

ARTICLES

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EDUCATION: CONCEPTUALIZING THE DISTINCTION

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Common wisdom and public discourse seem to suggest that there are two types of schools, private and public. Policy debates, media outlets, and comparisons of outcomes on standardized tests and interscholastic athletic competitions make use of the distinction. This essay argues that while such a distinction can be helpful, it also tends to obscure differences in the social organization of schools. Employing a sociological analysis and providing a historical overview of educational developments, the authors focus on centralization versus decentralization of school controls and discuss the ramifications of a broad versus a narrow market niche for schools.

In this essay, we have two tasks. First, we will conceptualize the widely used distinction between the public and private sectors of national systems of education by searching for prime environmental and social organizational dimensions along which the two kinds of schools may differ. Second, within the terms of this conceptualization, we will evaluate the usefulness of this distinction between school sectors for understanding the degree to which a school produces achievement gains among its students. We will conclude that the same environmental and social organizational dimensions apply to both public and private schools. Consequently, observed differences between them are matters of degree, rather than kind, reflecting tendencies for the two sets of schools to occupy different locations in the property space formed by these dimensions. These trends reflect differences of institutional history. They are analytically important, but significant trends toward the convergence of the two school types also are apparent.

The conceptualization that we present is couched at the organizational level. It specifies mechanisms that should account for observed differences in organizational form, instructional activity, and pedagogical outcomes between public and private schools. We intend this organization-level analysis to complement the individual-level analysis of the effects of public and private schools on students' cognitive achievement, which was the subject of the

research of Coleman and his collaborators and remains the chief topic of subsequent popular and scholarly discussion of the public-private distinction.

The public school-private school distinction has been taken for granted by scholars and laypersons alike for much of the 20th century, receiving sporadic attention from sociologists. In the 1950s, students attending the public and private schools of Bay City, Massachusetts were studied by Alice and Peter Rossi (Rossi, A. S., 1954; Rossi, P. H., 1954). The 1960s saw the publication of *The Education of Catholic Americans* (Greeley & Rossi, 1966). Little of significance followed these studies until the publication of *High School Achievement* (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982) and *Public and Private High Schools* (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Since their appearance, the comparison of American public and private schools has become a perennial topic for public policy discourse and sociological research.

Although the public-private distinction has occupied a privileged place in current policy debates, its pride of place has not been justified on conceptual grounds, which gives our enterprise particular importance. For this reason, we should ask what properties of school and school systems are conceptually important for understanding why they take the organizational forms they do, operate the way they do, and produce what they do. In other words, we should ask whether the distinction has any bearing on schooling (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1980), its nature and quality, on the curriculum, instruction, learning, and the character of schools.

We have no definitive explanation for the popular and scholarly interest in comparing public and private education. Public policy concerns have been sharpened by widespread criticism of the public schools in a period of conservative political ascendancy and by a growing fascination with the uses of social science research to design and assess the impact of policy.

As for the scholars, research in the sociology of education, like the whole sociological enterprise, is acutely responsive to movements in the policy domain. Moreover, the stress in recent studies on community as a key to understanding differences in public and private schools has gained force as it resonates with a broader literature on the social capital represented in community-like networks of face-to-face interaction. These networks are regarded as a key to the adaptiveness and productivity of organizations (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991). No doubt there is further resonance with the communitarian movement in social science (Etzioni, 1996).

For sociologists, the public-private comparison gains added significance from efforts to conceptualize organizational environments and understand how organizational forms and processes interact with the environment (e.g., Baker, 1992, on the political environment in which American Catholic education developed). Among the most productive of these efforts has been the attempt to situate organizations in their institutional environments. This effort

began with the old institutionalism associated with the work of Selznick (1957) and his students (Gusfield, 1955; Perrow, 1961; Stinchcombe, 1965; Zald, 1970). Recently it has given rise to the neoinstitutional literature on organizations, given its impetus by Meyer and Rowan (Meyer, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

INSTITUTIONAL SECTORS AND SUBSECTORS

For most sociologists of education, the term sector has been applied specifically to the distinction between public schools and the varieties of private education. However, for students of organizations, it has a broader denotation that directly addresses relationships between organizations and their institutional environments. We begin our discussion with these relationships.

Consider the differentiation of modern societies into institutional sectors. Scott, Meyer and their colleagues (1994) define institutional sectors as sets of organizations that are devoted to the same array of productive activities, emerging, persisting, and dying in socially ordered environments. Their approach is reminiscent of Parsons (1951) on the differentiation of modern societies into functionally distinct domains of socially organized activity. Each sector has its own institutional history and its own organizational forms. Each also has a distinct environment, with respect to both formal control and regulation and market conditions.

Sectors can be divided into finer and finer subsectors, until one reaches a limit of analytical usefulness. Our concern is with education as an institutional sector of American society, that is, as the set of organizations that either provides educational services or that interacts with these providing organizations, and with two of its principal subsectors, the public and private systems of elementary and secondary education.

We first consider matters of institutional history, with particular attention to the circumstances under which the institutionalized differentiation of the two subsectors developed. Next, we discuss how the institutional environments of these subsectors have affected their organizational forms, with particular stress on the regulatory and market-ordered characteristics of these environments. Subsequently, we turn from the level of subsectors to the local schools that are situated in these environments, the places where the work of teaching is done. We ask how the market locations and organizational forms of these schools affect the capacity of their faculties and administrators for organizational learning and, consequently, affect the degree to which their students are taught effectively. We go on to consider how these relationships may be affected by the selectivity of a school's inputs of students, personnel, and materials and the degree to which a school is chartered, in the sense of having a distinctive mission or of providing a distinctive brand of education.

HISTORY

We begin with colonial New England. In the colonies, educational responsibilities were vested in parents, following English practice (Cremin, 1970). Renaissance traditions identified the household “as the primary agency of human association and education” (Cremin, 1970, p. 124), and teaching, accordingly, made up a portion of women’s child-care responsibilities in the home (Perlmann & Margo, 2001). In 1642, for example, the colonial government passed “a law requiring masters of families to teach their children and apprentices to read” (Morgan, 1944, p. 87) and to oversee how satisfactorily parents carried out their didactic functions “concerning their calling and employment of their children, especially of their ability to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country” (Cremin, 1970, p. 124). And when some towns appointed a woman to be a dame school teacher, a hitherto solely domestic activity took on a public coloration through acts of legislation and their enforcement through an authority located outside the household.

