

BOLD VISIONS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

# Neoliberalizing Educational Reform

**America's Quest for Profitable  
Market-Colonies and the Undoing  
of Public Good**

Keith M. Sturges (Ed.)

*Foreword by Antonia Darder*

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## **Neoliberalizing Educational Reform**

Bold Visions in Educational Research  
Volume 45

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## **Neoliberalizing Educational Reform**

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*Edited by*

**Keith M. Sturges**



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This book is dedicated to all the people who have committed themselves to improving education, not as a profit-making endeavour, but as an imperative to the production of a civic society.



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ANTONIA DARDER

## FOREWORD

### *Pointing the Way toward a More Socially Just World*

The fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world, a world in which critique and possibility—in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom and equality—function to alter the grounds upon which life is lived. (Henry Giroux, 2010)

Over the last three decades, neoliberal policies and practices have deeply transformed the landscape of education in the United States and abroad. This has resulted in staggering changes to state and national educational policy debates regarding the curriculum, the preparation of teachers, educational leadership, and conditions of accountability under which all students are expected to achieve academically. The greatest consequence has been a crippling of the public educational system through a profound contempt for public education, culminating with the hostile takeover of schools deemed “failing,” according to matrices conveniently put in place by those leading the movement to privatize education. Yet, amid the wreckage of aggressive neoliberal policies and practices, there also has been an absence of a coherent political vision of struggle on the ground to counter the massive assault on public education.

True to neoliberal form, education has been further fragmented, ahistoricized, instrumentalized, and depoliticized by economic logic that betrays the very essence of democratic life. Instead of a public good open to all, education has been transfigured into a private good—a market commodity that can easily be controlled, bartered, and sold, without transparency or substantive regulation. Underlying this political decimation of public education has been a ruthless aim to solidify the role of schools, in preparing workers to faithfully meet the demands of capital. Even more disconcerting, as E. Wayne Ross and Richard Gibson (2006) argue in *Education and Neoliberal Reform*, “Neoliberalism is embraced by parties across the political spectrum, from right to left, in that the interests of wealthy investors and large corporations define social and economic policy. The free market, private enterprise, consumer choice, entrepreneurial initiative, deleterious effects of government regulation, and so on, are the tenets of a neoliberalism. Indeed, the corporate-controlled media spin would have the public believe that the economic consequences of neoliberal economic policy, which serves the interests of the wealthy elite, is good for everyone” (p. 2).

NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM

In the “flat world” of neoliberal educational policies, issues of difference and democracy have been expediently whittled away, so that decades of civil rights efforts to confront racism, poverty, and other forms of material inequalities and social exclusions are now readily dismissed as irrelevant to the present educational enterprise. Instead, the emphasis is placed upon privatization schemes that have uncompromisingly turned education into a tool for profit, whether this be in the form of new educational entrepreneurs who have carved a place for themselves by establishing charter management organizations; private efforts to create non-traditional teacher preparation programs that promise quick movement through an already insufficient curriculum; superintendents whose primary function is that of corporatizing educational life; or market profiteers that benefit hugely from neoliberal educational reform measures by peddling course materials, testing paraphernalia, and textbooks that support these aims.

The current conservative encroachment into education, however, is not a new phenomenon, but rather the current face of the larger capitalist enterprise. As such, neoliberal educational reform must be properly understood as an extension of the greater hegemonic apparatus of the capitalist state. This to say, it is bred through what Antonio Gramsci (1971) termed *hegemony*, where “spontaneous consent is given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group.” In the educational arena, neoliberal policies immersed furiously and persistently on the heels of the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report. In response to one of its basic tenets—schools should function as economic engines for the national economy—an unbridled process of educational privatization burst like hellfire on the scene, while mean-spirited rhetoric of failing public schools tore asunder progressive educational efforts that had barely begun to take hold. Accordingly, Reagan and his cronies went after public education with a vengeance, resurrecting exponentially past conservative accountability discourses of the 60s and 70s and former political tactics employed to disrupt the progress of the labor movement and other growing identity movements of the time.

Of course, rather than to attack progressive efforts by way of simply brute force, the power of the state apparatus was effectively deployed with the advancement of an economic Darwinism materialized through social reform measures that well-protected and bolstered neoliberal financial imperatives. In accordance, the safety net of the welfare state established by earlier Keynesian-inspired policies to contend with the downside of capitalism were quickly eroded, while simultaneously blatant corporate deregulation flourished. The result was the astonishing economic boom of the late 1990s that rivaled any previous economic era—a boom that simultaneously triggered a staggering wealth gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, lopsided wealth ratios today are the largest recorded, since the federal government began publishing such data a quarter century ago (Domhoff, 2013). Moreover, neoliberal financial antics of the mortgage industry, for instance, led to gross economic decline

particularly among working class communities of color. The unprecedented loss of homes and property fueled by the foreclosure crisis sent black and brown net worth to an all-time low. The lack of jobs and other financial resources has made it that much harder for our communities to recover and economist predict that it will take at least a full generation before we can regain what was lost in the last decade (Henry et al., 2013).

Despite this devastation, community concerns related to cultural and economic difference have been readily disarticulated from educational debates, neutralized by a hard-hitting meritocracy of accountability. In the process, an entrenched instrumental ideology of achievement smugly justifies the neoliberal disregard for difference, ignoring larger historical concerns of class, culture, language, and educational inequalities. That is, unless these are in sync with the tenets of a *neoliberal multiculturalism*—where racialized differences are indeed acknowledged and even celebrated based on an ethos of self-reliance, individualism, and competition, yet devoid of any genuine opportunity for participation or decision-making power; while simultaneously discourses and social practices that call for collective social action and fundamental structural change are consistently undermined (Darder, 2012b).

#### NEOLIBERAL REFORM AND THE CAPITALIST STATE

In sync with aggressive financial policies to intensify the concentration of wealth, a slew of anti-progressive initiatives have emerged since the 1990s that, in particular, targeted workers' rights, immigrant rights, language rights, and educational rights in the US. Through an unrelenting hegemonic culture of rampant greed and the indiscriminate delimiting of our humanity, a politics of social equality and public responsibility were systematically eroded away. The politics of privatization that undergird neoliberal reforms effectively maximized the power and control of health management organizations, supported voucher and charter school initiatives, opened the path to unprecedented public surveillance of the population, intensified military action abroad and recruiting efforts on school campuses, and established the largest prison industrial complex in the world. In fact from 1989 to 2010, the prison population increased by a staggering 77% (Mallik-Kane et al., 2012), which resulted in the overwhelming incarceration of poor working class men and women of color.

Neoliberal educational reforms are entrenched in the interests of the capitalist state and, more specifically, the political interests of the wealthy and powerful. With this in mind, it is not surprising that just as educational reform efforts of the civil rights era began to reap some promising outcomes in the late 1970s and early 80s, with improvement in educational outcomes for the most impoverished communities and an increase in college and university attendance by historically underrepresented student populations, the conservative antics of the Right revived their bitter campaign to discredit progressive educational efforts, advance the privatization movement, and usher in some of the most Draconian accountability measures in the history of

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US education. This, in turn, led to the most expansive national high-stakes testing campaign ever, aggressively solidified by the federal passage of *No Child Left Behind* by the Bush administration in 2001 and its transmutation to *Race to the Top* (RTTT) by the Obama administration in 2009.

These neoliberal educational reforms resulted in the pervasive commodification and instrumentalization of education, along with the unparalleled take-over of “low-performing” schools. This phenomenon was well illustrated by the brutal antagonism against public education by the privatization movement in New Orleans, following the widespread wreckage of hurricane Katrina. Today, the city is publically touted as the “home to the nation’s first all charter school district” (Mullins, 2014). This hostile takeover in New Orleans and a sea of schools across the country has placed the education of poor working class children of color on the neoliberal auction block, with little substantive concern for larger political questions of cultural difference, social equality, nor economic justice. The consequence has been the erosion of public education as a legitimate public space for democratic formation and genuine civic engagement. Similarly, the potential of public education as a legitimate site of struggle for the forging of culturally democratic life across the nation has been overwhelmingly trampled.

#### COUNTERING THE LOGIC OF THE MARKET PLACE

What has also been made glaringly obvious over the last several decades by the consequences of neoliberal policies in education—including the closing of schools in the most vulnerable neighborhoods, the mass firing of teachers, and growing reform efforts toward the rigid standardization of knowledge—is that educational justice cannot echo the logic of the market place and educational success cannot be reduced to an efficiency language of quantification and expediency, which strips away our humanity from the process of teaching and learning. As such, we cannot ignore that the logic of the marketplace has effectively normalized racialized and class stratifications, through the dominant values and beliefs proliferated fervently by the culture industry (Darder, 2012a)—the same values and beliefs that inform hegemonic schooling or what Paulo Freire (1971) called *banking education*. In the process, “dominated by pedagogies that are utterly instrumental, geared toward memorization, conformity and high-stakes test taking, public schools have become intellectual dead zones and punishment centers as far removed from teaching civic values and expanding the imaginations of students as one can imagine (Giroux, 2010).

Similarly, a bootstrap and victim-blaming ideology of deficit has been used to justify stripping away access to even a meager existence to the most vulnerable populations. Within neoliberal ideals, blatant failures of capitalism are ignored and even rewarded through the market driven politics of corporate welfare. Meanwhile, teachers, students, parents, and communities of modest means are blamed for the ills of society, as social reform policies deceptively function to disguise the inherent truth—in order for capitalism to function effectively, poverty is a necessity of the

system. To shroud this major contradiction in the discourse of liberal democracy, commonsensical myths about educational achievement, personal success, academic failure, poverty, and so on are perpetrated to deflect the responsibility for the nation's systemic problems away from the wealthy and powerful. Instead, those with the least power or influence are held responsible through the use of debilitating measures sustained by conservative reforms. This has resulted in spiraling reform efforts within low-income communities of color.

This also signals a serious need to critically challenge the racializing consequences of neoliberal accountability. In its place, we must call for a systemic critique of accountability that holds the most wealthy and powerful both politically and morally responsible for the dire consequences we are facing today in every facet of our lives, including the education of our children. Also at issue here is the manner in which reform language obfuscates corporate interests, while denying community members, students, and teachers voice, decision-making power, and just democratic participation in the evolution of their own lives, as cultural citizens of the world. And so insidious is the logic of the neoliberal marketplace, that now everyone, irrespective of political inclination, uses the shorthand term of “stakeholders”—an economist term used for shareholders or investors—to speak about those who are considered to have “a stake” in education. In concert, these “stakeholders” are seen as consumers of education (as a product), rather than co-creators of knowledge or cultural citizens in the process of enacting their democratic rights. By so doing, education is reified and “stakeholders” are objectified in ways that delimit their choices—most which are directly linked to corporate interests and the needs of the labor market.

#### STEM EDUCATION IN, THE HUMANITIES OUT

As authority and power has become more and more concentrated in the hands of the wealthy and the purpose of education more heavily aligned to neoliberal imperatives, where market profiteers enjoy full rein within the evolving terrain of free-market education. Visionary educational leaders have become passé, while the educational entrepreneur and the corporate-inspired administrator, guided by so-called “evidence based” (or scientific) research that supports neoliberal claims, thrive. The consequence, of course, is that public education has suffered a frontal blow at the hands of neoliberal technocrats. In concert, public school teachers are put on the defensive, in ways that have dwindled their authority and autonomy, even within their own classrooms; bilingual children have lost the right to be taught in their own language; corporate-inspired curriculum has become commonplace; fast-track teacher education programs have drastically reduced the time spent in teacher formation; and state and federal mandates for teacher education and classroom practice have become more and more instrumentalized, placing greater attention to testing protocols and prescribed learning objectives.

Simultaneously, STEM (Science, Education, Engineering and Mathematics) education has quickly become the great panacea for countering the academic

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disparities of the so called “achievement gap.” In turn, the humanities have come increasingly into disfavor, to the extent that even the new Common Core Standards prides itself in deemphasizing the pedagogical significance of literary fiction in the learning process. It is important to note that this is in direct correlation with the overall contempt with which the humanities have been treated during the last two decades within university education. Disturbing, of course, is that the humanities is generally that part of the educational curriculum most likely to raise critical questions related to human existence and social life, as well as ethical and moral questions linked to our practices as human beings in the world and the consequences of our actions upon individuals and society. Hence, as one might guess, funding for research in the humanities is today at an all-time low (Symes, 2011), while funding for STEM education and research is on the rise, despite the fact that “half of all STEM jobs are available to workers without a four-year degree” (Rothwell, 2013).

#### TOWARD A COHERENT POLITICAL VISION OF STRUGGLE

Since no form of oppression is ever complete and history remains, as Freire (1998) often reminded us, an unfinished affair, there are many who today work diligently to raise concerns and to struggle against the national and global impact of neoliberal policies on society and the environment. As is well documented in this volume, there have been demands for educational change made by both union and community activists. Immigrant rights groups have brought their concerns to the arena of educational debate. Student union organizations at various universities have launched important challenges to the neoliberal transformation of higher education. Unfortunately, at times, even these efforts have become inadvertently neoliberalized, in that they have remained often isolated from one another, focused on single issues, and more attentive to individual concerns. As a consequence, it has been tough to forge a larger political project for change, where collective solidarity and structural reinvention remain ever at the center, even when tending to particularistic concerns. In the absence of such a political vision, seldom can local efforts alone lead to systemic change of hegemonic structures that both reproduce and perpetuate gross inequalities. What this points to is the need for a coherent vision of social struggle in this country and internationally, where systemic changes are, indeed, the catalytic imperative that drives our various political efforts to reclaim collective control of our schools, our labor, our communities, and our lives.

Toward this end, Paulo Freire (1997) insisted that the oppressive system of capitalist production could not be altered without simultaneous collective efforts to democratize schools and the larger society—which, incidentally, is exactly what neoliberal reform strategies stifle through the logic of the marketplace and the quest for economic supremacy that inform the politics of neoliberal reformism. Not surprisingly, Freire argued, instead, that we fight against reformism and use “the contradictions of reformist practice to defeat it” (p. 74). To help counter these contradictions, Freire urged us to construct within schools and communities what

he called “advanced forms of social organizations ... capable of surpassing this articulated chaos of corporate interests” (p. 36). This again points to the need to challenge coherently neoliberal policies that promote corporate deregulation, unjust practices of the free market, bootstrap accountability, and rampant individualism. Furthermore, the underlying focus of our work at every level must entail a critical challenge to the social and material structures of capitalism and the neoliberal adherence to the false notion that a free-market equals democracy.

The struggle for systemic social change is, indeed, made more difficult in the current climate, where neoliberalism has made a farce of the democratic ideal of “civic engagement,” subterfuging the public good and the strength of our differences. To counter this travesty, we must move in theory and practice beyond reformism, as Freire (1997) suggested, and embrace through our daily praxis a larger political project for educational and societal transformation. This demands from us a more profound sense of political affiliation and a reinvestment in the collective power of social movement. Toward this end, we can strive to become more politically conscious and vigilant in our responses to the world, so that we do not fall prey to the common contradictions of neoliberalism that easily betray our liberatory dreams. This requires that we understand, as did Freire, that *no one exists outside the system* (Darder, 2015); and as such, a purity of politics or sectarianism are not the answer. Rather, we must enter into critical engagement with the complexities and nuanced ways in which hegemony impacts our lives as educators and world citizens, as well as the many social differences that exist among us, as a consequence of our cultural histories and material conditions of survival.

Similarly, to prevent the structural reproduction of oppression, so common to our world, also necessitates an ideological and epistemological shift in how we make meaning, define problems, seek solutions, and enact institutional and communal change. And none of this can transpire outside of an ethical and moral commitment to democratic participation, the dignity of human rights, and the struggle for economic justice. Toward this end, our work in schools and communities requires the solid integration of critical democratic principles, in cultural, political, and economic terms. At the heart of such a concept is recognition that the process of liberation, whether in the classroom or the larger society, can only be enacted through a coherent political vision of struggle, where neither unity nor difference is sacrificed.

Further, our collective strategies of struggle must also fully reflect and correspond to the contemporary historical moment. Human emancipatory strategies are both longstanding and dynamic, defined by the historicity of their emergence. There can simply be no return to the *good ole days* even of the 60s, which were—if truth be told—often mired in a contradictory and Eurocentric epistemology of assimilation, white privilege, patriarchy, individualism, and authoritarianism, even within progressive organizational contexts (Darder, 2015). Yet, despite historical contradictions, we must nevertheless continue to forge collectively an emancipatory vision of education and society—one that can *point the way toward a more socially just world*.



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#### A COURAGEOUS CONTRIBUTION TO THE EDUCATIONAL DEBATE

This fundamental purpose of this foreword is to extend an enduring message of solidarity and appreciation for the powerful analytical discourses provided in this book. *Neoliberalizing Educational Reform: America's Quest for Profitable Market-colonies and the Undoing of the Public Good* constitutes an impressive political contribution to a critical body of literature that courageously unveils the hidden curriculum of education in the current neoliberal era. More significantly, the volume encompasses both a rich language of critique and a passionate spirit of hope, as it contends substantively with many of the tough issues and concerns briefly engaged above. Furthermore, despite the educational crisis generated by the vulgar capriciousness of neoliberal reforms, Keith M. Sturges and his contributors have invested themselves in a formidable political vision for social transformation, not only within education and beyond. It is truly a brilliant example of how critical intellectuals can use the power of their scholarship to expose and undermine hegemonic discourses, when carefully examining and redefining the contours of educational debates, in ways that enhance our intellectual and political capacities to struggle more coherently in schools and communities.

Most importantly, what is made abundantly clear is that *individual freedom must never trump our pursuit for the common good*. Hence, the book offers a persuasive and powerful argument for building a broader base for political struggle, if we are to transform the philosophical foundations and practical intentions of public education. This requires that we ask new questions—questions profoundly driven by an emancipatory vision of society and the restoration of the public good. This timely volume provides educators, battling the consequences of neoliberal reforms, with hope and beckons us to recommit ourselves more fully to the struggle for a world where *the values of reason, freedom and equality can function to alter the grounds upon which life is lived*.

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## 1. EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE AGE OF NEOLIBERALISM

*A Call for a Focused, Empirically-Supported, Collective Response*

### NEOLIBERALISM & EDUCATIONAL REFORM

When David Harvey published *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* nearly a decade ago, it quickly became one of the most cited social science works of all time. The book was important for a number of reasons. It advanced a coherent definition of a previously nebulous and abstruse economic term. His accessible analysis laid down a common language that helped unite diverse scholars grappling with issues of fast-paced globalization, forms and degrees of previously unimaginable privatization, the dismantling of public good institutions, the collapse of labor benefits, the escalation of temporary labor relations, extreme wealth polarization, and the deployment of austerity measures that reduced the capacity or redirected the essential functions of institutions that were created to serve the public good. Along with that definition, Harvey brought together previously separate literatures and economic data to chronicle the events that culminated in the economic calamity that currently prevails.

This volume's central topic, *educational reform*, conveys both the seemingly straightforward and pragmatic activity of planned school change and, upon closer inspection, planned change that is deeply entrenched in political economic interests. It is linked directly to a notion of progress (Popkewitz, 1991; Tyack & Cuban, 1995)—progress in technologies, progress in structures and policies, progress in measurement, and progress in efficiency. Rightly so, Popkewitz (1991) defines *educational reform* as the perennial contestation and defining (and redefining) of public space. From revised formulas for federal and state funding, mandates for measurement and quality, academic supports, curricular design and development, teacher preservice, teacher and leader progress measures, professional development, community involvement, and so on, reform is the stuff of enduring contestations about who should be served, with whose input, and in what ways.

