
12	Tanzania*	Dodd (1968); Khan (2006); Lillis (1990); Therkildsen (2000)
13	Uganda*	Nielsen (2007); Suzuki (2002)
14	Zimbabwe*	Chikoko (2008, 2009)
ASIA (SOUTH/EAST) and PACIFIC REGION		
15	Australia	Chapman (1988)
16	Bhutan*	Bray (1997)
17	Cambodia*	Pellini (2005)
18	China* (including Hong Kong and Macau)	Cheng & Chan (2000); Hawkins (2000); Ho (2006); Lauwerys (1957); Robinson (1986); Tang & Bray (2000)
19	India*	Dyer (2005); Mukundan & Bray (2004); Nielsen (2007); Wankhede & Sengupta (2005)
20	Indonesia*	Bandur (2012); Bangay (2005); Bjork (2003, 2004); Kristiansen & Pratikno (2006)
21	Japan	Adams (1960a); Duke (1964, 1976); Ho (2006); Muta (2000); Takayama (2008)
22	Korea (South)	Adams (1960b); Ho (2006)
23	Mongolia*	Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe (2004)
24	Nepal*	Carney & Bista (2009)
25	Pakistan*	Jimenez & Tan (1987); Khan (2007)
26	Papua New Guinea*	Bray (1985); Maha (1997)
27	Philippines*	Guzman (2007)
28	Singapore*	Mok (2003)
29	Thailand*	Gamage & Sooksomchitra (2004)
30	Vietnam*	Nielsen (2007)

Table A1 (cont.'d)
Results by Region and Country

<u>Country</u> No.	<u>Country</u>	<u>Literature</u>
EUROPE, SCANDINAVIA, and CENTRAL ASIA		
31	Belgium	Dom & Verhoeven (2006); Verhoeven (1992)
32	Czech Republic	Daun (2004)
33	Cyprus	Pashiardis (2004)
34	France	Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker (2002); Daun (2004)
35	United Kingdom	Daun (2004)
36	Germany	Daun (2004); Weiss (1993)
37	Greece	Eliou (1978)
38	Hungary	Báthory (1986); Hálás (1993); Howell (1988); Kaufman (1997)
39	Netherlands	Van Langen & Dekkers (2001)
40	Norway	Karlsen (2000); Lauglo (1990)
41	Romania	Nielsen (2007)
42	Spain	Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker (2002); Engel (2008); Hanson (1989, 1990)
43	Sweden	Dahlsted (2009); Daun (2004); Lundahl (2002)
44	United Kingdom	Levacic (1993, 1998)
LATIN AMERICA		
--	N/A—Regional focus	Newland (1995); Schiefelbein (2004)
45	Argentina*	Acedo, Gorostiaga, & Senén-González (2007); Astiz (2006); Gorostiaga (2001); Munin (1998); Prawda (1993); Rhoten (2002); Schiefelbein (2004)
46	Brazil*	Dos Santos Filho (1993); Gandin & Apple (2002); Gorostiaga (2001); Meade & Gershberg (2008); McGinn & Pereira (1992); Reiter (2009); Schiefelbein (2004)
47	Chile	McGinn & Street (1986); Meade & Gershberg (2008); Munin (1998); Prawda (1993); Schiefelbein (2004); Schiefelbein & Schiefelbein (2000)
48	Colombia*	Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker (2002); Hanson (1974, 1983, 1989, 1995); Meade & Gershberg (2008); Prawda (1993); Schiefelbein (2004)
49	El Salvador*	Cuéllar-Marchelli (2003); Schiefelbein (2004)
50	Guatemala*	Gershberg, Meade, & Andersson (2009); Poppema (2009); Schiefelbein (2004)
51	Honduras*	Nielsen (2007)

Table A1 (cont.'d)
Results by Region and Country

<u>Country No.</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Literature</u>
LATIN AMERICA		
52	Mexico	Gershberg (1999); McGinn & Street (1986); Ornelas (1988, 2000); Prawda (1993); Reimers & Cárdenas (2007); Santizo Rodall & Martin (2009); Schiefelbein (2004); Schmelkes (2001); Tatto (1999)
53	Nicaragua*	Gershberg (1999); Gershberg & Meade (2005); Muhr (2008); Rivarola & Fuller (1999); Schiefelbein (2004)
54	Peru*	McGinn & Street (1986); Nielsen (2007)
55	Venezuela*	Hanson (1970, 1976, 1984, 1989)
MIDDLE EAST and NORTH AFRICA		
56	Israel	Gaziel (1998)
57	Yemen*	Nielsen (2007)
NORTH AMERICA**		
58	United States	Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker (2002); Buras (2011); Burgess (1976); Cheng (1976); Clark (1968); Cohen (1978); Hanson (1990); Katz (1971); Kirst & Edelstein (2006); Lauter (1968); McGinn & Pereira (1992); Payne & Knowles (2009); Reed (1991); Reyes (2006); Stein (1971); Wong (2006)
59	Canada	Karlsen (2000)
<p>Note: The studies listed here were compiled through a systematic search of seven top journals in comparative and international education, along with the <i>Journal of Education Policy</i>, <i>Journal of Educational Administration</i>, and the <i>Harvard Educational Review</i>, each of which has often published articles on decentralization within and outside the United States. In alphabetical order, the comparative and international education journals reviewed were: <i>Compare</i>; <i>Comparative Education</i>; <i>Comparative Education Review</i>; <i>Globalisation, Societies & Education</i>; <i>International Journal of Educational Development</i>; <i>International Review of Education</i>; and <i>Prospects</i>. Also note that the studies listed here relate to decentralization of K-12 educational administration and financing (and not, e.g., the decentralization of teacher education, among other things). Finally, studies of a theoretical nature are not listed here.</p> <p>*Indicates that country is labeled as developing for the purpose of this paper, based on non-membership in the OECD as of May 2014. Note that a few of the countries included in this appendix—and labeled as developed—were not original members of the OECD at its founding in 1961. These are Chile (joined on May 7th, 2010), Israel (joined September 7th, 2010), Mexico (joined May 18th, 1994), and South Korea (joined on December 12th, 1996) (OECD, n.d.).</p> <p>**Excluding Mexico, which is listed in the Latin America section.</p> <p>Source: Authors.</p>		

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