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## *Philanthropising Teacher Education? The Emerging Activities of Corporate Philanthropy in Teacher Development*

*¿Filantropía en la formación del profesorado?  
Las actividades emergentes de la filantropía  
empresarial en el desarrollo del profesorado*

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## Abstract

One crucial feature of the Global Education Industry (GEI) is its new mix of players. Within the GEI, corporate philanthropies have emerged as influential actors. They are increasingly involved in teacher education, in particular in the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers which not only constitutes a new market, but also a policy instrument to disseminate ideas and beliefs. In this context, corporate philanthropies preferably collaborate with the state, for instance by forging public-private partnerships. Drawing on Anheier's (2018) comparative approach, we explore the activities of Varkey Foundation (VF), a new edu-philanthropy, and Robert Bosch Foundation (RBF), a more traditional corporate philanthropy, in teacher CPD. Based on documents, we will apply a comparative perspective to explicate their purposes, approaches and roles, highlighting how both strive for change and, thus, engage in CPD. To conclude, we point out several implications for education policymaking, practice and future research.

*Keywords:* Philanthropy; public-private partnerships; teacher education; continuing professional development

## Resumen

Una característica crucial de la Industria Mundial de la Educación (GEI) es su nueva combinación de actores. Dentro de la GEI, las empresas filantrópicas han surgido como actores influyentes. Cada vez participan más en la formación del profesorado, en particular en el desarrollo profesional continuo (CPD) de los profesores que no sólo constituye un nuevo mercado, sino también un instrumento político para difundir ideas y creencias. En cuanto CPD de los profesores, las empresas filantrópicas colaboran preferentemente con el Estado, por ejemplo, a través de asociaciones público-privadas. Basándonos en el enfoque comparativo de Anheier (2018), exploramos las actividades de la Fundación Varkey (VF), una nueva edu-filantropía, y la Fundación Robert Bosch (RBF), una filantropía corporativa más tradicional, en el DPC de los docentes. Basándonos en documentos, aplicaremos una perspectiva comparativa para explicar sus propósitos, enfoques y funciones, destacando cómo ambos se esfuerzan por cambiar y, por tanto, se comprometen con el CPD. Para concluir, señalamos varias implicaciones para la elaboración de políticas educativas, la práctica y las futuras actividades de investigación.

*Palabras clave:* Filantropía; asociación público-privada; formación del profesorado; desarrollo profesional continuo

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, corporate philanthropies with multimillion-dollar budgets have become influential players in education around the world (Ball, 2019; Lubienski, 2021). That philanthropies arguably have a positive impact on society – becoming thus central to social capitalism – is a well-accepted tenet and has a long history dating back from the late nineteenth century as examples such as Carnegie, Rockefeller and later Ford Foundation show (for a critical review see Giridharadas, 2018). Contemporary philanthropism, however, is increasingly oriented toward the concepts of ‘impact investment’ and ‘venture philanthropy’ (Hölscher, 2010; Suwanprateep & Alberg-Seberich, 2015). In the field of education, their main aims are to foster quality, entrepreneurialism and innovation and (measurable) impact. Yet, it remains implicit and unexamined what ‘(good) education’, ‘quality’ and ‘impact’ are (Lubienski, 2021, pp. 21–22). Furthermore, in this ‘new edu-philanthropism’ (Lubienski, 2021), foundations tend to operate in the same fields that are key to the markets of their parent corporations. Not only does this blur the distinction between philanthropic and corporate activities, it also raises many pressing questions as to the implications of these developments to democratic and transparent governing; but it also impacts the understanding and the goals of education in general.

In this article, we shed some light on two corporate philanthropies and their work in teacher education – the Varkey Foundation and the Robert Bosch Foundation. The Varkey Foundation (VF), founded in 2010, is the philanthropic arm of the Varkey Group, and by that, closely connected to GEMS Education, the world’s biggest for-profit K-12 provider. VF is one of the new edu-philanthropies that have emerged in the last ten to twenty years, founded by wealthy self-made entrepreneurs, quickly becoming influential players in education (Lubienski, 2021). The Robert Bosch Foundation (RBF), founded in 1964 as the philanthropic arm of the German electronics giant Bosch, is a more traditional corporate foundation, which nevertheless did adapt within a changing philanthropic sector. While RBF is active in various fields, e.g., health and education, VF operates exclusively in the educational realm. RBF’s educational activities are mostly focused on its country of origin, Germany, whereas VF operates in various countries around the world; especially in Argentina where the foundation managed to take roots shaping teacher development (Esper, 2020; Matovich & Cardini, 2019).

In collaboration with state entities, both foundations have become deeply involved in training teachers. Their engagement in teacher education, and more specifically in the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers and school leaders, can be seen as resulting from the confluence of at least three developments. First, corporate philanthropies have become key players in the rising Global Education Industry (GEI) (Parreirado Amaral *et al.*, 2019; Verger *et al.*, 2016a). Core characteristics of the GEI include the opening-up of new market niches, such as teacher CPD, and the increasing role of GEI actors in education policymaking (Verger *et al.*, 2016b, p. 6). Second, collaboration with state entities has become a preferred mode of operation within the GEI (Robertson *et al.*, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi & Draxler, 2018). Forging public-private partnerships (PPPs) allows corporate philanthropies to scale-up their activities to reach a much larger number of schools, teachers and thereby students. Third, amidst globalized and economic-driven discourses, an increased emphasis has been put on teachers, teacher quality and teacher education (Paine *et al.*, 2016; Robertson, 2012; Schweisfurth, 2022). Seeing teachers as key drivers for economic success and applying a business lens to education resulted

in teachers being increasingly excluded from policymaking (Tröhler, 2015) and being perceived as part of the problem rather than the solution (Lubienski, 2021).

