



## Principals, Power, and Policy: Enacting “Supplemental Educational Services”

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*Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools that do not make adequate yearly progress must offer afterschool tutoring, entitled “Supplemental Educational Services” (SES). Drawing on 40 months of ethnographic research and utilizing actor–network theory, this article shows principals co-opting the SES provisions to do what they determine is required for their schools, often in defiance of NCLB. It demonstrates how, within an increasingly centralized governance of public schools and heightened private intervention, principals emerge as powerful policy actors. [principal, policy, actor–network theory, NCLB, SES]*

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a federal intervention policy aimed at closing achievement gaps through elevated academic standards and annual assessments, is not a radical shift in educational policy but, rather, a reflection of an increased emphasis on efficiency, accountability, and standardization in American schooling, as well as a tendency toward privatizing public education. Evoking what has become the “common vocabulary of education policy across the US” (Lipman 2000:1), NCLB is built on the premise that schools alone are unable to close the achievement gaps across social class and racial fissures and that they are in need of outside, often businesslike, intervention. By combining an “intrusive federal presence” (Wells 2009:7) with an increased privatization of educational support and services (Burch 2006), NCLB alters the relationships among private business, governmental agencies, and public schools.

In a provision unique to NCLB, Title I schools that do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as set by state educational agencies for three consecutive years must offer additional out-of-school tutoring, entitled “Supplemental Educational Services” (SES), provided by state-approved companies, the majority of which are private. Typically, these companies offer tutoring in mathematics and English during afterschool programs. While out-of-school intervention is not novel, SES, a nearly untested, yet mostly uncontested, component of NCLB, legitimizes the intercession of the private sector into public education (Koyama 2010; Sunderman 2007). By mandating “failing” public schools to contract with educational support companies, NCLB privatizes afterschool programs, “redrawing the public–private divide, reallocating tasks, and rearticulating the relationships between organizations and tasks across this divide” (Jessop 2002:199). These federally mandated public–private hybrids draw attention to spaces outside of government educational institutions and agencies as important sites of policymaking.

Although the participation of educational businesses in educational policy has become commonplace, their activities have largely been understudied. This article considers the roles of a for-profit SES provider and school principals as they implement NCLB-mandated SES programs in schools. Remarkably, within an increasingly centralized governance of public schools and a preponderance of private intervention, the principals emerge as powerful policy actors as they “appropriate” SES in their schools, creatively incorporating elements into their “own schemes of interest, motivation, and action” (Levinson and Sutton 2001:3). This piece reveals the ways in which SES directors and managers aim to influence the local policy choices, only to be outmaneuvered by the actions of DOE officials and school principals. Principals essentially (re)make policy as

they negotiate their contracted relationships with SES providers, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) regulations, and the NCLB mandates.

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in New York City (NYC) from June 2005 to October 2008, I address the question: What do public school principals do, as policy actors, when legislated to contract with, and reallocate some of their federal funds to, outside SES vendors? Providing in-depth views into the previously understudied relationships between public schools and private for-profit educational support companies, this article reveals the ways in which 45 NYC principals select, adopt, and then variably integrate these supplemental resources. It traces the interactions between the principals, government officials, and managers of a for-profit SES provider, referred to by the pseudonym "United Education," to show how the positions of the school principals and their accountability to other policy actors influence their ability and willingness to implement SES.

Utilizing actor–network theory—a perspective that aims to explain how people, their ideas, and the material objects they produce, join together in a dynamic network—this article makes four distinct contributions to the anthropological study of policy. First, it provides a cultural analysis of educational policy by situating NCLB as a series of local sociocultural practices (Sutton and Levinson 2001). Second, it expands the field of study to a broader field of interactions, to a "semiautonomous social field" (Levinson et al. 2009:777) to capture "the sheer complexity of the various meanings and sites of policy . . . [that] cannot be studied by participant observation in one face-to-face locality" (Shore and Wright 1997:14). Third, it follows actor–network theory in treating nonhuman objects, such as test score reports and SES mandates, as actors to reveal how policy processes are mediated by material things. Finally, the article disaggregates "a matrix of competition and overlapping power relations" (Levinson et al. 2009:777) to show the redistribution of policy influence across public–private spheres that have recently emerged as important contexts for the anthropological study of policy.

### **Studying Policy Critically: Theoretical Perspectives and Actor–Network Theory**

Referring to the conflicting definitions of policy, the multiplicities of policy processes, and the wide range of work conducted by policy researchers, Ozga aptly calls the field of educational policy research a "contested terrain" (2000:1). Within this terrain, critical qualitative policy research explores the ways in which three dimensions—people, policy, and places—interact to "shape implementation in particular ways" across diverse contexts replete with political subjectivities and differentials of power (Honig 2006:14). As articulated by the American Anthropological Association's Council on Anthropology of Education, anthropological study of policy can examine and explicate the multidirectional negotiated interactions, iterations, and enactions through which policy is articulated; among multiple aims, it "is committed to the critical study of policy as enabling or disabling the pursuit of social justice in a democratic society" (2007:3). Here, I review several of the perspectives anthropologists use to study policy; identify salient studies within these threads of inquiry; and indicate how my use of actor–network theory is informed by, and then departs from, these models.