The distinction between the family and government authority had its origin in the provisions of the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers, which regarded the household as the most fundamental educational unit, and the Poor Law of 1601, which recognized the need for agencies outside the household (e.g., workhouses). Kaestle (1973), for example, referred to usages dating from the English Renaissance that distinguished lessons offered in a classroom from individual (tutorial) lessons, and education designed for the “public good” as distinct from personal gain. Using modern language, we would apply “private” to the realm of the family and “public” to the society outside it. But the modern distinction made little sense at that time because all social functions were subsumed under the religious authority of the colony, and the household itself was the site of economic, religious, domestic, recreational, and educational activities that had not (yet) become differentiated into separate spheres.

Schools as entities outside the household had barely emerged. Reading instruction took place in the home with mothers teaching their own children, and in dame schools, neighbors’ children as well. Parents also were enjoined to train their children for a trade; should they fail to do so, the state could order children apprenticed to another family to provide appropriate instruction. Pursuant to church doctrine, the famous Old Deluder Satan Law of 1647 stipulated that when townships increased to a size of 50 households, they “shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read” (Cremin, 1970, p. 181), with sanctions for non-compliance duly noted. The rationale for the Law was straightforward: “It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the scriptures, as in former times keeping them in an unknown tongue” and to cloud the Original “with false glosses of saint-scheming deceivers”

(Fischer, 1989, p. 132), teaching children to read the Bible in English in order to understand and observe the religious principles of the colony was a matter of the highest priority. Note that this law mandated a teacher, not a school. In smaller places, the implication was that education need not transpire inside the venue of a school building. In larger places, with 100 or more households, the law required the establishment of a grammar school for the preparation of ministers; although the historical record shows that very few were built over the next century, and in both smaller and larger places, compliance was poor. Demos (1970), for example, indicated that Plymouth showed little interest in founding or running schools in the first 40 years of the colony's existence. At the same time that teaching and schooling were legally mandated, there were "numerous arrangements whereby ministers, schoolmasters, and school dames set up shop independently, attracted such pupils as they could, and collected tuition from parents" (Cremin, 1970, p. 184).

Cremin (1970) notes that

schooling went on anywhere and everywhere, not only in schoolrooms, but in kitchens, manses, churches, meetinghouses, sheds erected in fields, and shops erected in towns; that pupils were taught by anyone and everyone, not only by schoolmasters, but by parents, tutors, clergymen, lay readers, pre-centors, physicians, lawyers, artisans, and shopkeepers [adding] that education became increasingly a matter of "public concernment" in the colonies. (pp. 192-193)

But education was not to be confused with schooling; education was an indivisible element in a broader process of cultural transmission across generations (Bailyn, 1960) that did not depend simply on schools. A variety of incipient forms of educational arrangements existed at this time that modern (but not contemporaneous) usage would identify as public and private: private in the senses of family based and of entrepreneurial; public in the senses of non-familial and state directed. Because public referred to what was nonfamilial, the public realm contained private entities, such as venture schools, not just governmental ones (the latter consistent with 20th century usage). By the mid-18th century, reading instruction offered by women in town-supported schools increased in prevalence; and this development was accompanied by the formation of higher level schools in which writing and other useful subjects, like ciphering and bookkeeping, were taught (Perlmann & Margo, 2001). But lest we confuse modern and colonial usages of public and private (Bailyn, 1960), we should emphasize how the distinction had little meaning several centuries ago because the two were so intermingled. While we can readily identify household responsibility for educating children, both for their salvation and for preparing them to find a vocation and earn a living, the latter representing a moral as well as a practical responsibility, we must also rec-

ognize the explicit influence of Bible, church, and state on the conduct of parents (Morgan, 1944). In warning against presentist interpretations of the past, particularly rampant in Progressive accounts of American educational history, Bailyn (1960) indicated that the boundary between the family and its surrounding community was hazy at best, blurring the distinction between public and private.

The second half of the 17th century witnessed the youth of the period dealing with the hardships of colonial life differently from their parents by showing greater independence (Bailyn, 1960). Concern developed about the decline in community control and in the ability of parents to restrain their children within the bounds of traditional family life. Starting with the 1647 legislation, reliance on schools increased gradually, transferring “the maimed functions of the family to formal instructional institutions” (Bailyn, 1960, p. 27). In effect, the colonists relied on legislative action to cope with what were considered to be failures by families to raise their children in conformity to religious and social standards. During the same period, the decline of indentured service for employing labor meant that masters became more reliant on young apprentices to get out the production and accordingly spend less time on moral instruction and more on the practical. As the familistic quality of traditional apprenticeship declined, its more utilitarian aspects came to the fore.

In all, there took place a reduction in the personal, non-vocational obligations that bound master and servant and a transfer of general educational functions to external agencies. With increasing frequency masters assigned their apprentices to teachers for instruction in rudimentary literacy and in whatever non-vocational matters they had contracted to teach. (Bailyn, 1960, p. 32)

The advent of evening schools for apprentices in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was a response to the decline in practical and especially moral instruction taking place in familial settings: homes and tradesmen’s shops. One effect of this development was efforts by sectarian groups to further their religious interests by establishing schools, the financing of which became an issue of high priority. The efforts at finance were numerous: benefactions, rents, land sales, payments in kind, gifts of community property, and so forth—all tending to be insufficient. These efforts were public in a modern sense in that funds were raised through market transactions (like sales and rents); they were also private in another modern sense: they entailed individually owned property. The instability of funding stimulated the gradual introduction of local community taxation in some places, to supplement but not replace the various forms of unstable financing already in existence. While taxation did not guarantee adequate support, it nevertheless added another element of publicness (as well as of stability) into the financing of education in a

