

Chapter 10

Co-operation of Edu-business and Public Schooling: Is the Governance of Education in Finland Shifting from the Public Sector to Networks?



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Abstract The number of edu-business actors involved in Finnish schooling is increasing, as is their collaboration with the public sector. This chapter introduces concrete examples of how edu-business actors in Finland collaborate with state actors and also discusses what their aspirations are for future collaboration with state actors. By analysing these forms of co-operation and the expectations of Finnish edu-business actors, I aim to describe the current position and the course of governance of education in Finland. I argue that edu-business networks, that cross and blur the sectoral boundaries between public and private, create possibilities for edu-business actors to affect education policies in Finland. This possibility of a shift from the public governance of education towards network governance can weaken the democratic aspects of the public education system as networks lack commitment to transparent decision-making and accountability to the public.

Around the globe the education sector, traditionally seen as a public good, is now also seen as a potential source of economic benefits, as an investment and as an opportunity for supranational business.¹ Education has attracted private actors from different sectors and the private actors now have a wide range of roles and relationships with the state and especially the education sector.² Although some of these edu-business actors prefer to highlight philanthropic motives, what they have in common is their aim of making a profit by converting education into a commodity and an export product.³ The rise of private actors in education is connected to the commercialisation of education, what Anna Hogan and Greg Thompson⁴ have described as “the creation, marketing, and sale of education goods and services to schools by for-profit providers”. As a result of private actor activity in schools, business-related rhetoric has become embedded in the debate on education, introducing the idea of education as a service and students and their parents as clients.⁵ In turn, public funding has become a stimulus for private actors, many of which have only become established

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because of the demand for their services by governments.⁶ Evidently, the guiding principles of education are changing globally as the knowledge economy and global competitiveness narrative is challenging the welfare narrative. However, the political and historical context of a nation determines the degree and stage of the change.⁷

Following the global trajectory of commercialisation in education, the number of edu-business actors and organisations promoting edu-business has increased in Finland.⁸ In our research (see Seppänen, Kiesi, Lempinen and Nivanaho in this book), we have described the commercialisation development and the recognised actors in it as well as analysed their rationales, logics and modes of operation. This chapter contributes to research on edu-business in Finland as I will focus especially on the public sector's role in edu-business from the perspective of edu-business actors. I argue that edu-business networks, that cross and blur the sectoral boundaries between public and private, create possibilities for edu-business actors to affect education policies in Finland. In what follows, I present a little more background to my research, before discussing the shifting role of the public sector as a facilitator of edu-business in Finland.⁹

Blurring of Sectoral Boundaries Between Public and Private Through Partnerships and Networks

As discussed in the introduction to this book, the Finnish education system and its comprehensive schools are mainly organised and steered by public actors, in other words the state and the municipalities. There has not been much concern or debate about the growing impact of private actor involvement in the education system in Finland, although privatisation and outsourcing of healthcare, especially elderly care, has often made headlines in the Finnish media. Despite this it would be a mistake to think that Finland's schools are separate from or immune to commercial business interests.

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral and Christiane Thompson¹⁰ explain that edu-business actors operating in the global context i.e., the Global Education Industry (GEI)¹¹ are creating new ways of business-making that are “distinct from arrangements typical of classical economic thought, where the making and shaping of an industrial sector have been primarily influenced by (limited) governmental intervention in a self-regulating free-market environment”. In Finland, as the education space is predominantly public, the private actors have begun to integrate themselves into the public governance of education forming ‘ecosystems’.¹² This means that the private actors have created networks with other private actors as well as with public actors in order to advance their business and the ecosystem's goals.¹³ State actors, such as the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture,¹⁴ are central in these networks, a sign of the strong constraining role the state has had by regulating the business-making in Finland's schools, and in turn enabling edu-business as well.¹⁵ This supports Parreira do Amaral's and Thompson's¹⁶ argument

about how the public has “turned into a powerful connector that initiates, facilitates, and sponsors many of the activities in the GEL.” In Finland, some of the edu-business related organisations, such as Edita, Education Finland, EduCloud Alliance, are directly or indirectly owned or founded by the state, which makes the distinction between public and private even more blurred.¹⁷