Educational reform “has been a means of conceiving and enacting visions of the collective good” for a very long time (Provenzo, 2008). When neoliberalism and educational reform are held under the same light, the theme of collective good is replaced with collection of goods. Neoliberalism’s “veiled pursuit to destroy any tacit notion that we in the United States may have once had about the importance of the common good and public education as a human right” (Darder, 2012, p. 412)

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and its alleged promise to add value to planned change through privatization and calibration (Boyles, 2011; Lipman, 2011) open many opportunities for critical response and elaboration.

In her analysis of the transformation of Chicago's public education system to one that supports wealth accumulation of the elite and that is supported by new forms of governance, Lipman (2011) makes a number of crucial points that have widespread applicability. Among these, she emphasizes the irony of how national priorities compel government intervention to salvage failing corporate interests while abandoning public education to the lucrative private market because of its purported failure. Perhaps worse is government's active involvement in the commodification of public education through federal competitive initiatives such as Race to the Top. Fierce forms of privatized educational management, technical assistance, and reform experimentation target the most vulnerable schools (most particularly those serving large percentages of minority and poor children) and communities (Hill & Kumar, 2009; Lipman, 2011; Sturges, 2015) in the name of failure. This notion, failure, has been central to planned educational change since its inception (see early legislative debates during Reconstruction in Lee, 1949). But, more recently, it has been reinterpreted as a concept that is both faulted to the individual (Wilson, 2007) and to teachers, schools and districts (Ravitch, 2013), making intervention by private occupation a purported necessity and second-nature response.

Critical inquiry into the seemingly pragmatic and rational responses to the alleged failure of public education (and of underserved students, of teachers, and of principals) illustrates how *commonsense* serves as the mechanism that hastens public reaction to a perceived educational crisis (Apple, 2011; Lagotte & Wheeler-Bell, this volume; Lemke, this volume; Rosen, 2003; Smith, 2012). The discourse of crisis, articulated unremittingly in the media (e.g., ABC News' 2013 interview with Arne Duncan in which the Secretary said, "The United States is in a real state of crisis" as he compared the US to other developed nations), glorifies action and criminalizes anything resembling inaction. However, action does not automatically take the form of collective engagement. Among consumers of education goods and services (as students, families, and communities are now conceived), it takes the forms of choice in schools, teachers, and in selecting from pre-packaged curricular reform options (Ravitch, 2013). For reformers, action concentrates on raising test scores, delivering sanctions, and promoting the crisis and its solution.

Most perverse, the tactics are deployed by some of the same people who are being disenfranchised the most, a new brand of *freedom* fighters. This deployment continues unabashed by concerted counter-measure or deeply-oppressive coercion in great part because of a neoliberal ideology that makes the tactics appear as common sense (Gramsci, 1971). Democratic ideals such as freedom and the translation of that ideal into widespread individualist demands for *hyper-deregulation* urge localized struggle. Indeed, freedom may, in this context, be "just another word for nothing

left to lose” (Kristofferson & Foster, 1969). This version of freedom is indicative of a deepening integration, socialization, into this more mature market economy (Apple, 2001; Menter, Muschamp, Nichols, Ozga, & Pollard, 1997). This is especially crucial to note since one of its more instructive implications is that the marketplace is an imaginary for action, not a blueprint (Apple, 2001). Thus, the tactics are often responses to immediate threats and take the form of oppositional, yet parallel, countermeasures. In a Foucauldian sense, such a struggle for freedom is doomed because it echoes the system logic that supports the new political economy (Foucault, 1980). Many assist the further conversion of educational systems into exploitable markets (Lakes & Carter, 2011).

In some manner, every decision related to educational reform—whether in the realm of funding, teacher education, what can and must be taught, hiring decisions, teacher performance, alternative actions to poor performing schools, how poor performance is measured, or curricular and material development—is now in the hands of corporations, entrepreneurs, and foundations (Kumashiro, 2012b; Lipman, 2011). For instance, as I write this chapter, breaking news describes the New Orleans public school system being taken over completely by ReNEW Schools Charter Management Organization. The move, which will allegedly enhance educational opportunities for historically-underserved students and reduce inefficiencies, comes at the price of community engagement (Washington Post, 2014). What was previously the key measure of success in educational reform is, under neoliberalism, a key indicator of its failure.

While it is not the purpose of this chapter to trace the origins of neoliberalism in educational reform (see Lipman, 2011 and Harvey, 2005), a little context may be helpful. The past 50 years have witnessed unprecedented national educational reform policy and action. The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA I) solidified the federal government’s involvement in using education as one way to remedy gross inequities in US society. The Act drew from the Civil Rights movement’s call for civic engagement, inclusion, collectivism, support, and social justice. Ultimately, the appropriations were slow and slim—at best—and many of the interventions intended for historically underserved students were based on flagrant deficit models (Herriott & Gross, 1979). Less transparently, ESEA I laid the foundation for new kinds of public-private partnerships.<sup>1</sup> Almost overnight, relationships between research and development consultants, the Office of Education, local public school districts, teacher unions, nonprofits, and community groups implemented a wide array of reform experiments. While the 1960s and 1970s may have seen the production of the fundamental organizational relationships that would ultimately permit a few to reap the benefits of neoliberal policies, the Reagan era’s federal government reduction and the resulting experiments in cost-cutting measures mark the most immediate rise of neoliberalism.

Since the 1980s, public education in the US has been guided by national policy that increasingly demands high-level monitoring systems, a “whitewashing”

(Darder, 2012; Urrieta, 2006) homogenization of classroom activity and curriculum design, high-stakes testing, and competition for funding basic school operations (Sturges, 2015). This is especially problematic along the lines of race, class, and gender, since neoliberal policies and their implementation in educational reforms tend to reintroduce and reproduce projects and discourses that normalize a white, middle-class, and male vision of education (Apple, 2001; Darder, 2012). This infusion of unwritten national aims for the education of all children is reinforced at every turn. Schools are becoming increasingly divided along these demographic lines as sites of differential access to civic education and preparation for political engagement (Journell, 2011; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Neoliberal reform in education has also introduced an intensification—especially in schools attended primarily by low-income students of color—of curriculum narrowing, curricular dis-alignment as a means to maximize test scores, test-preparation in lieu of active engagement (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Shiller, 2011; Watts & Walsh, 1997), and decreased access to experienced teachers who have decision-making authority and creativity in pedagogical and curricular decisions (Brewer, 2014).

This national policy and set of priorities have been accompanied by demands that corporation-like structures replace school districts, and that, with those structures, come a change in values (Lakes & Carter, 2011). Specifically, job security, decision-making authority, and professional learning is being replaced by efficiency, expediency, and payoff matrices. Because neoliberal practices seldom align neatly with one another (Harvey, 2005), it is not easy to parse out which aspects of this crisis represent new forms of domination and which are recycled. Likewise, the deployment of some tactics symptomatic of neoliberal capitalism appear to work against one another. The pressing matter is that neoliberalism constitutes a web of tactics directed at a common aim of wealth concentration by and for a very small portion of the world's population (Lavine, 2012).

Neoliberalism's commonsense conception of freedom constitutes a re-envisioning of citizens' relationship to society: from a people with voice to consumers of services (Wilson, 2007). The notions of failure, external expert, and individual-in-system replace notions of educator professionalism, democratic engagement, and participatory democracy. Individual consumers of education services place individualistic faith in the progressive potential of charter schools, privatization of testing, teacher education (traditional and alternative), market-driven curricula, technological tutors and technology-based curricula, etc. Individually, this translates "very narrowly to define education as an individualistic enterprise in a market-based economy" (Kumashiro, 2012a). In this context, "education is a private good, an investment one makes in one's child or oneself to 'add value' to better compete in the labor market" (Lipman, 2011, p. 15). This, in turn, reinforces the repurposing of sites of formal, public education to ones that serve the individual's and society's economic development. Deemphasized are democratic engagement, social justice, and other ideals of democracy (Apple, 2001; Apple & Beane, 2007; Goodlad, Soder, & McDaniel, 2008; Hart & Mullooly, this volume).

## EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE AGE OF NEOLIBERALISM

A closely connected theme is the wresting of decision making authority for educational policy and planned change from educational leaders and elected officials and their redistribution to organizational hybrids comprised of corporations and the elite (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Kumashiro, 2012b, 2012; Journell, 2011). For instance, as Kumashiro (2012b) illustrates, companies, such as Pearson and ETS, which hold incredible amounts of power over education testing, test preparation, and disaggregated data sets, also have sway over which reforms are supported and funded to more widespread implementation. In addition, the dividing line between elected officials and neoliberal governance has become a hodgepodge of “mayoral control, appointed school boards, corporate CEOs running urban school districts, direct involvement of corporate actors and corporate philanthropies dictating school district policies” (Lipman, 2011, p. 47).

The research published thus far has raised important questions about contemporary educational reform and called for further scrutiny of both the specifics and cross-cutting characteristics of neoliberalism and schooling. The works have also offered a range of suggestions for addressing these political economic conditions. In the next section, I explore those solutions as counter-tactics and principal aims for action.

### IMPLEMENTS, PURPOSE, MOVEMENT

Public education in the US is in the midst of a crisis. It is not the oft-spun discourse flaunting America’s poor education performance in global comparisons. US academic quality is, despite characterizations to the contrary, admirable (Ravitch, 2013). The very real and more immediate crisis is the swift, mechanical undoing of a foundational institution of civic good—public education—and the hasty replacement of its core precepts for ones that are fleeting and profit-driven. Every profitable aspect of planned educational change is being commoditized and that which is not profitable is cast aside. Like never before, the policy domain holds the doors wide open for private marketeers. For instance, Race to the Top’s expansion of teacher evaluation systems and punitive measures permitted the private sector to profit from assisting state departments, districts, and schools (Howley & Howley, this volume; Ravitch, 2013). Profit-generating opportunities are developed and obtained through charter management, technology immersion, teacher retraining and support, and curriculum development. Some organizations, such as KIPP and Teach for America, are funded in part by the US elite and must, therefore, be seen as investments with expected profitable returns.

This crisis has direct consequences for teacher preparation, the ways in which reform programs are evaluated and the purpose of those evaluations, the development and use of new curricula, the hiring and employment terms of teachers and faculty, the quality of teacher work experiences, and the learning experiences and opportunities for students. It has enduring implications for all of society. The crisis has prompted a variety of reactions.



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### *Demand for Social Change*

When students march, faculty unite, and teachers strike to demonstrate opposition to the use of actions related to the new regime of educational reform, the acts index powerful localized victories. For instance, Giroux (2014) describes how New York University students learned from United Auto Workers how to unionize graduate teaching assistants. Kumashiro (2012a) illustrates a restrengthening of the Chicago Teachers Union. More recently, Puerto Rican teachers shut down Senate proceedings in response to a holiday vote that eliminated teacher pensions (Telenoticias, 2013). In Texas, the Community of Brothers in Revolutionary Alliance is promoting the academic and leadership development of underrepresented boys in Texas High Schools, so that they may thrive despite neoliberal influences. These victories complicate, problematize, and disrupt neoliberal activity. Taken together, they demonstrate that while neoliberal capitalism is far-reaching, it is far from totalizing and it has vulnerabilities.

However, localized actions that target neoliberalism's discrete vulnerabilities are unlikely to alter the underlying structural conditions of gross injustice. They inconvenience. Countermeasures, big media, big data, the insertion of corporatist values into public institutions, the stripping away of bargaining power, and the obsession with measuring teacher outcome indicators (that purportedly link neatly to classroom practice) are but a few of the strategies that have matured and continue to mature. Their vulnerabilities are continuously assessed and repaired, and new exploitative opportunities are continuously identified.

The opposition to neoliberalism in the US has been largely fragmented, particularistic, discipline-bound, and insular. Concurrent with this fragmentation, the conception of activism for social justice has itself become neoliberalized (Darder, 2012). This "rampant individualism" serves the neoliberal project both directly in the service of protecting private interests (Darder 2012, p. 413) and symbolically by pedestaling a world free from individual restrictions. An opposition movement entails sharing common aims and sense of community. I organize the following discussion around Touraine's (1966) definition of social movement as having three key features: (1) a vision for social change, (2) a collective identity, and (3) a definable adversary. I believe these features remain pertinent to exploring social movement vis-à-vis neoliberalism in educational reform.

### *A Vision for a Total Social Movement*

Localized victories are encouraging. They may hold tremendous symbolic value. They are not, however, necessarily representative of a coherent social movement or total social movement (Touraine, Dubet, Wieviorka, & Strzelecki, 1983). Since localized acts do not usually encompass both national democratic aspirations and efforts to transform social class conditions, they seldom lead to changes in structural conditions. As Harvey contends, while a number of organizations, collectives, and

ideologies that stand against neoliberal efforts exist, their objectives “cannot be realized without challenging the fundamental power bases upon which neoliberalism has been built and to which the processes of neoliberalization have so lavishly contributed” (2005, p. 187). Anything short of intentionally and continuously *chasing the shadows* (Touraine, 1992) will invite the return of neoliberalism.

Diminishing neoliberalism will require working collectively toward a common vision. Conflicting aims and strategies between organizations make them susceptible to divide and rule. The crucial task is to coordinate and communicate across experiences to expand the movement’s breadth and depth. I agree that, strategically, “an alliance has to be built to regain popular control of the state apparatus and to thereby advance the deepening rather than the evisceration of democratic practices and values under the juggernaut of market power” (Harvey, 2005, p. 206). That alliance must not fall into a sort of populist nonconformity, but remain focused on the reinsertion of democratic practice in both economic terms and in political and politicized institutions.

In his analysis of the May 1968 movement in *Logic of Failed Revolt* (1995), Peter Starr (1995) describes the logic of *structural repetition* in which outwardly-appearing actions aimed at social justice, instead of changing conditions, reinforce established regimes by helping the rival system learn the movement’s tactics and strategies. Take, for instance, the rush of campus funding at public universities during the 1970s and 1980s to build beautifying features that broke up public spaces, thereby creating seemingly natural obstacles that impeded mass demonstrations. At a time of the now taken-for-granted existence of big data, surveillance apparatuses, and other forms of public monitoring, system learning and continuous improvement is particularly strong. Tactics become old quickly. They are also turned against the individuals who stand in opposition.

For decades, in my work as a program evaluator of Title I curricular reforms, I hoped that helping school personnel understand which aspects of curricular reforms worked and in what ways might help build school personnel capacity and, thereby, contribute to their self-sufficiency. In my recent research on program evaluator identity, I learned that many people turn to the program evaluation industry with hopes of contributing to social change from inside the institutions (Sturges, 2014). However, relatively recently, major curricular reforms have begun to come with pre-determined metrics, usually defined around teacher evaluations, high stakes tests, and predestined progress intervals. In many cases, a curricular reform’s value can be judged only to the extent that it raises test scores, representing a vast and immeasurable logical leap. This means bypassing any efforts related to self-sufficiency. Some evaluators have redoubled their change-minded efforts by increasing their use of participatory evaluation approaches (Ghorashi & Wels, 2009). But, as a whole, even with national association stances on the ethical wrongness of “evidence-mania” (Schwandt, 2005), contract awards favor those who are willing to play the neoliberal game by utilizing strategies that “quiet” local voice (Greene & Lee, 2006) and championing assessment indicators.

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While the notion of reversing neoliberalism's hold on public institutions is gaining momentum, less clear are the collective end-goals. Some critical knowledge workers and activists argue or insinuate that there must be a great return to conditions that existed before the onslaught of educational reform privatization. There is no return. Indeed, "there is no there there" (Stein, 1937, p. 289); the political economic situation that gave rise to and then supported the maturity of neoliberal capitalism has shifted several times over. If conditions could be reverted to something that resembled what once was, our relation to those conditions would be vastly different. That does not mean the dystopian conditions that public education has endured over the last few decades, with the perilous decline in education as a mode of civic engagement and public good, are beyond remedy.

The current economic mess presents incredible opportunities (Lipman, 2011; Harvey, 2005). The middle class' loss of economic ground, in part exacerbated by student loan debt and the evaporation of professional and stable, well-paid skilled jobs (e.g., manufacturing), calls into question the neoliberalizing tendencies and forces this powerful segment of US society to explore radical alternatives. Multiregional and multinational organizing is taking shape. Lipman describes an emerging movement in which local stakeholders use public schools as spaces of participatory democratic discussion. Take, for instance, the Trinational Conference in Defense of Public Education, which brings together educators, students, and community activists from Mexico, Canada, and the US. A vision of public education that serves its liberatory potential by helping to change structured inequities is emerging. As Antonia Darder urges, such a social movement for public education must involve:

A coherent and revolutionary political vision that critically embraces universal human rights—a vision that privileges the needs of the many, in place of the few. Hence, our struggles against all forms of inequality must recognize that there is no liberation without a revolutionary transformation of the class society. (2012, p. 424)

This movement requires not individuals but people who share a vision and a movement-focused identity.

#### *Identity Production and a Collective Movement*

While not the specific definition of identity Alain Touraine had in mind, I am thinking of identity as that which is interwoven into everyday lived experience. It carries with it agency, a sense of belonging to a group, and lived expression (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). It conveys positionality and social position, and extends beyond posturing within circles to debating, informing, influencing, and learning; it is always in process, always learning, refining (Holland et al., 1998). Identity in the context of social movement specifies the actors who hold a common vision and who are committed to realizing it, thereby defining the sociocultural boundaries that permit what Kumashiro calls collectivization (2012a; 2012b).

The movement's main actors are academicians, their students, and public educators. Higher education—a space that is enveloped in punishing austerity measures, diminishing faculty freedoms and bargaining power, a quest for return on investment, and the (ab)use of a revolving and disposable teaching force—is decreasingly capable of leading the charge. The very socializing foundations of higher education have been corrupted and co-opted. Contemporarily, faculty members are being “conditioned into a culture of antidemocratic values that shape the expectations of their teaching, research, and tenure process” (Darder, 2012, p. 414). They are increasingly made responsible for the brokering and vetting of neoliberal mechanics and architects that continue to transform education to private enterprise. More established, even tenured, faculty face academic sanctions if they fail to conform to the new privatization-oriented provisions and requirements for newly determined forms of university success (Darder, 2012). Faculty in research departments, representatives of the grants culture, also must succumb to neoliberalizing pressures (Boyles, 2011; Daza et al., this volume). This has led many qualified, potential academicians to seek intellectual engagement outside the world of higher education (Sturges, 2014). As the academy's foundations show signs of wear and weakening, prospects for collectivization are declining.

This fervor to do something about the effects of neoliberalism also coincides with tuition hikes, incredible competition for attention from faculty whose case loads are beyond reasonable capacity, and student loan debt that may carry into mid-life (see Howley & Howley, this volume). It also coincides with a structural disinvestment in student engagement in social debate and a concomitant deepening of individualistic aims (both of which are symptomatic of neoliberal endeavors). While many liberal students have engaged in forms of activism that mimic liberal rationalities, as Giroux notes, their emphasis has been “on consumerism, immediate gratification and the narcissistic ethic of privatization” (2014, p. 65). In his cogent analysis, *The Erasure of Critical Formative Cultures*, Giroux illustrates the withering of opportunities for open debate and evidence-supported argumentation (2014). In its place are narcissistic blogs and micro-messages (e.g., tweets). When Giroux's analysis of the disappearance of formative cultures in institutions of higher education is combined with Harvey's (2005) critique of the 1968 student movements—in which he contends that individual freedom prevailed over concerns of social justice—civic disengagement is neither taught, nor supported; it is an alien concept to many students.