sense consistent with our modern understanding of governmental support being public. And in due course, schooling supported by taxes would become the key criterion for judging whether schooling was public.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, different kinds of schools began to populate the landscape. Tolley (2001) indicated that they gained financial support in several ways: by tuition payments, by funds raised by sponsoring groups, and by towns. Among these were the academies (also called seminaries), “incorporated to ensure financial support beyond that available through tuition alone” (Tolley, 2001, p. 227). Support through tuition alone was the hallmark of venture (entrepreneurial) schools (Seybolt, 1935). Academies, as well as dame schools for young children and specialized schools serving older populations that provided training in practical and commercial subjects, operated in a market. They advertised in newspapers and differed from the more familistic forms of education available in the colonial period. Although disputes among scholars have simmered over the similarities and differences among venture schools, Latin schools, and academies, the fact remains that they differed within and among themselves in curriculum, financing, and denominational affiliation. They were alike in that they responded to consumer demand and were part of a public economic domain not controlled by the state (though there were examples of academies established by state legislation (Tolley, 2001). Kaestle (1973) described a similar phenomenon in late 18th century New York City: tuition-based pay schools, available to the poor as well as to the more well-to-do (even though the latter often availed themselves of private (tutored) instruction at home. In the usage of the time, these schools were considered public because instruction was classroom based, not private because they were tuition based. Tuition-supported financing, of course, is now regarded as a defining property of private schooling.

According to Reese (1995, p. 7), Samuel Adams in 1789 promoted a “System of Public Education” in Boston. A committee of “distinguished citizens” supported a law for the election of what would become “the first formal school board in an American city” that “would administer and supervise public education, inspect the schools, hire teachers, and set the school curriculum and schedule” (p. 7). The committee comprised members of the commercial elite who designed schools that served their interests (e.g., by stressing English and practical and commercial subjects over the classics) and restricted entry to children who already had been tutored, attended dame schools, and could read and write. Despite the selectivity of these schools, the education of the poor also grew in salience: poverty, pauperism, and vagrancy frightened the merchant elite of Boston. Similar apprehensions were experienced in New York City, as well as in other cities. Kaestle (1973) reported that well-to-do New Yorkers believed that “public education meant an experience that would impress on young men their public responsibilities and give them the abilities to act as public figures” (p. 18); that is, according to the collective good rather

than to personal gain. Remedies for the problems of the poor were also sought in philanthropically supported charity (or free) schools and in Sunday schools founded by evangelical churches.

After the War of 1812...the elites who made up the School Committee, like town notables across the eastern seaboard, debated whether taxpayers should educate the poor by creating primary schools. Should the children of all social classes attend Boston's system of schools? (Reese, 1995, p. 10)

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the idea of schools controlled by secular political authority began to take root in debates over who should be educated with taxpayers' money, what kinds of schools (e.g., free, charity, common, pay) should benefit from government support, and what kinds of expenses (e.g., salaries, buildings) should be the government's responsibility (Kaestle, 1973). This notion of public has a meaning we clearly understand today. And to the extent that issues of equality began to infuse the discussion, there is still another meaning of public that pertains to the idea of citizenship and rights to social, political, and economic participation.

With so many ways to define public and private in the 18th and 19th centuries, distinguishing sharply between public and private schools at that time appears less than useful. In New York, for example, both the state and the city supported denominational schools, and in the bitter controversies between Bishop Hughes and both the Free and Public School Societies (both Protestant groups), Hughes fought hard for financial support from the government (Kaestle, 1973; Ravitch, 1974). While in the vocabulary of the 1840s, public and Catholic schools were clearly contrasted (Kaestle, 1973), it was not clear whether Catholic was equated with private. But in light of the religious and ethnic conflicts at the time, for Bishop Hughes and his supporters, given their hostility to the nascent system of common schooling, public meant Protestant (Ravitch, 1974). In the United States, we now think of Protestant as well as Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic schools as private; though in the Netherlands, for example, where the national government supports religious schools of all confessions as well as secular schools, they can all be considered public.

Characteristic of this age is the multiplicity of meanings residing in the idea of public. The emerging tax-supported schools clearly fit our modern definition. But schools supported by tuition payments, philanthropic contributions, subscriptions, and religious sponsorship also met criteria of what public encompasses: for example, exercising choices in a market of competing providers of schooling, or nation-building by maintaining and expanding citizenship. In the 19th century, the idea of publicness came to signify a movement of schools into the domain of the state, into that of the market, and into the civil society. It was marked by a concern with public welfare in the sense of the whole, but also with the welfare of more parochial groups, such as schools devoted to the interests of religious denominations transcending the household.

The mid-19th century witnessed the establishment of a variety of schools with mixed public and private characteristics (in the 20th century sense), the academies of the period being cases in point. These were incorporated schools (Tolley, 2001) to which tuition was also paid. Most were under religious auspices, both Catholic and Protestant, but also offered secular curricula. Their student bodies were diverse, both in socioeconomic terms and in drawing students from multiple locales, and in that sense cosmopolitan (Beadie, 2001). As to funding, Leslie (2001) commented that “in some cities Catholic challenges for public funds prompted clearer private/public distinctions, outside cities mingling private and public funds remained second nature” (p. 265). The impetus for tax-supported secondary schools, however, developed in the latter part of the 19th century from urban origins, not as an outgrowth of the rural and small-town academy movement, even though the academies sought funding from the state. Macro-economic forces that spurred the growth of an urban, white-collar middle class were probably the main reason for the expansion of urban high schools at this period and later their spread to the countryside. Leslie (2001) observed that

The public/private and religious/secular distinctions solidified after the Civil War. The Fourteenth Amendment provided a constitutional tool to separate church and the states (no longer only church and “the state”) while growing Catholic power fueled the issue emotionally and politically. Labeling high schools “public” and academies “private” began to have meaning. (p. 267)

And with the later decline of academies, the distinction extended to the differences between other kinds of schools that we now familiarly and without confusion label as private (both religious and secular) and public.

In sum, the term private is less than helpful in tracking historically the 20th century distinction between public and private. In the American colonial context, the description of education as a household (both parental and apprenticeship) function captures the phenomenon. A break from the household provision of education came with the development of tuition-based venture schools, existing in a market and dependent on consumer demand. This invention created a social reality to which the terms public and private gained relevance. The meaning of these terms expanded as new contingencies arose in the realm of education; among them the multiplicity of types of school sponsorship and the search for devices to create financial stability (Tolley, 2002). Apposite examples were the decision by some schools to solicit state, community, and philanthropic support and by states to undertake the provision of education.