Scholarship on the GEI has already yielded valuable insights on the changing role of philanthropy in education (Ball, 2016, 2017); it has also called attention to the networking effects of their concerted activities (Ball 2019; see also Ball *et al.*, 2017) to promote specific education policies (Au & Lubienski, 2016). This research also showed how the philanthropic emphasis on a rather narrow understanding of ‘good education’ (or more pointedly on ‘education as a good’) promoted a consumerist and privatized notion of education (Lubienski, 2021). Looking at the most striking examples, much research has focused on US foundations (cf. Au & Lubienski, 2016; Ball, 2019; Saltman, 2010; Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Apart from the language barrier, Erfurth and Ridge (2021, p. 245) attribute this focus to an affirmative reading of philanthropy in the developmental realm. There are, however, several notable exceptions (cf. Matovich & Cardini, 2019; Ridge *et al.*, 2019; Tarlau & Moeller, 2020). Still, research on the implications of corporate philanthropies’ CPD activities for teachers is scarce so far. Subsequently, Paine *et al.* (2016) urge researchers to examine “the consequences of how public-private partnerships transform the teaching profession and affect teaching practices” (p. 772).

Comparative studies on corporate philanthropy are still in an early stage, despite their promising potential for advancing our understanding of philanthropic activities (Anheier, 2018, pp. 1591–1592). To shed light on corporate philanthropies activities in teacher CPD, we apply a comparative perspective building on existing research. Looking at two major corporate philanthropies – one new edu-philanthropy (VF) as well as one more traditional foundation (RBF) – promises fruitful insights. VF and RBF both display similar approaches using teacher CPD as a policy instrument for which they invest significant resources and forge partnerships with state entities. Both have created prestigious awards on which their teacher CPD activities rely on. They are, however, operating on different scales and with different restraints. While an exhaustive analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, we aim to explore VF’s and RBF’s CPD activities by drawing on Anheier’s (2018) framework to discern ‘what they want to achieve, how they intend to do it and what they actually do’. We apply a document-based methodology, drawing material and information from reports and websites, we use the GEI as an analytical concept to explore their “rationales, logics, and modes of operation” (Parreira do Amaral & Thompson, 2019, p. 275) as well as implications for education practice, policy, and research.

We begin by outlining the GEI phenomenon and by relating it to developments in the philanthropic sector that are called ‘venture philanthropy’ or ‘new philanthropy’. Second, we highlight the role of teachers and teacher CPD within the GEI. Following the introduction of both foundations as well as outlining their governance structure, we take a look at their purposes, approaches and roles from a comparative perspective while focusing on their teacher CPD activities. Finally, we discuss some insights from this exercise and point out some implications for policymaking, practice and research.

## 2. Philanthropy as part of the Global Education Industry

In the last 30 years, a Global Education Industry (GEI) has emerged in the context of political, economic and technological shifts (Parreira do Amaral *et al.*, 2019; Verger *et al.*, 2016a). In their seminal work, Verger, Lubienski, and Steiner-Khamsi (2016b) define

the GEI as “an increasingly globalized economic sector in which a broad range of educational services and goods are produced, exchanged and consumed, often on a for-profit basis” (p. 4). As Parreira do Amaral and Thompson (2019) point out, these activities are “[g]lobal in scope and economic in both nature and outlook” (p. 273). For Verger and colleagues (2016b, p. 6), three developments are at the heart of the GEI: the opening-up of new market niches, the increasing role of GEI actors in education policymaking, and the growing connection between financial markets and the GEI.

In line with this special issue, it is crucial to discern several layers of complexity when researching the GEI. One of those layers and crucial feature of the GEI is its new mix of players (Thompson & Parreira do Amaral, 2019; Verger *et al.*, 2016a).

Before elaborating on the developments that made corporate philanthropies influential players within the GEI, we want to highlight their unique organizational form. Anheier and Leat (2019) describe the basic governance structure of foundations as having “a silent principal (in the form of a deed), trustees acting as de facto principals, and managers and program officers de jure in an intermediary position” (p. 12). Foundations are only indirectly accountable to the donor’s wishes, written down in the deed, and more directly to their trustees, which in some cases are connected to the parent company. Being “beholden neither to market expectations nor to the ballot box” (Anheier & Leat, 2019, p. 1), provides corporate philanthropies with a considerable amount of independence.

As outlined above, philanthropy in education is not a new phenomenon. However, today we are witnessing a global boom in philanthropy, when more and more foundations seem to own more assets than ever before (Anheier & Leat, 2019, p. 8). This boom is accompanied by a growing influence on education. Currently, corporate philanthropies are shaping education systems around the world, most prominently by successfully lobbying for legislation further opening up the sector (Au & Lubienski, 2016; Tarlau & Moeller, 2020) and by convening influential stakeholders (Ridge, 2019a).

Terms like ‘venture philanthropy’ (Erfurth & Ridge, 2021; Hoelscher, 2010; Saltman, 2010) and ‘new philanthropy’ (Avelar, 2021; Ball, 2008; Ridge 2019b) are used to capture these changes in the philanthropic sector. The European Venture Philanthropy Association describes venture philanthropy as an approach that aims to build socially oriented organisations; by supporting them with both financial (donations and investments) and non-financial resources the aim is to increase their social impact.<sup>1</sup> Different from social capitalism, these concepts place competitive advantages centre stage in foundations’ activities within the education sector.