In critical approaches, interrogating the power and politics of formal policy has emerged as an important, yet challenging, area of study. To focus on centers of power and authorized decision makers, anthropologists (Shore and Wright 1997; Wedel et al. 2005) have framed policy as a governing text, a normative discourse, and an authoritative declaration of purposeful action. Shore and Wright have most consistently drawn our attention to the norming power of policy. Conceptualizing policy as "language discourse

and power" (1997:18), as a "cultural agent" (1997:24), and "political technology" (1997:29) they unveil policy's neutral veneer to expose official policy as politically manipulated.

In their recent work, Levinson et al. make important distinctions between official, often government-generated, and informal policy by conceiving policy as an ongoing sociocultural "practice of power" (2009:767). Building on their earlier work (Levinson and Sutton 2001), they demonstrate how policy circulates in multiple directions, becoming fragmented and localized into a plethora of activities and practices that construct nonauthorized policy. They show local policy actors "appropriating" policy, selectively adapting and incorporating policy elements and resources. Similarly, the work of Datnow (Datnow et al. 2002; Datnow 2006) demonstrates how actors in the educational system draw on different references, interpretations, and privileges to enact the same (textual) policy and influence reform. The appropriation of educational policy highlights the local actors' interpretations and negotiations in the contexts of their everyday interactions and practices.

Several important cultural analyses, including Street's (2001) examination of Mexican teachers' redemocratizing state policy, Levinson's (2004) study of democratic citizenship education program as part of educational reform, and Stein's (2004) cultural analysis of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provide complex examples of policy appropriation. Stein's study, which most closely resembles mine in topic, informs my study by demonstrating how U.S. federal education policy is "cultured," through day-to-day practices. Particularly in the second half of her book, she examines how ESEA is variably appropriated in schools and argues that localized resistance of the policy mediates authorized policy effects.

In other work, actors who implement or appropriate policy across diverse contexts have been recognized as policymakers (Coburn 2005; Hamann and Lane 2004; Levinson et al. 2009; Lipsky 1980). Levinson et al. (2009) refers to localized policy actors as "non-authorized policymakers"; Lipsky labels them "street-level bureaucrats"—public service workers charged with implementing public policy as part of their day-to-day activities. In his seminal work, Lipsky focuses on individual workers, but argues that in the aggregate, their actions, "the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with the uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out" (1980:xii). Through their interactions with citizens affected by the policy, the street-level bureaucrats are policymakers even as they are constrained by resources and government structure. My study complicates this work by focusing not on the actions of individual local actors making policy but, rather, on how, through their complex relations and interactions, actors create new policy in situated locations.

Specifically in the contexts of schools, scholarship investigating the educational experiences of English learners has provided significant examples of educators as policymakers (Hornberger and Johnson 2007; Menken and García 2010; Ricento and Hornberger 1996). They reveal that "entirely new policies are often created in the process of policy negotiation and enactment in schools" (Menken and García 2010:2), in settings, aptly described by Ricento and Hornberger's multilayered onion metaphor for language planning and policy, as the innermost layers. Their work argues that because national and state language policy in the United States is often contested, it is ultimately educators who serve as the arbiters of language policy implementation, through their daily practices. Similarly, ethnographic studies make obvious the ways in which teachers appropriate the high-stake testing mandates and accountability of NCLB, especially for emergent bilinguals (Menken 2008; Sloan 2007).

Drawing on research in human cognition, Spillane et al. (2006) demonstrate that multiple dimensions of sense making influence policy implementation. They reveal, for instance, how different teachers arrive at variable accounts of policy

implementation based on their prior knowledge and experiences. Levinson et al. (2009) extend the examination of sense making to describe collaborative sense making in policy processes:

Policy-makers negotiate a complex field of meanings and understandings. According to this anthropological perspective, the making of meaning is fundamental to social action, and meaning is therefore always negotiated in social life; values are never fixed but rather are contingent on the mobilization of meaning in specific situations. . . . in other words, the process of normative cultural production requires an active negotiation of meaning. [Levinson et al. 2009:779]

My research situates sense making as a dynamic, reflective, shared, and often contested activity. Policy actors are able to provide accounts of this activity, which then become the measures by which they are evaluated and made sense of by others.

As demonstrated in recent studies (Ball 2010; Hamann and Lane 2004), places and settings beyond schools, such as state and local educational agencies and private urban institutions, are also important policy making contexts, and policy actors often reside outside of schools. Coburn, in her study of “nonsystem” actors’ roles in the educational policy processes, notes that a plethora of actors outside of schools “promote, translate, and even transform policy ideas” (2005:23). Likewise, recent anthropological studies of NCLB and related policies (Bartlett et al. 2002; Koyama 2009, 2010; Salinas and Reidel 2007) have documented the linkages between the accountability in political and business contexts and policies adopted by national, state, and local educational entities. Anthropologists (Shore and Wright 1997; Vavrus and Bartlett 2009) have thus called for methods capable of analyzing connections between contexts and simultaneously attending to multiply situated policy activities. Actor–network theory provides one analytical possibility.