Teachers are the most directly chastised and rebuked group of the lot. Public educators face sweeping rollbacks in work security, mandated dissolution of unions, and new forms of invasive (and misdirected) scrutiny. Like higher education faculty, they are increasingly treated as disposable labor and systems are in place to make them more easily replaceable. They are continuously reminded of these facts as they face concerted efforts to reduce their bargaining power as well as competition from graduates of alternative certification programs (see Nygreen et al., this volume) and from charter schools. Many are rightly attracted to and tempted by enticements

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to join the scores of charters that promise better pay, reduced surveillance, and opportunity for advancement (Ravitch, 2013).

A transformation of class society requires working across sectors on projects that bring together a broad base of stakeholders (and their cultural tools and methods). Some of these stakeholders are likely to have not always been seen as pertinent. From a collectivist standpoint, not only should the public education movement join together faculty, teachers, other educators, and students, but it must have a broader base of advocates, supporters, and activists. There is room to expand because of the crippling effects neoliberalism has had on so many people and institutions. This is not to suggest that there should be less voice for the workers and children who are the most immediately victimized. Because of neoliberalism's wide reach, both materially and ideologically, threats to the future of public education are threats to the whole of society. I agree with the spirit of Dan Laitsch's statement that:

If educators want to regain control of their profession and initiate positive change, as well as respond to current Neoliberal reform proposals, we will need to engage with economists, political scientists, and other intellectuals who have alternative frameworks to offer. Unless we can present the public and our political leaders with an alternative vision to Neoliberalism, we will continue to cede the context of the debate and fail to change the nature of the conversation. (2013, p. 24)

This engagement entails embracing a broader concept of public education. As community activists, museum curators, park naturalists, program evaluators, and public servants, many outside academia and school district systems also have stakes in this struggle. Some are the underpaid legions of adjunct faculty whose voices are quietened during their brief contract stints. An enormous force of Masters and Ph.Ds. stand ready to share their thoughts, experiences, and feelings as engaged intellectuals outside the bastions of the academy.<sup>2</sup> All are experiencing in familiar ways the grip of neoliberalism in their institutions. While some have steered or been steered away from the universities that promised offices in the ivory halls and space at the podia, their ideals, their desires to change the world, to protect democratic ideals, are very much intact. This corps of scholars located outside the academy is sometimes described as a facet of society that has already been co-opted and that is, possibly, irrelevant to such a movement.

That expansion may require acknowledging that prospective proponents are likely to be, whether unwitting, acquiescent, or active, servants and functionaries of neoliberal interests and projects. I have a hunch that most readers have participated in the neoliberalization of educational reform in some ways. In order to continue working in the arenas of higher education and public schooling, some educators and educational researchers engage in acts that may seem like necessary concessions, selective acceptances, or, when sufficiently repurposed, tools that benefit students (see Chang, this volume). For most, perhaps, it is impossible not to be, in some ways, socialized into this political economy.

Reductionistic and invective characterizations that paint the neoliberal reformer in broad strokes are not really advantageous. In addition to the clear proponents and staunchest advocates of neoliberalism's project to dismantle public education, such as Michelle Rhee and Bill Gates, who have done a phenomenal job of producing fervor in the absence of evidence, are the many who are positioned somewhere in between public schooling and privatization. Manifestations of the system logic that promotes conjecture about public education's purported propensity for ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and ineptitude. This logic carries with it the effectual belief that only through privatization will the US be able to bring about the educational reforms capable of saving the country's youth.

This is a matter of education; not only formal classroom education, but as an action of civic engagement and of opening dialogue around evidence. University administrators, charter school teachers, testing and tutoring company staff, and reform consultants are increasingly ready to hear alternatives to the current regime of educational reform. So is the general public, especially those whose children are caught in the crossfire and who pay both a figurative and literal price.

#### *Shades of Antagonism*

The adversary is less black and white than is often imagined. The inclination among some critical scholars and activists to oversimplify the antagonist by equating neoliberalism with the powerful politicians and business elite whose interests are served directly by neoliberalism's established ideological hegemony is compelling. However, oversimplifying the matter bypasses important complexities. Starr (1995) describes *the logic of specular doubling* in which the failure of a social movement may be more likely when its core advocates and leaders envisage and depict its rival as a simple binary opposite or "mirror image" of itself. In addition to what Starr identifies as particularly problematic in this—the reductionistic "vis-à-vis"-ness that leaves the movement vulnerable to co-optation—is that it oversimplifies people and their beliefs.

Left in the fuzzy middle are the uncertain (e.g., liberals who believe the technology solutions will alleviate growing social inequities and soft activists who believe that they contribute to social justice from inside institutions). As Lipman (2011) and Rosen (2003) note, consent is secured for neoliberal educational reforms not only by the elite and those they are able to influence directly, but also by parents, teachers, tenured and adjunct faculty, university students, and others who are caught up in this new political economy. It is, thus, being constructed by those who may gain in the short run, but who are likely to be its sufferers in the longer term. Many have joined forces with neoliberal projects for reasons of professional survival and others because it has been sold as a viable, concerted option for improving an education system that is suffering. See, for instance, the recent publication generated in a partnership between the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Boston Consulting Group, and Harvard Business School that targets business leaders to become local activists and

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sponsors of neoliberal projects. The *Brink of Renewal: A Business Leader's Guide to Progress in America's Schools* (2014) touts the values of choice, efficiency, and accountability that, with the involvement of business leaders, promise to culminate in “helping to accelerate change.”

Nonetheless, the adversarial struggle is not with all the individuals who manifest values that align with neoliberalism. It is, foremost, a struggle of ideas and discourses. It is a struggle with powerful blocs; ones that are bipartisan, complex, and dynamic. The set includes the people who believe they are doing what is best for themselves and their children through educational reform, as well as those who have found ways to use new forms of reform to bring about academic change. I suspect the former may be ready for viable alternatives. The latter, though diverse in their interests and their reasons for participating in the neoliberal project of educational reform, share the aims of disassembling public education and redistributing its profitable pieces to a variety of entrepreneurs and corporations.

#### *Collectivism, Empiricism, and Participatory Democracy*

Let us remap the social field, reconsider the set of people who have a stake, attempt to better understand the potential actors and role groups, and decide where we are going and with what resolve. There is no return to what was. However, our aims certainly embrace elements that have been valued and continue to be valued most. The tactics need updating, the strategies need to be more inclusive, and the aims need to be clearer. But, the common threads of valuing and enacting collectivism and empirical reflection are vital to what Lemke (this volume) refers to as “(un)making the neoliberal agenda.” Kevin Kumashiro (2012a) calls for shifting the public conversation about educational change by reframing the debate, by drawing on research, and by working across sectors. To do this, we need to amplify the voices of those who have not been heard quite as much, especially from those whose day-to-day lives involve neoliberal educational reform.

#### RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

The collection of chapters in this volume is not limited to the ways in which neoliberal strategies and their associated tactics are linked to what happens in classrooms or schools. Educational reform, as a concept and a discourse, spans a wide range of interest groups and institutions. It is also a topic of philosophical and moral struggle. As most of the chapters demonstrate, with neoliberalism's envelopment of public space, it is a topic that is closely linked to power and wealth accumulation, as well as personal accommodation and adaptations to survive economically in the world of education. Thus, the chapters explore the phenomena from multiple angles and stages of reform, including legislative decisions, funding, state support, teacher preparation, implementation and deployment, and community engagement.

The volume develops intersecting threads of inquiry that explore responses to three important questions about educational reform in the current political economy: (1) How does neoliberal policy create spaces and demand for commercialization?; (2) What is the relationship between increased commercialization in educational reform and new forms of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender inequity?; and (3) Are there substantial examples of successful, localized struggles against or appropriations of commercialized reform to suit the needs of faculty, teachers, students, and communities? Using empirical studies and a kaleidoscopic lens of disciplines (cultural studies in education, curriculum studies, educational anthropology, sociology of education, philosophy, policy studies, and teacher education), the chapters take aim at understanding how forces tied to neoliberalization and communities unfold in the many facets of educational reform in the US.

The chapters were selected to illustrate the complexity of a post-Keynesian, more mature, form of capitalism, as well as the contradictions that are inherent in its deployment. The volume has three interwoven intents: (1) to deepen our understanding of neoliberal educational reform; (2) to illustrate the complexity of the neoliberal crisis, and, as an expression of that complexity; and (3) to express ourselves reflexively not as neutral researchers, but as professionals whose work and professional identities intersect with new kinds of oppressive reform tactics. The authors offer convincing arguments that update, extend, and challenge our understanding of the ways in which ideology and power influence educational reforms. Their work offers a collective insight into how neoliberal reform has, in radically different ways from previous reform eras, created new markets and, with them, new forms of exploitation. Indeed, faculty tenure, the quality and freedom of scholarly research, college student experiences and aspirations, teacher education, community engagement, and K-12 student prospects are inextricably linked in this political economic transformation.

The work represented in this volume is complex, sometimes contradictory, and unapologetically devoid of simple answers to the problems observed, described, and interpreted. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the subject matter is complex and contradictory. Instead of providing a blueprint for action, the volume is intended to serve as an impetus for reflection and to help broaden awareness of the impact neoliberalism is having on so many facets of educational reform.

Second, the contributing authors represent not only a broad spectrum of disciplines, but are situated in various ways in the practice of educational reform. Through their chapters, they communicate how they are involved in some form or fashion in the educational reform activities that intersect with neoliberalism. Some have worked for charter schools, corporations that perform education reform contract work, program evaluation firms, and university-based research centers (as part of the grants culture). Some have served as tenure-tracked faculty in traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs, adjunct instructors, community college faculty, and public school teachers. This breadth of positions is intentional, since the



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volume is intended to stimulate discussion across disciplines and thereby amplify our collective voice.

While the volume honors the disciplinary traditions of contributing authors, each chapter contains a section that discusses author positionality and how her, his, or their work intersects with neoliberalization in educational reform. Situating themselves reflexively not only boosts the credibility of the studies, but offers us insights into how that voice took shape and why the topics resonate with them. I hope this addition will inspire readers to reflect on how their work might be defined and directed, at least in part, by this political economy. We all must accept some responsibility for this neoliberal contraption, and to both complicate and further establish credibility by intertwining the intersubjectivities of personal voice and scholarship. This crisis is not “out there” it is everywhere.

#### VOLUME'S ORGANIZATION

The volume is organized into four sections. The first of these, *Manifestations of Neoliberal Ideology in Education Policy*, is devoted to exploring neoliberalism's grip on power through policy, state intervention, and the production of accountability data. The section presents a cross-section of work from education policy analysis, educational anthropology, and sociology of education to explore implications of current major reform policy primarily at the state and federal levels. In “Farming the Poor,” Caitlin and Craig Howley survey the many innovative mechanisms that create tremendous profit for neoliberal investors in the public education sector to argue that, although touted as the remedy for poverty, education is a major source of profit. As they explore topics such as the roles of sponsored education research, school closure, charter schools, federally-mandated supplemental education services, student education debt, and for-profit colleges, their major concern is with the ways in which these mechanisms have become intensified, systematized, and work in tandem to further disenfranchise the poor both directly and indirectly.

In chapter 3, Melinda Lemke draws on critical discourse analysis to scrutinize the ways in which ideological aspects of neoliberalism play out in the educational policy arena. Her contribution, “(Un)Making the Neoliberal Agenda in Public Education,” traces a set of struggles in curriculum policy processes and high school social studies standards in Texas, which ultimately privilege the male, whitestream status quo. In this context, exploration, critique, intellectual searching, and democratic engagement are exchanged for a narrowed and limited conception of truth.

Brian Lagotte and Quentin Wheeler-Bell explore how the practice of military recruitment in schools exemplifies a particular kind of bureaucratic domination that helps shape educational policy and that manipulates privacy. In “Dominating Educational Policy,” the authors find that, much like corporations that use big data to flood the market with ads, the military uses student data to target recruiting messages. Their detailed analysis uncovers how parents' ability to protect how their children's data are used is limited and how district-level actions are blocked, even

threatened by the likely prospect of sanctions. The authors demonstrate the inherent tension between democratic deliberation and radical free-marketization of schools.

Section 2, *Profiting from Higher Learning & Teacher Education*, provides an in-depth look at how neoliberalism has reconceived higher education as a place of job skills acquisition and, since the economy's needs are ever-shifting, a promise for money-making in perpetuity for the controllers of the means of privatized education. The three chapters articulate multifaceted problems in higher education, while also demonstrating that higher education has tremendous hope for survival as an institution of public good. Kysa Nygreen, Barbara Madeloni, and Jennifer Cannon offer a powerful critique of fast-track, alternative teacher certification—or as they refer to it, the “Boot Camp Teacher Certification”—especially as it relates to preparing teachers to be social justice-oriented. Drawing on their own experiences working as teacher educators in a variety of institutions and programs, including a *boot camp*, the contributors effectively demonstrate how alternative certification programs tend to reproduce a neoliberal logic and a white, middle class orientation to serving the *other*. They argue that this set of orientations restricts the extent to which teachers who graduate from these programs are equipped to combat inequities.

In “From Student to Steward of Democracy,” Steven M. Hart and James Mullooly explore the ways in which emerging public school teachers may develop a sense of personal agency to construct and enact a transformative educator identity. By highlighting the experiences of two teachers in a model teacher education program, the authors illustrate a stewarded approach to the cultural production of civically engaged educators. The stories highlight how the novice teachers came to identify broad social and political forces that create inequities. They also demonstrate, conversely, that deeply-entrenched self-perceptions prevented the participants from engaging in practices in their communities and classrooms that align with their transformative pedagogical beliefs.

In chapter 7, Stephanie Daza, Jeong-eun Rhee, Sharon Subreenduth, and Michelle Proctor employ a combination of critical race theory, decolonizing and social justice frameworks, and anthropology of policy practice to illustrate how neoliberal dynamics of power function in higher education externally-sponsored knowledge work. In their chapter, “Funding as (Re)Form in Higher Education,” the authors describe and analyze the restrictions placed on academically-situated scholars who work within and against what they the authors refer to as “the re/de/form industry of neoliberal scientism.”

The third section, *Neoliberalizing Sites of Public Education*, offers an in-depth look into some of the ways neoliberalism impacts the learning opportunities of students who are already marginalized. While neoliberal strategies are employed in all public schools in the US, students from culturally-marginalized and economically-disenfranchised groups are experiencing particularly brutal forms of structured stratification. In “Give Me a 3, Tell Me I’m Effective, and Leave Me Alone,” Jeanne Cameron uses a portraiture approach to illustrate one teacher’s professional life history experiences in public education. She explores the damages

left by neoliberalism's competitive approach to curriculum reforms, especially those inflicted on teacher motivation and, ultimately, turnover. The chapter traces the de-professionalization and de-intellectualization that teachers have endured.

Jean Patterson presents a qualitative case study of a high school that recently deployed a schoolwide large-scale, federally-funded reform, the 21st Century Learning Initiative. In "High School 21st Century Learning Initiatives as a Manifestation of Neoliberalism," she offers a cogent analysis of the numerous ways in which the neoliberal discourse is expressed and observed throughout the school. Among these, for instance, is the mismatch between the widely-dispersed rhetoric of college and career readiness and the everyday classroom practices associated with the reform. As Patterson convincingly argues, the prioritized practices that surround this rift exemplify the supremacy of beliefs about educational reform over facts.

In chapter 10, "Cultures of Collaboration and Blame," Mary Roaf offers an ethnographic critique of the complex and contradictory character of charter school operation. Drawing on a combination of anthropology, organizational research, and critical race theory to conceptualize the study, Roaf describes the tenuous nature of charter school staff employment, charter management organization responses to accountability mandates, and charter branding and marketing. In addition to her depiction of the business of chartering, she illustrates how what appears to be (and what is touted as an example of) community and staff voice is achieved through undemocratic means.

In the final section, *Community and School Responses to Neoliberal Reforms*, contributing authors consider some of the ways local response from communities, parent groups, and school personnel are sometimes dismissed as irrelevant to educational reform initiatives and aims. Through ethnographic research at the school and community level, the authors explore adaptations of educational reforms to fit with school and community needs. In her ethnographic case study, "Flatlands Charter School and the Common Core," Aurora Chang problematizes the critique of charter schools by demonstrating how school leaders may strategically appropriate neoliberal trappings, such as Common Core State Standards, to serve students. Drawing on Freire's notion of pedagogical love, and Darder's elaboration on that notion (2003), Chang describes how a charter school's leadership retained considerable autonomy and decision-making authority. The case is demonstrative of the need to help educators become better equipped to decide ethically and collaboratively about how to negotiate the many educational reforms that come their way.

Liza she presents findings from a critical ethnographic study of school closings in New York City. In chapter 12, "From Alternative Policies to Alternative Ideologies," she explores a series of educational reforms that laid the foundation for school closings, as well as the formation of powerful community-based organizations that promoted alternatives and a "counter-imaginary" to the neoliberal regime that attempted to dominate the city's public education system. Her research chronicles the formation of this new imaginary, the school district's concerted efforts to silence community voices, and the ensuing (and ongoing) struggle.

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Finally, in her ethnographic study of the potential for young people to impact neoliberal school reform policies from their positions in funded non-profit social movement organizations, Hava Gordon explores youth activists' social movement organizations in the context of educational reform. In her chapter, "Shaping and Challenging Neoliberal School Reform," Gordon discusses how the blurring of activity between elites and students of color complicates any assessment of the extent to which the movement is meeting its aims. This blurring contains both possibility and an undermining quality. By examining four activist groups whose struggle is to ensure student voice in educational reform decisions, she demonstrates how the social movements' messages are toned down and reframed as they enter into longer-term partnerships with elite reformers.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The passage of ESEA I was an incredible feat of interest convergence that would permit the Federal government to establish long-term contract relationships with selected external experts, enhance the quality and access to assessment data to enable parents to monitor the performance of their schools, and lead to curricular experimentation (House, 1993).
- <sup>2</sup> In anthropology, for instance, more than half of doctorates now work outside of academia (AAA, ND).

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**SECTION 1**  
**MANIFESTATIONS OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY**  
**IN EDUCATION POLICY**

CAITLIN HOWLEY AND CRAIG HOWLEY

## 2. FARMING THE POOR

*Cultivating Profit at the Schoolhouse Door*

### INTRODUCTION

The comfort of the rich depends upon an abundant supply of the poor. (Voltaire)

Because the US is, for the moment, among the wealthiest of global powers, its poor confront “unique” opportunities to serve national purposes—not so much as citizens, but more as revenue sources and consumers. In international context, the poor in this wealthy nation possess comparatively more disposable income, generating revenue streams throughout American society. Furthermore, contemporary neoliberal policy has transformed public institutions serving the poor into sources of profit for private enterprise (Harvey, 2005). We argue that the schooling of the poor provides many such opportunities for wealth creation, eagerly seized upon by education entrepreneurs and the well-financed reformers who wrought such transformations (Ball, 2012). Our chapter theorizes the operation of schooling for the poor on neoliberal terms and demonstrates the main points with empirical illustrations. We begin by disclosing our understanding of neoliberalism in general.

In our reading, neoliberalism is the ideology of globally ascendant advanced capitalism; that is, the ideology of globalization (A. Howley & C.B. Howley, 2007). In this schema, globalization is the postindustrial worldwide manifestation of free trade under neoliberal economic rules, which emphasize market liberalization, strong private property rights, deregulation, privatization of public enterprises (such as public education), and reduction of public funding for social services (Bauman, 1998; De Blij, 2009; Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism provides support and warrant for globalization with its themes of individual liberty; the rule of law (insofar as it protects individual rights and unfettered commerce); distrust of state economic intervention; and above all, the market understood as the guarantor of overall prosperity (Harvey, 2005; Turner, 2008). In this conception, wealth represents the common good (regardless of maldistribution).