Subsequently, new philanthropy signals two trends: The first is the introduction of market principles like competition, efficiency and impact (Avelar, 2021; Lubienski, 2021; Olmedo, 2016). Thereby, corporations and businesspeople transfer the entrepreneurial philosophies and methods – that helped them amass huge fortunes, not seldom by means of predatory capitalism – into the philanthropic sector (Ball & Olmedo, 2011, pp. 84–85). The second trend is their growing aspiration to shape public policy (Avelar, 2021; Olmedo, 2016). Regarding this, Tarlau and Moeller (2020, p. 340) point out the intention to benefit the foundation’s parent company. However, Tarlau and Moeller (2020) highlight that philanthropic influence is more than just “a neoliberal, profit-maximizing scheme” (p. 337) to create new markets for their parent company or to increase

1 See the webpage article: ‘What is investing for impact?’ at <https://evpa.eu.com/about-us/what-is-venture-philanthropy> [retrieved October 13, 2022].

the employability of their future workforce. It is an attempt “to garner power and influence on different scales, and re-make public education in their own image” (Tarlau & Moeller, 2020, p. 337).

In line with venture philanthropy and new philanthropy, a new kind of corporate foundation emerged. Often founded by self-made billionaires, new edu-philanthropies can rely on their multimillion-budgets while using different forms of direct funding, financial investments and contributions to political campaigns to advance their political agenda (Lubienski, 2021, p. 23). Such new edu-philanthropies, like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, are often either from the global North themselves or at least influenced by the modes of operation of such northern foundations (Tarlau & Moeller, 2020, p. 357). Naturally, these new edu-philanthropies also contributed to a changing philanthropic landscape which, in turn, shaped more traditional corporate philanthropies to a certain degree.

In line with the logics of the economy of scale, collaborating with the state, for instance by forging public-private partnerships (cf. Robertson *et al.*, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi & Draxler, 2018), has emerged as one of the preferred modes of operation of corporate philanthropies. This is due to the fact that state entities play an important role as gatekeepers, facilitators of marketization or providers of funding (Thompson & Parreira do Amaral 2019, p. 7). In addition, the collaboration with state entities like ministries of education allows corporate philanthropies to scale their activities, i.e., disseminate their ideas to a much larger number of schools, teachers and thereby students, than by addressing teachers or schools individually. Those collaborations also allow to bypass the challenge of dealing with hesitant school principals and educators individually. Furthermore, the collaboration with the state is a much subtler approach than publicly pushing for policy change which might provoke resistance by the public.

### 3. Teacher Education in the GEI

The discourse on the teaching profession has been shaped by a changed perception of teachers since World War II (Tröhler, 2013). In addition, an economic emphasis has spurred a global discourse on the quality of teachers and teacher education. Teachers have become increasingly perceived as drivers of economic prosperity in the knowledge-based economy. Hence, a lot of attention is directed towards teacher *quality* (Robertson, 2016; Schweisfurth, 2022), which led to “frenzied calls” (Saltman, 2010, p. 100) to transform teacher education. Subsequently, “revising and strengthening the professional profile of the teaching profession” (European Commission, 2014, p. 4) has become a mantra in many countries and for many GEI actors around the globe.

Surprisingly, the increased economic emphasis on the teaching profession seems to be accompanied by a contradictory development: teachers being further excluded from policymaking processes. Policymakers increasingly see teachers “as targets of change rather than as collaborators in debating and developing educational policies” (Paine *et al.*, 2016, p. 765). Tröhler (2015) describes this as a form of “de-democratization” (p. 761), in which the professional experience of educators is bypassed in favour of statistically verified, evidence-based knowledge.

More recently, GEI players like corporate foundations are increasingly engaged in teacher education, and more specifically in continuing professional development (CPD). There are at least two reasons for teacher CPD being an attractive field of activity for GEI

players. On the one hand, teacher CPD constitutes a new market niche. Due to fewer regulations in CPD than in other parts of teacher education, teacher development in many countries is a low capitalized new market granting easy access for GEI players to tap into. On the other hand, teacher CPD constitutes a fast-paced policy instrument that can be used to disseminate ideas and beliefs. While it may take years for changes in university-based teacher education programmes to actually reach the classroom, CPD courses promise much faster adjustments. Therefore, teacher CPD is not only the preferred tool for state entities to react to sudden societal developments, but also a tool for epistemic governance for corporate philanthropies – especially where CPD budgets are low and schools, cities and/or regions are particularly interested in low-fee or no-fee training.

Applying a business lens to education, corporate philanthropies – as well as other GEI players – “tend to identify the problem in terms of ineffective employees [...] or inefficient organisations rather than societal factors” (Lubienski, 2021, p. 31) like, for instance, socio-economic background (cf. Anheier & Leat, 2019, p. 65). Therefore, instead of lobbying for a more equitable society, better working conditions for teachers or increased teacher voices in the decision-making processes, they rather focus on “the strategies and technicalities of teaching/learning” (Bottery, 2009, p. 689).

## 4. Analysing Varkey Foundation and Robert Bosch Foundation

As outlined above, corporate philanthropies have become influential players within the GEI and have discovered teacher CPD as a new field of activity. In the following, we present two of these corporate philanthropies engaging in teacher CPD: VF as an example of a new edu-philanthropy, and RBF as one more traditional corporate foundation.

First, we introduce both foundations and outline their governance structure. Second, we draw on Anheier’s (2018) framework to generally map “what foundations want to achieve (purpose) and how (approach) from what they actually do (activities as roles)” (p. 1593) while specifically focusing on their teacher CPD activities.

