

New forms of government school provision – an international comparison

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Driven by a desire to improve academic outcomes and transform ‘failing’ schools, governments around the world have often turned to the development of new forms of state-funded school. This paper looks at three such instances of the introduction of new forms of schooling, within three urban localities (academy schools in London; charter schools and small schools of choice in New York City; and Schools of Tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro). It considers the extent to which these types of school did improve academic outcomes for their students and draws comparisons across each case study in order to understand their similarities and differences. It concludes that although the quasi-marketisation of school systems through the introduction of new (often private) providers might improve outcomes, this is not the only means by which improvement can be attained; and that instead the introduction of new forms of school may be successful because this enables certain other changes to happen. It highlights the limited nature of impact evidence available in all instances, which restricts our ability to properly evaluate the effect of new school types on outcomes.

Keywords: Government schools; academies; charter schools; privatisation; marketisation

1. Introduction

Since at least the early 2000s there has been a growing trend, around the world, to explore alternatives to the traditional government school model – a policy-driven approach to challenge the status quo and increase the diversity of school options open to parents and children. Such policy initiatives have led to a raft of newly-named school types, providing free-to-access schooling alongside traditional government schools, such as ‘free schools’ in Sweden, ‘charter schools’ in America or ‘academy schools’ in England. These schools are state-funded, but in some cases can be run for profit, marking a step towards the privatisation of schooling (while still remaining free for students to access, in line with the wider provision on offer).

This paper will explore examples of new school type in three distinct, but nonetheless comparable, cities. It will examine the evidence that these new forms of schooling contribute

to improved student outcomes and make comparisons between the models explored. It will focus on academy schools in London; ‘small schools of choice’ and charter schools in New York City; and ‘Schools of Tomorrow’ in Rio de Janeiro. By comparing these different models of school this paper will inform the international debate around school choice, particularly highlighting the lack of robust evidence that exists to properly evaluate each. It will contribute to the wider academic and policymaking contexts around the move towards the marketization or quasi-marketization of schooling.

These three cities have been chosen purposefully, firstly because they are all large in terms of population (in each case there is a large school-age population and a large number of state-funded schools) and broadly comparable in size; and secondly because they represent three instances in which new forms of government school have been introduced in order to drive improvement – particularly in terms of academic outcomes – which has coincided with broad improvements in these outcomes for each city (Elwick and McAleavy 2015). In all three cities, these particular policies took place within a wider programme of educational reform and this analysis will inevitably touch upon a more holistic view of these reform programmes. While some of the wider policy initiatives to create new models of schooling (such as charter schools in the US) were implemented at a national level, there was nonetheless a direct move towards increasing the supply of such schools at a metropolitan level in each instance. There was a sense that many government schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas, had failed in terms of learning outcomes. The Schools of Tomorrow in Rio (New York City Global Partners 2011), the initial academies in London (DfE 2015a) and the charter schools and small schools of choice in New York (Bloom and Unterman 2013) were largely established on the sites of previous government schools that had consistently been perceived as failing over many years. In each city, these new schools served the most disadvantaged communities and sought to establish a ‘no excuses’ culture which rejected the

view that disadvantaged students were often doomed to fail. In each case, these new models of schools aimed to increase school choice, which, as Burgess and Briggs note, is an attractive option if it ‘reduces or eliminates the role of location, thereby enabling children from poor families to access good schools’ (2010, 647).

Chubb and Moe argue that introducing such forms of school, as part of the marketization (or quasi-marketization) of school systems, can result in higher levels of school effectiveness through the changes in school governance structure (1998), a view disputed by others such as Ball, who suggested that the effects of market inequalities led to a more stratified system of school (1993). Whitty and Power described this marketization thus:

Recent reforms have sought to dismantle centralized bureaucracies and create in their place devolved systems of schooling with increased emphasis on parental choice and competition between increasingly diversified types of school. These reforms are often seen to be leading to an increasing “marketization” and “privatization” of education (Whitty and Power 2000, 93).

It should be noted that in all cases explored in this paper, the new forms of schooling operated alongside traditional government funded and run schools, hence the term ‘quasi-marketization’ or ‘so-called’ markets (Tooley 1995).

In New York City establishing new schools was a central component of reforms initiated by Mayor Michael Bloomberg (in office 2002-2013) and his schools chancellor Joel Klein (2002-2011). Two types of new school were utilised during the 2000s in New York City: small schools of choice (SSCs) were, as the name suggests, considerably smaller institutions than the large schools they replaced – increasing the choice and competition of schools in the city, often co-located with other SSCs on campuses where once a single large school had stood (Nadelstern 2013). Klein and Bloomberg also made use of the charter schools movement – encouraging operators to expand in New York City, meaning that these schools (free from municipal control and with much greater freedom of regulation) increased from just 17 in 2002 to almost 200 by 2013 (New York City Charter School Centre 2014).

Although evidence for charter schools across the US is mixed, the evidence in New York City does seem to suggest they outperform other district-run schools there (Hoxby, Murarka and Kang 2009).