We approach this work in part from our rural West Virginia background and in part from our involvement with rural education internationally. We see rural ways of living and knowing as harboring purposes alternative to those promoted by neoliberal rhetoric and with immense practical importance for the troubled century ahead (see, e.g., C. B. Howley, A. Howley, & Johnson, 2014;



C.B. Howley, 1997; C.W. Howley, 2006a, 2006b; C.W. Howley, & Hambrick, 2014). These alternative purposes have a great deal to do with domesticity (see Jackson, 1996, for a statement of education that involves making a homeplace); kinship, family, and community (see Theobald, 1997, for a relevant rural education classic); and involvement with the land (see Leopold, 1949, for the classic formulation of the construct of “land ethic” and Orr, 1996, for assertion of the need to *re-ruralize education*).

Appalachia—where we live and work—is infamous for its history of deprecations in the name of extractive profit-making (Eller, 2008; Gaventa, 1982; Williams, 2001). We do not, therefore, see neoliberalism or globalization as representing any species of postmodern rupture. Rather, it seems to us an old war, fought on much the same terms. We find the emergence of neoliberalism as a bona fide ideology for globalized capitalism curious overall. Although it is used principally to justify exploitation and resource extraction across the globe, our concern here is a sort of intensification, and internalization, in the US of such extractive enterprises—a wicked sort of *innovation*.

From this outlook, grounded in our understanding of neoliberalism and globalization, and in our experiences and work in Appalachia, we discuss (1) education research about branded interventions, (2) cycles of school closure and replacement with charter schools, (3) federally-mandated supplemental education services, (4) credentialism,<sup>1</sup> (5) the explosion of student education debt, and the (6) rapid growth of for-profit colleges. We argue that these measures are manifestations of the ideology of globalization (aka “neoliberalism”), and that they represent varied improvisations of neoliberal influence on education policy and practice. Throughout the discussion we give examples and revisit our building argument and evidence.

#### GETTING RICH ON THE BACKS OF THE POOR (CHILDREN)

What causes poverty? In a sense, it is a silly question: being poor is, first, a relative condition (how can you tell?); secondly, not only individuals but families, towns, states or provinces, nation-states, and global regions can be poor (why?); thirdly, in some aggregations *impoverished* individuals and families are less numerous, while in others (as in the US) they are ever more abundant. Conceptions of the “cause” of poverty are important because they inform—even determine—action to deal with manifestations of poverty and processes of impoverishment. Such conceptions direct relevant policy, inform (or distort) scholarship across a variety of fields, and can ultimately serve to characterize ideologies, societies, and politics.

The question is endlessly complex, but we think there are two very different answers in play, both fairly simple. The most popular and self-evident answer in the US (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006) is that *the poor* cause poverty (Lerner, 1980; Smith, 1985). Eliminate them and you eliminate poverty. According to this view, the poor are increasingly abundant because they breed ferociously and thereby propagate the

vices that make their children poor in the future (see Angus & Butler, 2011, for the upshot under neoliberal rules).

Far less acceptable in the US is the explanation that *the rich* cause poverty (see the French economist Thomas Piketty, 2014, for a compatible explanation). This account, a systemic one, is by no means so self-evident as the first. But we find it more believable and—as an explanation rather than a tautology—in fact simpler (Occam’s razor). From this perspective, poverty is *socially arranged*, and the impoverished do not make the arrangements. This essay takes up one feature of these social arrangements: how “the rich” in the US today use schooling to enlarge their profit stream.

There is room for debate on these interpretations, of course. The parties of the debate are easy to identify, and the middle ground is very narrow.<sup>2</sup> Note, though, that the popular theory (e.g., Ruby Payne’s 1996 *The framework for understanding poverty*)—that the poor cause poverty—implies that training the children of the impoverished to good habits will eliminate poverty, precisely by eliminating impoverishment from the succeeding generation (i.e., with the new prevalence of virtuous habits). And this theory is now the reactionary path chosen for schooling the poor in the US (Ravitch, 2013). It seems to us, however, that good morals, and even ethical thinking itself, do not, and never have, ensured a fair distribution of resources or of life-chances.

From another vantage point, however, we can see plainly that the popular strategy is doomed. (It has been tried repeatedly, of course: that is why it is so appealing in the present, modernized with scientism; see our consideration of contemporary education research, below.) But the strategy’s effectiveness hardly matters—because culturally and economically it so clearly fits the US jurisdiction. There is profit to be made from the poor; we do not actually *want* them to vanish. A proven doomed strategy is perfect for the purpose of profit making.

We call this program of exploitation “farming the poor” after the 18th-century English practice of letting private contracts for the operation of workhouses—and allowing operators to keep any income generated from inhabitants’ work. Justified by an ideology of personal entrepreneurial responsibility in which the marketplace is the natural framework for human interaction, the contemporary “farming” program ensures that the schooling of poor students at once broadcasts their alleged failures and also demonstrates well their “need” for market-based interventions. In the neoliberal scheme of things, the poor are a different kind of “social capital”—that is, as a social group, they are a source of income for entrepreneurial do-gooders.

What distinguishes 18th-century “farming” from the 21st-century version? Just about everything: the two metaphorical farming operations are as different as actual 18th century agriculture and 21st century agribusiness. We explain, below, an industrial (postindustrial, if you must) phenomenon of capitalist (not pre-capitalist) wealth accumulation. And more than that, of course: with capitalist business models dominating public school administration for at least 100 years (Callahan, 1962) and curriculum for at least 50 (Kliebard, 2000), private enterprise has determined it

can profitably assume day-to-day control of publically funded schools and districts (see, e.g., Berliner & Glass, 2014). It is an amazing development for “the world’s oldest democracy.” Indeed, we imagine such development means that democracy is moribund ... for the time being.<sup>3</sup>

We begin, perhaps perversely, with a consideration of education research and development (R&D). It might seem that education research has little to do with the sordid reality of processes of impoverishment, but here we attempt to demonstrate its deep implication in farming the poor. Next, we examine the neoliberal nitty-gritty of K-12 schooling: charter schools, education management organizations, and supplemental services—all of which are features of privatization under the corporate practice of “outsourcing.” The State (as distinct from a real public or any particular government) retains nominal authority over these practices, but it is useful to remember that “nominal” means *in name only*. Next follows a parallel treatment of higher learning in America: rather, the very low-down on its higher learning—the elimination of working-class alternatives to college, easy credit and hard debt for the working poor, and expansion of the for-profit postsecondary education sector. With much regret, we suspect that “liberal learning” is today far more likely to oppress the poor than to liberate.

#### *Farming the Poor with R&D*

In this section we consider (1) the redirection of education R&D toward corporate purpose; (2) the privatization of government education contracts; (3) the utilization of the medical model for establishing effective “interventions” and (4) the branding of “what-works” curricula. These topics, because they represent a level of systemic oversight, and authoritative and comparatively prestigious direction, suggest a comprehensive critique of neoliberal intrusions into schooling. We do not have sufficient space to articulate such an analysis, but we do observe privatization and neoliberal ideology have not only invaded school operations (Molnar, 1996), they have more recently come to dominate education research itself (Baez & Boyles, 2009). Illustrations are easy to find. Xerox (2013), for instance, offers the following hint to its devotion to education “research and development” (R&D):

Researchers at the Xerox Research Center Webster in New York, invented the Xerox Ignite™ Educator Support System, a one-of-a-kind workflow and software solution that pushes hand-marked student work (on paper today or on tablets tomorrow) into the digital analytics domain—making it faster for teachers to evaluate student work and easier to address the reality that students learn concepts at different paces and in different ways.

The Xerox site includes (1) requisite praise from the superintendent of an affluent district and (2) testimony from one of Xerox’s “principal scientists.”

Science is a key word here. The districts for which improvement is shrilly demanded are not at all like the one guided by the superintendent who permitted

Xerox to quote and name him. Districts said to be in need of improvement are far more likely to serve very impoverished communities (e.g., Olsen & Sexton, 2009; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Holding impoverished districts “accountable” means they have a seemingly desperate need for the transformative scientific power of Xerox. No Child Left Behind (PL 107-110, 2001) (NCLB) and Race to the Top (funded by PL 111-5, 2009) demand it of them: they must improve, and they must use scientifically correct products to do so. *It's the law.*

The appearance of the “scientist” is thus among other things<sup>4</sup> a Xerox marketing ploy that ties educators to the language of NCLB, Race to the Top, and the Education Sciences Reform Act (PL 107-279) (ESRA). Of course, the new research regime provides the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) to find and encourage the more rigorous (scientifically correct) research that might belie inflated corporate claims (see Schoenfeld, 2006; and WWC, 2013). We address this misguided saving grace later in our discussion of branded products, near the end of this section.

*Brief R&D background.* A little background about the business of American education research seems in order. Americans do a lot of it (for a European contrast, see Rey, 2011). For one, we train nearly all education doctoral students to conduct studies—and 6,500 education-school candidates earn terminal degrees each year by completing dissertations (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). Thereafter, many take tenure-track positions in colleges of education that impose research expectations, and as a result hundreds of education research journals publish many thousands of research articles annually. This training enterprise is famously uneven and decentralized (Eisenhardt & DeHaan, 2005), and it is therefore difficult to control from any federal or national center. The conservative regime nonetheless already exerts effective influence with two principal extant policy instruments.

First, *well-funded* research is literally the most valuable to contemporary universities (Baez & Boyles, 2009; Giroux, 2007). Large federal awards not only swell an institution’s total revenue stream, but universities seize 50% or more to administer the work. Competition is intense, and proposals too often make inflated claims—about closing achievement gaps, ensuring transformation, or sustaining systemic change. The promises cannot ever be fulfilled (Scott, 1998), and the funded efforts typically fail to deliver (Ravitch, 2000, 2011).

Second, through the mandates of ESRA, the regime has already remade in its own image the progressive research infrastructure it inherited from what Bickel (2013) calls “the era of the Social Contract.” Federal research centers, regional educational labs, comprehensive technical assistance centers, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) system—all have been repurposed and privatized. And the repurposing includes the WWC—which advertises and brands commercial materials as *scientifically* good (see below).

The State has effectively intruded, on behalf of corporate power, into the domain responsible for conceptualizing and understanding what “education” is, how it might work, and does work; and evades publicly funded schooling on behalf of the common

good (or, now, *arguably* on behalf of the public good). A fox (capital) in sheep's clothing (scientism) rules the hen house: this is the ruse this section illustrates.

*Redirecting the focus of education R&D toward corporate purpose.* The fundamental condition needed by a more corporate R&D effort is a schooling purpose that is more corporate. This has already happened:

The [Common Core] standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy. (Common Core, 2013, ¶ 1)

This is momentarily hideous language, according to some observers (e.g., Ravitch, 2013; Theobald, 2009), but few educators object because it is now so commonplace. It was different in the past. Studies (e.g., Downey, 1960; Taggart, 1980) actually asked ordinary Americans what they wanted from their schools, across four broad domains: (1) intellectual and academic, (2) instrumental and productive, (3) social and political, and (4) esthetic or spiritual. The list now seems breathtaking and even transgressive. In fact, since 1983 (the year in which President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, *A Nation at Risk*, was published, claiming widespread educational failure and launching a new era of education reform) hardly any researcher has published peer-reviewed work asking such questions of ordinary people (Emery, 2002; C. B. Howley, Picket, Brown, & Kay, 2011). But the language of contemporary content standards (e.g., the Common Core), philanthropic education agendas (e.g., The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014), federal education law (e.g., NCLB), finds warrant in corporate aims.

We conclude that Paul Theobald's claim is correct: corporate experts and politicians have arrogated to themselves the exclusive right to define educational purpose (Theobald, 2009). Again, this development is relatively new, and it is "hegemonic" in the startling way characteristic of neoliberal intrusions. That is, corporate power and needs predominate, horizontally (all schools) and vertically (from supply closet to White House). Massively repurposed education needs a repurposed R&D effort, and since 2002 ESRA has provided the federal authority and the means for creating "newly professionalized education scientists," as Baez and Boyle (2009, KL 283) call them. A vast R&D enterprise thus comes under the direct and indirect sway of neoliberal purpose, with federal dollars and neoliberal ideology leading the way, assisted, of course, by impatient philanthropists like Bill Gates (see, e.g., Ball, 2012; Klonsky, 2011). Redirecting federal education R&D funds to corporate ledgers has proven very easy: the State need simply allow a larger proportion of private firms to bid on education R&D contracts—and this is precisely what has happened within the past decade.

*Privatizing Government Education Contracts.* During the era of the Social Contract (Bickel, 2013), the federal government assumed a progressive stance in education. *Brown v. Board* (1954) brought the nastiness of American schooling to center stage, and Sputnik (in 1957) upset American leaders in a different way. In the mid-1960s, the federal government established the technical assistance infrastructure mentioned previously (centers, laboratories, ERIC). Grants and contracts went to non-profit entities, organizations whose official *raison d'être* was the public good, an arrangement that fostered critique and thoughtfulness. Notable resulting contributions include the Coleman Report (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Weinfeld, & York, 1966)—which discovered that schooling systematically reinforced social inequality, and Jerome Bruner's social studies curriculum (Bruner, 1965).

This kind of intellectual independence is not of interest to the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), the successor to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (IES, 2013), which oversees contemporary federally-funded education research. Thus today, the non-profit provision is gone, and large for-profit research firms have received contracts to operate much of the infrastructure (in many cases providing fewer services and engaging practitioners hardly at all).

At the very outset of the new R&D regime in 2002 (the year in which ESRA was enacted), a prominent psychologist observed:

It will be difficult to enlist the current generation of self-styled educational evaluators behind a banner promoting more experimentation. Fortunately or unfortunately, they are not needed for this task. They are not part of the current flurry of controlled experimentation now underway. And while the future demand for experiments cannot be predicted accurately, it may well be possible to meet all this demand with staff from contract research firms and university faculty in the policy sciences. (Cook, 2002, pp. 195–196)

Cook's implication that the government would look more kindly on corporations than on colleges of education proved correct. We explain the purposes and outcomes of all these experiments ("branding") under the next two headings.

*Using the pharmaceutical model for establishing effective "Interventions."* The experiments Cook championed in the quoted passage turn out, under IES leadership, to concern product testing on the model of drug testing. The question is: will the drug (education material) work to cure the disease (low test scores)?

Though predictable, adoption of the pharmaceutical model for education research is truly odd. Education—even the regimented form known as schooling—does not involve, and is not at base, the treatment of disease. Even teaching is not administration of a treatment, except in the jargon of experimentation (teachers deliver "interventions" cf. Cook, 2002). Experiments can certainly be useful, but they are by no means the best forms of education research (Phillips, 2006). Neither the capacity to read nor to do arithmetic (let alone to pursue wisdom) cures anything,

especially not ignorance, which remains pervasive because it is an existential condition. Education is quite literally “lifelong learning” it is a regimen of varying purposes, qualities, and forms. One lives and learns variously.

To stick with the tiresome pharmaceutical metaphor, then, “education” is more like diet than like disease. Alas, medical research about the effects of diet would not be so promising as drug testing. Taubes (2007) gives a detailed and nuanced account of the distortions<sup>5</sup> provided by medical science in the name of dietary advice: it is a tale of good intentions and bad counsel, replete with large sums that education researchers can only dream of. In any case, the complexities of diet, its systemic character, and the many variants that are both culturally possible and healthy, seem a far better metaphor for education (even for schooling) than the administration of drugs.

Indeed, growing and learning humans—via healthy diets (whatever they might prove to be)—become increasingly circumspect and better able, in at least one formulation (e.g., Freire & Macedo, 1987), to “read the world and the word” in its assorted guises. This alternative outlook on a continuous and enlarging view of education purpose and process foregrounds the oddness of the regime’s utilitarian choice. There is said to be a *conservative* outlook, but a truly conservative outlook consistently *commends* a liberal education (e.g., Barzun, 1959; Finn, Ravitch, & Fancher, 1984; Kirk, 1996)—one that used to promise intellectual enlargement. Apparently, the State and its backers now intend something else—something other than education proper—for the schooling they are prepared to fund.

Where does this impoverished form of schooling come from? It comes from poor schooling, directly from the example of the State’s own poor stewardship of schools for the poor—especially those in collapsing cities dominated by huge and largely dysfunctional school bureaucracies (see Anyon, 1980, for a classic study of this impoverished outlook on schooling). The inspiration for private enterprise is clear: business should be able to do marginally better, but for still less money. After all, the postindustrial mantra for public service actually is *more for less*—the very opposite of Ted Sizer’s famous “more is less” (Sizer, 1984).

The plan for impoverished schooling, then, hardly aims to educate the poor. Indeed, curing the poor through administration of marginally effective treatments will devolve to a disappointing formulaic exercise because, as Ravitch (2011) suggests, the overall plan is punitive. The reformers cannot imagine that the qualities of places and students not only remain relevant, but that *they are the educative point*: communities, families, and ways of living on earth. Though so far the evidence is obscure and contradictory, it is possible that with cheaper, smaller, privatized schools, entrepreneurs might be able to tweak test scores a bit higher overall. Such a plan is not the “game-changer” so frequently advertised.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, one might observe that although medical treatment of disease with drugs is sometimes richly effective (with pharmaceutical firms posting durable profits thereby), the treatment cannot actually eliminate disease. In fact, excessive attention to pharmacy distracts medicine as a whole from addressing health. We imagine,

then, that *this* oversight is the part of the metaphor that does apply: with education representing the process of health, and educational impoverishment the process of disease. The industry *needs* the disease: health reduces the profit stream, just as an actual cure for diabetes would do.<sup>7</sup>

*What-works branded curricula.* Some good, if not much, can come from comparing *Everyday Math* to *Saxon Math*—even though neither is a drug nor ignorance of mathematics a disease. It is reasonable, we think, to know how such products compare overall, though the knowledge cannot say if your school *should* use either with your students, in your community, in your place, and in your culture.

Exactly that presumption, though, is behind the mandate (it is an official order in law via various federal education programs) that educators use only *scientifically correct* products: those for which experiments have developed some (not very much) evidence of (partial) effectiveness. The research branch that synthesizes this knowledge (and has displaced the ERIC system as the principal collection of relevant education information) is the WWC. One of us has concluded that the What Works Clearinghouse has found “not much that works and that what does work does not work all that much” (C. B. Howley, 2009, p. 7). The results are as disappointing as ever, as they must be given the nature of reality (see e.g., Patton, 2011; Ravitch, 2011; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Walters & Lareau, 2009).

Like many educators, and some neoliberally-oppressed scholars, we ourselves are certain that schooling in impoverished places could be better. But decreeing that educators in those places use well-branded products (PL 107–110, 2001) will not come close to supplying the want. When the disappointment sets in, however, we predict it will not be the regime<sup>8</sup> that will be rightly held to account: it will be the educators, the families, the communities, and the entire cultures (including children themselves).

One of the most famously branded “interventions” is the highly-scripted Success For All effort. The WWC (2009) deploys its approval in its characteristic formulaic language:

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for SFA® to be medium to large for alphabets, comprehension, and general reading achievement. No studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed fluency. (WWC, 2009, p. 1)

Success For All, the corporation, however, is predictably enthusiastic:

With two decades of research, hundreds of testimonials, and results from forty-seven states, Success for All is proven to achieve results . . . Central Elementary School in Pennsylvania went from failing to thriving in one year with Success for All — showing remarkable gains in reading and math. Read how they did it. (SFA, 2014, ¶ 3, ¶ 1)



As the WWC branding parties know, substantiating positive (causal) effects in past “implementations” are only a first step to securing effects in the future, in additional locations. Brining to scale an innovation known to *cause* gains means that new sites (e.g., for SFA) must exhibit a high level of “fidelity of implementation.” That is: *they have to do it right*. No improvisation, no innovation, and few changes at all are allowed—that work is reserved for the experts. These causal affirmations arising from RCTs mean, in fact, that failure of gains to materialize indicates that the causal factor has somehow been subverted. And who will be blamed for such subversion? Teachers and administrators, and perhaps students and families.