The concept of ‘public private partnership’ (PPP), has also entered the field of education in Finland. During the process of conducting this research and attending edu-business related events, I noticed the phrase ‘public private partnership’ frequently spoken in English in the middle of an otherwise completely Finnish discussion by edu-business actors. The term PPP is ambiguous which is why different actors can interpret its mechanisms with different motives and expectations.¹⁸ According to Graeme Hodge and Carsten Greve,¹⁹ PPP can be thought of as either a governance scheme or a language game. As a form of governance, PPP emphasises contracts and connections between the sectors. However, as a linguistic term, ‘public–private partnership’ is a way of moving away from the concepts of ‘privatisation’ and ‘outsourcing’.²⁰ Talking about a ‘partnership’ is a way to describe private sector involvement in a positive manner, as privatisation is often discussed in the media with a certain amount of criticism.²¹

According to Susan Robertson and Antoni Verger²² the background to the proliferation of PPPs in education reflects the spread of neoliberal ideology. Proponents of neoliberal ideology argue that free markets and competition increase efficiency, risk-taking and innovation in publicly governed systems such as schools.²³ Arguments for utilising PPPs in traditional public education highlight the need for private actors to bring innovative solutions that can improve deep systemic problems such as the accessibility, quality and equality of education.²⁴ In turn, arguments against the PPPs are based on concerns about the impact of these mechanisms on teachers’ working conditions, increased privatisation and again, on equality.²⁵ Moreover, an additional subject of debate has been whether PPP agreements should be only temporary solutions to address challenges in the public system or whether a permanent ‘paradigm shift’ in education governance needs to be pursued.²⁶

As PPPs blur the boundaries between public and private sectors, more private actors are obtaining opportunities to participate in the public education arena. The emergence of several non-state actors operating within and beyond the government embody the shift of political power from a traditional hierarchical government to a networked governance.²⁷ According to Wayne Au and Joseph Ferrare,²⁸ government is often referred to as a public power that is based on democracy and is thus accountable to the people. As they are regulated by public sector roles, government bodies who decide on educational policies must work transparently for the public.²⁹ In contrast, network governance is based on the informal authority of flexible networks. These networks are constantly evolving and expanding systems³⁰ which include a diverse set of personal and corporate relationships that are created either through formal (i.e. visible) or informal (i.e. hidden) channels.³¹ By building networks, the edu-business actors create more opportunities for themselves to affect policies, do

business and build new capital.³² As the world is ever more connected, the relationships between GEI actors also cross and transcend national borders and form networks in which education policy is created and disseminated globally.³³

According to existing research about network governance, a wide range of policy networks creates ambiguity in decision-making processes; due to the informal authority of the networks, it may remain unclear what has been agreed on, between whom, with what consequences and in return for what. In the absence of clarity, political decision-making processes are exposed to power games and the boundaries between the public and private sectors blur.³⁴ The challenge for network governance is therefore its lack of commitment to transparent decision-making and accountability. There are no formal tools to redress the potential losses non-governmental organisations or networks may cause, for example, to public education.³⁵

PPPs and network governance do not represent a clear distinction between public interest and private interests, but require a redefinition of the role of the state in education.³⁶ This shift of the power over education from public towards networks cannot be clearly defined or traced as the public is also intertwined in these networks. Lucas Cone and Katja Brøgger discuss what they call ‘soft privatisation’:

What we are witnessing in this shift, we suggest, is not so much the privatisation of previously state-led education as it is the emergence of a public infrastructure of educational governance that allows institutions, corporations, and interest groups to (per)form political-pedagogical assemblages outside the mediating auspices of sovereign governments. Soft privatisation refers to the mechanisms enabling this re-configuration of the public.³⁷

This phenomenon of the re-configuration of the public governance of education is the starting point of my study. By analysing how the Finnish public sector co-operates with edu-business and what aspirations edu-businesses have around this co-operation, I set out to look for signs of the course of governance of education in Finland.

Studying the Perspective of Edu-business Actors on Their Co-operation with the Public Sector in Finland

My research on Finnish edu-business draws on the HOPES research project for which we conducted interviews during 2019–20 as discussed in the chapter about edu-business in this book by Seppänen and colleagues. For this chapter, I analysed interviews with 13 actors, who practice or promote edu-business in Finland. The actors were representatives of different types³⁸ of edu-business related organisations: publishing businesses (Edita and Sanoma Pro), a large-scale technology business (Microsoft Education Finland and their former employee), EdTech startups (3DBear, Eduten, Education Alliance Finland and Seppo) and organisations which promote edu-business (EdTech Finland Ry, EduCloud Alliance, HundrED, xEdu and governmental cluster programme supporting education export, Education Finland).