### **Actor–Network Theory**

Actor–network theory (ANT) may, because of its diverse mutations, be most accurately considered as a dynamic “virtual ‘cloud’ ” (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:ix). It extends the field of study to interactions that cross multiple contexts to reveal the complexities and power embedded in policy processes. “ANT treats networks as contested and precarious multiplicities which order practices, bodies, and identities through complex enactments” (Fenwick 2009:119). It provides a “way of intervening in education issues to reframe how we might enact and engage with them” (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:1); ANT “offers a way to understand even apparently established networks as fluid assemblages that are continually built and translated, and provides the tools for thinking differently, and with greater agency, about issues that appear powerful and entrenched” (Gorur n.d.). In what Fenwick aptly characterizes as the “uptakes” of ANT by educational interests and research, ANT ideas have been extended and reconfigured to “trace the mess, disorder, and ambivalences that organize policies and practices such as those compromising education” (2009:118).

The theory, which was initially developed and employed by Latour (1988, 1999, 2005), Callon (1986; Callon and Latour 1981) and Law (1986, 1999) to interrogate the theoretical framework of science studies and technology, situates the social as dynamic networks built and maintained by actors to achieve particular goals. The power of the theory lies in its insistence on following the ongoing processes “made up of uncertain, fragile, controversial, and ever-shifting ties” (Latour 2005:28) rather than attempting to fit the actors and their activities into bounded categories, geographical sites, or groups of analysis. Importantly, the theory collapses long-standing binaries such as human–nonhuman, local–global, and agency–structure by emphasizing the interactions of actors who sustain and transform the networks across time and space.

Applied to policy processes, ANT demonstrates how policy actors make sense of their daily situations and take actions through associations with others. In the larger ethnography from which this article is drawn, the theory is applied to an emerging NCLB-directed network as it develops, holds actors from government, private tutoring businesses, and schools together, and alters its compositions as linkages between these disparate actors are made, remade, and unmade. That study examines how these things form associations that produce effects, including student classification systems, procedures for failing schools, and SES regulations in NYC. It finds that as actors, in schools, in government, and in the for-profit educational support industry, join together to attend to school failure, they accomplish real tasks, institute regular practices, and establish their own authority in an emerging policy network; however, their actions are often discordant and contradictory, leading to a host of unintended consequences.

Here, I focus on principals, an ethnographically understudied subset of policy actors, as they confront the situations created for them by the SES mandates and negotiate their relationships with the SES provider and school district officials. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which principals and SES managers—and all the material objects, such as test score reports and supplementary curricula, they enlist—connect, reconnect, and sometimes disconnect in a policy network. Negotiations between these actors are traced, as they “persuade, coerce, seduce, resist and compromise each other” (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:4), proposing their own theories of action to explain their behaviors and interactions.

In actor–network theory, human actors do not act alone. Objects with subjective investments mediate educational practices and “shape intentions, meanings, relationships, routines” (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:6). For example, SES curricula can align standards and lessons across school and afterschool, organize the use of school space, redistribute resources, and redefine the role of school principals after the class period. ANT shifts attention from what these nonhuman actors are to what they can do.

The SES network develops, expands, and contracts through what Latour calls “translation”—a process in which different actors come together, influence and change one another, and create linkages that eventually form a network of action and material; “when translation has succeeded, the actor–network is mobilized to assume a particular role and perform knowledge in a particular way” (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:10). In this article, I enter the SES network after the primary actor (the federal education department via NCLB) has found relevant actors (SES providers and failing schools) and has delegated representatives from groups of actors (principals, appointed officials, and SES managers) into roles. Principals, SES managers, and district officials get involved in varying degrees of investment, performing their interpretations of their roles. In general, emphasis is placed on how these actors mediate the actions of others; specifically, principals are shown to gain power as local policymakers by persuading SES managers and DOE officials to do what they want.

### **Negotiating Methodology and Introducing Policy Entities**

Methodologically, there are two ANT approaches—to follow actors via interviews and ethnographic research, or to first examine material objects, such as texts, reports, and databases, that serve as intermediaries that pass between actors. In 2005, I began to examine what happens to school failure under NCLB when actors—adults in the public school system, for-profit educational support companies, and authorized policymaking institutions—set about eliminating it in NYC, the country’s largest school district. At that time, I had accepted a training position at an educational support company and had become interested in the ways businesses were increasingly participating in public education. I aimed to diverge from conventional educational ethnographies and policy

analyses by considering the behavior of disparate policy stakeholders as policymakers and expanding the field of study to transactional spaces across multiple contexts in schools, for-profit educational companies, and government agencies. After attending SES provider fairs, events where school administrators gained information about SES directly from the providers, I contacted a handful of principals that I'd met at the fairs.

Several of the principals I initially contacted signed SES contracts with United Education. Ultimately, over the 40 months of the study, my sample size of principals grew to 45, all of whom partnered, at some time during the study, with United to provide SES at their schools. Although the principals led 42 schools (three of the 45 replaced three others initially interviewed) across the five NYC boroughs, they were joined in the emerging network through their linkages to United, the city's DOE office responsible for overseeing SES, and their accountability under NCLB.