*But what is education research, really?* The doing of education is difficult, after all, because conducting human and social life is difficult and complex. In this light, anticipating and actually planning to invent, test, and prescribe effective and efficient methods that educators must ape with high fidelity is not just intellectually myopic, it is educationally deceptive (see, e.g., Baez & Boyles, 2009, and Phillips, 2006, for somewhat similar perspectives). In our experience of teaching and watching teachers teach, we are fairly sure that teaching requires continual innovation and improvisation. It seems to us good when it involves the active collaboration of students and teachers, and that insight means teachers need to respond to their students in ways that cannot be predicted (see Cohen, 1988, for a compatible interpretation).

On this view, the neoliberally-reformed research regime seems purposively short-sighted to normalize myopia among education researchers. Thus we tend to agree with observers like Bruner (1996) that the work of education research, in particular among other types of inquiry, is thoughtfulness itself. Yes, practicality is required, because education research is indeed an applied science—but the vision propagated by IES is both impractical and thoughtless. A pluralistic research enterprise is essential to teaching and learning, to schooling, to education, and to the project of thoughtfulness itself. Without thoughtfulness, practicality is not, we think, possible. The relationship between practicality and thoughtfulness can be seen in the improvisations that good teachers take as they respond to their students. To support this enterprise a variety of research forms seems advisable.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Divestment, Displacement, Replacement and Misplacement*

This section considers policies that render country and city neighborhoods and their schools as useful zones for educational profiteers: (1) identification of “failing” schools and the federally-mandated provision of private tutoring; (2) cycles of school closure as part of the State’s divestment of public responsibilities in city neighborhoods and country places; (3) the introduction of charter schools to divested spaces, many of them led by education management organizations (EMOs); and (4) tightened relationships between home valuation and the advertised quality of schools (see Lipman, 2011, for an excellent autopsy of such cycles).

*Helping the Poor to Buy Tutoring.* Federally-mandated private tutoring services (known as “supplemental education services” or SES<sup>10</sup>) divert public education dollars to private entities, as a stop-gap to avoiding NCLB-mandated school closure. Section 1116(e) of NCLB stipulates that Title I schools (with 40% or more of students eligible for subsidized meals) identified as “in need of improvement” must (1) offer low-income parents a list of tutoring organizations approved by the state (for-profit, non-profit, and district entities); (2) pay for services selected by parents; and (3) continue to support tutoring services from approved vendors until the schools are no longer categorized as in need of improvement.

Immediately upon this mandate, private tutoring companies rushed to qualify as providers. One team of investigators reported revenue growth on the order of 100% to 500% (Burch, Steinberg & Donovan, 2007). As larger firms capture more market share, of course, they enlarge class sizes (Burch et al., 2007): profit depends on efficiency<sup>11</sup>. Burch and colleagues also found that fees correlated with firm size: individual tutors cannot exploit the market presence of a Kaplan or Sylvan. Said the president of one large provider, “We’re in business to make money” (Walsh, 2002).

Clearly, the SES mandate was a neoliberal windfall for tutoring companies; whereas wealthy and middle-class families had been their primary consumers, vendors now had federally-mandated access to students from impoverished families (Burch, Steinberg & Donovan, 2007). Vergari (2007) observed, however, that the SES “policy reflects the tenet that public education dollars belong to families rather than to school districts” (pp. 316–17). Two propositions, then, are legitimized here: (1) redirecting public funds to private hands makes sense and (2) the State supports parents in the disestablishment of public schooling. The latter proposition is less evident, more nuanced, more important, and very functional as a subtext: it is arguably one way to help colonize the public mind to the desired end—the fully colonized public mind is neoliberalism’s best defense (see Scott, 1998, on a prostate civil society, and Gaventa, 1980, for an Appalachian example).

With the introduction in 2011 of federal waivers of certain NCLB requirements in exchange for the implementation of other accountability measures, some states have chosen to continue supporting supplemental education services although not required to do so (McNeil, 2012). Not surprisingly, vendors expressed dismay at the loss of revenue but are positioning themselves to take advantage of school, district, and state relationships developed via SES provision to identify new business opportunities (Molnar, 2013).

So, how has SES been of help to children from “failing” schools? The large size and “market share” of the leading providers hardly guarantees success with their new clientele. SES diverts public funds to private contractors; the whole school may or may not benefit; and suppliers do not, after all, have to be “highly qualified” like the teachers whose failed efforts they are supplementing (Public Education Network, 2013). One recent study of NCLB-mandated supplemental education services suggests that students are more likely to perform better after receiving a minimum

threshold of approximately 40 hours of tutoring—but the gains are predictably small and not significant (Heinrich & Burch, 2011). Moreover, accumulating 40 hours was difficult, the researchers found: school funds were limited and hourly rates high. And in fact, the US Department of Education’s own study of the impact of SES found that students who got services did not perform statistically significantly better than their peers who did not receive tutoring (Deke, Dragoset, Bogen & Gill, 2012).

*Displacing the poor and their schools.* Neoliberal urban renewal, ironically enough, recommends school closure to improve neighborhoods. School and district consolidation has already been a blunt policy instrument in rural places across the entire 20th century (C. B. Howley, Johnson & Petrie, 2011). The logical result, long confirmed in rural regions, is larger schools designed to exact a greater *achievement cost* from impoverished students (Bickel & C.B. Howley, 2000).

But as the neoliberal school closure argument apparently goes, persistently struggling schools require dramatic intervention to improve—and what is more dramatic than death? Particularly after the Great Recession of 2008, policymakers increasingly called for the closure of neighborhood schools by the hundreds, in neighborhoods more segregated than they had been in 1954 (see, e.g., Orfield, 2001). Coupled with a new recessionary economic urgency, state and local authorities deployed the “saving money” argument widely used in other school closure enterprises (Howley et al., 2011). Unfortunately, studies find that closing urban schools contributes almost nothing to resolving cities’ fiscal crises (e.g., Dowdall, 2011; Farmer, Pulido, Konkol, Phillippo, Stovall & Klonsky, 2013).

Predictably, school closure is followed by displacement and destabilization as public investments decline, neighbors leave, and businesses shutter. But what was once “blight” becomes real estate newly available for gentrification, as public neighborhood schools are replaced with charter schools (along with selective enrollment and magnet schools) to attract middle-class and wealthy families (Lipman, 2011).

We need to be clear that this sort of enterprise reinforces the class- and race-based segregation of American neighborhoods and schools. White flight, for instance, is one expression of this tendency. Although that flight is largely over because whites have massively sorted themselves out of many cities, when the racial proportions do change, small flights often ensue, as Volk (2014) observed in comparatively rural Garden City, Kansas. It is a vicious, de facto, and effective version of “school improvement”—and a common one, as the Detroit, Philadelphia, and Chicago experiences attest.

Like the rural Appalachian coalfields, some of America’s great cities have also become national sacrifice zones. Orr (2009) has observed that permanent destruction of land and water, theft of property value, and decimation of community in Appalachia are ignored nationally (and embraced locally by the powerful). Perhaps the reason is that the poor are supposed to serve this sacrificial purpose. According to Orr (2009, p. 113), the coalfields “are a third-world colony within the United States,

a national sacrifice zone in which fairness, decency, and the rights of old and young alike are discarded as unnecessary on behalf of the national obsession with ‘cheap’ electricity.” On this logic, Detroit has outlived its purpose: who *now* needs it since the auto industry has declined? The answer might be Kaplan, Sylvan, and for-profit education management organizations (EMOs) ... for the moment.

*The privatized school displacing the government school.* Neoliberal renewal efforts suggest replacing now-closed neighborhood schools with “public” charter schools, of which more than a third (Miron, Urschel, Aguilar & Dailey, 2011) are run by for-profit EMOs. Originally imagined as models of innovation (Budde, 1988) with the cooperation of teacher unions, they have now become big business—a Big Enchilada in Jonathan Kozol’s (2007) telling, and they have helped keep union membership low and falling—from about 16% in 2009 to about 11% in 2012 (Rebarber & Zgainer, 2014).

The narrative in support of charter schools<sup>12</sup> increasingly argues that chartering provides an important source of entrepreneurial competition among so-called “traditional” public schools, which will in turn be inspired to produce better student outcomes for fear of losing market share to charters. Charter schools are said to empower parents with consumer choice: if dissatisfied with their government school, they can turn to the marketplace for immediate improvement. Once this principle is established—as it already is—advocates can “advance their ideas in moral terms by appealing directly to a parent’s presumed right to choose” (Lubienski, 2001, p. 9; see Smarick, 2014, for a recent display of this assumption). The Council of Chief State School Officers (2013, p. 4), with feigned neutrality, has also listed reasons for the phenomenal growth of choice options: “to increase the availability of high-quality options in communities without equal access; to drive improvement through marketplace competition; or to promote individual liberty.” Such provisions reflect the neoliberal infatuation with, for instance, world-class performance (“high-quality options”), the appropriateness of marketing metaphors to every human domain, and, of course, the elevation of liberty well above the other democratic virtues (fraternity and equality).

The future of the charter school movement will have to be led by school management companies like Concept Schools. It’s not just their concentration on science, technology, engineering and math; it’s their persistent and determined focus on student achievement and the end goal of career and college-ready graduates. (Williams Sims, Concept Schools CEO; as cited by Phillis, 2014)

In place of a social project that accrues benefits to the commons and is open to all, the conversion to the consumer-choice model remakes education as shopping: pulling from the shelf what one prefers for one’s own private reasons. The public system now being dismantled in this way is the prize for generations of struggle. Consider that the US has never been able to construct a healthcare system on a similar basis—as the furor over the recent Affordable Care Act changes makes very clear. To imagine the neoliberal end-game for schooling, think of a system

of schooling that looks more like American health care. Education on this model would be a sort of risk management. Insurance companies—society’s professional risk-management experts—could help, no doubt. Risk-management, indeed, is the neoliberal idea behind the model of district administration dubbed “portfolio management.” Just as one seeks profits from a variety of investment holdings (the “portfolio”), the education management scheme known as “portfolio management” seeks to maximize test scores by manipulating districts’ varied holdings: “traditional,” chartered, specialized, vocational, residential—the possible variety could be wide, especially for large and very large districts. But the large, consolidated, rural-county districts in West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia could be places the portfolio model might be “brought to scale.” As Berliner and Glass (2014, pp. 193–198) note, portfolio management is a way to manage the investment one brings to exploiting the poor: “In the spirit of refusing to invest in, protect, or care for schools that produce uncompetitive test scores, [portfolio-managed districts] divest themselves of such schools.”

Charter schools farm the poor, rather than students generally, because they are frequently authorized to replace existing, non-charter public schools with low student achievement—schools that, because of the very strong association of achievement and poverty, tend to serve large proportions of impoverished students (Palardy, 2013). As such, charter schools are presented by education reformers and neoliberal advocates as an innovative public-private market solution to bad schools in impoverished neighborhoods and communities. Let private enterprise farm the poor for (inevitably) better results. It makes sense that the charter-school industry will seek to operate, not just schools, but entire public-school districts: industry lobbying for this predictable agenda is indeed underway, targeting impoverished urban and rural areas (see, e.g., Hill, 2006; Smarick, 2014).

As of this writing, 5,997 charters are in operation, representing 6.3% of all public schools in the nation (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013). Their number has grown by roughly 7% each year since 2008; only eight states do not permit charter schools. In terms of total expenditures, charter school districts spend 19% less per pupil than regular public schools, allocating proportionately fewer dollars toward instruction, teacher pay, and student support services and more toward administrative costs (Miron & Urschel, 2010). Some sources (e.g., Rebarber & Zgainer, 2014, p. 10) report that charter schools augment their public resources via private fund-raising.

Support, both ideological and financial, comes from the highest levels of power. For instance, charter schools receive monies from state and local sources, but may also be funded by competitive grants from the US Department of Education’s multi-million dollar Charter Schools Program. The federal Race to the Top competition also included considerable incentives for applicant states to enact new charter school legislation or expand the number of charters authorized each year. Charters also receive munificent funding from private foundations such as Albertson, Gates, and Walton (see, e.g., Whittinghill, 2011).

Despite the enormous investment of public and private funds in this venture, the effectiveness of charter schools is mixed—even when using the neoliberal advocates’ preferred unitary metric of test scores (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006; Miron, Evergreen & Urschel, 2008). In one large and widely-cited study across 27 states and approximately 1.5 million charter and traditional public school matched pairs of students, charter school students had an average of .01 to .03 standard deviations higher growth scores on state math and reading tests than their matched counterparts at traditional public schools (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes, 2013). More than a quarter (29%) of charters in the study had higher achievement than traditional public schools, nearly a third (31%) had lower scores, and the remainder (40%) performed similarly. A meta-analysis of charter school research likewise finds that charter schools do not consistently outperform traditional public schools (Betts & Tang, 2011).

Closely linked with charter schools are the private entities (EMOs) that operate charter schools under contract, often for profit. In other words, public funds are provided to EMOs to run and sometimes establish new charter schools. For-profit EMOs run in 33 states, and non-profit EMOs in 29 (Miron et al., 2011). In 2010–11, 35% (n=758) of all charter schools were managed by for-profit EMOs, 79 of which are “virtual” schools (Miron et al., 2011).

As with charter schools in general, the test-score effectiveness of those operated by EMOs varies widely ((Furgeson et al., 2012; MacIver & MacIver, 2007; Mathis, 2009). EMO-run schools tend to be less diverse than the local public school districts in which they are situated (Miron et al., 2011) and employ teachers with less experience (MacIver & MacIver, 2007). EMOs have also used profits to advance the interests of privatization through lobbying, political campaign contributions, and the development of model legislation (Davis, 2013).

The high profile that comes with market share is not always welcomed by EMOs. For example, White Hat Management, an EMO that received hundreds of millions in funding to operate charter schools in Ohio, was sued by 10 school boards *and* the Ohio Department of Education; just two percent of its students demonstrated “adequate yearly progress” per NCLB requirements. The attorney representing White Hat, though, was adamant that public funds became private once they entered White Hat’s coffers: “If I’m Coca-Cola, and you’re a Coca-Cola distributor or a Coca-Cola purchaser,” said the attorney, “that doesn’t entitle you to know the Coke formula or find any financial information you’d be interested in learning from the Coca-Cola company. And that’s kind of what they’re [the Ohio Department of Education] demanding” (quoted by Coutts, 2011, ¶11).

*Poor schools sell houses.* The common school is a hallowed idea in the ideology of American schooling, and at one time it seemed consistent with the American dream of a classless society. In America we still pretend social class does not exist, but the poor are nonetheless getting poorer and the rich much, much richer. Schooling helps here, too.

The comparatively affluent, with abundant fiscal free will, can shop even for public schools; they do not really need chartering as do the poor (to parrot the industry rationale of “need”). The affluent shop simply by purchasing houses in reputedly good attendance areas, or newly gentrified and “renewed” neighborhoods: it is that simple—for them. The poor enjoy this choice, of course, much more weakly, but overall, their existence serves another purpose entirely in this phase of the schooling game.

Although the common school was a bold (outrageous) ideal, it withered across the course of the industrializing 20th century. Residential zones were segregated by class and race, and the developing national education system settled into place on that basis—there was little enough “commonality.” Buy the right house, and homeowners inherited the right school, and they still do: only the rich enjoy fiscal free will. But how does one exercise such freedom in judging the right school?

The troubled schools of the poor establish the applicable baseline. In the past, home buyers acted on common sense and insider information. Expensive housing probably indicated good schools, and lovely school buildings were an adornment to lovely neighborhoods. But it was all still only a rough guide. Today, “state report cards” provide a *scientifically correct* guide. An affluent home buyer can now go further than previously possible and compare neighborhoods at a finer grain by comparing the varied test-score metrics. Are the schools in Bryn Mawr, PA, better or worse than those in Radnor, four miles distant? Both are fabulously affluent places on Philadelphia’s “mainline” with the sort of homes and neighborhoods that many Americans envy. But which is *objectively* better?

Is there an empirical link between test scores and the domestic real estate market (all else equal)? Haurin and Brasington (1996) studied the relationship in nearly 30,000 households from a variety of metropolitan neighborhoods; the regression explained an adjusted  $R^2$  of 70%. This is very high for any study relevant to schooling. Of the 44 independent variables, 34 were significant at  $p < .01$ : *and two of these reflected local schools’ test scores*. The authors conclude, “We find that a measure of student achievement is very important in explaining spatial variations in real constant-quality house prices” (p. 335). If you must think conventionally, go with Radnor’s A- over Bryn Mawr’s B+, or look for the real winner somewhere nearby—the one sporting an actual A. Wealthy housing buyers apparently do look.

So where do the poor come into the calculation? Radnor and Bryn Mawr are at the top of the heap because accountability provisions gather the goods on the really bad schools, for instance, right next door in Philadelphia (F!!). Schooling for the poor demonstrates the putative excellence of the schools in places where the affluent buy housing. The poor add value in this way to the housing of the rich (and, of course, those who trade in such housing).

To summarize the argument thus far, and going backwards toward the beginning, we have suggested that under neoliberal rules, everyone (even those impoverished under such rules) and every organization is a customer: those who buy into A+ catchment areas by purchasing houses in them; districts that acquire portfolios of

school types as an investment strategy; administrators who supply their own local customers with branded education products; the parents who confront whatever choices on offer in the market thus arranged—and the government (to end at the beginning) that buys research shorn of critical capacity and intellectual breadth. More particularly, in all of this “liberalization” the poor—as Gans (1994) brilliantly suggested—have myriad productive functions. Part of the productivity is symbolic (as in providing justification for corporate intrusions into urban and rural schooling, or as the anchor to educational value scales), but the poor also play an active role by continuing to exist. To a certain unknown point of imbalance (where their anger cannot be contained), their numbers can (as they do) grow, a growth that redounds to the benefit of the marketplace.

The poor, however, also have a useful role, a quite literal one, in themselves making money. Readers may not realize that *debt* is money in economic terms (Heilbroner & Thurow, 1998). For example, the credit-card debt that the poor accrue with interest rates up to 20% or so—much higher than inflation, and much higher than that applied to the affluent. When the poor go into debt, then, they literally *make money*. A good source of such money-making on the backs of the poor is, in fact, higher education. The neoliberal cant about schooling purposes insists (nearly) everyone be prepared for college, which has become enormously expensive in the US.

#### *Farming the Poor through Credentialism*

In this section, we examine policies and practices that encourage the impoverished to seek ever-higher levels of postsecondary education, regardless of the dubious connection between such training and the functional knowledge and skills required for work. We discuss (1) the contemporary emphasis, in the teeth of rising income inequality, on higher education for all; (2) resultant increases in student debt, particularly among the young and poor; and (3) the growth of for-profit institutions of higher education, which rely largely on monies students acquire through federal education loans.