I focused on parts of the interviews where the actors were asked to discuss the collaboration between edu-businesses and the public sector.³⁹ Using qualitative content analysis⁴⁰ I began by collecting from the interview data the forms of co-operation as well as the interviewed actors' thoughts concerning the co-operation with public actors. Next, I themed the reduced data by connecting similar ways of co-operation and similar thoughts about the current state and future of the co-operation. Finally, I analysed the data in each theme, as a reflection of the background literature of public private partnership and network governance.

The views of these 13 actors cannot cover all of the views of Finnish edu-businesses, but as diverse actors they provide an overview of how business-related co-operation with the public sector had been carried out and is hoped to be carried out. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, therefore the quotations presented here have been translated into English. In what follows, I first look at the forms of co-operation between edu-businesses and the public sector and then at the edu-business actors' aspirations about co-operation in the future.

Forms of Co-operation Between Edu-business Actors and the Public Sector

In this section, I present a spectrum of forms of co-operation between edu-business actors and the public sector, which were mentioned in the interviews. These forms of co-operation are as follows: public sector as a customer of edu-business; public sector funding of edu-business; edu-business actors as specialists; public school teachers as evaluators, developers and promoters of edu-business products; co-development and co-creation projects and formal and informal collaborative platforms for education export.

The work of edu-businesses often revolves around selling a product or a service based on demand. As the education providers in Finland are mainly public, the customers of edu-business companies are thus also public. In other words, a school or a municipality pays the company in order to use their products; in such cases the companies are mainly supplying learning materials, such as books, digital materials and applications. Companies also have license contracts with a school or with all schools in a certain district (e.g., EdTech company Seppo's Helsinki-wide license contract). In addition to buying products from edu-businesses, the public sector also awards grants and funding to support them. Some of the interviewed edu-businesses have applied for and received grants from Business Finland, which is "the Finnish Government organization for innovation and trade"⁴¹ as well as project funding from the Finnish National Agency for Education. The CEO of an edu-business accelerator company xEdu also shared how some EdTech companies utilise incubator services, such as NewCo Helsinki or Boost Turku, which function through funding from these cities. By funding edu-businesses and purchasing their products, the public sector

creates preconditions for these companies to operate and do business, i.e. the public facilitates the edu-business in Finland.

The interviewed edu-business actors also worked with the public sector as specialists offering statements, consulting and training for the public sector. Actors at Edita and Microsoft, companies in Finland that are attached to a global partnership programme, New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL),⁴² mentioned various types of consultancy work they do for the public sector. They offer different kinds of training for teachers, for example, they educate certain teachers as tutors for the NPDL programme, they train teachers and give lectures about digital pedagogy or how to utilise “twenty-first century skills and learning design when planning lessons” (Microsoft).⁴³ In addition to training the teachers that are already practicing in the profession, the companies conduct training in the existing teacher education programmes at universities. By training both in-service teachers and teachers-to-be, the companies have the opportunity to influence the practices and ideas that teachers take into public schools (by which I mean public sector schools). Edu-businesses also offer consultancy services and training to local education departments. For example, Microsoft Finland’s digital learning and strategy director explained that they train municipal decision makers and ministers. With the consulting and training services the companies guide teachers, principals and heads of local education departments towards “systemic thinking and making the change in the right way”, as Edita’s representative explained in the interview. This “right way” represents the company’s view of the ideal education system in Finland. As the companies are connected to global actors, like NPDL in this case, their view on education is formed by the combined effect of the global and local context.

According to those interviewed, public sector school teachers can work as evaluators, developers and promoters of edu-business products. Education Alliance Finland for example have teachers as ‘freelance’ evaluators of EdTech products. In other words, the company pays a teacher to evaluate a certain product using the company’s platform. Teachers can also work on the product development of edu-business companies and teachers can be paid or asked to promote the companies’ products. For example, the CEO of xEdu explained that one way of introducing edu-business products into schools is to “find those individual teachers, who are the thought leaders, who will make their municipality adopt a position and make the decision, that hey, we will start using this”. Teachers in Finland share their experiences on good practices and products with other teachers in their own school communities as well as in wider online groups. When a teacher is promoting a certain edu-business, they can potentially influence their own school, and as in the above quotation, the wider community to use the services and products of the company they are associated with.