Data for the larger study was compiled from many sources. It included interviews with principals, assistant principals, parent coordinators, and other school staff as well as with members of the Department of Education's regional superintendent offices, the Office of School Support Services, the Office of Strategic Partnerships, the Mayor's Office, and a variety of other boards and panels associated with NCLB and local reforms in NYC. In total, I conducted nearly 90 interviews with school administrators—principals, assistant principals, and deans; some administrators, including more than half of the 45 principals, were formally interviewed more than once. Interviews with United Education lawyers, managers, marketers, and teachers, as well as observation and participation in afterschool SES programs, governmental meetings, DOE meetings and seminars, school meetings, teacher-training sessions, community assemblies, policy forums, and United meetings contributed to the data. NCLB regulations, SES materials, school documents, and diverse public media items were also collected. For the larger ethnography, I conducted 87 informal interviews and completed more than 144 formal audiotaped interviews. I collected and reviewed more than 550 SES- and NCLB-related documents and amassed over 250 pages of typed observational notes, which along with the interviews were initially analyzed using NVivo 2.0 (and, later, ver. 8.0).

### **Supplemental Educational Services**

Title I schools that are found to be in need of improvement are legislated to make SES—in the form of individual tutoring or small group instruction in reading and mathematics outside of regular school hours—available to students eligible to receive free lunch (i.e., low income). Nationally, approximately 250,000 or 20 percent of SES-eligible students participated in 2005–06 programs. During the study approximately one-fifth of the NYC schools were in need of improvement (SINI) and one-fifth of the city's student population of 1 million was eligible for supplemental services. Annually, more than 200-thousand children were eligible to receive additional educational support under NCLB in the city, but enrollments peaked at 87,366 in 2004–05 and by the end of the study in 2008 had fallen to 77,408.

As this study began, there were 1,800 SES providers approved to offer SES across the country; at that time, 132 were approved in NYC, although only 87 were active. By the end of the study, 62 providers were active. These providers were quite diverse. In 2004, 69 percent of the providers were private, 25 percent were school districts, two percent represented college or university programs, and four percent had unknown affiliation (Sunderman 2007). Some, like United, represented large test preparation corporations that were recognizable by name and that boasted multiple decades of practice providing academic assistance to students. Others were small local organizations. These companies were poised to earn nearly \$200 million, with large for-profit national companies, such as

The Princeton Review, Kaplan K12 Learning, and Sylvan Learning, securing one-third of the profits in the open SES market—where providers were encouraged by the federal government to strive for market share—to compete for students. The tutoring industry, which has doubled in size since SES was legislated, has a potential to become a \$2 billion a year enterprise (Saulny 2005). In NYC alone, slightly more than \$798 million was paid in the first year of this study to providers who were able to charge a maximum of nearly \$2,000 per child for 100 percent SES attendance.

Paradoxically, SES providers are not held to the same accountability and high standards as schools under NLCB (Koyama 2010). According to the law, the content of practices of SES should align with the states, but there is little state or district oversight of the curriculum, lessons, and assessments used by the SES providers. There exists a similarly alarming absence of program oversight, monitoring, or regulation by the federal, state, or local authorities, leading Sunderman to note that “for providers, the basic requirements are minimal” (2007:4). Providers are to be removed if they fail to increase student achievement for two consecutive years; however, the companies use their own data to determine achievement gains. Recently conducted studies (Heinrich et al. 2009; Muñoz and Ross 2009; Ross et al. 2009) suggest that gains in academic achievement for students attending SES are nonexistent, small, or statistically not significant.

Funding SES has also been questioned. Monies used for SES are reallocated Title I funds—funds that the federal government has allocated to the country’s highest-poverty schools to improve the academic achievement of the lowest-performing students. Under NCLB, Title I funds (which were already granted to districts and schools) were slightly increased but do not represent separate additional funds for school districts or individual schools (Sunderman 2007). School districts must set aside 20 percent of their Title I funds to cover the cost of providing SES and the expense of transferring students out of “failing” schools. Title I funds used to pay for SES are then deducted from individual school Title I allotments. However, administration costs, such as parent outreach, cannot be paid from the Title I set asides, and it is estimated that NCLB costs states nearly ten times as much as they receive from the federal government.

## **United Education**

United Education is a national for-profit, educational support company and provider of SES services. United has hundreds of employees in a number of states across the United States and currently offers a range of educational services for individual students and schools, including curriculum and professional development for teachers and afterschool tutoring and academic instruction. According to members of United’s executive administration, United is an organization that focuses on quality and results; it is a company that has built its reputation on providing high-quality educational services and products. United continues to expand its educational programs, but, according to the company’s president, it remains “true to its original values of being student-focused and results-driven.” United is built on a commitment to excellence of services and products. A company vice president confirms that United is “absolutely committed to our students’ success . . . to ensure that they have every opportunity to learn in a way that suits them” (letter to NYC regional superintendents dated October 4, 2005).

United Education is a composite company created with the aim of protecting the confidentiality of study participants. The actions, practices, and products I attribute to United Education are drawn from five actual companies, and the data I present are drawn from situations and activities I have observed. To the composite, I have not ascribed patterns of activities but have attributed only situations, actions, and circumstances that were well documented, either through observational field notes, written (mostly public)

documents, and interviews. The five companies from which United is drawn are similar in their bureaucratic organization, their SES programs, their missions, and the quantity of school accounts and students enrolled. Four existed as educational support companies prior to NCLB and one was started during 2002. So similar are the actions taken by the five companies in response to NCLB that public records and government reports often aggregate them, along with other providers, under the rubric of “well-known” or “well-established” SES providers. Any numbers and statistics I attribute to United are averaged without distorting the overall services or programs of each component company.