Table 1.

*Comparative perspective on Varkey and Bosch foundations, drawing on Anheier (2018)*

Introducing both foundations and their governance structure	Who are VF and RBF? What does their governance structure look like?
Purpose	What is the vision of VF and RBF? What is it they want to achieve?
Approach	How do VF and RBF try to achieve their purpose?
Role	What do VF and RBF actually do while pursuing their goals?

### 4.1 The Varkey Foundation

In 1968, the couple K. S. and Mariamma Varkey from India founded Our Own English High School, one of the first private schools in Dubai (City Today, 2021). In the following decades, Sunny Varkey, their son, managed to turn a small private school into the largest K-12 private education provider in the world, Dubai based GEMS Education

(formerly known as Global Education Management Systems) (GEMS Education, 2022c). Since 2015, Sunny's older son, Dino Varkey, has been the CEO of GEMS Education, while Sunny acts as chairman.

In 2021, GEMS Education was said to own and operate 63 schools, thus educating over 130,000 students, primarily in the Middle East and North Africa (Arabian Business, 2021). In 2019, before the global COVID-19 pandemic began to unfold, the company's value was estimated up to \$ 4 billion (Nair *et al*, 2019).

GEMS Education (2022a) claims to offer much more “than just great schools that set a benchmark for quality education”. Every schools is said to be “built on the same core values that encourage every GEMS student, regardless of their age, to develop a social conscience and become an active member of the global community” (GEMS Education, 2022a).

Contrary to GEMS Education's self-portrayal, Ridge *et al.* (2016) highlight the company's highly stratified class-based approach, providing different types of education to students based on tuition fees – just like an airline offering first, business and economy class tickets. In the past, GEMS Education also made the news for “proposing to close lossmaking schools and opening others at more lucrative locations” (Rai, 2014) and paying their teachers from Asian countries significantly less than those from the West (Gulf News, 2007).

The Varkey Group Ltd. is an investment holding company established in 1979 by Sunny Varkey as a parent company, managing and overseeing a broad range of other large and small subsidiary companies. There is a hybrid/geographical corporate structure and a highly vertical/centralized chain of command – in which primarily family members hold key positions – that allow the Varkey Group Ltd. to trade in economic sectors as different as K-12/Higher education (GEMS Education, Everonn Education Limited, International Horizons College/AHC GCC Investment), construction (Chicago Maintenance & Construction Co LLC), transportation (Bright Bus Transport/School Transport Services LLC), or financing (GEMS MENASA TopCo (Cayman) Limited).

VF, founded in 2010 by Sunny Varkey, with former U.S. president Bill Clinton as honorary chairman, can be seen as the strategic philanthropic arm of the Varkey Group, considerably backing the activities of GEMS Education. The foundation is headquartered in the UK, with offices in Dubai, Ghana, Uganda and Argentina. It is a charity organisation registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales under charity number 1145119 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales under company number 07774287 (Registered Office: Oakwood Estate Chertsey Road Windlesham, Surrey GU20 6HY). While for the financial year from April 2020 to March 2021, VF reported having 60 employees (Charity Commission for England and Wales [CCEW], 2022a), in June 2022, however, VF's (2022e) website lists only 19 employees.

According to Ridge (2019a), the majority of VF's income derives from GEMS Education. As Table 2 shows, a significant decrease in income and expenditure took place during the COVID-19 pandemic (CCEW, 2022b).



Table 2.  
*Varkey Foundation's income and expenditure (2016-2021)*

<b>Income/ Expenditure (in million €)</b>	<b>04/2016- 03/2017</b>	<b>04/2017- 03/2018</b>	<b>04/2018- 03/2019</b>	<b>04/2019- 03/2020</b>	<b>04/2020- 03/2021</b>
<b>Total gross income</b>	20,03	39,2	22,46	3,83	2,72
<b>Total expenditure</b>	18,72	35,52	22,17	7,79	3,91

*Note:* Data retrieved from the Charity Commission for England and Wales (2022b). The figures have been converted from Pound to Euro according to the exchange rate on December 31 that year.

Beyond of what is legally required, VF does not provide much transparency. For instance, VF stopped publishing updates in the news section of its website between January and October 2022.

In the last years, VF has seen several changes to its leadership team. According to his LinkedIn profile, Vikas Pota was appointed to CEO of VF in September of 2010, after having been with GEMS Education and GEMS Learning Trust for seven years prior. After eight years, VF (2018) announced that Pota would step down and that Cate Noble would take over in June 2018. According to her LinkedIn profile, Noble had previously been with GEMS Education Solutions and PWC UK, before becoming COO and eventually CEO of VF (2018). A few months later, however, Noble left the foundation again in November 2018. Since then, VF has not announced the appointment of a new CEO.

Pota, according to his LinkedIn profile, followed his successor and returned as non-executive chairman from June 2018 to January 2020. On its website, VF (2022f) currently lists Nicole Lui as executive director. According to her LinkedIn profile, the foundation's former regional coordinator took over as executive director after Pota's second term ended. She is also mentioned as contact on the Charity Commission's (2022d) website providing publicly available information about the foundation.

Dino Varkey, Sunny Varkey's older son and CEO of GEMS Education, and Harsha Varkey are listed as patrons on the foundation's website (Varkey Foundation [VF], 2022d). Trustees of VF are currently Sunny Varkey's second son, Jay Varkey, (since 2011) and Sir Michael Lockett (since 2015) (CCEW, 2022c).