In addition to teachers linking the edu-businesses with schools, the companies work directly with public schools through various co-development and co-creation projects. The publicly initiated, coordinated or funded projects and programmes mentioned were MPASSid, DigiOne by the City of Vantaa, EduCloud Alliance and the Six City Strategy (6Aika). The most frequently mentioned project was the Six City Strategy, which was described as a good way for edu-businesses to enter schools

to test and develop their products in an authentic classroom environment. The interviewees saw this co-creation with schools as an immense opportunity and they were pleased that the public sector and its schools were participating more than before in the development process of EdTech products. By providing access to public schools, the public sector enables the edu-business to develop and grow in Finland as well as eases their access to the global education industry—as the representative of EdTech Finland Ry explained: “... we are quite agile in Finland, and especially if you can get in for the Six City Strategy’s Agile Piloting project, you will be able to get some kind of good reference with which you can go abroad more easily”.

In the interviews with those associated with the global NPDL program (Microsoft and Edita), we also discussed a programme called the Oppimisen Pohjantähti [the North Star of Learning], which was implemented in Finnish schools by Microsoft in 2014. The program was based on the NPDL program and lasted three years. The aim of the program was to create a national vision for the future of learning, to guide the professional development of teachers and principals and to effectively utilise technology in the transformation of learning and teaching.⁴⁴ In 2017, to continue the work, the OPPIVA network was founded by Finnish municipalities in collaboration with Edita Publishing. In the summer of 2021, the OPPIVA network encompassed 32 municipalities.⁴⁵ Through Oppimisen Pohjantähti and now the OPPIVA network, municipalities and their schools are connected to the global NPDL program. That connection allows information, such as ideas about the purpose of education and the ways to implement it, to flow from the global education industry to the schools in Finland and the other way around.

As mentioned, edu-businesses can utilise their experience and references from the co-creation projects to access the global education industry. In addition to these projects, edu-businesses have an opportunity to apply to Education Finland, which is an education export program coordinated by the Finnish National Agency for Education and funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It was founded in 2015. On Education Finland’s website, it is explained how “Finland’s exceptional results in education made its educational concept and image famous worldwide”, which “gave rise to a global market opportunity” and therefore education “was identified as one of the Finnish government’s key export programs”.⁴⁶ The interviewees, many of whom are members in the program, explain that Education Finland works as a beneficial link between governments abroad and the EdTech companies in Finland. We also interviewed the Program Director, who explained that Education Finland facilitates the networking of its members, and as a public actor, it is easier for them to be in contact with possible international buyers and connect the members with them. This kind of support from the Finnish education brand and a governmental program with its networks strengthens edu-businesses possibilities to scale their product globally. The effect of this desire to export Finnish educational products on domestic education in Finland is not yet clear, but seemingly the public sector schools are participating in the export process as edu-business companies develop their products to be ‘export-ready’ in the abovementioned co-development projects.

In summary, the edu-business actors in Finland interact with the public sector in multiple ways. Businesses supply products and services for the demands of the public

sector i.e., municipalities and schools and they provide statements on topical issues, consulting and training to education providers and professionals. The public sector provides the businesses with funding and public sector teachers can work for edu-business companies as evaluators, developers and promoters. Edu-businesses and the public sector work together in developing new education products and exporting these products abroad. These forms of co-operation reflect how public education and education business are intertwined in Finland and how private and public actors work together to achieve their own and common goals. Co-operation networks create continuous connections between edu-business actors and public sector actors, such as teachers and teachers to-be. In addition to these concrete ways of collaboration, edu-businesses also have informal connections to the central public sector actors.

The Finnish National Agency for Education as a Central Channel for Interaction

Many of the interviewees reported that there is an ongoing interaction between the edu-business companies and public sector actors, especially with the Finnish National Agency for Education. As a more formal connection, edu-business actors are invited to different workgroups of the Agency or the Ministry of Education and Culture as specialists. For example the chair of EduCloud Alliance mentioned that he is part of a learning analytics workgroup and the creative director of HundrED spoke about being on a steering group for the development of comprehensive schools. In addition, the companies create and maintain informal connection with the Agency. Edita's business director of learning for example explained that they have a close relationship with the Agency as they regularly meet with the director general [Olli-Pekka Heinonen in 2019] and the directors of different departments. He further explained that, even though the Agency is not officially part of their Educodes business, they keep them posted about their work and customer feedback. Similarly, the CEO of Seppo commented that in addition to his formal connections, he has informal connections with the National Agency for Education:

Just previously this week, I messaged the director general of the Agency, saying that we could help in this [COVID and distance learning] situation and he replied saying nice, thank you, let's see and get back to it. And this morning they got back to us. So these kinds of informal partnerships or some partners we have in principle, but of course those formal, we do those formal partnerships.