### **Findings: Principals Exert Their Power through Shifting Webs of Relations**

The authority of NCLB’s SES provisions is carried out by many actors, including principals. Yet, with little active federal oversight, many principals negotiate the SES mandates, not by explicitly rejecting their policy roles, but by commandeering the SES provisions. More than half of the 45 principals in the study were able to direct, if not control, the activities of the SES providers in their schools. They persuaded SES providers to meet their demands and convinced the DOE that they, the principals, should have power over their SES partners.

Understandably undaunted by the irregular oversight of SES programs, principals emerged as powerful network actors. Reacting to increased responsibility, explicit accountability for academic progress, and publicized district evaluations—but often in defiance of the NCLB—principals in this study drew on “calculated” facts collected in test score and progress reports to explain and justify their actions to other actors, including district officials and SES managers. Principals became explicit and active policy makers as they interjected themselves into what I have broadly framed below as SES accountability and assessment.

#### *Distributed Accountability*

Although NCLB focuses on accountability, standardization, highly qualified teachers, and scientifically determined curriculum in schools, there is little state or district oversight into the curriculum, lessons, and evaluative measures used by SES providers. There exists a similarly alarming absence of consistent SES program evaluation in NYC. An official with the state’s education department (NYSED) explained the state’s position: “The state doesn’t see its job as one of regulating private industries. We are here to oversee the contracts between our state’s schools and these businesses” (interview, October 19, 2005). A member of the federal Education Department (ED) confirmed that the states, not the federal government, were responsible for working with “industry leaders” to implement SES and he cautioned that too much federal regulation would be vigorously fought by the tutoring and testing industry, which would ultimately “bring SES to its knees” (telephone interview, March 28, 2006). In the words of a Manhattan assistant principal, “They [the SES providers] don’t have to do anything by the book because they don’t have a book!” Indeed, while the procedural requirements, such as submitting attendance and enrolling students, are tightly organized by the DOE, the SES programs are largely unexamined.

Officially, SES providers’ contractual accountability, albeit minimal, is to state and local educational agencies and not to the individual schools or the students and their parents; however, the DOE often deferred to individual principals when differences in expectations arose between providers and schools. Despite the legislated oversight role of the DOE, principals, with their power in their school’s network, were able to directly impact the afterschool onsite SES providers, often persuading them to dramatically modify their

preapproved programs. Some principals, in the examples that follow, minimize SES enrollments and others conversely maximize them by enlisting SES managers and DOE officials to become network allies.

Nearly all of the 85 school administrators—principals, assistant principals, and deans—I interviewed noted disparities in accountability between themselves and the SES providers. Specifically, they pointed out that when schools consistently failed to meet the annual progress goals set by NCLB they could be closed or restructured, potentially leaving principals and many in their staff without jobs; SES providers, on the other hand, who partnered with such schools faced no such consequences. Many principals determined that SES providers, which shared none of the accountability for raising test scores, were literally not worth the cost.

While school districts were legislated to use the Title I funds allocated to schools to cover the costs of implementing SES programs, these funds could not be used for administrative costs associated with SES, such as parent outreach and enrollment processes. Those expenses were to be covered by the school and several principals noted the financial hardship incurred by administering SES. During a meeting of school administrators sponsored by the DOE, one assistant principal exclaimed: "If you're not paying for it, we're not doing it. No flyers. No letters. No special parent meetings. I know what the [NCLB] rules say, but if there's no funding, there'll be no supporting SES from here" (field notes, August 27, 2007). Principals also argued that using the set aside Title I funds for SES was too costly for schools to absorb. Twenty-nine of the 45 principals interviewed stated that shifting Title I funds to SES reduced their ability to provide services during and after the regular school day.

Taking advantage of a loophole in the policy, in which low demand for SES can justify reduced spending on the programs, some principals manipulated the number of eligible children who enrolled so that they could use the SES set asides for other purposes. Four principals who partnered with United explicitly took actions to manufacture low demand for SES. One, the principal of a Bronx middle school, demanded that United offer services only on Saturday despite the company's data showing dramatically lowered participation rates for Saturday SES programs. Thirty-eight students enrolled in United's Saturday SES program and only 54 percent of them attended for the first two months of the program. In contrast, more than 150 students attended the school-sponsored Saturday Academy, which had been developed and supported by the principal, who acknowledged that he intentionally "put SES up in competition against the [well-established] Academy." The other three principals capped SES enrollment between 50 and 70, citing limited available classrooms for afterschool use as the reason, and thus reduced the Title I funds they used for SES. When challenged by a United manager, one of these principals called a DOE official and persuaded him that rooms available for SES were limited, even though nearly 600 students were accommodated during the school year. By creatively managing the uncertainties of the SES mandates to their own advantage and instilling a DOE official as an ally, principals convinced United to comply with their decisions. In doing so, their power in the network was exercised and accumulated through their alignments.