As the public-private distinction became sharper and more widely acknowledged, its bases narrowed because the social realities that had given rise to the varied criteria of the public and private in education disappeared.

Education left the household. Most of the small entrepreneurial schools vanished. The academies and seminaries, with their multiple modes of financing, gave way as the high school came onto the scene. Schools as collections of classrooms became the dominant organizational form, regardless of how they were owned or financed. By the beginning of the 20th century, the public-private distinction was firmly institutionalized, with a meaning that now was taken for granted. In essence, the distinction denoted, and continues to denote, a difference of formal control and regulation; namely, ownership by governmental or non-governmental entities.

Acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the public-private distinction, so understood, has been accompanied by the belief that the public schools provide schooling that is at once an entitlement and a duty of citizenship and, for both reasons, must be universally accessible. Within the broader frame of state oversight, in the private subsector the citizenship duty can be fulfilled in schools devoted to the particular interests of persons, families, and groups. Consequently, the public and private subsectors differ in the scope of governmental control and regulation to which they are subordinate and in the degree to which their missions, curricula, and instruction are responsive to many or few particular interests. In the public subsector, governmental control is more pervasive and the particular interests often more numerous, but often also individually less binding.

An important organizational element in the scope of governmental control and regulation, particularly in light of the idea of the citizenship entitlement to schooling, centers on the ability of schools to select their student populations. In the 20th century, it has come to be generally the case that schools in the private sector are free to select who attends them; in the public sector, tax-supported and government-controlled schools are customarily not free to select. There are, however, notable exceptions to this generalization, with the New York City public schools providing numerous cases. Here we find places like the Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant, and earlier Townsend Harris; Music and Art, Needle Trades, and Culinary Arts High Schools. These examples represent schools that vary according to student interest, artistic talent, and academic ability, some of them requiring competitive examination for entrance.

Aside from these exceptions, which exist in other locations as well, the principle of admission to schools in the public sector is residence in a specified catchment area. The fact that schools can select their student populations means they are in a position to adapt their curricular and instructional programs to the characteristics of the student body; that they can reduce potential disjunctures between school program student interests. These advantages accrue because wherever schools can choose students, students can choose the school. Public schools, by contrast, and with the exceptions noted, must take all comers. The selection process then gets shifted to diverse local real estate markets and away from the school.

ENVIRONMENTS OF CONTROL

Having completed our historical overview, we turn to the consequences of these differences for the external environments of control in which American elementary and secondary schools are found. The control of an organization's activities may be exerted through formal internal regulation, through market discipline, and through external laws and administrative regulation—all important components of both public and private schools. We propose that the environments of control in which public and private schools exist create greater pressures for the standardization of organizational forms and procedures in the public than in the private subsector. These pressures have three sources: bureaucratic formalization and consequent standardization of procedures; the organization of markets for personnel, students, and textbooks; and exposure to mandated innovation. Our analysis centers on individual schools. As we have noted, certain private schools, as well as public ones, are parts of larger systems, as is true of diocesan Catholic schools, or under some sort of supervision by an external body, as is true of many Lutheran schools. Because of our central interest in how control affects the workings of classrooms, we will treat these larger systems as part of the environment of the schools that they contain and their structures of control as part of the external control of these schools.

As our historical review shows, by the middle of the 19th century, diverse arrangements for schooling had converged on a state-run system, marked by what Meyer (1983) called "fragmented centralization." With time, the centralizing tendencies extended into the private subsector, though less pervasively and with less force. Although the effective formal control and funding of the state-run schools, like that of the private schools, was in local hands, by the early years of the 20th century the entire educational sector displayed what Rowan (2002b) termed an "industry standard" (p. 5). That is, appearing throughout both public and private elementary and secondary education were English language instruction in the same secular subjects, conducted in graded classrooms of similar layout.

Similar teaching and other specialties also emerged, along with conventional understandings about training and entry, forming a common occupational structure for K-12 education. This structure provided the basis for a common set of practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff. Organizational and substantive diversity in the supply of education now was concentrated in the small private subsector, which, however, remained substantially constrained by the industry standard.

In the past two decades, the public subsector's control environment has become less fragmented and more centralized. Control over funding has moved away from local bodies toward state and federal agencies. More important, public schools and systems are exposed to increasing pressures to

account for student learning. These pressures have resulted, in statewide testing programs that carry performance sanctions of some force, state administered incentives for improved instructional performance as measured by achievement test scores, and an increasingly central role in evaluating schools' performance for the testing programs of private agencies like the Educational Testing Service and ACT.

Consequently, public schools and school districts have become more bureaucratic and hence more standardized, in at least three senses. First, they have experienced increasing formalization that extends into the technical core of the school to affect, for example, staff recruitment and evaluation, curricula, and student management. Second, the formal rules of procedure in these areas are universalistic, so that exceptions and deviations, whether or not they are adaptive, are hard to make. Third, this formalization and universalism now extend into the evaluation of instructional performance. This trend makes the key performance indicators, many of them linked to external incentives and sanctions, such as achievement test scores, and rates of college attendance, visible and significant in the eyes of school and system administrators and relevant public actors. These changes have converged to place substantial limits on the autonomy and discretion of both administrators and teachers. With respect to the public subsector, it is no longer possible to characterize the schools as engaged in a world of institutionalized myth (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Meyer and Rowan (1977) meant this characterization to apply only to the American case, and Rowan (2002a) at least has recanted with respect to American public schools as well. The development of a formalized occupational training and recruitment structure on which public school systems are particularly dependent exerts further constraints toward standardization.

Recently, the universalistic character of public schools has become associated with the bureaucratic elements of school organization, while the particularistic character of private education has become associated with the familistic attributes of community. There is a good measure of truth in the proposition, however, that most schools (save the small, independent ones) possess significant bureaucratic elements. That is, as education has become a citizenship entitlement and obligation, the work of schools has become subject to formal, universalistic regulation by state agencies as well as by nonstate (private) bureaucracies—like dioceses and such commercial ventures as the Edison Project. This development precisely follows Max Weber's (1978) argument.