Like GEMS Education, VF solely focuses on educational projects. Even though their activities have sparked researchers' interest (cf. Esper, 2020; Matovich & Cardini, 2019; Ridge, 2019a), VF "is able to operate without receiving much attention" (Erfurth & Ridge, 2021, p. 245).

## **4.2 The Robert Bosch Foundation**

Founded in 1886 by Robert Bosch as a workshop for precision mechanics and electrical engineering in Stuttgart, Germany, the company Robert Bosch GmbH today not only produces tools and household appliances like freezers and washing machines, but is also the biggest supplier of car components in the world (Statista, 2021). According to its annual report, the revenue of the Bosch Group in 2021 was € 78.7 billion, with earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) of € 2.8 billion (Bosch, 2021, p. 4). Worldwide roughly 400,000 employees work at over 400 company locations (Bosch, 2021, p. 4).

RBF was founded in 1964 as the company's philanthropic arm. It is headquartered in Stuttgart, with a branch office in Berlin. The foundation is registered as a limited company at Stuttgart's county court under the number HRB 109 (Registered Office: Heidehofstr. 31, 70184 Stuttgart). RBF currently has approximately 200 employees (Bosch Foundation [RBF], 2022g).

RBF holds 94% of its parent company's shares. With almost € 5.4 billion in equity capital, RBF is the largest private foundation in Germany (Statista, 2020), which has one of the biggest philanthropic sectors worldwide (Kolleck, 2019, p. 420).

Since its establishment in 1964, RBF (2022h) claims to have "provided more than two billion euros for charitable projects". The foundation's income is largely derived from the dividends of its parent company's shares. Therefore, it does not come by surprise that the annual income significantly declined during the pandemic.

Table 3.

*Bosch Foundation's income and expenditure (2017-2021)*

<b>Income/ Expenditure (in million €)</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>Cash inflow</b>	135,33	226,53	224,06	121,80	69,38
<b>Funds used</b>	135,33	226,53	224,06	121,80	69,38

Note: Data retrieved from annual reports (RBF, 2019,2021a, 2022l).

Similarly to VF, RBF has seen considerable changes at its top in the last two years. Prof. Dr. Joachim Rogall headed the management board from 2015 until his retirement in June 2021. His successor was Dr. Bernhard Straub, who became CEO of RBF in May 2022 after having worked for the Bosch Group for over 30 years. Straub joined Sandra Breka who had been part of the foundation's leadership team since 2017. Straub became responsible for the areas health and education, while Breka, took over global issues, strategic partnerships, and the Robert Bosch Academy (RBF, 2021e). Since Breka stepped down in May 2022, Straub alone has been leading RBF (2022h).

RBF's board of trustees includes nine members. After working for Bosch for over 30 years, Christoph Kübel was appointed as chairman of RBF's board of trustees in July 2021 (RBF, 2021b). He followed in the footsteps of Dr. Christof Bosch, the grandson of Robert Bosch, who still is a trustee (RBF, 2021b). Many trustees have either family ties to the foundations' founder, Robert Bosch, like Dr. Christof Bosch and Matthias Madelung, or have been part of Bosch Group's management board before, like Prof. Dr. Liselotte Højgaard and Dr. Rolf Bulander.

RBF (2022g) intends to follow "the legacy of Robert Bosch ... continuing his commitment to social and societal causes in a contemporary form". The foundation operates in different areas, including education, health, and global issues.

Compared to other major German corporate philanthropies, like Bertelsmann Foundation (cf. Höhne & Schreck, 2009), RBF has been able to operate without receiving much attention from teacher unions (for exceptions see GEW, 2013; Oelrichs, 2020) or researchers alike.

### 4.3 Insights from the comparative perspective of teacher CPD courses

In this section, we will draw on Anheier's (2018) framework to discern what VF and RBF want to achieve, how they intend to do it and what they actually do, focusing on the foundations' teacher CPD activities.

#### **Purpose**

*What is the vision of Varkey Foundation and Bosch Foundation? What is it they want to achieve?*

VF's basic mission statement says that "every child should have a good teacher" (GEMS Education, 2022b). More specifically, the aim of VF is "to improve the standards of education for underprivileged children throughout the world" (GEMS Education, 2022b). RBF outlines its goal as to create "more good schools" (RBF, 2022d, translation by authors) in Germany to benefit all children and adolescents (RBF, 2022i).

Even though these are rather general statements, they both imply a desired future which apparently differs from the status quo. Hence, the purpose of both foundations is focused on change in education.

While VF directly focuses on teachers, RBF (2022i) rather focuses on "educational organizations in becoming learning organizations". By addressing teachers and/or schools, both foundations ultimately target students. For instance, RBF (2022c) states that to meet "future requirements", education "must increasingly impart creative, social, and technical skills to complement theoretical knowledge". This way, RBF (2022b) wants "to make sure that institutional learning prepares young people for an active and self-determined life". This illustrates, how VF and RBF have both adopted a vision and language that is in line with global discourses in education: *Education for All* with its focus on access and quality, *Knowledge Society* and its focus on producing the knowledge and skills for a competitive economy. While there is nothing inherently problematic with this focus, it opens up discursive opportunities to a more economic approach to teacher education, namely the business lens of venture philanthropy. This is particularly pertinent when looking into the education activities not only of these foundations but also of the units that are closely related to them, as is the case with VF and GEMS Education.

#### **Approach**

*How do Varkey Foundation and Bosch Foundation try to achieve their purpose of making change happen in education?*

VF (2020a) can be characterised as an operational foundation, which is highlighted by its four core principles: Innovation, evidence, influence, and action, as illustrated by the quote below:

**Innovation:** We promote innovation within and beyond our organisation to strengthen the hand of the teacher. We aim to push boundaries, and find new ways to solve new and existing problems. [...]