According to the interviewees, the Agency is active in contacting these businesses in relation to their expertise. For example, xEdu's CEO reported about the interest of decision makers in their work by referring to the fact that the National Agency for Education visited xEdu, to hear who they are and what they do. Sanoma Pro's business director of comprehensive education highlighted the collaboration between companies and the Agency to be, globally speaking, "quite rare, that in Finland public officials and private sector discuss and collaborate. This does not happen in

many countries, at least I don't know in our frame of reference where this happens". Having an active public actor, and especially such a central actor, upholding the connection and interaction is beneficial for the edu-business as the Agency is a channel to national public schools as well as governments abroad through Education Finland. As it is important for edu-business to keep the Agency "on their side", they also lobby decision makers. This was explained by the program director of Education Finland when asked if private actors lobby politicians. The director confirmed that they do, and illustrated further that private actors:

Just inform about disturbances, inform about legislation, inform about grievances, inform in all ways. Send petitions, approach their own MP, who conducts a parliamentary inquiry, approach the Minister directly, approach the Director General of the National Agency for Education, approach me directly, approach officials.

By lobbying decision makers, the edu-businesses can try to influence policy-making in order to make their views about education heard.

Edu-business Actors' Aspirations for Future Collaboration with the Public Sector

In the interviews, we also asked how the actors see the co-operation between private and public actors in the future as well as what would they like from the public sector. We did not specify any particular area but allowed the actors themselves to highlight what they felt was important. The actors raised numerous themes linked to the desire for public activities to facilitate edu-business in Finland. Here I start with matters around which the edu-businesses wished the public to change, and then look at edu-business actors' perceptions of attitude towards edu-business and their wishes for its improvement.

One problem that EdTech companies were struggling with was accessing the supply chains of public education. Innovation projects, such as the Six City Strategy mentioned in the previous section of results, have opened the doors of schools to businesses. The representative of EduCloud Alliance saw these ongoing innovation projects as a good sign of co-operation, but hoped to have the comprehensive school even more closely attached to "systematic processes where different things could be tried out between a company, an educational institution and students". However, he pondered that a school cannot be "a product development organization" because "there is simply no free lunches", explaining that if a company offers something for free to schools, there is an agenda behind it that should be thought through.

The problem according to the edu-businesses has been the continuation of these innovation projects, and joining the educational supply chains, especially when those are dominated by other powerful players such as publishers and university-run initiatives. A representative of 3DBear explained how it was difficult for edu-businesses to join the supply chains after innovation projects, as large players (publishers) dominate the market. He described this difficulty in accessing supply chains as a

“systemic process problem in Finland”. With 3DBear highlighting publishers as “established players”, the EduCloud Alliance’s representative, for his part, considered that services sold by universities were unfair since they were able to sell with “society’s funds”. He then called for “open, fair and transparent competition”. It is understandable that the smaller edu-businesses experience the situation as unfair, since the larger publishers and university-owned companies seem to have easier access to contracts due to their long history of working with the public sector. Regarding these supply chain processes, the representative of EdTech Finland Ry said that it takes a very long time to make deals in the industry, because the contracts made in Finland are long-term, and prohibit any external purchases. She emphasised that mutual understanding between the public and private sectors is necessary in order to learn how these novel processes could be smarter for both sides and unnecessary work could be avoided.

As described earlier, edu-business actors and the public sector already collaborate in the field of education (product) export, but the edu-business actors required more involvement. Both Seppo and EduCloud Alliance hoped that education business companies would be involved in the education export companies and projects of higher education institutions (university or university of applied sciences). EduCloud Alliance argued further that ecosystemic export is the only way for Finland to export education abroad. Education Finland, a publicly owned export program of Finnish education products, has responded to the need for collaboration in “edu-export”. Eduten’s CEO for example, has been satisfied with the establishment of Education Finland and would like the organisation to be even larger in size and budget. In his opinion, increasing funding for Education Finland is a clear development target, compared to the financial support received by international education export companies. The edu-businesses clearly see an ecosystem, where the public and private sector work together, as the way forward. Governmental support is important to the companies when exporting education abroad.