Nevertheless, the trends toward bureaucratic standardization are less consistently and pervasively apparent in the private subsector, where specific market niches and a local control that is based on nongovernmental ownership combine to buffer the schools from bureaucratic pressures. Among these schools, hiring and firing of staff can be somewhat more particularistic, curricula may be less extensively specified, and the discipline of achievement testing (though for perhaps the greater number of these schools, not the discipline of accountability for

rates of college going) is slack. Each of these aspects of school operation can be focused on the particular interests of a relatively homogeneous clientele. The degree of exposure to diverse interests is itself an important dimension of sub-sector variation. We will consider it when we turn to questions of organizational form and control.

SCHOOLS AND MARKETS

Both public and private schools exist in environments that are organized in significant ways as markets. Perhaps the most powerful force that moves public, more than private, schools toward standardization is the organization of the markets in which they find personnel, students, and textbooks. Their narrow market niches and lesser exposure to governmental control and regulation allow them substantial selectivity in recruiting and retaining staff and students, so that both the staff and student membership of these schools can align well with the particular interests of their clienteles and of their governing bodies.

Textbooks constitute a high proportion of the content that is taught in elementary and secondary classrooms, and they are supplied in a concentrated market. Because the textbook market is dominated by a handful of publishers, the industry is marked by a slow rate of product innovation and supplies texts that are sufficiently general and superficial in content so that they can be used in a diversity of school settings. Consequently, textbooks constitute a powerful barrier to local instructional innovation, thereby creating strong pressures for curricular and instructional standardization.

Schools in the private subsector should be buffered to a significant degree from the constraints of this market. The narrow market niches that private schools occupy, combined with a less formalized technical core of instruction, should make it possible for private school teachers, more often than their public school counterparts, to use teaching materials they have prepared themselves. They also should more frequently look outside the textbook market for the books they have their students read, more often draw selectively and with supplementation on commercially published textbooks, and use materials sold in commercial markets that cater to religious and other narrow niche schools (e.g., creationist science textbooks).

Finally, the narrow market niches that private schools occupy buffer them from mandated innovation. It has become a truism that American public education has become a field littered with the remains of instructional innovations that have failed of implementation (Cuban, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In contrast to the textbook market, the market in which instructional training, information, and program development are supplied to schools is extremely heterogeneous, including numerous independent private organizations and government agencies. In this market, products and suppliers emerge at a rapid rate and disappear no less quickly. Consequently, the school or district that enters the instructional

innovation and development market finds an abundance of short-lived possibilities—the curricular and instructional fads that seem to dominate instructional reform in the US. Schools that serve a specific, delimited clientele, that is, private more often than public schools, are in a position to be highly selective in entering this market or may not enter it at all. A diverse clientele restricts such choices, as do popular and governmental pressures for accountability to enter the innovation market unselectively and often.

DIFFERENCE AND CONVERGENCE

We must not push the matter of difference too far. The development of the public and private sub-sectors displays a trend toward similarity as well as difference of environmental and organizational attributes. With education defined as an entitlement and obligation of every citizen, private schools have become public in significant ways. Even though private schools do not get their funds from the government, they nonetheless get them by participating in financial markets of one kind or another: through bank loans, bond issues, philanthropies, or endowments invested in the stock market. They increasingly hire teachers and administrators from secular labor markets and, in the case of Catholic and other religious schools, less and less from the pool of vowed religious whose work is based more on faith than market position.

For all schools, public and private, the academic curriculum has become standardized around state mandates, following worldwide patterns of convergence for teaching basic elementary school skills and high school graduation requirements: English (or mother tongue), science, mathematics, social studies, foreign language (Meyer, Kamens, & Benavot, 1992). To the same end, the constraints of college requirements are felt equally keenly by both public and private high schools that offer college preparation. And while some private schools are free-standing (like elite college preparatory schools, secular as well as religious), others are parts of overarching administrative structures—Roman Catholic diocesan schools being the prime example.

Some current reform movements in public education constitute a new pressure toward the convergence of the public and private in education. They can be seen as attempts to infuse the public schools with communal patterns of organization and conduct, while maintaining universalistic regulation through such devices as grading, yearly promotion, standard academic curriculum, and rules of decorum. It remains to be seen whether this movement will successfully push the organizational form of at least some public schools in a communal direction. It also remains to be seen whether schools in the private sector, subject to continuing pressure toward equality in educational life chances, will become increasingly subject to formal, universalistic regulation.

MARKET NICHEs, ORGANIZATIONAL FORM, AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Now we turn to the local school. We consider how its capacity to instruct effectively may be affected by its organizational form and location in the educational services market. Given the uncodified nature of instructional practice (Dreeben, 1996; Herbst, 1989), in most schools this capacity must be a matter of local knowledge about how to deal with the kinds of students a school enrolls, within limits set by the available material resources for teaching. For this reason, capacity for instructional effectiveness is substantially dependent on opportunities for organizational learning about instruction by a school's faculty and administrators. These opportunities, in turn, are effects of market location and organizational form. Capacity for organizational learning is a prime condition, but not a sufficient one, for viable local pedagogical knowledge, a caveat that must be kept in mind throughout the following discussion.

Organizational learning denotes the processes through which the members of an organization diagnose and solve problems of work and gain compliance with these solutions, thereby adapting to changing circumstances that affect the work they do. The sensed problems and problem solutions have to do with the rules that govern the conduct of work. Behavior in social settings is governed, with greater or lesser effect, by rules; that is, by regulations, routines, norms, and expectations (March, Schulz, & Zhou, 2000). Rules can be either active or passive; that is, a rule can mandate a particular act or line of action, or they may limit action by preventing certain acts from taking place without specifying what acts must occur. Organizational learning denotes the informal processes through which a group within an organization alters or invents rules and gains compliance with the newly formulated rules. It includes the processes through which the need for rule change is sensed, multiple interests in the ways the work is done aggregated or, if in conflict, negotiated, new understandings about the work framed and disseminated, and new rules and action tightly coupled. Thus, organizational learning involves a group's learning from experience and means of social control.

In schools, the rules that bear most directly on instruction include those that govern (1) the content and organization of the curriculum, (2) the distribution of instructional and related resources among classrooms, teachers, and students, (3) standards of instructional or academic performance, (4) the conduct of instruction (including efficiency—rates of gain adjusted for pertinent traits of a student body), and (5) the school schedule and thereby the definition of time allotments to different subjects and activities, and the assignment (and hence matching) of teachers with students in classrooms. Organizational learning in the instructional workplace centers primarily on conventions, norms, and expectations concerning how instruction is conducted and what constitutes satisfactory and unsatisfactory results.