*Banking on college for all.* Many nations have made the mistake of over-stressing higher education. In the US, the sheer number of students enrolled in college has increased nearly ten-fold, from 2,338,226 in 1947 to 21,016,126 in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012): this represents a 799% increase, compared to an increase of 104% in the total United States population during roughly the same period (1950 – 2010) (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Perhaps more revealingly, the percentage of young people enrolling in postsecondary institutions has grown substantially. In 1967, 25.5% of the 18-24 population was enrolled in college; by 2010, the proportion had risen to 41.2% (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). Interestingly, the overall increase between 1990 and 2000 was 11%, but between 2000 and 2010 it was 35% (Snyder & Dillow, 2011)—a likely effect of the Great Recession.



Such growth in college attendance is not really a matter of rational choice; there are other, more proximate antecedents. In the contemporary US, all high school students hear the message that they should get a four-year degree to earn bigger salaries (Kirwan, 2009). This simplistic message embeds several missteps especially dubious for students from impoverished families. First is debt (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). College tuition, like medical prices, have outstripped inflation for decades (The College Board, 2013). Second, the value of the college degree has slipped over this period, as more and more students complete the experience (Collins, 1979; 2002). Third, even when children from impoverished families complete degrees, they earn less than children from affluent families (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Wright, 1979, 2005). Finally, their odds of completing degrees are substantially less (Pascarella et al., 2004). These conditions act jointly, of course: on average for the poor, the odds of completion, returns to investment, and debt are worse—for a credential that really is only a pre-requisite today to *still further study*.

Many people, even from affluent families, do not fancy academic work, are not engaged by ideas for their own sake, and do not enjoy reading and writing (e.g., Willis, 1977). What keeps them from pursuing vocational training and careers in skilled trades, where the qualifying route involves activities that would engage them more fully?

Much of the reason lies with the hubris and vanity of American culture (Crawford, 2009)—together with the systematic credentialism described by Collins (1979, 2002). Credentialism, as characterized by Collins, indicates a “bull market” *for credentials themselves* in which possession imparts status (irrespective of accomplishment). Such a market deflates the value of the degree obtained—as it becomes ever more common. Under this sort of market, the sought-for status is accessible only via more schooling. For the neoliberal agenda, this is a perfect scheme.

On this view, academic degrees and credentials are adornments and vanities that the poor, especially (and on average) can ill-afford; in constant dollars, college tuition has more than doubled since 1980 (NCES, 2012), consistently outstripping the overall inflation rate (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). But students from poverty are enrolling, dropping out, and acquiring debt that cannot be easily forgiven (Pascarella et al., 2004; United States Department of Education, 2013). The result is that the difference in entry and completion rates between affluent and low-income students has *widened* substantially (Bailey & Dynarsky, 2011). And yet the insistence that everyone needs a four-year degree to be someone becomes more shrill with each passing year.

*Easy education credit and hard debt.* The average amount of education debt (both federal and private) held by college graduates has increased by 65% just since 2006. Among students graduating from college in 2006, 59% carried student loan debt, with an average debt amount of \$18,976 (Reed, Shireman, Asher & Irons, 2008). Just six years later, in 2012, nearly three-quarters (71%) of the graduating class of 2012 had student loan debt, at an average of \$29,400 (Reed & Cochrane, 2013).

Debt among college noncompleters (roughly a third of students who enrolled in college in 2003-04 had not completed their program of study and were no longer attending six year later) is even more troubling. The percentage of noncompleters who had received federal student loans<sup>13</sup> between 2003 and 2009 ranged from 25% for students who first enrolled at a public two-year college to 86% among students who first enrolled at a for-profit college, compared to 54% at public 4-year institutions and 66% at private nonprofit 4-year institutions (Nguyen, 2012).

Students attending for-profit institutions are even more likely to be saddled with education debt. According to the College Board, 96% of graduates at 4-year for-profit schools took out loans (higher even than Nguyen's estimate above) (Baum & Steele, 2010). And much of the credit extended to students at for-profit institutions comes from the federal government: nearly a quarter of Pell grants and federal education loans go to for-profit schools, totaling roughly \$23.9 billion in 2009 (United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2010).

Moreover, noncompleters borrow more money per credit hour than graduates. For instance, noncompleters from for-profit schools borrowed an average of \$350 per credit earned, compared with \$220 per credit earned by completers, a difference of \$130, but disparities characterize all institution types—from \$70 at private, non-profit four-year schools to a low of \$10 in public two-year schools (Wei & Horn, 2013). This farming operation leaves college dropouts with a disproportionate share of education debt, and less to show for it.

The US Department of Education is explicit about the injunction to repay student loans: “You must repay your loans even if you don’t complete your education, can’t find a job related to your program of study, or are unhappy with the education you paid for with your loan” (United States Department of Education, 2013, ¶3). This is sobering language: it sounds as though pursuing social mobility through higher education can be dangerous. Of course, a liberal education is not principally about money, right? That is correct—for anyone to whom it is supremely important, especially those who can afford curiosity and culture as a luxury good. For the rest of us, one must wonder. One can read Dostoyevsky and Homer very well without tuition: many engaged students of our acquaintance say *better*.

Clearly, lenders and universities are generating revenue from the poor. And they want to keep them on campus with retention and remediation programs. But these very measures also source employment to the middle-classes: a win-win situation. Complaints about the volume of students taking remediation courses are disingenuous: the cultural problem is much deeper than lack of access to higher education and deeper even than prison-like city high schools for the poor. In America, most higher education institutions are not selective, and a great many are virtually open access.

Our position may at first strike readers as ungenerous and even reactionary. But we are not happy with the many children of the upper reaches of the middle class who have no place in higher education, at least at age 18-22: because privilege has convinced them they are owed degrees that confer high status and an easy life. They

are, by our lights, the central problem with respect to the over-valuing of higher education in America. They are the foot soldiers of credentialism: the ones who make it work. Without them, the poor could not be farmed on this acreage. It is worth observing that a shrinking middle class may not have the capacity to absorb these misguided students, who, along with the originally impoverished, confront increasing levels of underemployment (Abel, Deitz & Su, 2014).

Meanwhile, important trades and occupations are maligned as unworthy (Berry, 1990; Crawford, 2009). The American education system has never embraced the apprenticeship model, as prevails for instance in Germany. The rewarding work of construction, manufacture, and repair is, in effect, left to good people the culture maligns as losers. Prospects for good income in skilled vocations and trades—work that engagingly combines head and hand—are nonetheless excellent (e.g., Crawford, 2009; Kraybill & Olshan, 1994; Rosenbaum, Stephan, & Rosenbaum, 2010). The commonly heard rationale that the Globally Enhanced Information Age requires at least a bachelor's degree is cant, but the marketplace in credentials requires it. One must also observe that bull markets, when fevered, create bubbles—Alan Greenspan's famous "irrational exuberance." The college-frenzy seems like just such exuberance: and shoddy online degree programs for adults employed fulltime—and run by for-profit "universities"—are perhaps the schooling version of junk bonds. Observe, though, that most universities—private non-profit and state-sponsored—also operate such programs. With an adequate customer base, developed programs can be outsourced; universities now receive bids from companies looking to secure provenance for their online operations (Parry, 2010).

*A new sector arises from easy education credit.* As state funding for higher education eroded over the past decade, and public institutions struggled to accommodate Great Recession-inspired college-going, for-profit college enrollments accelerated dramatically. While postsecondary enrollments in general grew by 31% between 1998 and 2008, enrollments at for-profit colleges grew by a frightful 225% (United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012). This is a sector that thrives on exploiting the lack of public options for technical education, and the working class is their market. Nearly 2.5 million students enrolled in for-profit colleges in 2010, representing approximately 12% of all postsecondary students (Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Education and Employment, 2013).

Neoliberal arguments championing this growth in enrollment (and revenue) suggest that for-profit entities fill gaps in the education "market" and allow students who might not otherwise have postsecondary options to earn degrees. But the cost of such "opportunities" is enormous. For one, the literal cost of attending a for-profit institution is much higher than that of attending a public college: Associate's degree and certificate programs cost an average of four times more than tuition for similar programs at community colleges (United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012).

Another cost associated with for-profit colleges is an explosion in the debt carried by students. Much of the recent growth in student loan debt comes from students attending for-profit institutions. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of students attending 4-year for-profit colleges and 86% attending less than 4-year for-profit colleges borrowed money to cover tuition in 2009 (Nguyen, 2012). Other estimates are even higher: the College Board reports that 96% of graduates at 4-year for-profit schools took out loans, 53% with a cumulative debt of more than \$30,500 (Baum & Steele, 2010). And much of the credit extended to students at for-profit institutions comes from the federal government: nearly a quarter of Pell grants and federal education loans go to for-profit schools, totaling roughly \$23.9 billion in 2009 (United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2010).

Such debt is especially untenable for students who drop out of school without earning a degree—a third pernicious cost of attending a for-profit college. In 2009, the majority (54%) of students who borrowed money to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a for-profit, four-year institution had dropped out (Nguyen, 2012). Among noncompleters at for-profit colleges, nearly one third (31%) had federal loan debt equal to or exceeding 100 percent of their annual income compared to 21% for 4-year private nonprofits, 13% for public 4-year institutions, and 7% at public 2-year institutions (Wei & Horn, 2013). Lacking a degree and facing large debts, students who drop out have higher unemployment rates and lower incomes than those who complete their degrees (Nguyen, 2012; Wei & Horn, 2013). Because their debt is unsustainable, fully 29.4% of students who dropped out of less than 4-year for-profit schools defaulted on their loans (Nguyen, 2012).

Unfortunately, even students who complete their degrees at for-profit schools default on their loans at extremely high rates. Although students at for-profit colleges account for only 13% of federal education loan borrowers, they constitute nearly half (47%) of all federal defaults (United States Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, 2012).

#### BETTING ON THE POOR

Under neoliberal rules, not only is everyone a customer, but everything is necessarily for sale: everything has its price when the market determines all values and functions, and when the purpose of everything is to enter the marketplace. Ideas, Marx’s “hands,” and Bourdieu’s cultural capital: all represent sources of accumulation, and all turn into trash. Such a vision is surely horrific, and we hope we are very wrong. The best refuse is recyclable, of course, and poverty (the idea, and the process) seems positioned to play this role in the neo-liberalized version of schooling.

Ravitch (2013) reminds us that education research has demonstrated (since at least the Coleman report) that poverty is very closely (i.e., causally) associated with depressed test scores. We cannot be sure in the gold-standard sort of way about “causation,” but the association is so widespread, so strong, and so durable across

the generations that it merits the attention it does not—and cannot—receive when the poor function as an essential part of the economy.

In this light, when a society blames the poor for “their” poverty, as the US does, a great deal of money can be made in the name of doing the impossible—from education R&D purportedly aimed at finding a cure for poverty, to charter schools taking over education in impoverished neighborhoods, to expensive higher education’s claiming to guarantee social mobility. Indeed, the impossibility of these efforts renders the whole enterprise of farming the poor sustainable. In our society, the “social capital” constituted by poverty (i.e., the poor themselves) self-reproduces—profitably so, and in ways that Karl Marx could not have imagined. This is one explanation for why the relentless American education reformism appears not to work. We keep the poor well enough to profit from them, and neoliberalism has discovered therein a rich vein to mine.

Officially, however, education is both the advertised cure for poverty and a source of cash flow for educational operators. Education is reputed to remedy poverty by instilling the needed virtues that overcome the laziness, poor planning, unreliability, and dissipation said to characterize the poor. It is hard work, however, and the promise of this sort of education is (luckily for neoliberalism) compromised at every turn by institutional vices that so conveniently mirror those ascribed to the poor. From the perspective of profit, it is a win-win situation. For the poor, and for society, however, it is a cultural disaster.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The market for and over-reliance upon credentials as such, especially as unmoored from accomplishment; see Collins (1979) for the classic treatment.
- <sup>2</sup> As for the narrow middle ground, we agree that habits like frugality and restraint help one to live a better life. However, as Tolstoy (1898) observed, the very same phenomenon (e.g., poverty) looks quite different from one’s own social location (as rich or poor) as compared to a vantage on the great stochastic processes of society: economics, culture, history, and social geography.
- <sup>3</sup> The days of the nation-state—democratic or not—may be numbered under the ideological regime (neoliberalism) established for the planet by trans-national business firms (see, e.g., Gilman, Goldhaber, & Weber, 2011; Sassen, 1996). Sassen, in particular, has suggested that citizens of this new world-order are those firms, and not individual humans.
- <sup>4</sup> For instance: responsiveness to ERSA, a bid for corporate authority, a sign of conservative rectitude, assertion of the link between corporate and educational R&D work, and so forth.
- <sup>5</sup> Most tellingly, perhaps, is Taubes’s claim that hugely expensive, large-scale, randomized-control trials (RCTs) costing hundreds of millions of dollars have *repeatedly* failed to identify the actual risk factors for heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Such failures have not prevented the profession and the State from jointly misleading the public (see Taubes, 2011, for the argument).
- <sup>6</sup> Even this accomplishment (with about 6,000 charter schools on the ground) has not yet materialized (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes, 2013). Charter schooling does not produce higher test scores, even with much smaller schools and often the ability to exclude some students.
- <sup>7</sup> Obesity is a particular challenge in our Appalachian home, where the medical industry is rapidly establishing diabetes centers to service the disease. In southeast Ohio, where one of us lives, we see medical firms celebrating newly established diabetes treatment centers and the chartering industry called in to service the “disease” of urban schooling.

- <sup>8</sup> We indicate the regime as bi-partisan: the Obama administration has pursued largely the same policies as the Bush and Clinton administrations before it.
- <sup>9</sup> The quality of research is always an issue, and it is perhaps easier to organize good-to-excellent quality in the formulaic mode of normal science. Myopia works if one restricts one's vision to a very small field!
- <sup>10</sup> The acronym should seem familiar: it is also used for *socioeconomic status* (i.e., SES).
- <sup>11</sup> The course of factory schooling constitutes a veritable cult of efficiency (Callahan, 1962). Educationists, however, hardly ever acknowledge that the *process of education* is inherently inefficient: missteps and diversions are more important than easy success and direct attack. It is refreshing, therefore, to know that wise observers like Jane Jacobs (2004) and Diane Ravitch (2013) *do* acknowledge the fact.
- <sup>12</sup> Charter schools are publicly-funded schools operating under a "charter," an authorization. For-profit entities, non-profit entities, or districts may operate them. Statute provisions vary by state, but charter schools usually must offer open enrollment, must not charge tuition, and must accept state and federal accountability policies. But the point of chartering, in the beginning and now, has been to relieve the "chartered" schools from state and local education regulations—particularly for staffing, curriculum, and budget management. The reported abuses (e.g., Coutts, 2011) are predictable in the circumstances.
- <sup>13</sup> Data on the average *total* debt—from both federal and other sources—carried by noncompleters is difficult to come by.

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MELINDA A. LEMKE

### **3. (UN)MAKING THE NEOLIBERAL AGENDA IN PUBLIC EDUCATION**

*A Critical Discourse Analysis of Texas High School Social  
Studies Policy Processes*

#### INTRODUCTION

One defends democracy by leading it to the state Mannheim calls ‘militant democracy’—a democracy which does not fear the people, which suppresses privilege, which can plan without becoming rigid, which defends itself without hate, which is nourished by a critical spirit rather than irrationality. (Freire, 1973, p. 58)

A microcosm of our broader democracy, US public education is shaped by competing politics, agendas, and historical moments. A function of federal, state, and local policy, public schooling is viewed by some as a linchpin to democratic equality. Yet to others, the purpose of public education is to serve the US economy. Rather than a social equalizer and public good, in this vein education is held as a private commodity hinging on merit, choice, and privatization. If as Laswell (1958) posited, education is about who gets *what, when, and how*, then within this ideological divide educational policy clearly operates as a high-stakes game with great consequences for students and society.

Given the friction between the ideal of public schooling as the guarantor of progress and hastened economic disinvestment in public schools, there is a need to examine the structures and discourses that control educational policy. The present study uses critical discourse analysis to examine the ideological machinations of neoliberalism within Texas curriculum policy processes and resultant high school social studies standards. In the following section I outline key problems neoliberalism poses for public education and society, as well as how my study adds to educational research literature focused on issues of ideology, inequity, and standardization. My analysis reveals how Texas curriculum policy processes and implementation in the form of high school social studies standards serve as sites of ideological conflict. In doing so, I argue that neoliberal discourses privilege certain forms of erudition, ultimately buttressing “standardized” student knowledge construction supportive of a market driven status quo. I conclude my analysis by highlighting educational quandaries

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created by undemocratic policy processes, broad implications for student knowledge production, and hope for un(making) the neoliberal agenda in public education.

#### MAKING THE NEOLIBERAL AGENDA

Neoliberalism is a historical and socially constructed ideology that needs to be made visible, critically engaged, and shaken from the stranglehold of power it currently exercises over most of the commanding institutions of national and global life. (Giroux, 2008, p. 10)

Designed to attack twentieth century Keynesian economics and welfare programming, contemporary American thinking about neoliberalism can be traced to Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962). Premised on false claims about US constitutionalism, Friedman's neoliberalism or a revived classical liberalism, held decentralized governance and free market activity to be the best check against a paternalistic state. Yet, in moving to supplant democracy with market driven interests, by definition neoliberalism aims at privatization, weakened social welfare safety nets, and undermined federal authority to protect the public good (Giroux, 2008; Giroux & Giroux, 2006; Harvey, 2007). Neoliberal policy not only aims at denigrating public services as unneeded welfare programming, but seeks to remove public regulatory powers—not by proving that regulations fail society, but by showing that state regulations restrict economic growth (Duggan, 2003; Sloan, 2008). As a result, the neoliberal promise of economic and therefore political freedom is little more than hallow rhetoric.

Similar to England's Thatcherism, neoliberal policies under Nixon and Reagan involved an upward distribution of wealth and power. In the 1970s and 1980s these policies ushered in corporate reductions of highly skilled workers and the concomitant invention of a contingent workforce lacking liveable wages and benefits (Harvey, 2007; Krugman, 2005). This neoliberal economic shift occurred alongside business and military allegations that US schools failed to create a skilled workforce (Cuban, 2004). US corporate downsizing and outsourcing, skyrocketing poverty, and false claims about worker proficiencies in the technical professions have only increased in recent years contributing to what Shapiro and Purpel (2005) referred to as the "race to the bottom" (p. 368). Thus, in a short period of human history, neoliberal policy and messaging operated in tandem to foment a new Gilded Age for the wealthy with a permanent underclass (Katz, 1990; Krugman, 2005).

Referring not to political affiliations such as Republican or Democrat (Aronowitz, 2003), according to Harvey (2007) neoliberal discourses pervade US institutions in ways that are "commonsense" to how "we interpret, live in, and understand the world" (p. 23). Yet, neoliberalism does more than just promote the free market. Moving beyond nineteenth century factory-style efficiency models, the evolution of capitalism in its contemporary neoliberal form serves to colonize personal conduct, knowledge production, and our most intimate subjectivities—while simultaneously

marginalizing certain *Othered* groups for their nationality, sex, gender, social class, or racial status (Duggan, 2003; Giroux, 2008).

Due to their role in societal knowledge production, schools have been central to the neoliberal project of a reconstructed democratic society (Aronowitz, 2003)—with the history of business-orientated influence over public schooling and curriculum well-documented in educational research literature (Callahan, 1962; Cuban 1993, 2004; Cuban & Tyack, 1995; Kliebard, 1995; Shapiro & Purpel, 2005; Tyack, 1974; Zilversmit, 1993). Contemporary neoliberal attacks on public and higher education promulgate learning environments focused on economic efficiency, predictability, and determinism instead of critical consciousness, civic engagement, and political empowerment (Giroux, 2002; Saltman, 2006). Broadly, neoliberal discourses are part of educational policies that cut school funding, promote charters and vouchers, corporatize teacher training, advocate standardized curriculum models within the K-16 pipeline, and leave schools vulnerable to corporate advertising (Apple, 2001; Cuban, 2004; Giroux, 2002; Sleeter, 2002, 2008; Sleeter & Stillman, 2008; Sloan, 2008). Through well-insulated sociopolitical discourses and resultant policies, the *McDonaldization* of school life has become the new normal for public education (Ritzer, 1993).