**Evidence:** We generate evidence about what works to improve educational outcomes. We place the teacher at the heart of this enquiry. We aim to learn from everything we do, and find new ways of generating evidence. Our evidence informs our policy perspective, as well as supporting decision-making on teaching practice, and adaptive programming. [...]

**Influence:** We build relationships, convene and mobilise networks to change the way people think about and support teachers. We make a case for system change to the elite influencers who hold the levers. We convene the education sector. We support and energise students, parents, the general public, and educators themselves to lobby for change and lead the change themselves. We are driven by evidence, innovation, and our values and moral imperative.

**Action:** We work direct [sic.] with beneficiaries because in itself this makes a difference to raising the status and capacity of teachers; we have a direct impact, we learn through doing; and deepen our understanding of the issues. We demonstrate proof of concept and establish ourselves as a serious and credible organisation.“ (VF, 2020a)<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, RBF develops and carries out own programmes and projects while, at the same time, providing funds for specific purposes which is why it can be characterised as a mixed foundation (Anheier, 2018, p. 1595).

As Table 4 shows, VF and RBF both have developed various programmes and initiatives.

Table 4.  
*Foundations’ programmes and initiatives*

<b>Programme area</b>	<b>Varkey Foundation</b>	<b>Bosch Foundation</b>
Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global Teacher Prize</li> <li>• National Teacher Prizes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German School Award</li> </ul>
Teacher CPD (Selection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Leadership and Innovation Program (PLIE), Argentina, Uruguay and Ecuador</li> <li>• Train for Tomorrow, Ghana</li> <li>• Instructional Leadership Training, Uganda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop School Leadership, Berlin and Saarland (Germany)</li> <li>• Workshop Welcome, Arriving and Getting Ahead, Hesse (Germany)</li> <li>• Workshop Learning – Individually and Collaboratively, Berlin, Brandenburg, Saarland, Saxony and Thuringia (Germany)</li> <li>• Workshop From Data to Action – Data-Based School and Classroom Development, Schleswig-Holstein (Germany)</li> <li>• Workshop Learning Democracy, in Lower Saxony (Germany)</li> </ul>
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting and funding research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding research scheme</li> <li>• German School Barometer</li> </ul>

*Note:* Data retrieved from foundations’ websites

<sup>2</sup> See also the website of the Foundation: <https://www.varkeyfoundation.org/what-we-do/> [retrieved October 13, 2022].

To reach its goal of providing every child with a ‘good’ teacher, VF aims “to build the status of teachers to ensure that the quality of teaching is enhanced, and outcomes will improve” (VF, 2018a). Since 2014, teachers from around the world have been able to apply for the foundation’s Global Teacher Prize which comes with a prize money of \$ 1 million (VF, 2021). In addition, VF (2022a) has begun to promote National Teacher Prizes.

The award ceremony for the Global Teacher Prize is embedded into the foundation’s Global Education and Skills Forum, a get-together of high-profile individuals, including high-ranking politicians, entrepreneurs, academics, journalists and celebrities like Hugh Jackman and Priyanka Chopra, which takes place in Dubai annually (Ridge, 2019a, para. 6). Through this event, which VF (2022b) refers to as the “Davos of Education”, the foundation intends to “[s]teer and inform the global conversation on education [emphasis deleted]” (VF, 2020a, Some ways).

VF (2022g) conducts CPD programmes in South America and Africa, where it claims to have trained over 45,000 teachers and school leaders so far. In Argentina alone, VF reached over 7,500 teachers and school leaders with its *Programa de liderazgo e innovación educativa* (PLIE), a “six-week program designed for current and aspiring school leaders with a special focus in leadership, innovation, communication and technology” (VF, 2022g) in collaboration with the Argentinian *Ministerio de Educación*.

VF also conducts and funds research projects and works with partners by providing grants “to innovative organisations which share our values” (VF, 2020a, Some ways). For instance, VF has developed a close relationship with UNESCO by funding projects and, in return, serving on various UNESCO boards (Ridge & Kippels, 2019, pp. 102–104).

According to RBF (2022a), its approach is to “develop exemplary solutions for the future”. To identify, edit and, disseminate such ‘good’ or ‘best’ practices within the German education system, RBF has created various programmes and institutions that draw on the foundation’s flagship award. Since 2006, schools have been able to apply for the prestigious *German School Award*. The first prize is awarded by a well-known German politician, like the chancellor, and currently comes with a prize money of € 100,000. Since no meaningful impact from the School Award has been found (Albers, 2016, p. 319; Klein & van Ackeren, 2018, p. 592), the hopes for change shifted to its German School Academy (Häcker, 2017, 32:50).

RBF’s CPD institution was founded in 2015, but was recently reintegrated into the foundation’s structure. The goal of RBF’s School Academy was to provide “materials on good education and school practices” (RBF, 2022j) and to organise training courses and projects. Subsequently, the School Academy developed CPD courses based on the ‘successful’ practices of the awarded schools, such as their ‘workshops’ which are one-year or two-year school development programmes (Gottmann *et al.*, 2020, p. 11). These CPD courses are disseminated within Germany’s federal system via the collaboration with state entities, like the Länder ministries of education and their respective CPD agencies, by forging cooperation agreements (cf. Landesinstitut für Pädagogik und Medien, 2017). Before its reintegration under the foundation’s roof in July 2021, RBF’s German School Academy (2021) claimed to collaborate with state partners in almost all of Germany’s 16 federal states. According to its annual reports, RBF has invested more than € 22 million in its CPD institution between 2015 and 2021.