Studies of organizations in several institutional sectors, including commerce, manufacturing, and research and development, suggest that the effectiveness of these problem-diagnosing, problem-solving, and compliance-gaining processes is a function of their location in lateral, collegial networks and of their density and centrality (affecting the ease and accuracy of communication), their capacity for informal social control, and the degree to which they act autonomously (i.e., the degree to which the network is buffered from intrusion) (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Recent work on high school faculties (Bidwell & Yasumoto, 1999; Siskin, 1994; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994) suggests that such collegial networks have significant effects on faculties' collective capacities for making and implementing adaptive changes in local rules of instruction. There is some evidence that the effects of these capacities extend to rates of gain in students' cognitive achievement (Yasumoto, Uekawa, & Bidwell, 2001).

Because the members of such networks tend to develop common understandings about the nature of their work and how to go about it, we can think of them as small adaptive communities. The research on the formation of these communities, limited as it is to high school faculties, shows that such communities are more likely to form within teaching fields, constrained by the division of instructional labor, than they are to embrace entire faculties, let alone faculties and administrators. These findings leave open the question of conditions that might favor the emergence of schoolwide adaptive communities, including the conditions under which they incorporate local school administrators. Intuitively, it seems reasonable to think of school size and of the intensity of faculty specialization as probable fostering or inhibiting conditions.

Niches and hierarchies. We consider the autonomy of faculties and faculty groups and of local school administrators (either separately or in conjunction with teachers) to be a function of the diversity of interests in the external environment and of the degree to which they are buffered from intrusion by the interested actors. Note that we consider the interests of the central administrators of a school system to be a part of the external environment of the schools in the system.

When the staff of a school are exposed to diverse interests, their situation permits negotiation over both the ends and means of the instruction they provide, a political process that potentially provides them with leeway to frame their own local pedagogical rules. When they are exposed to a homogeneous interest environment, they lose autonomy with respect to the ends of the schooling they offer. In effect, they are in a condition of substantive domination by the external actor, while autonomy with respect to means or procedural rules, is a question of the degree to which the dominant external actor trusts the technical competence of the staff. We will propose that this trust is, in turn, a function of the chartering and selectivity of the school.

A useful way to analyze the bearing of external actors and their interests on the autonomy of teachers and local administrators is to consider the degree to which their market niches and organizational form buffer them from the interests of these actors. The width of market niches determines the diversity of interests to which schools are exposed, while organizational form affects the degree to which faculty members and administrators individually or collectively become active agents in the determination of instructional rules and in securing the implementation of these rules. The weaker such buffering, the greater a school's vulnerability to the interests of the persons and groups that are active in its environment, including the persons and groups in the administrative echelons of school systems. Therefore, the more vulnerable it should be to bureaucratic standardization and mandated innovation, affecting the location of rule setting, changing, and suspending.

By definition, the breadth of the niche that a school occupies in the market for schooling determines the diversity of external interests to which it is potentially exposed. The narrower the niche, the more homogeneous the interests of the actors in the external environment. Buffering as a consequence of organizational form requires a more extended discussion. We propose that this buffering is a function of formal hierarchies of authority. The more centralized such a hierarchy, the stronger the buffering effect.

Internally, organizations, including schools, gain autonomy to set, change, or suspend rules as power becomes dispersed among numerous actors. They also gain autonomy over rules as interest diversity increases, allowing room for maneuver as one interest is played off against another, that is, as a consequence of negotiation between actors in the environment and in the organization. In either of these situations, rule setting, changing, and suspending become functions of internal hierarchy, negotiation among interested actors within the school, or experiential learning by the school's administrators or teachers. An organization like a school loses this autonomy as the number of actors decreases either because of coalition forming negotiation among external actors in a market ordered environment or because of centralization in a hierarchically ordered environment.

Our reasoning points to a tradeoff of control between the faculty workplace as hierarchically subordinate or as vulnerable to the play of diverse interests. While a hierarchy, whether internal or external to a school, buffers from diverse external interests by aggregating and expressing them, it also places the school in a structure of formal domination. The more decentralized the hierarchy the less effective the buffering, so that the force of external control then depends on the diversity and number of actors and interests. This is the situation of many public schools in the United States, where school boards and district administrators comprise only a part of the array of interested actors who potentially can influence their regulations and routines.

External hierarchies. With respect to external authority, in a formal sense a school that is operated by the state is buffered because the state in principle acts to represent the full range of interests of the citizens for whom education is an entitlement. The resolution of any difference of interests takes place before policies are made and resources are allocated. Similarly, in a formal sense Roman Catholic diocesan schools should be more effectively buffered from particular interests than parochial ones, with diocesan authorities performing the same functions of interest aggregation and expression that are performed by governmental authorities in the public sphere.

Despite the centralizing trends that we have noted in the United States, effective authority over public schools remains primarily local, so that the state hierarchy is substantially decentralized. As we have suggested, most of these schools are located in broad market niches. Therefore, most of these schools are vulnerable to direct interventions by locally interested actors, such as aggrieved or ambitious parents, interest groups, employers and business organizations. An extreme example is provided by the current wave of charter school establishment in Arizona. There, state law allows virtually any plausible group to begin a charter school, with minimal governmental supervision. As a result, the numerous charter schools being founded are highly responsive to the particular interests of the founding groups, on which they are entirely dependent for resources and students.

In fact, despite the centralizing effects of the accountability movement, public schools may be more effectively buffered from the state agencies to which they are formally responsible than from the local actors that stand outside the formal structure of control. This difference in the effectiveness of buffering can be attributed to the concentration at the local level of actors who supply two major resources to schools—funds and political support. It brings us to the second type of buffering, which is resource dependence between external actors and organizations. As classic resource dependence theory suggests, the greater the dependence of an organization on any single actor, individual or collective, or coalition of actors in its environment, the greater the control of that actor over the organization's effective goals, modes of operation, and output. At the same time, the more these actors or coalitions value an organization's output of goods or services, the greater its autonomy in relation to them and the greater its potential control of their activities.