In contrast, 15 principals in the study worked hard to maximize SES enrollments, not necessarily to fulfill their roles in the SES network, but according to one principal, "so we can get all the kids in SES and then teach them what we want." These principals convinced SES providers to "customize" their SES programs to fit within their comprehensive school plans. Essentially, the principals tailored the afterschool programs to resemble the school day in overall structure, curricula, staff, and instruction, often in direct violation of NCLB rules. United came to call SES "eighth [class] period" and several principals referred to it as "extended day."

Aligned with NCLB directives, United's SES curriculum was already reflective of the state's academic standards. Texts used in the SES programs resembled, if not replicated, materials being used during the school day and in summer school. However, the 15 principals who attempted to recruit as many students as possible into SES sought further curriculum accommodations; each directed SES providers to incorporate materials used during the day into the afterschool programs. In most cases, the inclusion of the instructional matter violated the providers' contracts with the DOE, which specified preapproved curricula. Yet, persuaded by the principals, usually with a threat of nonrenewed contracts, the SES providers added the new (unapproved) material without notifying the DOE of the change. Through these "agreements," the principals increased their network power and the SES managers, who did not concede accounts despite the requested curricula changes, helped maintain their companies' market share, and with it, greater connections within the network.

More than half of the principals in the study, including the 15 previously mentioned, argued that SES should only reinforce lessons taught during school hours. One explicitly stated that SES curriculum was an extension of daytime lessons, and, therefore, she wanted as much consistency between the two as possible. She argued that "having SES wouldn't make sense otherwise . . . it is to support, not supplant, our lessons . . . I don't need kids getting too many new ways of doing things . . . I don't need teachers trying to teach differently" (field notes, December 2, 2006). Other principals concurred and SES often replicated daytime instruction. Further, pressure by several network actors—including the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the teachers' union, and principals—resulted in United's SES teaching staff being comprised primarily of DOE teachers. Principals multiplied their connections as they enlisted select teachers to join the SES instructional teams. In this way, the principals used the daytime standards (in curriculum, in staffing) to "achieve orderings of practice at a distance" (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:85) and the specific standards—themselves an effect of complex actions and previous translations—to achieve some sense of durability. And, yet, because the standards were applied to the localized practices in SES, new possibilities of enacting them emerged.

Often with incentive of increased enrollments, some principals went beyond making requests or demands for curricular and instructional changes to convince providers to alter the structure of the SES, and hence the SES network. Some principals, who had community-based organizations (CBO) providing services during and after school required SES providers to accommodate the CBO's schedules. Few CBOs were state approved to provide SES; however, they entered into the SES network through their ongoing work with schools. Most were reluctant participants as the SES program was made to either "push services into" the CBO program or to take students out of the CBO program for an allotted amount of time. The CBOs were already under partial authority of the principal and their offices often located in the school and, thus, had already been enrolled into the school network. In the SES network, they became, however, unpredictable nodes, insisting that their own objectives be met, consistently challenging SES content, and contributing to messy translations that destabilized the network (Koyama 2010).

With the curricula, the teachers, and the program structures set to reflect schooling, principals began targeting particular students for enrollment in SES. Although providers were able to offer services to any grades for which they had been approved, some principals, against the DOE regulations, limited the grades to which SES providers could offer services. A few principals challenged SES mandates further by selecting which students, or subgroups of students, would be offered particular SES programs even though NCLB explicitly stated that all eligible children were to be given access to SES.

A Queens principal chose to target those students who scored in the middle of the DOE's 1–4 test score designation. He had his staff contact parents of SES-eligible students who received scores of 2 and 3 and encourage them to enroll their children in SES. Parents whose children received scores of 1 and 4 were not called individually. Instead, these parents and guardians may have received the school's SES information sheet that had been sent home with all children. Of the 149 students who enrolled in SES, 125 had scored 2 s or 3 s. Only ten students who received the lowest score of 1 enrolled in the program. The students at this school who needed additional academic support—especially those scoring 1 s—were not provided those resources in afterschool programs. They were “left behind” as the principal made sense of his school's situation, garnered the numbers to support his actions, and went about constructing his own theory of action to explain his remaking of policy.

Principals, who “knew best,” relied on the knowledge created in everyday actions in schools to make decisions in SES programs. The principals, who were strong members of both the schools and SES networks mediated the knowledge between the two. However, within the SES network, the knowledge was continually being modified, adapted to the context of for-profit afterschool tutoring. Through sustained ethnographic focus, this dynamic nature of localized federal and state policy was revealed and the complexities of daily sense making as part of distributed accountability made clear.

### *Mutable Assessments*

Evaluation practices—such as the high-stakes testing under NCLB and the less consequential pre and post tests of SES programs—are “organizations of activity that produce space and time by mobilizing and accumulating distant settings [in which such things as academic standards were adopted and test questions devised] into present contexts and accounts” (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:114). They are “cultural devices with various meanings” (Shore and Wright 1997:7). For the principals and SES managers in this study, there are conflicting assessments, based on the academic learning standards, which have become ubiquitous in education. Numbers are gathered, scores are calculated, and the assessments are variably transformed into visible reports, like the progress reports already discussed, which are then circulated as cultural texts. The following examples demonstrate how standard assessments, even in controlled testing environments with well-developed guidelines, are “done” or enacted based on local considerations and principals' preferences.