In 2018, RBF (2022e) developed a research funding scheme to provide grants for researching the ‘successful practices’ of the schools who received the foundation’s School Award. In 2018, RBF also launched its own online channel, called the German

School Portal<sup>3</sup>, in collaboration with *Die Zeit Publishing Group*. Via the School Portal, for instance, concepts of the awarded schools are shared. In 2019, the foundation also launched a representative survey that covers different school related topics, called the *German School Barometer*.

The titles for RBF's endeavours – German School Award, German School Academy, German School Portal, and German School Barometer – not only suggest to the public that these are funded and run by the state, which is not the case, but also highlight the foundation's nationwide aspiration to shape German education.

As the philanthropic arm of big corporate foundations, VF and RBF can both rely on considerable economic resources, albeit lately diminished by the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on their parent companies. Regardless, they are still able to fund major events, prestigious awards, extensive CPD programmes, and research projects.

VF and RBF both have identified teacher CPD as a key instrument to pursue envisioned change. Teacher CPD can be used to disseminate the foundations' ideas, such as the quality criteria for RBF's School Award in a bottom-up fashion (Klein & van Ackeren, 2018, p. 591). Their theory of change implies, that, because of their teacher trainings, educators will change their practices which, in turn, will transform not only their schools but also move the school system in the envisioned direction – one school at a time.

Regarding teacher CPD, VF and RBF both collaborate with state entities, like ministries of education. Even though VF is based in the UK and its parent corporation (Varkey Group/GEMS Education) operates mostly in the Middle East and North Africa, the foundation managed to land in South America. Besides the cooperation with the state nodal actors – in the case of Argentina for instance the Foundation's Country Director Agustin Porres and the National Minister of Education Esteban Bullrich – private actors play important roles for the landing of the Varkey Group in new areas – in the case of Argentina, especially Edúcere and Michael Lightfoot Associates (Matovich & Cardini, 2019). Less is known about how RBF and its School Academy gain access to the public sector in Germany.

## Role

*What do Varkey Foundation and Bosch Foundation actually do while pursuing their goals?*

In line with research on other major corporate philanthropies, the roles of VF and RBF can be described as innovating<sup>4</sup> and substituting (cf. Anheier & Leat, 2019, p. 60). In regard to their role as innovators, VF and RBF both primarily rely on their operational approaches. Both have devoted substantial resources to create various programmes and institutions. To create the envisioned change, both foundations have developed prestigious awards, built influential networks and use teacher CPD as a major driver for pursuing their goals. By creating and/or financially backing initiatives that strive in the same direction and by creating evidence, they further strengthen their agenda-setting abilities to 'innovate'.

In regard to substituting, VF and RBF both have spread their teacher CPD courses by collaborating with state entities. RBF did this primarily through their *German School Academy*. VF (2018a, Programmes) works with public partners in various countries "to

<sup>3</sup> See the homepage of 'Das Deutsche Schulportal', online: <https://deutsches-schulportal.de> [retrieved October 13, 2022].

<sup>4</sup> It has to be noted that even though innovation might be regarded as inherently positive, it is used here in a neutral way.

build new programmes that will deliver better school leaders, better teachers in classrooms and better results”. Hence, both foundations take over “responsibilities usually attributed to the state, such as teachers’ and school managers’ training” (Matovich & Cardini, 2019, p. 190).

For VF and RBF, this collaboration grants access to public school systems. In addition, it allows them to scale up their activities by addressing a much larger number of schools, teachers and students. However, “it is not the state, but a foundation that claims to change lives through education and that wants every child to have the best teacher” (Matovich & Cardini, 2019, p. 190).

As Matovich and Cardini (2019) highlight, this collaboration benefits both sides: “the Foundation and the state are ‘shielded’ from political conflicts. At the same time the latter is able to reach its workers, eluding political confrontation or conflict” (Matovich & Cardini, 2019, p. 190). In addition, public entities can use this partnership to draw on foundations’ legitimacy (who, for instance, claim to rely on the best practices of the schools awarded by the German School Award) and the foundations’ potential to be neither accountable “to market expectations nor to the ballot box” (Anheier & Leat, 2019, p. 1). However, there might be side-effects to this collaboration as well.

In the next section, we discuss our findings and highlight some implications for education policymaking, practice and research.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

One core characteristic of the GEI includes opening-up new market niches, like teacher education (Verger *et al.*, 2016b, p. 6). Of course, there are different ways in which the various GEI players, like big tech (cf. Lewis, 2022), engage with teacher education. We have focussed on two kinds of corporate philanthropy in education – new edu-philanthropies and more traditional corporate philanthropies – and their increasing activities regarding the professional development of teachers.

VF and RBF both want to be changemakers in education. As other researchers have pointed out, sometimes one cannot escape a sense of irony when comparing corporate philanthropies’ purposes to the ways their parent companies do business, sometimes making use of predatory capitalist strategies, registering their companies in fiscal paradises to avoid transparency, and identifying legal loopholes (cf. Anheier & Leat, 2019; Giridharadas, 2018; Lubienski, 2021). For instance, VF’s and RBF’s mission statements aiming to shape a positive future for today’s children are contradicted by GEMS Education reinforcing inequity through its socially stratified airline model of schooling (Ridge *et al.*, 2016) and Bosch’s involvement in the so-called ‘dieselgate’ providing manipulated technology to cheat on cars’ engine emissions (Zeit Online, 2019).