As external hierarchies become steeper, so that the centralization of authority increases, a school becomes dependent on the central authority and is in a situation similar analytically to the resource-dependent school in a narrow niche. In addition, public schools in communities where active stakeholders are few are likely to be in this situation either because district administrators can dominate the school's environment or because they can easily form coalitions or be co-opted into coalitions with the community actors. Schools that serve sectarian communities in which family, community, and school

boundaries are blurred and overlapping, and those that serve elite clientele are similarly situated, whether this clientele is private, as in the case of elite secular private schools, or public, as in the case of schools in affluent communities.

Internal hierarchies. Internal hierarchy is of particular importance when external interests are diverse because it affects the distribution of power to affect instructional rules. To the extent that authority becomes concentrated in the hands of the principal, the school's faculty should become effectively buffered from local external interests. However, in most public school systems, principals are notably weak actors in the chain of command, lacking the power resources required to make their formal authority effective (Bidwell, 2001). Here private schools are likely to have the advantage, perhaps apart from those in diocesan systems large and complex enough to approximate public school districts. This advantage should derive from their substantial autonomy in their external environments, providing space, other things being equal, for the emergence of strong leadership by the principal.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENTS' LEARNING

When a school is heteronomously controlled, that is, when it is subject to strong external domination, a prime condition is present for both inhibited experiential learning and for tight coupling of rules and action. Its curriculum and modes of instruction should be highly stable, uniformly realized, and unresponsive to pedagogical movements and changing local circumstance. These effects of heteronomy should be stronger the greater the legitimacy of the external control and the sparser the opportunities available to the staff for employment elsewhere. Authoritative control should produce a strong tendency toward habitual compliance, weakening individual teachers' and administrators' sensitivity to either pedagogical innovation or local change, while centralization generally implies centralization of means of enforcement as well as means of decision making. This tendency should be stronger the smaller the school and the less specialized the faculty, since as the number of teachers and the number of specialties increases, so should the number of points in the hierarchy for breaks in communication from the center and the number of opportunities for faculty contact with colleagues and professional groups outside the school.

When a school is autonomous, without effective external control, the incidence of experiential learning among its administrators and faculty and the coupling of rules and action is a function in part of the centralization of its internal administrative hierarchy, working similarly to the centralization of external control. However, as central internal authority weakens, control should disperse within a faculty, the more so the larger its size and the more specialized its roles. This dispersion should allow multiple pedagogical inter-

ests in the faculty some freedom of play, providing focal points for the formation of loci of local experiential learning, the formation of external ties, potentially allowing more cosmopolitan forms of pedagogical learning, and for the coupling of locally differentiated rules and instructional action. Under these conditions, although the incidence of experiential learning is high, it also is likely to be differentiated and divergent, rather than coordinated and convergent. Moreover, although rules and acts may be tightly coupled, the substance of these tightly coupled, localized loci of control are also likely to be divergent, giving the aggregate appearance that rules and action are imperfectly linked.

This argument implies that a faculty and its administrators cannot easily form an adaptive community. That is, they cannot easily form a network that is both cohesive (so that rules and acts are tightly coupled and substantively convergent) and consensually adaptive (so that experiential learning takes place more or less consistently throughout the network). The argument also implies that adaptive communities, on average, will occur less frequently in public than in private schools. This difference is expected, in part because, at least at the secondary level, public schools tend to have larger enrollments than private schools and more specialized curricula and faculties. It also is expected because of the lesser ability of public schools to select their students and because of their greater propensity toward bureaucratic standardization. Moreover, the centralizing trend in the external environment, produced by the accountability movement, should accentuate hierarchical control more sharply in public than in private schools. That is, accountability requirements, which bear more sharply on public than on private schools, demand an identifiable agent, normally an administrator who is accountable for instructional performance. We expect this agent, consequently, to try to achieve and then enforce as uniform a set of instructional practices as possible within the school or schools for which he or she is responsible. In addition to large size and intensive faculty specialization, this circumstance would also provide a barrier to the incorporation of administrators into schools' adaptive communities.

When hierarchies are flat, agency tends to diffuse, so that the greater number of a faculty may be held directly accountable to parents and others of a school's constituents and stakeholders, whose competing or conflicting demands are likely to dampen a faculty's efforts to solve instructional problems or to pursue a given set of pedagogical rules. However, if organizational autonomy is more often found among private than public schools, their narrow market niches should substantially reduce the frequency with which the teachers in these schools find themselves agents that are responsible to incompatible interests.

Because the chances for the formation of adaptive faculty communities are further reduced by the concentration of textbook markets and exposure to mandated innovation, organizational form and environmental attributes have

more frequent and stronger mutually reinforcing adverse consequences for instructional productivity among public than among private schools. The probability of this adverse effect becomes still higher in the public subsector because external accountability requirements increase the chances of hierarchical control within schools and districts.

EFFECTS OF SELECTIVITY AND CHARTERING

The degree to which a school is selective of its inputs should affect organizational learning in three ways. First, selectivity of students and materials defines the hard realities that teachers confront every day in their classrooms. These constraints on daily work arise from the degree to which students are selected according to criteria consistent with a school's mission and the degree to which texts and other materials are chosen according to similar criteria, thereby escaping the concentrated textbook market. The lower the level of student selectivity, whether by the school or by the students, the greater the likelihood that teachers will confront problems of student motivation, resistance, and capability. The lower the level of materials selectivity, the greater the likelihood that teachers will find themselves working with materials ill suited to what their courses require and their students can handle.

Second, faculty selectivity, interacting with chartering, affects the likelihood that adaptive faculty communities will form. These communities are characterized by cohesion and consensus. That is, they display dense networks of ties between colleagues that are characterized by positive sentiments, in this case, based primarily on professional respect. In these dense collegial networks, problem-solving interaction can be frequent and relatively free of the distortions that are produced by multilinked communication. At the same time, in these networks, interpersonal influence provides the social control that grounds action in the instructional rules and conventions on which the community agrees. When a school can select its administrators and faculty, it is likely to select them on the basis of instructional outlooks and styles and technical and moral capacities that accord with the school's mission and the motives and abilities of its students. Moreover, when the school is chartered, that is, when its mission is explicit, valued, and widely known, the criteria for selection are likely to be clearer than in other schools, and faculty members are more likely to be self-selected as well as selectively recruited.