In London the academies programme (again, a nationwide initiative) began in 2002, when some chronically underperforming schools were closed and re-opened as flagship 'academies'. Although these schools are now widespread across England, they were originally known as 'city academies' and first operated in London (Curtis et al. 2008). Academies are publicly funded autonomous schools that are not required to follow the national curriculum and are free from municipal control (instead accountable directly to the national government). As in the US, the evidence for academies is mixed in England as a whole; however the best new academies are seen as some of the highest-performing government-funded schools in London (National Audit Office 2012). As well as turning around some schools previously described as 'failing', there is evidence that academies also injected a new form of competitive pressure into the London system (Baars et al. 2014).

In Rio – as in New York City and London – new schools were established in typically high-poverty areas. The secretary of education for the municipality, Claudia Costin, identified around 150 schools in urban slums where learning 'was almost impossible' (New York City Global Partners 2011, 1) and in their place opened 'Escolas do Amanha' (Schools of Tomorrow) (Costin 2014). These new schools had improved facilities and learning resources, better quality teachers and an extended school day. Although operating for less time than their counterparts in New York City and London, these new schools have shown impressive results in terms of improving the academic performance of their students when compared with other government-funded institutions in the city (Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro 2014).

1.1 Methodology

This paper used a form of critical realism (see Sayer 2000) in order to critique and investigate the systems of schooling employed in the three contexts studied and the ways in which the new models of school improved outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students. Fletcher's paper on the application of critical realism in qualitative methods was used as a basic frame in order to conduct empirical research (2016), while Easton has argued the defence of case study research via a critical realist stance (2010) that served to justify the method employed.

By adopting a comparative case study approach in order to collect and analyse data, investigations of each city can be conducted, combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Goodrick 2014). This method is based upon the systematic comparison of data points ('cases') (Kaarbo & Beasley 1999). Although the definition of a 'case' is somewhat contested (Ragin 1989) in this instance it is used to refer to the bounded phenomenon of school reform within a specific urban area. As well as providing an in-depth focus and description of each individual case, the comparative nature of the method involves analysing and synthesising differences and similarities between cases in order to both demonstrate theoretical explanations and to contrast different contexts (Collier 1993, 108).

Each case study combines an analysis of secondary literature and data with a series of qualitative, in-depth, interviews that were carried out with around ten individuals from each city including policy-makers, school leaders (principals and headteachers), teachers and academics. All of those interviewed have direct and recent experience of the school systems in question and can offer a unique perspective on the policy changes implemented (either because they were involved in implementing them, or were directly affected as a result of their implementation). I will particularly focus on the last ten to fifteen years in each city, although relevant policy changes in Rio have taken place more recently (since around 2009) than those in London and New York City (which extend back as far as 2002/2003). As

explained above, selection of the cases paid heed to potential comparability (Kaarbo and Beasley 1999, 380), but was primarily purposeful (see Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003) in terms of identifying distinct models of schooling which have, at least on the face of things, improved outcomes for their students.

The interview data used in this paper has been selected in order to illustrate the most salient and relevant issues. It is representative of the wider dataset and where there were significant oppositional views expressed these have been noted. Alongside this qualitative data, quantitative data has also been used throughout in order to demonstrate the changes in academic outcomes in each city. In each instance standard government measures have been detailed (e.g. GCSE results in London, graduation rates in New York City and 'IDEB' national test scores in Rio) and where available other forms of quantitative data which show the relative performance of different school-types has been included. The availability and comparability of this range of data is severely limited and is a key weakness in the ability of any of the systems to properly evaluate the impact of different school types on outcomes.

The following sections of this paper will focus on each city in turn, explaining the policy framework that has enabled new forms of schooling to take root; what the evidence suggests that the impact has been on student outcomes in these new school types; and what the future holds in each case. The final section of the paper will directly compare these different models, without disregarding the context in which each operates.

2. London – diversification of the system (the academies programme)

The school system in London (and indeed across England) has become more diverse since 2002, with the introduction of a new form of school – academies – particularly driving this move towards diversification. This section will focus on the implementation and impacts (so far as they can be seen across the limited time period) of academy schools, particularly in London (the site of the first academies and one of the greatest concentrations of academy schools in England). It will assess to what extent evidence exists for the improved performance of academy schools, particularly in light of recent rhetoric and policy announcements by the UK government which acclaim the model as the ‘best way to ensure every child, regardless of birth or background, has access to a world-class education’ (Morgan 2016). Alongside academy schools, in 2010 ‘free schools’ were introduced in England, which are government-funded, not run by local authorities, and can be set up by parent groups, charities etc. Owing to the availability of data (in part due to the relatively short period that most free schools have been open) this section will focus solely on academies.

Academies are publicly funded independent schools that are not required to follow the national curriculum. There are currently over 4,000 academies in England, and more than half of these are organised in formal collaborative arrangements, colloquially known as academy chains (DfE 2015a, 1). The first ‘sponsored’ academies (originally known as ‘city’ academies – a term dropped once these schools were opened outside urban centres) opened in London in 2002. Schools that were seen to be failing were replaced with new schools, removed from local government control and run instead by a government-approved ‘sponsor’ in the form of a not-for-profit trust provided with philanthropic support by the sponsor (Meyland-Smith and Evans 2009). After being elected in 2010, the UK’s Coalition Government introduced a new type of academy school in England – the so-called ‘converter’ academy. This programme

allowed schools that were already performing well to convert to academy status of their own accord without the need for a sponsor to take over their management (West 2015).