Related to education export, the 3DBear representative reported that Finnish edu-businesses are currently seeking growth abroad since they do not have the opportunity to grow in the domestic market. In his opinion, in order for the Finnish education technology ecosystem to emerge and strengthen, there is an absolute precondition that its players must be able to expand in their home market. The publishing company, Sanoma Pro’s representative, echoed this view in the hope of doing business in the domestic market, and regrets how the elderly care discussion has presented the situation to be “private versus public”. He explained that public money should be used wisely, but at the same time, fierce competition and opportunities to make business are needed. Hence, edu-business actors experience the education markets in Finland as being too regulated and want the public sector to make it easier to compete and do business.

As a way of expanding in the domestic market, the edu-businesses required more public money to be invested in education. Additional funding for municipalities and schools is considered necessary in order for schools to more easily obtain e.g., paid systems and longer-term, more comprehensive training programs. Edita, a publisher that is one of the companies selling these training programs, suggested that ministries

should channel money to schools through grants: “I really hope for a lot more money for education and specifically funding for ministries to channel it through government grants more to education providers so they could better choose what they want training for and they would also then have money to buy it”. Requiring more money for public education institutions to use on edu-businesses’ products and services highlight the desire of the public sector to facilitate the edu-business in Finland.

The interviewed actors largely agreed on the various issues related to doing edu-business in Finland, but the autonomy of teachers was a controversial topic. In addition to hoping for increased funding for a more independent procurement system for schools and their teachers, some interviewees called for closer involvement of teachers in processes such as digitalisation. However, the CEO of Education Alliance Finland called for the time spent by the teacher as well as the payment for the work done by the teacher to be taken into account in co-development, as there is often an incorrect assumption about how much time teachers have for testing and commenting on the companies’ products. Microsoft emphasised that the co-operation between schools and businesses should follow the needs, strategy and vision of municipalities and schools.

Contrary to the desire for teachers to have more power and more involvement, the interviews also highlighted the wish for top-down decisions on the use and procurement of educational technology. A representative of EdTech Finland Ry reported that many would like a “top player”, such as the Finnish National Agency for Education to be able to assign public “rubber stamps” to their products. Eduten’s representative refined this idea by hoping that the Agency would more strongly suggest tools and information about them to schools so that “teachers could genuinely make an informed decision about what they want to adopt and what they don’t”. He continued: “I think it would be really great if we could create guidelines for teachers in Finland, and why not abroad as well, about how and why they would like to have technology in the classroom”. Seppo’s representative, on the other hand, described an ideal model as a “national program, in which someone would pay Finnish education providers to use Finnish products, so we could obtain references from there automatically, which could then be used internationally”.

Giving top-down instructions contradicts the highly valued autonomy of teachers in Finland. Three actors expressed in interviews that the great autonomy of Finnish teachers to choose their own way of working is a good thing and a strength, but it makes the education business difficult, as they have to sell their product to each school and teacher separately. This view, which presents the dilemma between respecting the autonomy of teachers and doing business, was highlighted by EdTech Finland Ry:

In Finland, you cannot pour anything from above—everything has to go from below. And that is the strength of the Finnish education system and it makes it so good, but it is a really big headache for companies. Respecting it while you’re trying to do business.

The actors seemed to have considered the impact of doing business on teachers and their autonomy. Others emphasised the involvement of teachers and the implementation of co-operation on the schools’ terms, which could implicate companies caring

about the position of teachers or knowing that such an approach is more long-term. Some actors, on the other hand, want the governmental actors to have a stronger and broader control over the introduction of edu-business products into schools, which would automatically reduce teacher autonomy. In this way, the governmental actors, such as the Finnish National Agency for Education, could utilise their power by strengthening the position of the edu-business in public schools in accordance with the wishes of the ‘edu-business ecosystem’.