#### *The Culture Wars: Critical versus Neoliberal “Drill and Kill” Education*

The pedagogic device, the condition for the materializing of symbolic control, is the object of a struggle for domination, for the group who appropriates the device has access to a ruler and distributor of consciousness, identity, and desire. (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999, p. 268)

War on Poverty educational reforms were landmark in that for the first time in US history, social policy addressed the role public education played in transmitting, controlling, and recreating social and economic hierarchy beneficial to the upper class. Critical scholarship of the time highlighted connections between political economy, broad social arrangements, and educational experience (Carnoy, 1974; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), as well as how teacher pedagogy and curriculum supported the status quo (Apple, 1979/1990). Despite this momentum, the Reagan Administration’s *A Nation at Risk* (1983) ushered in a wave of neoliberal educational policy changes. Part of broader culture wars fixated on improving US workforce “efficiency,” managing “urban” crime, and scaling back “welfare” programming, individuals like Reagan’s Assistant Secretary of State Chester Finn championed back-to-basics and lecture-based education far removed from critical thinking. Former Secretary of Education William Bennett and scholars such as E. D. Hirsch and Mortimer Adler also pushed a narrowed, male-centric, “classics” version of history and literature (Kincheloe, 2001). Representative of a paradigm shift in educational politics, between the 1980s and 1990s educational rhetoric and resultant policy were dominated by neoliberalism and conservative modernism.

Notable local activism and critical scholarship pushed back against this bent and what came to be considered a *manufactured crisis* that from a critical view, failed to address basic economic, sex, gender, and racial inequities within urban school landscapes (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1984). Such critical scholarship and local engagement refused to accept a deficit policy model, which placed the onus for success on already disadvantaged students and was quick to label community schools as failing. Rather, contextual issues like entrenched racism, generational poverty, disappearing safety nets for women and children, high student mobility rates, increased community surveillance, and perennial staff turnover were highlighted (Lareau, 2003; Fine & Wise, 2000; Noguera, 2003).

Research also documented how standards-based policy actually weakens critical pedagogy, decreases rigor, and increases the achievement gap (Reardon, 2011). Apple (1990, 2000) examined for example, the ways US social studies curriculum and Channel One programming reproduces conservative ideology. Nichols and Berliner (2008) documented how the threat of sanctions leads to system gaming that inculcates “drill and kill” teaching and excludes low performing students from testing. Finally, Collin and Apple (2011) discussed how schools utilize bureaucratic and technologically-focused curricula to the demise of humanities-based critical thinking skills.

Texas-specific research also revealed an accountability system that diminishes rigor and further marginalizes already disadvantaged youth (Vasquez Heilig & Darling Hammond, 2008). While McNeil and Valenzuela (2001) found Texas to emphasize “the lowest level of information and skills, crowds out other forms of learning, and disengages students in many urban schools” (p. 138), Salinas (2006) found that even the most committed US history teachers acquiesced to high-stakes test preparation. Overall, it has been argued that state accountability systems focused on high-stakes testing and lacking in culturally rich curriculum act to ignore, isolate, stratify, and perpetuate violence against certain bodies in our public schools (Lugg, 2003; Shapiro & Purpel, 2005).

Integral to the maintenance of an ideological system premised on inequality is control of information, access to it, and the processes by which new knowledge is constructed. The Texas accountability system relies on curriculum standards mandated by the State Board of Education (SBOE), with control of that curriculum signifying control of knowledge production. Akin to the ideologically-driven elimination of Mexican American Studies in the Tucson, Arizona Unified School District (TUSD) (Davila, 2012) was the 2010 SBOE high school social studies Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) revision process.<sup>1</sup>

Local, national, and international media outlets recognized the culture war status of the Texas revisions, critiquing board members for ideological changes that resulted in uncritical and narrowed curriculum standards (see: TEKS Watch for a comprehensive list). A content analysis by Vasquez Heilig, Brown, and Brown (2012) illustrated how SBOE revisions to the US history TEKS rendered “race



invisible” (p. 413) and addressed racism “without directly using the term and without acknowledging the White identity of those implicated in these actions” (p. 416).

Yet, a study that goes beyond an analysis of the US history TEKS and includes a critique of the policy processes responsible for the TEKS revisions does not exist. My study fills this research gap by examining the ideological machinations of neoliberalism within high school world history, US history, government, and economics TEKS, as well as relevant curriculum policy processes. While it does not offer a macro-level analysis of neoliberalism (see for example, Duggan 2003; Giroux, 2008; Ritzer, 1993), my study offers a micro-level critique of neoliberal discourses found within a specific Texas state agency and resultant high school social studies curriculum standards.

In the following section I outline my research methodology, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Using critical discourse analysis, my study answers the following question: How is neoliberal ideology expressed in the 2010 high school world history, US history, government, and economics TEKS and related SBOE policy processes? As a form of critical bricolage (McLaren, 2001) my study challenges the so-called “open” SBOE policy process and “facts” contained in the revised TEKS. My study reveals how neoliberal discourses are silent on historically difficult sociopolitical and economic issues to the detriment of what Freire (1973) called *problem-posing education*, which fosters critical knowledge construction and respective student identity creation.

#### METHODOLOGY

Given this study aimed to understand the ways neoliberal discourses exist in the 2010 high school social studies TEKS and related SBOE policy processes, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was an apt methodological approach. While various forms of CDA exist, common to most approaches is a focus on social problems, hegemony, ideology, taken-for-granted realities, and the reproduction of dominance through forms of talk and text (Cheek, 2004). CDA is concerned with the role context plays in generating and maintaining discursive noise and/or silence around sociopolitical and economic issues. It also uses interdisciplinarity and interpretation with the aim of social action around the problem addressed (van Dijk, 1993).

Following the CDA tradition of taking an “explicit sociopolitical stance” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252), it is important to note here that my research proceeded from the assumption that educational policy creation and implementation does not occur in a vacuum, as various value laden exigencies shape the policy process. As a white feminist researcher who has been influenced by the critical, feminist, and queer theoretical traditions, it also proceeded with the understanding that policy processes and respective documents are not value neutral. Rather, I understand policy silences and explicit constructions of nationality, social class, sex, gender, and race as imbued with values and ideological beliefs that can work to the disadvantage those already disempowered by power relationships.

Finally, my personal experience as a former Texas high school social studies teacher and district curriculum writer prompted me to view the 2010 TEKS revisions as falling within longstanding political efforts to constrain and script what students learn. I was raised by an educator and union laborer, schooled under the New York State Honors Regents System, and studied secondary social studies education, history, and law as an undergrad. New York's system is not without blemish nor will I naively assert that I am free from the totalizing effects of neoliberalism. Yet, I know that I benefited from a system that challenged students to be organic creators of knowledge—something that individual Texas teachers might aim at, but is missing from the system's core.

Cognizant that my positionality impacted the selection of research topic, questions, theoretical approach, and analysis, to increase research trustworthiness and challenge my privilege as a researcher, I utilized an audit trail or what Cheek (2004) called a "decision trail" (p. 1147). My audit trail included "detail about which texts were analyzed, why they were chosen, and how they were generated" and aimed at "congruence between the theoretical constructs underpinning the approach taken to discourse analysis and the analysis conducted" (Cheek, 2004, p. 1147). Thus, I documented how my positionality and epistemology related to the selected texts and research process, as well as linkages between theoretical leanings, methodological selection, and overall interpretation. My audit trail also included all collected documents, as well as 200 pages constituting note-taking, reflection, and analytic memos. This audit trail was reviewed four times by a researcher with expertise in qualitative methodology.

### *Data Collection*

The social studies TEKS include world geography, world history, US history, government, economics, psychology, sociology, and special topics or approved electives in social studies (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2013d). Data collection included selection of the world history, US history, government, and economics TEKS, which encompassed over 50 pages of text. As a former world history, US history, and government teacher and curriculum writer for all four TEKS areas, I purposefully selected these subjects. This decision was based on first-hand experience teaching these subjects prior to the 2010 revisions and gleaning knowledge from working with the subjects as a curriculum writer after the revisions were made.

In order to contextually situate my analysis, I also collected 83 SBOE policy, meeting minutes, social studies reviewers, and textbook resolutions documents from 2009-2012. Meeting minutes specifically included documents from the Committee of the Full Board, Board of Education (non-full board), and Committee on Instruction. Although the social studies revisions took place between 2009 and 2010, I collected and analyzed 2011 and 2012 meeting minutes for any follow-up discussion on the hearings, public controversy, or revision implementation. I also collected and read reviewer committee comments to understand committee composition and how

the SBOE received public feedback. Finally, I collected and analyzed textbook resolutions to learn of linkages between the TEKS and textbook purchases, which not only impact 4.8 million Texas students, but smaller textbook markets in other states.

### *Data Analysis*

My critical discourse analysis of the SBOE and TEKS documents involved iterative data gathering, reading, and written analysis. Contained within an audit trail, document collection allowed me to attend to the sociopolitical context within which the TEKS revisions were made. After completing data collection, to add structure to my critical discourse analysis I created templates (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for the non-TEKS documents and for each TEKS subject. Although I already had a working knowledge of the TEKS, these templates allowed for the careful identification of policy processes driving the revisions, as well as permitted a side-by-side comparison of curricular changes between the 1997 and 2010 TEKS. According to Cheek (2004):

Discourse analysis involves more than analysing the content of texts for the ways in which they have been structured in terms of syntax, semantics, and so forth. Rather, discourse analysis is concerned with the ways in which texts themselves have been constructed in terms of their social and historical 'situatedness'. (p. 1144)

Thus, while my study does not offer a TEK for TEK analysis, my findings highlight broad machinations of contextually driven neoliberal ideology within SBOE policy, practice, and high school social studies standards.

Key to guiding this template analysis was the development of clear definitions for neoliberalism and ideology. In addition to the literature previously discussed, I drew heavily on Giroux's (2008) articulation of neoliberalism, as well as philosophical writing on ideology and critical consciousness (Eagleton, 2007; Freire, 1973; Marx & Engels, 1846). In addition to advocating free market and venture forms of capitalism, neoliberalism also manifests itself within highly classist, sexist, and racialized tones. Neoliberalism holds individuals rather than society responsible for failure, plus supports military and religious fundamentalism culminating in a uniquely American hegemony (Giroux, 2008). Thus, I specifically looked for discourses, either within SBOE policy processes or specific TEKS curriculum standards, which structured silence on historic conflict or whitewashed difficult sociopolitical and economic issues. I also looked for language demonstrating bias towards corporatization, American-Euro-centrism, certain religious beliefs, white, male heterosexuality, and US militarism.

My definition of ideology included those ideas, values, and beliefs that legitimate a dominant political power through discourse-based false consciousness. As originally understood by Engel's, false consciousness involves the ways people consciously and unconsciously participate in their own disempowerment. Moreover,

it implies that the promotion and legitimation of ideology not only emanates from the dominant group, but the material structure of the whole system (Eagleton, 2007). In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels (1846) held that by interfering in the consciousness of others, ideology seeks to rationalize, homogenize, naturalize, and eternalize specific forms of hegemony. Thus, education that utilizes “dialogue and communication” to support individual empowerment is viewed by the ideologue as a threat to their own false reality (Freire, 1973, p. 150). Working in tandem, ideology and false consciousness help to ensure cyclical reification of power and concomitant subordination of the *Other*.

Finally, since the aim of my study was to critique neoliberal discourse, I drew from the Frankfurt School’s critical tradition, here critical theory as understood in Horkheimer’s (1974) writings on immanent criticism and negation. Concerned with breaches between ideas and reality, negation works to identify how sociopolitical institutions, discourses, and life purport to stand for one thing, but actually stand for an opposite. In line with Horkheimer (1974) I aimed my analysis at “salvage[ing] relative truths from the wreckage of false ultimates” (p. 183).

Given neoliberal ideology is most effective when rendered invisible through common-sense discourses about the ways things are, in applying my templates to the SBOE and TEKS documents I carefully looked for discourses indicating that the SBOE sought to reify power of the dominant group. This meant looking for ways that SBOE demonstrated political bias and/or limited public dialogue during the TEKS revision process. This also meant determining whether or not the revised 2010 TEKS provided a critical and culturally relevant view of world and US peoples, cultures, politics, and economics—or retracted from cultural relevance.

To do so, after each template reading of the SBOE policy and TEKS documents, I stepped back from the research process several times (McMullen, 2011). Multiple readings allowed me to return to the documents with new questions, with each reading resulting in several reflective and analytic memos. These memos served as the basis for my findings on SBOE policy, as well as the selection of three themes that were consistent across the four TEKS subjects. Together, my study involved a year of data collection, note-taking, analysis, and compiling information into an audit trail. In line with CDA, I targeted my overall analysis at offering “an interpretation” of the data with the goal of encouraging critical dialogue around my findings.

#### THE SBOE AND TEKS AS SITES OF IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT

Since the 1960s, critical, feminist, queer, and multicultural educators have advocated for eliminating false knowledge, silence on difficult social issues, student isolation, and disadvantage through non-ideological justice-orientated curriculum, pedagogies, and schooling (Apple, 1990, 2000; Banks, 1996; Gay, 2002; Gibson, 1976; Nieto, 2000; Johnson & Lugg, 2011; Pinar, 1998; Sleeter & Grant, 2009). My critical discourse analysis of SBOE and TEKS documents revealed that the politics and policy processes of the SBOE do nothing to improve upon critical pedagogists’

concerns about public education—now spanning fifty years. Rather, the SBOE and TEKS serve as sites of ideological conflict that support “standardized” and market driven student knowledge construction and identity creation. In the first section of the findings, I discuss how SBOE policy processes and documents reveal neoliberal discourses aimed at narrowing critical dialogue about social studies education. Through the themes of, “Western-centrism,” “White, Male Individualism” and “Free Enterprise as a Social Good,” I discuss how the revised 2010 TEKS are imbued with neoliberal ideology to the detriment of student democratic engagement.

#### *Narrowing Curriculum through State Board of Education Policy Processes*

Authorized by the Texas Education Code, the State Board of Education (SBOE) consists of fifteen elected, non-salaried<sup>2</sup> members serving 15 Texas regions. Between 2009-2011 the SBOE partisan divide was ten Republicans and five Democrats and as of the 2012 November election,<sup>3</sup> that divide remains the same (Texas Freedom Network, 2013). Governor Rick Perry (R) appoints one of the elected members to a two-year term as chair (TEA, 2013c). The role played by the Governorship in structuring the SBOE and the longstanding Board political divide both highlight political thinking and leverage over SBOE policy processes.

Regular and committee meetings must occur at least quarterly and be open to the public, which includes live broadcast and Internet publication of meeting minutes. Proposed rules, amendments, and repeals also must appear on the SBOE meeting agenda for discussion and an action known as a First Reading. Once the mandatory thirty-day public comment period ends, a Second Reading occurs at two subsequent board meetings. Unless otherwise specified by state or federal law, a rule cannot take effect until the beginning of the school year, at least 90 days after the rule adoption date. Aside from the commissioner’s authority to file rule corrections with the Secretary of State, no oversight of SBOE proceedings exists as all SBOE rules are approved by the SBOE (TEA, 2013c). Since 2000, a Republican governor has appointed the SBOE chair, who holds sway over meeting agendas and public hearing tenor. Given a Republican governor appoints the SBOE chair and a conservative leaning Board approves its own policy processes, SBOE policy checks and balances are all but eliminated.

The organizational functions of the SBOE are to guide, monitor, and regulate Texas education policy, execute and moderate textbook and instructional materials contracts, regulate Texas Education Agency programs, and oversee the Permanent School Fund. Policy is designed by the Instruction, School Finance, and School Initiatives standing committees, and ruled on by the Committee of the Full Board. In addition to the Committee of the Full Board, members are required to serve on one five-member committee. Aside from work and ad hoc meetings, written or public testimony can be given at any SBOE meeting, but the chair may limit testimony considered repetitious or excessive (TEA, 2013c).

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The Committee on Instruction is tasked with the establishment and implementation of curriculum and graduation requirements, textbook oversight, and student assessment. The Committee on School Finance monitors state and federal funding issues including textbook finance and community education funding. The Committee on School Initiatives regulates educational statutes, technology, communication, open-enrolment charters, special districts, and training of SBOE members (TEA, 2013b). Finally, the Committee of the Full Board revises the TEKS every ten years, adopts textbooks, hears public testimony to this effect, and despite viewing itself as a *corporate* entity, mandates so-called *well-balanced* curriculum free of ideological bias (TEA, 2013a, emphasis mine).

In 2009, SBOE solicited curriculum advice from high school social studies review committees comprised of educators and citizens (TEA, 2011c). It also sought the assistance of six “expert” reviewers who were not required to have a degree in the subject area consulted. The reviewers included: David Barton (WallBuilders); Jesus Francisco de la Teja, (Professor and Chair, History, Texas State University); Daniel Dreisbach (Professor, American University); Lybeth Hodges (Professor, History, Texas Woman’s University); Jim Kracht (Associate Dean and Professor, Education, Texas A&M University); and Peter Marshall (President, Peter Marshall Ministries) (TEA, 2009a).

Much of the reviewer testimony had a neoliberal bent. Barton (2009b) for example, commented that the 1997 TEKS overemphasized pedagogy and methodology and did not contain enough facts about a Christian creator or bible. He also was concerned that the TEKS overemphasized socialism and did not properly describe a “competitive,” “profit-orientated,” “free-market,” “exceptional,” and “republican” United States. Dreisbach (2009c) supported revising the 1997 TEKS to include emphasis on Christianity in world and US history, as well as to increase a discussion of white male leaders in US government. Finally, similar to Barton’s concerns over the 1997 TEKS, Marshall’s (2009d) testimony was worth quoting at length:

Fulfilling these educational mandates in the State of Texas will require the students to learn why America is the greatest country in the world... (p. 2)

Reading through the TEKS as they are currently constituted could give the impression that history just ‘happens,’... That is, of course, the false teaching of Marxism. (p. 3)

The discovery, settling, and founding of the colonies happened because of the Biblical worldviews of those involved. (p. 4)

Anne Hutchinson does not belong in the company of these eminent gentlemen [William Penn, John Smith, and Roger Williams]. She was certainly not a significant colonial leader, and didn’t accomplish anything except getting herself exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for making trouble. (p. 8)

Having received an outpouring of criticism about reviewer comments, in 2010 the SBOE heard public testimony<sup>4</sup> from educators and stakeholder groups including

for example, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), American GI Forum, League of Women Voters, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Palestinians for Peace and Democracy, Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and the Texas Indigenous Council (TEA, 2011a-b). In total, the TEKS revision process was on the SBOE Committee of the Full Board agenda seven times in 2009 and 11 times with public testimony in 2010. Despite participation by various stakeholder groups, the SBOE chair limited the length of testimony several times throughout the hearings. Moreover, the Committee on Instruction, which is charged with curriculum standards and textbook oversight, did not discuss or hold hearings regarding the social studies revisions. Aside from mention of continued changes to the Economics TEKS, the social studies TEKS fell off the SBOE's policy agenda in 2011 (TEA, 2013b)—meaning that the SBOE paid little attention to media and educator criticism of the 2010 revisions.