Converting to academy status did originally come with significant financial benefits, although these have since declined (e.g. Abrams 2012).

As a result of the introduction of converter academy status, there has been a massive expansion in the number of schools (particularly at secondary level) becoming academies; this has included an increase in the rate of sponsored academies opening as well (Worth 2015, 2). As can be seen in Figure 1, this new policy had a significant effect on secondary schools in London, with a huge shift in many boroughs across the city between 2010 and 2015 (DfE 2010; DfE 2015b). It should be noted that in a small minority of boroughs schools have so far resisted this approach, with very few converting to academy status.

FIGURE 1

This focus on London is particularly relevant because the city's academic outcomes have improved dramatically since around 2003 – inner London went from the worst-performing region in England to the second best (behind only the more affluent region of outer London) by 2013 according to the government's key secondary performance measure (Baars et al. 2014).

Policy towards the management of government-funded schools was based on a commitment to diversity of provision. Some London schools benefited from improved local authority support; others were removed from local authority control and were designated as academies. There is a belief amongst some commentators that allowing new providers of education services to compete for students with existing providers can drive change and improvement: Hill (2012, 12) stated that 'school diversity and choice can undoubtedly contribute to school improvement' and Sahlgren's (2013, 97) research into school choice and

education quality argued that increasing choice (e.g. by allowing new providers entry to the market) ‘can be especially important for disadvantaged students’.

Against this backdrop of change, evidence for the performance of academy schools across England is mixed. In particular, a recent literature review from NFER (Sims et al. 2015) suggested that ‘there was no conclusive evidence for the impact of academy status on attainment in primary schools’ and that there was only some evidence ‘sponsored secondary academies had a positive effect on pupil performance’. Given the fact that converter academies are still a relatively recent creation there is little substantial research on their performance, and what there is points out that more time may be required to fully assess their performance (Worth 2014). According to the Minister of State for Schools in England (Gibb 2016), the best new sponsored academies are now some of the highest-performing government-funded schools in England and indeed some of the participants interviewed for this research highlighted both the direct and indirect effect of these academies:

The local authority have had these schools, they had failed, their own solution didn’t work ... taking them away from that culture and saying you are now part of an independent movement where expectations are different, terms and conditions are different, things are going to be different, was a short sharp shock that allowed those schools to change their culture ... For us though, the kind of schools we have taken on and I am sure for ARK and Oasis [two academy chains with schools in London] and the other academy chains that have done it, it has been removing them from the monolithic culture where failure has been accepted (head of a group of academy schools).

According to the participants interviewed in London the best academies provided proof that radical transformation of outcomes was possible: the ‘threat’ of forced conversion to academy status ‘concentrated the mind’ in some schools and assisted others to ‘raise their game’. Given the rhetoric surrounding the introduction of academies, and particularly the language of a ‘short sharp shock’ that they supposedly provide, the level of improvement in

such schools' outcomes has been moderate. The National Audit Office (NAO) (2007; 2010; 2012; 2014) has undertaken a sequence of studies of the academies programme and has generally found that, compared to other schools academies have made good progress in terms of improved results at GCSE-level. In its 2014 report, based upon changes in Ofsted ratings for schools that had received formal interventions, sponsored academisation resulted in roughly half of schools improving their category in 2012-13. However, this was less impressive than the improvement experienced by schools with interim executive boards or schools that received no intervention at all (see Figure 2). It should be noted that the number of schools involved is small (in the case of the two intervention types) and the NAO (2014) point out that schools receiving no intervention may have been receiving informal/other forms of support beyond the scope of this analysis.

FIGURE 2

There is some evidence that academies can produce improved learning outcomes for students. A 2015 report on academies from the Department for Education did show that converter academies outperformed schools maintained by the local authority, although at a similar rate (suggesting this was due to the fact they started from a higher baseline), and sponsored academies' performance improves the longer they are open (in this instance with the rate of improvement outperforming those in non-academy schools). At primary level, in sponsored academies that had been open for two years, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level improved by nine percentage points since opening, which was double the rate of improvement in LA maintained schools over the same period (DfE 2015c). Research in 2009 by Policy Exchange, a think tank, suggested that the short-term impact of the academies in the programme in the UK was 'almost always positive' (Meyland-Smith and Evans 2009, 11). Furthermore, a recent report for the Sutton Trust (Hutchings et al. 2014) found that on

average high-poverty students studying at a sponsored academy were likely to do better at GCSE level than their peers in mainstream schools.