The principal of a Staten Island elementary school was adamant about gathering data, especially test scores—and told everyone she worked with, including the United Education staff, that she wanted to see increased test scores across all grades. She admitted: “You could say that I'm score obsessed. I want to see progress, not just a point here and there, but real gains [in test scores]. . . . Raising test scores is my mission. Period” (interview, November 28, 2007). The principal explicitly warned United's SES director that she wanted to see score reports often and that if there were not “huge gains” between the beginning and the end of the SES program, she wouldn't be renewing their contract the following year.

In the spring of 2008, fearing that the “high” pretest scores would make it impossible for the program to show improvement, the SES supervisor chose not to report the actual pretest scores of nearly 60 students, who had scored greater than 80 percent but, rather, fabricated scores of less than 50 percent. The scores went unquestioned until the second month of the program when quarterly student progress reports, which included the arbitrarily manufactured scores, were sent home to parents and guardians. After receiving the report, a parent questioned her son's pretest score of 40 percent. Her inquiry was

quickly followed by five others and by the time I learned of what parents were calling “misreported” and “impossible” scores, the United manager had reviewed the answer sheets for all 228 tests taken at the Staten Island school and had found 72 sheets to contain, in his words, an “excessive combination of erasure marks, changed answers, and illegible marks.” My interview with the manager took place the week after his review of the test scores. When I asked about the test scores, the manager admitted that they made no sense; in the suspicious tests, erasure marks could not hide what had initially been correct responses (interview February 29, 2008).

Two weeks later, I learned from an SES instructor that an SES supervisor had confessed to changing the scores and had been terminated by the manager. According to the fired supervisor, he had lowered the scores because he wanted the posttest scores to show a “huge measurable improvement.” He explained his actions:

It's like in order for us, I mean them [United Education] to keep up their accounts, they need to show that we're doing something. You know, like we're making kids learn. . . . The principal kept saying that we had to improve test scores or else we wouldn't be back next year. [interview, April 4, 2008]

The supervisor admitted to feeling “constantly under surveillance” by the principal, who he knew to be singularly focused on improving test scores. Paradoxically, his response, a fabrication of low pretest scores, was an enactment of his accountability to increasing scores and also a resistance to the tenuous calculable arrangement with the principal.

Once discovered, the fabricated failing test scores set into motion a host of activity at United. The SES director interviewed several SES instructors, consulted with several managers and other administrators, and sought advice from the company's lawyers. Office staff reviewed and rereviewed the scorecards. Ultimately, United explained the test discrepancies to the principal as an error in the program's database and then rescheduled makeup exams. For her part, the principal remained somewhat skeptical about United's ability to get reliable scores through retesting but was steadfast in her commitment to increasing test scores. Using the concept of “translation” to consider what happened at the elementary school, it becomes clear that even when numbers, transformed into measures and scores, function as objective and immutable objects and are acted on by humans, they can become messy mediators of future actions.

For United, the SES pre-, mid-, and posttest scores required by the DOE were themselves inconsequential compared to the process of administering and performing the tests. According to United's SES director, the pretests and midterm tests were not diagnostic and their results were not intended to inform instruction. When asked, what then did the tests inform, several United administrators echoed the response of one manager, who stated: “To measure how we're doing. . . . The DOE requires we do quarterly progress reports and parents like when we include test scores. . . . Numbers or scores matter to parents” (field notes, March 3, 2008). The tests, which could have been a curriculum guiding tool for instructors were instead used as props that allowed United to appear as if they were measuring—and by logical extension attending to the students' specific skill weaknesses. They were not. Although United had the data, they did not have the academic expertise or support to use it to differentiate instruction.

In fact, having the testing data created a problem for the company, which had to develop a reason for its collection. The director stated that collecting the data fulfilled the SES provider's contract with the DOE, which stated that progress needed to be tracked and recorded. One United manager told a junior high school principal that the test scores indicated how well United was testing, not how well students were performing. The principal replied that she “would be the one to grade United's performance” and would look closely at “the end-of-the-year [United] progress report,” which included the

pre-, mid-, and posttest scores, along with the average percentile changes in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) by grade level. In an interview, the principal stated that the test scores would determine whether or not she invited United back the next year as her school's SES provider.

In the same interview, however, the principal stated that what really mattered to her was that United was conducting the tests. She explained:

I need the SES providers to do their jobs. If they say they're going to do something, they better damn well do it. Like the pre-, pre-, post-, mid-, whatever tests they say they do. They better just do them. And then they better tell me how it went. If they don't, I just don't return their calls or ask them back. They let me down—and that matters more to me really than the scores. Scores go up and down, always have, always will. I want to see results, but I really want to see effort. [interview, March 15, 2006]

The assistant principal, in a separate interview, confirmed that performing the tests was as important, if not more important, than the actual results. She said:

Well, it's really about doing the tests. We need to do the tests repeatedly, again and again, so that kids and parents see we are serious about this testing stuff. . . . When the providers give tests or practice tests it's like one more time. . . . And the scores, well we need the numbers, God knows, especially this year since we went down last year, but what we really need is the testing. Parents are always asking about testing. They actually want more testing. [interview, May 10, 2006]

Initially, I was skeptical that parents wanted more testing, but this was confirmed by a DOE parent survey (2006). The importance of testing for the school administration seemed to be twofold: They wanted the SES providers, like United, to administer the three tests as promised and then they also wanted parents to know that the school administration was supportive of testing their children throughout the day and also in the afterschool programs.