In addition to the issues the interviewees wished to see changed, they also reflected on the public’s attitude towards edu-business. Edu-business actors hoped that the public sector would be “education-friendly”, meaning a positive attitude towards the development of education from the perspective of the education business. Some of the interviewees felt that there is reluctance in Finland towards education business. The creative director of HundrED reported that there has been “unacceptably little interest” in Finland in what is being done in the world and he hoped that global examples would be taken into consideration, for example, in terms of digitalisation and sustainable development. He had also experienced that the interest towards edu-business is much greater in other parts of the world compared to the interest in Finland. This view was echoed by Education Alliance Finland’s CEO, who argued that there is prejudice against businesses in schools. He illustrated that private actors, such as Sanoma and Microsoft, which brand themselves as ‘non-private’ have the best success, which indicates that as those companies have been working with and in schools for a long time, they have been able to integrate themselves in the public system in a way that is not seen as being a separate business. xEdu’s CEO also raised the dominant role the publishing companies has had in the education market, but reported how curriculum reform and digitalisation has opened up new opportunities for new actors. Throughout the interviews, the edu-businesses and their products are presented as something new and innovative, whereas the public schools are sometimes depicted as stagnant.⁴⁷ In this context, Education Alliance Finland’s CEO wished for awareness and dismantling of tradition by the public sector:

... awareness and recognition of tradition, and somehow openness to your alternative ways of operating. And that doesn’t mean, in my opinion, that we have to take any nonsense to schools uncritically, but rather to acknowledge that we do have such a tradition and then, just like on pedagogical grounds, begin to break that tradition and think, what could be some alternative ways to operate.

However, he also felt that the acceptance and openness towards edu-business is increasing, which can be seen in the establishment of Education Finland. He felt it to be ground-breaking that the National Agency for Education as a “traditional public sector actor” has its own unit, which promotes the sales of the products of private companies. In addition, the CEO of Seppo argued that “schools have opened their doors to collaboration”. He described how the previously critical view towards edu-business has changed:

Previously, I remember when I was in school, the attitude towards business collaboration was very critical, and people thought whether it was ethically acceptable. But now it is a totally different situation, and they want the companies to bring new ideas to school.

3DBear's CEO also agreed that "in recent years the public schooling in Finland has begun to open up in a good direction, so that today it is possible to work on for example innovation projects and try out new things". He felt that collaboration with local education departments in different municipalities and their teaching staff is now more open-minded. Similarly, xEdu has experienced their collaboration with public sector as positive, but acknowledged that they have chosen the right partners from the public sector, such as the City of Espoo, to work with. Microsoft's digital learning and strategy director, when asked about possible changes in education or economic policy, turned momentarily to English to say that "*public private partnership*" thinking has increased. This increase in the openness towards edu-business goes hand in hand with the increase and establishment of forms of co-operation between the public and the private sector in Finland.

Conclusion: Will the Public Sector Continue to Strengthen the Role of Edu-business and End up Re-configuring Their Own Role?

The findings of this study show how edu-business and the public sector in Finland are connected via the demand and supply of education products as well as via funding and co-creation projects. Edu-business actors also provide services, such as teacher training and consulting and public school teachers work for the companies in developing, promoting and evaluating their products. Through these concrete forms of co-operation, such as the co-creation projects, companies have direct contact with the public schools and have the opportunity to pass on their own educational and pedagogical values to the schools. As the edu-business actors are increasingly connected to international networks, values from the global education industry are flowing into Finland and its schools. A clear example of this is the teacher training provided by Microsoft and Edita in Finland, which is based on the global NPDL programme. Moreover, the OPPIVA⁴⁸ network which is also based on NPDL, connects over 30 municipalities and their schools to GEI through NPDL. The term 'public private partnership' being used in English in otherwise Finnish interviews and discussions also reflects the global influence, thus adding another layer to the notion of 'PPP as a language game'.⁴⁹

In addition to edu-businesses having direct links to schools and teachers, the actors in this study described the Finnish National Agency for Education as a central channel of interaction between edu-businesses and the public sector. The companies having both formal and informal connections to a significant public sector actor in education strengthens the network of the actors, improving their opportunities to affect education policies and practices.⁵⁰

The increase in co-operation and connections between the public sector and edu-business actors is following the global trajectories of commercialisation in education and reflects the emergence of networks and sectoral boundary breaking co-operation

in the Finnish field of education. The Finnish state acts in these co-operations and networks as a significant facilitator by connecting actors such as schools and businesses and through financing co-creation projects or companies directly. This follows Parreira do Amaral and Thompson's⁵¹ description of the change in the role of the state caused by state's activities in GEL.