The reasons used to support the programme of academisation in London varied, across the group of those interviewed. One leader of an academy chain explained that the schools taken on are those ‘where the school has failed and local solutions haven’t worked – often over an extended period of time.’ In this way, he argued, academies acted as a backstop, injecting ‘new hope, new drive, [a sense that] things are going to be different and a more robust approach to running the school’. Some interviewees suggested that the effect of academies was to apply pressure for improvement across the system through the existence of an alternative form of governance. One senior figure who was central to London’s education reform for many years spoke in very positive terms about the role of the academies in ensuring the success of London schools in general. He referred to academisation as a ‘structural solution’ – for him the very existence of a possible structural solution via academies had the effect of generating improvement even in schools that did not ultimately become academies:

I don’t think you should underestimate the importance of the academies, their input into London, because it did mean that where there needed to be a structural solution, there was a structural solution available. I think it’s very important that that avenue was opened (senior educationalist).

There are similarities between this view and a common view among supporters of charter schools in the USA that ‘charters’ can have a beneficial effect not just on the students they educate but also on standards locally, as conventional government schools are forced into action for improvement by the competitive pressure they perceive from the charters. The evidence for this is highly contested in the USA; however, some studies do support the idea that new providers can stimulate system-wide improvement, as in the case of Hoxby, Murarka and Kang’s (2009) investigation into charter schools in Michigan:

Public schools that were subjected to charter competition raised their productivity and achievement in response, not only exceeding their own previous performance but also improving relative to other Michigan schools not subject to charter competition (Hoxby, Murarka and Kang 2009, 333).

While London has experienced a dramatic change in school provision over the last five/six years, recent announcements by the Conservative Government in the UK suggest that this change might continue at pace: the March 2016 white paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' suggested every school could become an academy (DfE 2016a), although since publication the Government has suggested that it may pursue alternative options, including relaxing the ban on opening of new selective schools (DfE 2016b). No matter what policies are pursued, the saturation of academies within the English education system suggests that they are likely to remain a significant part of the landscape for some time to come. In this light, further research to understand their effect remains a priority. The evidence that does exist (and has been collected via this research) suggests that creating greater diversity and choice within the system – by allowing access to new providers – can apply pressure for change and drive improvement, but the level of this improvement, so far, appears to be only moderate.

Although sponsored academies have operated in London since 2002, the widespread introduction of academy schools only really began in 2010 when the law changed to allow converter academies. As such, it is difficult to equate wider improvements in London's outcomes (e.g. Baars et al. 2014) with the introduction of such new forms of school. Different local authorities in London have adopted vastly different policies towards academy schools (see Figure 1) which has resulted in a diversity of provision, concentrated in just one city, which does not have a parallel in the rest of the country. It is not possible, however, to ascertain anything more than correlation between such diversity and London's overall outcomes.

3. New York City – replacing ‘failing’ schools with new school structures (small schools of choice and charter schools)

Of the three narratives expressed in this paper, the story of New York City can be regarded as the most controversial. New York City was governed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg from 2002 until 2014 and in that time he, along with his long-time schools chancellor Joel Klein, closed down (or scheduled for closure) over 160 public schools (Fertig 2014), mostly large high schools in disadvantaged areas. This strategy was often unpopular with both parents and teachers (New York City Public School Parents 2012). In their place Bloomberg and Klein opened up new schools which were structurally distinct from their predecessors – known as ‘small schools of choice’ (SSCs) – and encouraged charter school organisations to open new charters in the city. This two-pronged approach to improving schools through structural means coincided with improved academic outcomes across the city (e.g. Elwick and McAleavy 2015), particularly in terms of high school graduation rates, which went from 51 percent in 2002 to 74 percent by 2014 (New York City DOE 2014).

These small schools of choice were often co-located in the buildings of the schools they replaced, but were distinct from their predecessors, with entirely new bodies of staff. They were ‘located mainly in disadvantaged communities’ and were academically non-selective (Bloom and Unterman 201, 1). One of the interviewees emphasised the distinctiveness of such schools:

So the new schools really were entirely new organisations, which I think makes a real difference in terms of preserving the model and implementing it in a way that was distinct from the larger factory-style high schools (former special adviser to the chancellor).

The former special adviser especially drawing attention to these small schools in comparison to their ‘factory-style’ alternatives.

Meanwhile, charter schools are public schools that are free to attend, often supported by private financial backers; as such they are not conventional government schools as they

are not controlled by traditional school boards or hierarchies. Proponents of charter schools believe that they provide greater accountability: charters are granted by the government and come up for renewal at regular intervals, with underperforming schools ‘required by law to be shut down’ (Klein 2014, 81), while simultaneously offering greater autonomy (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools 2015). A former education department official highlighted this:

Very often in charter schools you don’t have to deal with the other b**t. It’s very clear that your job is to raise student performance and as long as you do that, you’re left to do your job (former senior official in the New York City DOE).

As with the academies programme in England, charter schools exist across the USA, however the Bloomberg mayoralty provided an impetus for their growth in New York City, their number increasing dramatically during his term in office (New York City Charter School Centre 2014).