The 2005–06 and 2006–07 progress reports for the junior high school, parts of which the principal directly downloaded into her own annual reports, showed five to seven percent increases in test scores across all grades in ELA, but varied from five percent increases to 11 percent decreases in mathematics. Such fluctuations were common, but United's SES managers were, according to one manager, instructed by the director to "play up the reports as an invaluable service" even though the reports, along with the three tests given during United's SES program often indicated a reduction in test scores. Internal marketing instructions stated: "Be sure to tell parents that we give three tests, a pretest to see where their child is, a midterm test to prepare their child for the state examinations, and a posttest to measure progress." Thus, the actions of giving the tests and reporting the results were given importance at United over the actual scores. Even though some scores indicated failure and others demonstrated success by NCLB standards, all scores were secondary to the actions—testing and reporting scores. Here, we distinctly see "the ambivalence between calculation and non-calculation" (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:128) as network actors collude across the school and SES to enact testing, affording it a reified durable representation. Through translation, testing—replete with tests, scores, reports, and administrators, the DOE, and the SES provider (to name only some of the actors)—appeared stable at this school. Testing became a policy-backed cultural norm, even though in this example the various manifestations of it are made ethnographically evident. Nonetheless the principal successfully used testing as a way to increase her favor with parents while simultaneously creating greater overlap between the SES and school networks.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Revisiting the Emerging SES Network**

SES mandates created or assembled circumstances in which certain activity was enabled or constrained. SES provisions were translated into specific and seemingly stable, complex

practices. Principals, through their interactions with other policy actors, enacted creative and practical management of problems constituted by the uncertainties of the policy. They established and performed their SES network power, often by drawing on their membership in school and district networks. SES providers negotiated their relationships with principals by making requested changes to their programs in efforts to maintain their market share, or network connections, and make profits. Thus, SES assembled principals, district officials, and private tutoring businesses, fragmenting the authority of each but not eliminating their power to act for their own benefit.

Implications of this study are best articulated by considering the emerging SES network as a chain of translations, most often forged around accountability and assessment, instead of student learning. This article draws attention to the ways in SES legitimizes the privatization of public education, demonstrating how policy actors become complicit in establishing and maintaining a crisis narrative that links failing schools (as measured by standardized assessments) with diminished global economic power—at the expense of a focus on learning.

Market reforms, such as NCLB's SES mandates, rely heavily on the manipulation and presentation of calculations—the measurement, value, and comparison of numbers—and on private instructional intervention. These reforms undermine the work of principals by drawing their attentions away from what students are (and are not) learning toward categorizations and cut scores. Principals' actions in this study were often practical as they became accountable to the calculations but so too were they indicative of current educational policy intended to standardize and assess, rather than to promote capacity for creating engaging and effective learning environments.

Similar to other reforms and recent interventions (e.g., *Race to the Top*), NCLB in general, and SES specifically, was conceived at a distance (measured by a lack of network nodes) from educators responsible for implementing them. In these national policies, the interests of those in schools, including principals, were not considered. Paradoxically, as principals appropriated SES by translating between the school and SES networks, their power was temporarily increased. However, often their actions resulted in “more of the same” for the students, who by most accounts were already being “left behind” during the school day.

Yet this article also makes obvious that principals, no matter how powerful they become as local policymakers, alone, do not reproduce situations in which so many children are found to be failing. Multiple actors—those in educational agencies, private educational support companies, testing businesses, government officials, and even educational researchers through their study focus—participate in the enactment of federal policy. We see through ethnographic examination that actors make sense of and take practical action according to the situations made available by NCLB. In this study, it is clear that the SES mandates, as one component of the federal government's current educational reforms literally “re-form” very little but, instead, reproduce circumstances that assemble and stretch actors' attentions between accountability, regulation, and intervention within a milieu of increasingly privatized educational practices.

To better understand the workings and impact of market-driven reforms and private intervention, anthropological studies of policy will need to extend beyond what I consider the most visible education networks—children, their parents, teachers, administrators, and community members in schools. ANT analysis as a theoretical and methodological framework for examining policy has the power to disaggregate and link policy sites across multiple private and public contexts. I agree with Fenwick and Edwards who recognize that “ANT analysis is especially suited for conceptualizing the spaces of evaluation and accountability that are performed in varied educational environments” (2010:116). By studying policy as a set of dynamic, complex, and often contested relations among

humans, their material objects, and their environments, anthropologists are well positioned to illuminate how current national reforms sacrifice learning to heightened standardization and accountability. Finally, a network analysis of policy that utilizes ethnographic methods can be instrumental in revealing how the privatization of public education makes school failure, and the ensuing need for intervention, highly profitable and problematic—and, thus, in need of continued critical analysis.

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