Regarding their approaches, there are some striking similarities: VF and RBF both have identified teacher CPD as a key instrument to pursue envisioned change, both collaborate with state entities to disseminate their CPD courses, and both have created prestigious awards for teachers or schools. However, considerable differences can also be seen. While VF operates in various continents, RBF’s CPD activities focus on its home country. While VF was able to reach huge numbers of teachers with its CPD programmes, RBF’s CPD courses address a much smaller number of educators. While VF develops its CPD programmes together with international consultants (Matovich & Cardini, 2019, p. 192), RBF claims to only edit already existing concepts and approaches of schools

awarded by its German School Award via its School Academy (Gottmann *et al.*, 2020, p. 4). These differences might also help to explain, why VF's CPD activities have sparked researchers' interest (cf. Esper, 2020; Matovich & Cardini, 2019; Ridge, 2019a), while RBF's activities have received less attention so far (cf. Altrichter *et al.*, 2020).

In line with research on other major corporate philanthropies, the roles of VF and RBF can be described as innovating and substituting (cf. Anheier & Leat, 2019, p. 60). Regarding the former, while we did not measure performance in a narrow sense, it is, however, not to pull out of thin air to assume that the impact of VF's and RBF's CPD courses depends on variables like group size and course length. Following Anheier and Leat (2019), we suggest measuring performance in a wider sense to not only find out if foundations' approaches can deliver on their goals, but also to account for unintended consequences and contradictory effects. For instance, even though corporate philanthropies are well equipped to take on risks of failure, there might be an incentive to report primarily positive results due to their collaboration with state entities (Anheier & Leat, 2019, p. 71). Regarding the latter, both foundations take over "responsibilities usually attributed to the state" (Matovich & Cardini, 2019, p. 190). To gain access to public education, VF has developed close relationships with state nodal actors, with private actors playing important roles in the landing in new areas (Matovich & Cardini, 2019). Less is known about RBF's partnerships with state entities like German Länder ministries of education. However, looking at the operations of both foundations, we assume their award ceremonies to be one opportunity to develop beneficial relationships with key public figures that might be gatekeepers that can become door openers.

Not only does the collaboration with the state as a mode of operation grant access to public education systems, it also holds the triple benefit of, first, allowing foundations and other GEI players to scale-up their activities (instead of having to approach one teacher or school at a time), second, not having to deal with hesitant educators, and, third, being a much subtler approach than publicly pushing for policy change which could provoke resistance. As Matovich and Cardini (2019) have demonstrated, both sides seek to benefit from such public-private partnerships. Therefore, the state partner needs to be accounted for as well – in line with research on the GEI which highlights the role of the state (Thompson & Parreira do Amaral, 2019, p. 3).

From a policy perspective, CPD is an important tool to soften the gap between what teachers are supposed to do in the eyes of policymakers and what teachers do or deem important. From an individual perspective, undertaking "appropriate and value-enhancing professional development" (Ball, 2019, p. 678) could also be seen as a way to keeping up. Applying a performativity lens might allow for further insights into why these public-private partnerships in teacher education thrive and what the implications for the teaching profession, especially regarding professionalism and autonomy, might be. Also, the CPD focus on teachers' competences and skills shifts attention away from issues such as working conditions and pay.

VF and RBF both have created numerous initiatives, programmes, and expert groups – with teacher CPD being one big arrow in their arsenal. With foundations learning from the Gates Foundation and others that are directly shaping public policy (Au & Lubienski, 2016), researchers have to be aware of such concerted efforts trying to advance a corporate philanthropy's education agenda. Nevertheless, for successful agenda-setting, a polyphonic chorus is needed to create a critical mass (Parreira do Amaral, 2016, p. 469). Part of this chorus is creating 'evidence' "to promote preferred policy ideas and business



models” (Parreira do Amaral & Thompson, 2019, p. 274). Therefore, it does not come by surprise that both VF and RBF conduct, commission and fund research projects.

Corporate philanthropies rely on their reputation which might change in case of failure and/or loss of legitimacy (Kolleck, 2019, p. 422). With VF and RBF both building upon and around their prestigious awards, reputational damages to these, e.g., by an awarded teacher or school being involved in a public scandal, could have adverse effects not only for these awards, but also for all the activities both foundations built around them as well as for the foundations themselves. Therefore, these flagship awards might not only constitute a powerful tool to gain legitimacy, increase their agenda-setting capabilities and foster building relations with public figures, but also present a potential Achilles’ heel.

Looking at aspects of transparency, Esper (2020, p. 86) highlights important issues regarding the contracting mechanism as cooperation agreements typically do not involve a public tender. In addition, there is a difference in how transparent corporate philanthropies are beyond of what is required by law. For instance, while one can easily find RBF’s leadership team and annual report on the foundation’s website, VF has not announced the appointment of a new CEO on its website since 2020.

The fact that corporate philanthropies engage in public education without offering the same amount of transparency that is usually required by state institutions – which, at least in theory, are required to provide certain information if asked by the public or their representatives in parliament – raises some important questions for democratic societies. This is particularly true when considering that foundations are primarily accountable to their founder via the deed, in which the foundation’s mission and areas of activity are defined, and their trustees, which often have worked at the parent company or are family members of the company founder. This raises the question, if and how democratic accountability of private-public partnerships can be realised or to which degree corporate philanthropies should be able to shape public education.

Many of the themes and issues discussed in this article are the topic of Benedict Kurz’ doctoral research. Taking up the threads developed in this article to further our understanding of corporate philanthropies collaborating with the state to train teachers around the world promises important insights into this new layer of the Global Education Industry.

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