The policy of identifying underperforming schools and closing them in New York City was enabled by the new accountability measures the city’s Department of Education (DOE) had put in place. It became possible for officials to isolate the worst-performing schools according to quality reviews, progress reports and an extensive survey of teachers and parents (Nadelstern 2013, 22). One of the witnesses interviewed, who was a senior charter school executive, endorsed the strategy of school closures, commenting that when a culture of failure is ingrained, the only option is to sweep the board clean. This view was echoed by Eric Nadelstern (2013, 36), who claimed that ‘large failed organizations, including schools, never reinvent themselves’. The decision to close schools was often presented, particularly by those interviewed who worked in the DOE, as the only viable choice:

What we had was a lot of schools that were low performing, dreadfully low performing, twenty-five, thirty percent graduation rates, with two thousand, three thousand kids (former senior official in the New York City DOE).

The interviewee explicitly linking underperformance with the large bodies of pupils in such schools; the small schools of choice that replaced them were a necessity in terms of filling the school place gap that would otherwise have resulted. As an academic interviewee noted, the scale of the newly created SSCs ‘made it more feasible to address the needs of individual kids;’ a view supported by an education department official:

The first reason is they’re simply easier to manage. It’s very difficult to find people who can effectively manage a school of 5,000. It’s much easier to find someone who can manage a school of 500 ... if you have 400–500 kids in a school, then you have 20–25 teachers and they each have 20–25 kids in a class and that strikes me as the right ratio ... And small schools differed from the large failed schools they replaced in that they could grow slowly and carefully as we phased them in. It built a strong culture and they could build from the ideas up, rather than from the oppression of precedent and tradition (former senior official in the New York City DOE).

Research into 123 of these small schools that were created between 2003 and 2008 does suggest that they outperformed their district counterparts; New York City’s lottery system of place allocation meant that to some extent attendance at these schools was randomised, and as such it is possible to make comparisons between students who obtain places and those who do not. Table 1 shows that graduation rates in these small schools are markedly higher, as are results in the English Regents exam (an end-of-high-school test where a score of 75 or more is used to indicate college readiness).

TABLE 1

The authors of this research have published several studies which provide positive evidence of the impact SSCs have made (e.g. MDRC 2015) and affirm that ‘SSCs in New York City continue to markedly increase high school graduation rates for large numbers of disadvantaged students of color, even as graduation rates are rising at the schools with which SSCs are compared’ (Bloom and Unterman 2013, 111).

In terms of the other new form of school which took root during the 2000s, charter schools nationally have achieved mixed results (Kelleher 2014, 32); however the evidence relating to those in New York City does seem to suggest that they outperform other district schools. Hoxby, Murarka and Kang's 2009 review found that:

By the end of third grade, the charter school students' scores are just about five points higher than those of their lotteried-out counterparts [i.e. in district-run schools]¹. By the end of the sixth grade, their scores are about 21 points higher than those of their lotteried-out counterparts. And so on up to the eighth grade, at which time their scores are about 30 points higher than those of their lotteried-out counterparts (Hoxby, Murarka and Kang 2009, IV–8).

The authors state that this 30-point gap is comparable to the difference in student performance in Scarsdale (one of New York City's most affluent suburbs) and Harlem (one of the most disadvantaged districts)(Hoxby, Murarka and Kang 2009, IV–8) – which suggests that charter schools close the attainment gap significantly for their more disadvantaged intake.

As can be seen in Figure 3, in each of the three neighbourhoods in New York City where charter schools are most concentrated (all areas with higher than average levels of disadvantage [New York City Center for Economic Opportunity 2016]), the percentage of students deemed 'proficient' in mathematics and English is higher in charter schools than in district-run schools.

FIGURE 3

The Centre for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) (2013) has also carried out a number of studies which focus on the impact made by charter schools in New York

¹ The system of school place allocation in New York City involves a 'lottery' which allows for a quasi-experimental comparison between students who gain a school place at a specific school and those that do not.

City, and which are broadly positive about their effect when compared to district-run schools: ‘on average, students in New York City charter schools learned significantly more than their virtual counterparts in reading and mathematics’ (14). CREDO’s 2015 report on charter schools in urban districts found that charters in New York City obtained greater learning gains in both mathematics and reading when compared with average achievement of all schools in the region (12–15).

As with all of the new forms of schooling explored in this paper, the lack of evaluation of their implementation through randomised controlled trials (RCTs) means that it is very difficult to properly understand the effects that these schools have had on outcomes. Diane Ravitch has identified instances where charter schools serve different populations from those of their district-run counterparts (Ravitch 2012) which should lead one to take a cautious approach to the evidence above. Nonetheless, although this might explain some of the difference in performance when comparisons are drawn within individual areas it would not account for the differences identified by the CREDO studies (2013; 2015) which focused on pairs of individual students (one half studying at charter schools, and the other at district-run schools) with similar characteristics. Furthermore, the 2015 CREDO study suggested that in total, charter schools in New York City have 14% of students in special education and 81% students in poverty, while traditional public schools in the city have 14% of students in special education and 82% of students in poverty (7).