Consequently, selectivity and chartering should work together to produce pedagogically consensual faculties, whose members are both trained in the instructional rules that characterize the school and who are likely to form strong collegial ties on the basis of mutual professional respect. When the school is small, selectivity and chartering should create conditions under which the entire faculty forms an adaptive community, whose members by virtue of training and prior experience and participation in the community's

pedagogical problem solving and environment of social control follow the same rules of instructional procedure.

This pedagogical agreement, realized in action, should create a consistency of classroom experience, crossing subject matter lines, that increases the likelihood of effective academic outcomes for the greater number of students in the school. When the school is large and the faculty correspondingly more intensively specialized, selectivity and chartering should create conditions similarly conducive to adaptive faculty communities, but these communities are more likely to occur within subgroup boundaries produced by the division of faculty labor, in particular, the teaching fields and departments. In these schools, instructional adaptations are more likely to be subject specific rather than facultywide, producing subject-varying modes of instruction that produce varying trajectories of academic attainment according to students' subject-specific capabilities and interests. Smaller schools, chartered schools, and homogeneous schools make adaptation more likely because the range of activities that requires consistent adaptation is narrower than in schools where lack of selectivity allows the multiplication of difficulties to occur.

Third, when a school can select its staff, what it wishes to accomplish in its courses and how it conducts them are likely to align with the interests of parents and other external actors. This alignment should lead these external actors to trust the competence of the staff, that is, it should increase their willingness to grant them the pedagogical leeway to set its own rules for teaching. Chartering should strengthen trust in teachers' pedagogical competence, to the degree that explicitness of purpose and clarity about the nature of the schooling to be provided makes clear to both staff and external actors the criteria on which staff selection has occurred.

Because private schools more often than public schools are selective of faculty and of students, chartered, and small, their faculties should more often form faculty-wide adaptive communities with beneficial effects on the value that they add to students' learning. However, private high schools, no less than public schools, are usually larger and more heterogeneous than the elementary schools in their subsector, so that differential learning trajectories should be observed more often in high schools in both subsectors, but should describe more elevated learning curves among the private high schools. However, no small number of public schools, in particular academically oriented and other special purpose high schools, are chartered and can be selective of faculty. The trends that we have posited for the formation of adaptive faculty communities and for students' learning should characterize these schools as well.

CONCLUSION

Our review of the institutional histories of the public and private subsectors in American education indicates a process of institutionalization in which the subsectors became increasingly distinct. In this process, state versus private ownership has come to denote differences in the way in which citizens' entitlements to and obligations for schooling are balanced. As a consequence, the public, by contrast with the private, subsector has become more vulnerable to trends toward political and regulatory centralization and consequent bureaucratic formalization and standardization and to the constraints of the concentrated textbook market and the vicissitudes of the heterogeneous market for pedagogical innovation.

We identified two primary social organizational dimensions along which schools vary: the degree to which their control environments are centralized or decentralized (so that schools are more heteronomous or autonomous organizations) and the degree to which they occupy broad or narrow niches for the provision of educational services. Dichotomizing each of these dimensions yields a fourfold property space. Schools in decentralized environments and broad niches are highly vulnerable to multiple interests of local external actors, those in centralized environments and broad niches somewhat less vulnerable, those in decentralized environments and narrow niches still less vulnerable, and those in centralized environments and narrow niches the least vulnerable of all.

At present, the public schools are in the first of these cells, but recent trends suggest that they may be moving toward the second, becoming somewhat less exposed to the interests of multiple local actors. Schools in the private subsector occupy the third cell, for the most part, although some (such as Catholic diocesan high schools), are in the fourth. Thus, the private schools at present are likely to be on the average more autonomous than public ones. However, as our historical review suggests, they may be moving toward greater exposure to regulatory control that is external to any educational systems of which they may be a part. If so, they, like the public schools, may experience pressures toward standardization and possibly also toward dependence on the textbook market and on mandated innovation.

Moreover, a common consideration for all schools is the general viability of pedagogical practice, with respect in particular to schools that pose the most intransigent problems of learning and student conduct. The viability question cuts across all schools, regardless of subsector. Selection of students by schools is a device that enables the reduction of exposure to such intractable problems, a device to which private schools, on average, have greater access.

Our discussion of the conditions that foster organizational learning among faculties centered on relationships between degrees of organizational autonomy and niche width and the occurrence and scope of adaptive communities

within faculties and the interaction of these conditions with faculty size and specialization. This discussion led to the conclusion that the fostering conditions occur more often in private than in public schools. This conclusion gained further strength when we considered the additional interaction effects of varieties of selectivity and of chartering.

However, our treatment of the relationships between organizational learning, heteronomy-autonomy, and niche width should make it clear that some private schools are in less favorable situations, while some public schools are in very favorable situations. The former include private schools that are not well placed in the market for students or that, like many inner city Catholic schools, serve disparate clienteles; the latter include public schools that enjoy narrow niches by virtue of families' residential choices. Therefore, in research on the organizational conditions and mechanisms that affect teachers' work and students' learning, the public-private distinction is of secondary importance to more analytically fundamental dimensions along which school organization may vary. That is, the public-private distinction seems to us analogous to the idea of urbanism. Like urbanism, it is a significant feature of the institutional landscape, and thus worth close analysis. However, it also is a convenient, *omnium gatherum* for a cluster of mechanisms that provide the explanation of the historical course and for the operation and effects of the full range of educational organization found in both the public and the private subsectors.

Indeed, the urban-rural dichotomy is of limited use because it obscures significant particularities of urban and rural life and institutions, both similarities and differences. In the same way, the public-private dichotomy obscures key social organizational dimensions along which schools differ. In the historical portion of our essay, we delineated how in public discourse the public-private distinction has acquired the denotation of governmental versus non-governmental control. However, as the remainder of our essay shows, this meaning of public and private in the educational sector of our society maps only vaguely onto analytical dimensions that are central to understanding how schools work. These dimensions cut across the boundary between schools that are under formal governmental control and those that are not.

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This article was presented as a paper at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Center for Research on Educational Opportunity (CREO) at The University of Notre Dame on November 9-10, 2002. A collection of conference papers is scheduled to be published in an upcoming book from Notre Dame Press.

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