As the public sector has such a dominant role in Finnish schools, it is understandable that private actors attach their hopes for the future to changes in the role of the public sector. The interviewed edu-business actors hoped for continuity of publicly coordinated innovation projects, more funding for schools to spend on education products and an increase in co-operation in education (product) export as well as in co-operation in general. The role of the public sector is thus an important factor if the edu-business is going to thrive in Finland. In the light of this study, edu-business actors in Finland do not seek to reduce or eliminate the power of the public sector, but hope for the public role to be reoriented to a more favourable stance that would benefit the edu-business. This is also connected to Cone and Brøgger's⁵² idea of soft privatisation, as the edu-business actors aim to re-configure the public, instead of competing with it. The edu-business actors want the public to be more strongly involved in financing, guiding and promoting of doing business in Finland, so that the actors could have the opportunity to grow and succeed in the domestic market and continue to global markets and succeed there with the support from the Finnish brand and ecosystem. Thus, edu-business actors do not need a confrontation between the private and public sector, but an "ecosystem co-operation" with other actors and the public sector to develop and export the Finnish edu-business.

Is there an issue with edu-business actors' perception of the ideal role of the public sector? The recognised forms of co-operation between the public sector and edu-businesses as well as the aspired direction of the relationship indicate a possible shift in the governance of education from public governance towards network governance. Although co-operation in itself has strengths and for example during the COVID-crisis the platforms of Finnish edu-business actors and large GEI actors played an important part in enabling distance learning,⁵³ network governance as a way of governing public education has its threats. Therefore, PPPs and network governance should not be put in place without critique or thorough consideration.

As argued by Stephen Ball and Carolina Junemann,⁵⁴ as well as Au and Ferrare,⁵⁵ network governance creates ambiguity in decision-making processes as the private actors of the networks are not accountable to democracy and therefore to the general public. With the public sector ultimately responsible for children's right to education, companies don't have to worry about the overall goals of education but can instead focus on their specific goals and thus take greater risks in the pursuit of profit. In addition to such a distinction between the accountability of public and private, network governance often operates in more subtle ways by influencing educational ideologies and decision-making.

Through visible and hidden connections, edu-business actors have the possibility to affect the ideologies behind the Finnish education system. As the interviewees mentioned, the attitude towards edu-business has already changed towards a more positive direction and "PPP thinking" has increased. The dilemma between increasing

and decreasing teacher autonomy in Finland, which was presented by the interviewees, is an example of the emergence of business ideologies in Finnish education. As reflected on by one interviewee, teacher autonomy is a strength in the Finnish school system, but consequently makes business activities more difficult. This embodies how business ideologies have risen to challenge the ideologies of education as a public good, and teaching profession with high autonomy, both of which have guided education in Finland. The interviews showed that the edu-business actors acknowledge and ponder this dilemma and other issues around commercial actors entering the public education space. They nevertheless still aim to find ways to manage to do business in Finland.

At present, when the public sector still has such a central role in Finland as an enabler and a constrainer of commercialisation, the state actors must consider carefully what the purpose of education is and who is responsible for making such a decision and based on what ideologies. It is not a question of whether co-operation and private sector innovation is or is not beneficial, but who has the decision-making power and who is accountable if something goes wrong. At the moment, and increasingly in the future the questions of e.g., data management and ownership, artificial intelligence and inequality will create more challenges to the governance of education. As edu-business actors operate at a rapid pace, creating progressively more connections nationally as well as globally, it is a challenge to stay abreast of the networks being created and their impact. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the commercial actor participation in education even further, as schools worldwide have struggled with creating functional distance learning practices.⁵⁶

Thus far, the state has over time, increased the opportunities for edu-businesses by enabling, promoting and sponsoring edu-business. However, the state still appears to have a strong decision-making power and overall control of the comprehensive education in Finland and especially as regards facilitating commercial business activities. It is difficult to judge where the public sector should draw the line between enabling and constraining edu-business in Finnish schools. One can only hope that the decisions and processes will be made based on information, consideration and transparency.

Notes

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13. Ibid.
14. “In Finland, the national administration of education and training has a two-tier structure. The Ministry of Education and Culture is the highest authority and is responsible for all publicly funded education in Finland. The Ministry is responsible for preparing educational legislation, all necessary decisions and its share of the state budget for the Government. The Finnish National Agency for Education is the national development agency responsible for early childhood education and care, pre-primary, basic, general and vocational upper secondary education as well as for adult education and training. Higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture.” <https://www.oph.fi/en/about-us>. Accessed 17 May 2021.
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37. Ibid.
38. The groups are based on Seppänen et al. 2020, op. cit.
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