Although, as with academy schools in England, the evidence for the effectiveness of charter schools and SSCs is relatively limited and is, in most cases, based upon a relatively small number of cohorts, there is nonetheless an impressive array of studies which suggest that both outperform standard district-run institutions. By 2013 around a quarter of schools in New York City were either charters or SSCs (Kelleher 2014; New York City DOE 2015), representing a significant minority of school options for students/parents. There was a

feeling, amongst those interviewed, that the presence alone of these new types of school had led to an increase in choice and competition and been at least partly responsible for the wider improvements in New York City's academic outcomes during the 2000s. Critics would caution against such a view (e.g. Ravitch 2012), particularly because of the lack of causation that can be attributed to these school structures. Despite this, the tentative evidence that does exist does indicate that both charters and SSCs have played a role in the overall improvement trajectory of New York City's school system.

4. Rio de Janeiro – new schools to serve the most challenging areas (the Schools of Tomorrow)

Of the three new forms of school discussed in this paper, the Schools of Tomorrow (‘Escolas do Amanha’) model pioneered in Rio de Janeiro is the most recent to take shape – implemented from 2009. The model relates less to changing school structures than the academy or charter school approaches and is instead primarily concerned with addressing issues of culture and ethos.

Since 2008 the city of Rio has been governed by Mayor Eduardo Paes. Along with his Secretary of Education (2009–2014) Claudia Costin, Paes drove a programme of reform in Rio’s basic education schools. The Schools of Tomorrow blueprint was created in response to the unique challenges faced in the city’s highly deprived areas where, according to Costin, learning ‘was almost impossible ... those schools were the only presence of the state in those areas’ (New York City Global Partners 2011, 1). Costin targeted at-risk students and at-risk districts. The Schools of Tomorrow programme was designed for students living in the ‘favelas’ (low-income informal urban areas, often controlled by drug dealers and other criminal elements). Historically, these neighbourhoods have suffered from the highest school dropout rates and the worst scores in standardised tests (Gomez 2013). In all, 155 schools were identified and re-designated (Costin 2014): receiving special support ‘including infrastructure improvements, books and materials, and hardship pay for teachers’ (Bruns, Evans and Luque 2012, 111).

Although initiated on the site of pre-existing schools, the Schools of Tomorrow promoted a completely different school culture: widening the programme beyond the usual academic curriculum and providing sporting, cultural and social welfare facilities throughout an extended school day. Those interviewed for this research spoke positively about the work

of these schools. The curriculum on offer at these schools was specifically designed to be comprehensive – providing a rounded experience for students. As one interviewee said:

The school is a means for the children to grow and to learn how to live in society, and we need to help them with that ... we have to be concerned with the child as a person (school director).

The Schools of Tomorrow were based upon six ‘pillars’ – areas in which they differed from mainstream schooling across the city. These were:

- Ensuring the full-time engagement of children – pupils are encouraged to participate in arts, sports, science etc. outside of the formal curriculum, remaining onsite for at least eight hours a day.
- Promoting science courses – many of the Schools of Tomorrow are equipped with science labs and experienced teachers who can lead experiment-based science lessons in order to further develop pupils’ skills and interest.
- Expanding basic health coverage – each of the new schools has a dedicated team of nurses attached to it as part of a partnership with the city’s Department of Health.
- Building capacity among teachers – teachers are provided with additional training in areas such as conflict resolution and are helped to provide support for children who have experienced traumatic upbringings (common in the favelas).
- Expanding the educational ‘neighbourhood’ – creating better connections with the community is a key aim of these new schools. Each school has a dedicated officer in order to liaise with community members and to help break down the walls between the school and community. Parents and grandparents are encouraged to become active supporters of the school and to demonstrate positive behaviour for the pupils, both inside and outside the institution.

- Introducing additional ‘remedial’ classes for some students – aimed at small groups of pupils, taking place beyond the school day in order to help them to gain a better understanding of material.

(Gomez 2013; New York City Global Partners 2011).

In the first instance the Schools of Tomorrow were often characterised as providing a safe haven for pupils from their day-to-day lives which, in some areas, could be extremely difficult and distressful. Many of those interviewed who spoke about these schools emphasised the fact that they were often the only place that children could go to get away from the troubling environments in which they lived.

Bruns, Evans and Luque (2012) highlighted the important role that such schools played in these deprived areas, and by implication the benefit that additional focus on such schools can provide:

Most [young people there] have never set foot outside the favela, been to a Rio beach, or even seen a shopping mall. The school is a respected island in the community and, for many students, the cleanest and safest place they know (Bruns, Evans and Luque 2012, 111).

In terms of academic outcomes, although still very early, the results so far have been relatively impressive. Figure 4 shows the change in scores on the IDEB (the basic education development index – created from test scores along with student flow data) for the first years (5th grade) and final years (9th grade); as can be clearly seen, in both cases the Schools of Tomorrow improved by a greater margin than their municipal counterparts.

FIGURE 4

An academic working in Rio who was interviewed described the Schools of Tomorrow project as ‘the most innovative in Rio’ – evidenced by both the assessment data but also improvements in a number of other metrics. Schools of Tomorrow showed a remarkable improvement in reducing truancy, bringing about a 37.6 percent decrease between 2008 and 2011, and in reducing school dropout which was at 5.1 percent in 2009,

and 2.3 percent in 2013 (Costin 2014). An official municipal publication described it as follows:

The program has proved to be effective both at keeping children at school and in its capacity to promote significant learning gains among people most in need. The initiative's positive impact goes beyond the students, transforming the lives of whole families in deprived areas (Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro 2014, 42–3).

The municipality paints a picture of the considerable success it believes these schools have achieved. In order to achieve many of their goals, the Schools of Tomorrow were provided with additional funding and resources, particularly in order to increase teacher salaries and make these previously unappealing schools more desirable to work in (Costin cited in Robinson 2015). This extra cash fuelled resentment among some of the (non-Schools of Tomorrow) teachers who were interviewed as part of the research. Two different teachers both suggested that if other municipal schools were given the same benefits and resources they too could improve their results and deliver a better education for their students. It is clearly difficult to delineate exactly what effect this financial support had, as it is intrinsically linked to the other changes that the Schools of Tomorrow were subsequently able to implement. Nonetheless, as Hattie (2015) suggests, 'more money' alone is unlikely to make a huge difference: 'it is not the amount of money spent that is important but how it is spent and how the programme logic of investing more then leads to enhanced student outcomes' (25). In the case of the Schools of Tomorrow, this extra funding has clearly been used very specifically and according to a clear blueprint which has been replicated across the system.

As well as the improvements in the Schools of Tomorrow, Rio's municipal schools more widely also improved over this period (which makes the Schools of Tomorrow's relative success even more impressive). National test scores for municipal schools show that at both 5th and 9th grade level schools in Rio outperform those across the rest of the country

and these schools have improved since 2007 at a greater rate than those across the country as a whole (INEP 2015). Furthermore:

From 2009 to 2013, nearly 38,000 students were retaught how to read and write. The functional illiteracy rate fell from 13.6 percent in 2009 to 3.1 percent in 2013, comfortably beating the target to reduce to under 5 percent by 2016' (Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro 2014, 10–11).

Despite such impressive figures the future of the programme is not totally assured. A senior official in the municipal education department suggested that although the programme would continue now that Costin was no longer the Secretary of Education, it would not be expanded. As the model was specifically designed to apply to those schools operating in the toughest areas this is perhaps not surprising: the challenges which the Schools of Tomorrow were designed to tackle are not necessarily applicable to every school or every area in Rio. Further, the fact that they require additional resources and finance means that it would be costly and potentially impractical to continue to roll it out (undoubtedly concerns of the current education administration). Nonetheless, there is clearly evidence that those schools that converted to Schools of Tomorrow are improving academically at a faster rate than their municipal counterparts. Claudia Costin said of the programme that:

The most important battle was changing a culture that didn't even think poor kids can learn ... thus the Schools of Tomorrow share a common curriculum with the rest of the city's schools, a common testing schedule and common expectations about success (Costin cited in Pearson 2011).

Interestingly she highlights the similarities between these schools and other public schools in the city, rather than emphasising their differences. This adds further weight to the argument that this model certainly seems to be beneficial in terms of tackling schools perceived as failing or schools serving particularly deprived populations, but would perhaps not be appropriate as a city-wide standardised model of schooling.

5. Discussion

The new models of schooling described in this paper are each different and operate differently according to their context, however, they were all introduced in response to the same basic challenge: improving schools that were perceived as failing, often with particularly disadvantaged populations of pupils. Clearly comparison between these different models need to take into account the contexts in which they were both introduced and continue to function: the favelas in Rio are unique environments, with a unique set of challenges and even the most impoverished areas in, for instance, London, cannot be readily taken as parallels. This discussion will consider the similarities, and variances, between the charter schools, the small schools of choice, the academies and the Schools of Tomorrow; highlighting the limited nature of the evidence of impacts that exists.

The ‘solution’ of creating new forms of schools has been critiqued, particularly by John Hattie, who suggests that:

Given that the variance in student achievement between schools is small relative to variance within schools, it is folly to believe that a solution lies in different forms of schools. These new forms of schools usually start with fanfare, with self-selected staff (and sometimes selected students) and are sought by parents who want “something better” (Hattie 2015).

Hattie goes on to note that although there is evidence that such schools often improve attainment in the short term, the long-term effects ‘lead to no differences when compared with public schools’, which he argues is due to the fact that within a year ‘the “different” school becomes just another school, with all the usual issues that confront all schools’ (Hattie 2015). Although this is a very real and obvious danger of creating a breed of ‘new schools’, in the three city case studies explored in this paper I would argue that this return to the status quo, predicted by Hattie, has not occurred – evidenced through prolonged improvements in the attainment of such schools in relation to their counterparts. Instead change has become deep-rooted and sustained – either because the model of new schooling has become so

widespread that change is not limited to individual institutions but becomes system-wide; or because these new schools are not simply structurally different, but create a whole new culture. This can be partly seen through the reverberating effects of some of these schools – helping to improve other traditional state/public schools by stimulating system-wide improvements (e.g. Hoxby, Murarka and Kang 2009), either by showing what it is possible to achieve with disadvantaged pupils – mentioned by interviewees in both London and Rio – or by creating a competitive climate where schools feel pressure to improve by each other's relative success.

There are some key similarities between the models of schooling identified here: they largely receive additional funding or resources, at least during their initialisation; they generally have greater levels of autonomy, but are also more accountable too; they are claimed to increase the levels of choice and competition with the 'market' for schools; and, perhaps obviously, they represent a break from the 'norm'. To discuss to each of these in turn, the additional resourcing (whether financial or otherwise) was broached in the previous section with reference to Hattie's (2015) point that extra money alone is unlikely to have a huge impact. However, while this might not in and of itself make a great deal of difference, it could be suggested that the reason these schools were given more money/resources was because they were identified as those in most need of it – in other words it is not the exact amount or nature of the support provided that had an impact, but the fact that this support was targeted at the schools who could make the most of it. Regarding the increase in autonomy and accountability, while this was a consistent factor for the charter schools and academies in New York and London, and to a lesser extent the Schools of Tomorrow in Rio, it is the case that such freedoms were often extended across these systems (for instance all schools in New York were offered greater autonomy over their budgets and over staff hiring decisions). Equally, the enhanced accountability regimes often operated at the system-level rather than

just applying to these new forms of school (e.g. all schools in Rio were subject to regular bi-monthly tests so that the education department had up-to-date information about pupil performance). The evidence relating to market forces, and the role played by choice and competition between the new forms of schooling and other public schools, is far more limited. As there is not a truly free choice of schools in any of the cities explored, it is debateable whether a proper market can operate and, in the absence of this, whether market forces will genuinely result in choice and competition driving up standards. Indeed, this competitive role envisioned for many of the new schools is contradictory to their elevation as ‘disseminators of good practice’ (Ball 2007, 182). Instead a quasi-market is created, with a significant element of ‘co-opetition’, as described by Adnett and Davies (2003). As such, perhaps it is not the marketisation of the school system which brings about improvement, but the possibilities opened up by these new schools – the fact that they directly bring about other benefits for their pupils.

One of the key differences between the types of school described in this paper is, I would suggest, that between a structural solution – as evidenced particularly by the academies and charter schools – and a solution which focuses more explicitly on changing the school culture – more obviously the approach adopted by the Schools of Tomorrow. While these are not binary categories by any means, and there is clearly overlap between the two, they do reflect two distinct starting points and methods of implementation. It is probably too early to really understand how these different approaches affect outcomes, but the Schools of Tomorrow model is extremely interesting as a more holistic approach to change for the pupils, without necessarily revolutionising the underlying school structure or governance. There is considerable evidence that the greatest bearing on student outcomes is achieved by intervention around the point of contact between students and school (e.g.

improving the quality of teachers [Ko and Sammons 2013]) and as such perhaps it is these aspects of the new models of school that are most important when considering their impact.

However, despite the comparisons that it is possible to make across these different systems, the nature of the outcome measures available mean that such a comparison is at best limited. The different foci in each city (e.g. the particular attention paid to numeracy/literacy improvement in New York City, versus the more holistic approach to cultural change in Rio) means that the evidence as it exists is simply not broad nor deep enough to really understand how these new models of schooling have impacted upon outcomes.

This paper has sought the views of those close to the education systems and schools in question, drawing upon the experiences and perceptions of key witnesses to supplement the evidence base that does exist. However, such a method, while providing a rich source of data is nonetheless fraught with difficulties. It should be remembered that the witnesses interviewed were often those that implemented policy changes – the lack of robust independent evaluation of the new forms of schooling has meant that those with the greatest level of insight have a vested interest in portraying the success of such approaches. In each city studied a whole range of other education policies were implemented at the same time as these new forms of school (see Elwick and McAleavy 2015) and as such, separating out the impact of individual policies on attainment is exceptionally difficult and draws attention to the weaknesses of the evidence that currently exists. This paper has tried to demonstrate how these new schools have improved in comparison to other public schools (so that the key variable is the school type), but any relationship in these changes can only ever be described as correlation than as true causation.

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	Target SSC enrollees (outcome %)	Control group counterparts (outcome %)
Graduated from local high school	70.4	60.9
English Regents exam score of 75 or above	40.2	33.4
Maths A Regents exam score of 75 or above	24.6	24.7

Table 1. Estimated effects of SSCs on 4-year high school graduation and college readiness exams (graduation rates 2005-2011; exam scores 2005-2011) (Bloom and Unterman 2013, 8).

Figure 1. Comparison of percentage of secondary school pupils studying at an academy by London borough (2010-2015) (DfE 2010; DfE 2015b)

Figure 2. Change in Ofsted ratings for schools subject to intervention (2012-13) (NAO, 2014, 35)

Figure 3. Proficiency rates (all grades) in the three districts with the highest concentration of charter schools (New York City Charter Schools Center 2014)

Figure 4. Change in test scores for Schools of Tomorrow and other municipal schools (2009-2011) (Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro 2014, 42–3).