In addition to TEKS revisions, the SBOE also reviews and adopts instructional materials. To this effect the SBOE issues resolutions that express opinions and concerns about Texas textbooks. While not binding, these resolutions are important because they demonstrate SBOE member thinking on policy and other decision-making processes. As of 2010, SBOE instructional materials resolutions included the following: theory should be distinguishable from fact; patriotism, respect for authority, and the benefits of the free enterprise system should be promoted; US history should be presented positively; social movements generate no clear consensus; depiction of traditional female-male roles is valued; and discussion of life-style choices deviating from mainstream values is discouraged (TEA, 2013c). These textbook resolutions are significant as they serve as ideological signposts of Board thinking that shaped the 2010 TEKS revision process.

At the height of the 2010 TEKS revisions, in addition to limiting testimony length, movements to extend public hearings also typically failed. Yet, while the Board did not grant extra time to hear public concern about the revisions, the SBOE did have time for extensive discussion on the “documented gross pro-Islamic/anti-Christian distortions in Social Studies texts” (TEA, Sept. 24, 2010, p. 3). At that same meeting it passed a textbook resolution stating, “Whereas more such discriminatory treatment of religion may occur as Middle Easterners buy into the US public school textbook oligopoly, as they are now doing” (p. 5). Arising from its concern that Islam dominates US public education, a month later the SBOE also approved a new social studies elective—*Bible's Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and new Testament and Their Impact on the History and Literature of Western Civilization* (TEA, Nov. 19, 2010).

#### *The TEKS as a Mechanism to Regulate, Deskill, and Disempower Texas Students*

My critical discourse analysis of SBOE documents reveals a state agency engaged in the exact opposite of providing Texas students with a *well-balanced* curriculum. Like the controversial 2009 science TEKS revisions that permitted increased influence over standards by “intelligent” design creationists, the high school social studies

TEKS underwent neoliberal ideological revisions. My critical discourse analysis of the 2010 world history, US history, government, and economics TEKS highlights curriculum standards that regulate and narrow student critical thinking in the short term. Akin to Apple's discussion of *official knowledge* (2001), through an officially sanctioned ideological view of history, governance, and the world, this analysis also shows that the politics of the TEKS have the secondary purpose of deskilling and disempowering students over the long term.

To begin, the 1997 TEKS used the terms *including* and *such as* to emphasize or limit curricular content. *Including* means the given TEK will be tested, while *such as* means the TEK is optional. Both terms remained in all four 2010 TEKS subjects. Yet, it is important to note here that in response to pushback against 81st Texas Legislature's House Bill 3 (2010), which increased social studies testing to include world geography, world history, and US history, TEA further narrowed tested material by labeling the 2010 TEKS as either *readiness* or *supporting* standards (TEA, 2011d). In doing so, TEA signalled to Texas educators that *readiness* standards would appear more frequently on tests than *supporting* standards—at a ratio of about six to four. It also was true that *supporting* standards outnumbered *readiness* standards by the same ratio—leading to a significant narrowing of curriculum (TEA, 2011d). Under the current testing regime, US history is the only tested high school social studies subject, with world geography and world history made optional subjects for graduation (83rd Texas Legislature, 2013).

In addition to the narrowing language of *including*, *such as*, *readiness*, and *supporting*, of the subjects analyzed, the 2010 US history TEKS had the most significant downgrade in student thinking requirements. In numerous places students were asked to “identify,” “understand,” and “explain,” instead of complete higher order skills like “analyze,” “evaluate,” and “defend a point of view” (TEA, 2013d). Considering US history currently is the only subject tested for graduation, the SBOE and TEA established an unequivocal proviso on student learning—reduced critical thinking.

Specific content of the 2010 TEKS also was problematic, embodying multiple forms of neoliberal ideology. My critical discourse analysis of the 2010 TEKS led me to interpret three primary themes that support my argument that the SBOE and TEKS serve as a site of ideological conflict aiming to legitimate a neoliberal view across the social studies. These themes included: Western-centrism; White, Male Individualism; and Free Enterprise System as a Social Good.

*Western-centrism.* In its textbook resolutions, the SBOE made no illusions about its preference for presenting the “positive” aspects of US history and culture. Similarly, my analysis of the TEKS revealed an ideologically driven narrative aimed at erasure of historic conflict. It also found a glorification of western culture, Christianity, and war time events. Simultaneously, discussion of complex sociocultural, political, and economic issues involved in transnational interactions is missing.

In world and US history, the terms “colonialism” and “imperialism” were replaced with terms like “Columbian Exchange” and “expansion,” which in the new phrasing



of the TEKS fails to require that students unpack imperial hegemony. Premised on faulty and conservative leaning historical memory, the 2010 US history TEKS also supported a narrative of American exceptionalism (TEA, 2013d). This included for example, that students learn the findings of the House Un-American Activities Committee “were confirmed by the Venona Papers” and focus on “individuals of the conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s, including Phyllis Schlafly, the Contract with America, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority, and the National Rifle Association” (TEA, 2013d). Following from the SBOE goal of offering a *well-balanced* curriculum, individuals like Angela Davis and Harvey Milk, as well as groups like Amnesty International and Green Peace were not required or suggested TEKS learning.

Across all 2010 TEKS subjects, the socially constructed and complex relations between groups, cultures, and religions either were rendered natural and placed within a dominant western, Christian narrative, or removed all together (e.g., Required learning on Chinese, Japanese, Mongolian, Ottoman, and sub-Saharan African civilizations was removed from world history and a section discussing the “problems of immigrants” was removed from US history (TEA, 2013d). The history and scope of polytheism and non-religion was absent from the revised world history TEKS, which universally adopted the markers “BC” (Before Christ) and “AD” (After Death) instead of “BCE” (Before Common Era) and “CE” (Common Era) (TEA, 2013d).

Increased emphasis on and bias favoring Judeo-Christianity was found in the revised 2010 government TEKS, which replaced the language “Natural law and natural rights” with “laws of nature and nature’s God” (TEA, 2013d). In emphasizing the role of “biblical law,” the revised government TEKS also mislead students about the role Christianity played in the establishment of US democracy. Students for example are required to identify, “major intellectual, philosophical, political, and religious traditions that informed the American founding, including Judeo-Christian (especially biblical law),” and “individuals whose principles of laws and government institutions informed the American founding documents, including those of Moses” (TEA, 2013d). The influence of secularism in the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment, as well as complexity found in colonial American religious and political beliefs, which included deism, is completely ignored. Moreover in covering the Enlightenment, only white male philosophers were listed as required learning in the revised 2010 world history and government TEKS. Few female philosophers were included, and intellectual renaissances outside western culture were not included.

In addition to this emphasis, Christian imperialism is not included in the TEKS. Topics such as Pope Leo II’s initiation of the Crusades and sacking of Constantinople, the Spanish Inquisition’s use of torture, and forced Christianization of indigenous peoples was not in the revised world history TEKS. Some language actually exceeded a preference for Christianity, inscribing ethnic hatred and misunderstanding through the following, “explain how Arab rejection of the State

of Israel has led to ongoing conflict” and “summarize the development and impact of radical Islamic fundamentalism on events in the second half of the 20th century, including Palestinian terrorism and the growth of al Qaeda” (TEA, 2013d).

In the revised world and US history TEKS, numerous war time dates and events were required learning. Yet, why war happens was not. Further, the consequences of war, such as death toll, human rights violations, wartime rape, consequences of the atom bomb, the proliferation of weapons, military spending, and post-traumatic stress disorder, were not required or suggested TEKS learning. Similar to textbooks of the early twentieth century, war was discussed only in terms of dates, military battles, and the successes of white male leadership. In world history for example, students were required to learn about “Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Hideki Tojo, Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill” and in US history the list expanded to “Omar Bradley, Dwight Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, Chester A. Nimitz, George Marshall, and George Patton” (TEA, 2013d). None of the 2010 TEKS subjects required students learn about the history of discriminatory US military policy towards women, people of color, and queer individuals, or that numerous social groups participated in or were exploited through various US war efforts (e.g., Bracero Program).

*White, male individualism.* In addition to the previously described military exploit, patriarchy manifested itself within the 2010 TEKS both in the overt placement of white, middle class, heterosexual men throughout the curriculum standards, as well as the consistent absence of discussions focused on female and queer issues. The kind of curriculum supported by critical, multicultural, feminist, and queer scholars is nonexistent in the state-sanctioned Texas social studies curriculum. Across the revised TEKS, men were portrayed in traditional roles and were celebrated for their white, heterosexual masculinity. Moreover, any tangible discussion of sociopolitical movements “of the people,” which might have included recognition of women and queer activism were non-existent.

The revised 2010 US history TEKS were structured through a chronological date and individual, or great person, approach to teaching history. Moreover, the *readiness* and *supporting* standards severely restricted who and what is taught. Only seven individuals for example including, Henry Cabot Lodge, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, Sanford B. Dole, Woodrow Wilson, John F. Kennedy, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, were included in the US history *readiness* standards. Further, the latter three individuals received the *including* label rather than the passive *such as*, meaning that out of 67 names in the revised US history TEKS, only three white males were required learning. If teaching history through the lens of individuals were appropriate, which it is not, then this list excluded TEKS covering for example, Upton Sinclair, Susan B. Anthony, Ida B. Wells, W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Hector P. Garcia, and Betty Friedan (TEA, 2013d).

The 2010 US history TEKS also followed the historical trope of the white male presidential narrative. While students were required to learn that President Obama

is the first Black president in US history, the history of race relations and racism was glossed over. Across all four revised TEKS subjects, the white male narrative passively included non-whites (e.g., indigenous peoples only discussed through US “Indian policy” in US history or minority issues only addressed in Supreme Court cases in government). Ethnic and racial groups that were included also were discussed monolithically, lacking within group heterogeneity and depth as people or historic empires. In the revised 2010 world and US history TEKS for example, Japanese history was referred to only through Japanese “imperialism,” “dictatorship,” or internment through Executive Order 9066 (TEA, 2013d).

Since the United States has not elected a female president, women are all but excluded from this type of history, economics, and government-telling. Despite the involvement of women on the world and foreign government stage, major contributions of women were marginalized in the 2010 world history, government, and economics TEKS. Most of the required learning about women in world and US history was passive, assuming that women did not participate in early government, religion, and labor movements. The women who were selected possessed strong conservative or neoliberal ideological leanings, in world history including for example, Mother Teresa, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, and Golda Meir. Moreover, women and people of color were lumped together as monolithic, stereotypical window-dressing—often “added-on” as fighting for suffrage, assistance on the war time home front, or fighting for civil rights (TEA, 2013d).

Despite the reality that the western narrative involves patriarchal stratification, military aggression, colonization, genocide, rape, and domestic violence, the role men played in this narrative was muted. Instead, the revised 2010 world history TEKS asked students to, “identify examples of genocide, including the Holocaust and genocide in the Balkans, Rwanda, and Darfur” (TEA, 2013d) as if the United States had not committed abuses of its own. Moreover, when resistance to oppression did occur, it was done by individuals rather than groups, and framed in exceptionalist discourses of how “American ideals have advanced human rights and democratic ideas throughout the world” (TEA, 2013d). Difficult discussions of historic and contemporary classism, sexism, homophobia, racism, ageism, and disability simply were not present in the revised TEKS. Although often found in advanced placement world history texts (Bentley & Ziegler, 2006), the historic worldwide existence of patriarchy, poverty, human trafficking, child labor, and US militarism were not required or suggested TEKS learning.

*Free Enterprise as a Social Good.* Not only was scripted reading of the US Constitution written across the revised 2010 TEKS through “Constitution Week,” but the TEKS mislead students on debates concerning US constitutional history. Across the revised TEKS for example, the language “democratic society” was supplanted by “constitutional republic” (TEA, 2013d). The 2010 government TEKS also overemphasized the acclaim Alexis de Tocqueville afforded US democracy without comparable discussion he gave to the disease-ridden living conditions of

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nineteenth century industrial America. Moreover, *readiness* standards across the 2010 TEKS included positive reference to business and military events. Events that were not tied to military or free enterprise system benefits were referred to passively. Compare the specificity of language in the first 2010 US history TEK with that of the second US history TEK:

Describe the dynamic relationship between US international trade policies and the US free enterprise system such as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo, the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—*versus*—

Explain how the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, gender, and religious groups shape American culture. (TEA, 2013d)

Overall, the free enterprise system unequivocally was viewed in the 2010 TEKS as a positive contribution to the world. As requested in Barton’s (2009) reviewer comments, language like competition, entrepreneurship, innovation, choice, private ownership, profit, and freedom from regulation, was written across the revised TEKS to describe the US economic system. In US history, concern for the environment shifted from “trace the development of the conservation of natural resources” to “identify the roles of governmental entities and private citizens in managing the environment” (TEA, 2013d). In world history students were asked to “formulate generalizations on how economic freedom improved the human condition.” In all four revised subjects they also were required to “identify the role of the US free enterprise system within the parameters of this course and understand that this system may also be referred to as capitalism or the free market system” (TEA, 2013d). Such language eliminates discussion of historic critiques of capitalism—framing that only one “expert” reviewer, de la Teja, viewed as ideological (TEA, 2009a).

Across all four revised TEKS subjects there was a general oversimplification of highly complex economic issues. The 2010 economics TEKS for example, adopted a simplistic one-size fits all model for the US economy, adding an entirely new curriculum strand on “personal financial responsibility” that focused on investment and capital formation (TEA, 2013d). Communism was removed from a list of terms denoting economic systems that have “worldwide political and economic effects.” The revised economics TEKS also required that students learn about neoliberals such as European economist Friedrich Hayek and US economist Milton Friedman, while removing Vladimir Lenin from world history, Robert LaFollette and Eugene Debs from US history, and Karl Marx from economics (TEA, 2013d). Finally, in clear support for neoliberal policy, the 2010 government TEKS required that students, “understand how government taxation and regulation can serve as restrictions to private enterprise” (TEA, 2013d).

Social class as a category of analysis was missing across all 2010 TEKS subjects. The revised US history TEKS distinguished between “legal” and “illegal” immigrants without required learning about the political complexity of these terms.

TEKS covering labor history, working conditions, the continuation of unequal pay, and urbanized hyper-segregation was non-existent (TEA, 2013d). Social Security and Medicare also were framed in terms of “solvency” within the revised US history TEKS (TEA, 2013d). Moreover, in the 2010 world history, US history, and economics TEKS, global economic recession and depression were listed only in terms of causes and governmental responses, rather than impacts on various groups. The economics TEKS also removed the requirement that students learn the “level of economic development of selected nations,” silencing any focus on international poverty (TEA, 2013d). A discussion of why poverty exists was not included in the 2010 TEKS, rendering economic stratification as natural or a common-sense reality.

The revised 2010 world history TEKS required learning about technology only in terms of military advancements and development of the modern global economy. In US history technology was linked to military advancements like “machine guns, airplanes, tanks, poison gas, and trench warfare” while in the economics TEKS technology was connected to market growth (TEA, 2013d). Yet, a discussion of global diseases like cholera, malaria, and HIV/AIDS was missing from all four revised TEKS subjects. Although found in advanced placement texts (Bentley & Ziegler, 2006), broad-based problems associated with technological advancement, micro-lending, Internet bullying, globalization, proliferation of biological weapons, labor servitude, environmental degradation, and global warming were not required or suggested TEKS learning.

While the 2010 US history TEKS required that students “evaluate efforts by global organizations to undermine US sovereignty through the use of treaties,” controversial policies of organizations like the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund within the developing world were not included in any TEKS subject (TEA, 2013d). The revised TEKS denied that economic problems like US economic stratification, poverty, and global exploitation exist. Rather this framing was muted, only showing up in the 2010 economics TEKS as, “explain why scarcity and choice are basic economic problems faced by every society”—while simultaneously removing the requirement that students analyze “economic rights,” “consequences of business decisions,” and business “ethics” (TEA, 2013d).

In summary, the themes Western-centrism, White, Male Individualism, and Free Enterprise System as a Social Good, confirm claims that public schools are under attack by a neoliberal agenda now more than ever. In addition to narrowing curriculum content, SBOE policy processes implemented through the TEKS serve as a long term mechanism for the regulation, deskilling, and disempowerment of Texas students. Texas high school social studies standards currently exist as little more than narrowly proscribed “facts” that support one view of history, society, governance, and economics.

As demonstrated, the TEKS content focuses on the dominance of western culture and Christian religion, to the demise of pluralism. It re-inscribes white, male, heterosexuality, implying that social groups do not play a role in history, governance, or economics. Finally, by supporting the free enterprise system as a social good,

among other concerns the revised TEKS fail to ask hard questions about US poverty, capitalism, and economic inequality between social groups and the Global North and South. Best capturing SBOE neoliberal positionality within US ideological culture wars is a 2010 government TEK asking students to, “evaluate *whether and/or when* the obligation of citizenship requires that personal desires and interests be subordinated to the public good” (TEA, 2010d, emphasis mine).

#### CONCLUSION

Schools do not only control people; they also help control meaning. Since they preserve and distribute what is perceived to be ‘legitimate knowledge’—the knowledge that ‘we all must have,’ schools confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups. (Apple, 1990, pp. 63–64)

Balanced policy environments are difficult to establish. Competition over scarce resources prompts differential and often prejudicial policy treatments of class, sex, gender, and race (Fusarelli, 2011). Thus, when examining local context and the role policy actors have in shaping policy, it is critical to consider whether policy fails because of policy short-comings or actual implementation (Loeb & McEwan, 2006; McLaughlin, 1987).

In a similar vein, my findings demonstrate how ideologically driven policy not only can have *negative*, but also the *intended* effects desired by the policy writers—here the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). Although my findings are limited by the specific context and discourses analyzed, they reveal a statewide policy failure resultant from an ideological power imbalance. Moreover, my findings demonstrate how the lack of adjudicatory oversight into the policy machinations of the SBOE, permits an ideologically driven entity to steamroll policy without concern for the public welfare of 4.8 million Texas students.

Feminist constitutional scholar VanBurkleo (2001) observed that the Latin *educere* means “to lead out” or “away” from ignorance and oppression. The ideological curriculum reform processes of the SBOE and resultant high school social studies TEKS do little to lead Texas students “away” from ignorance, but rather maintain an ideologically narrow view of history, governance, economics, and the world. Such ideological machinations of a *public* institution like the SBOE operate to legitimate a narrowed rather than critical view of society, which contributes to the systemic cultural reproduction of unequal social relations. According to Apple (2004), “No matter how radical some of these proposed reforms are and no matter how weak the empirical basis of their support, they have now redefined the terrain of debate of all things educational” (p. 19). This statement aptly describes the ideologically driven “expert” panel and prejudicial policy proceedings that occurred during the social studies TEKS revision process. Rather than reconstruct social studies education to include social relevance, missing voices, and correct factual error (Loewen, 1995; Zinn, 2003), the SBOE did just the opposite.

Since teachers may temper knowledge presented to students out of a fear they might learn of the injustices that institutionally target certain US populations (McNeil, 1988), the revised TEKS spell disaster for student knowledge construction and identity creation. The ideologically selective addition and omission of ideas not only limits how students might engage and view themselves, but increases the likelihood that they will more easily subscribe to a specific ideological bent—that of neoliberalism. Ideally, these changes will prompt Texas educators to pushback, considering for example, how immigrant and refugee students might learn to interpret US foreign policy from the TEKS; how the TEKS rendering of Christianity imposes upon atheist, agnostic, and non-Christian students; and what it means for poor, female, and queer youth to be pedagogically non-existent in Texas social studies curriculum standards?

As understood by Nieto (1995), US social studies curriculum often glosses over the undemocratic, dark side of history, failing to foster democratic consciousness among students. Setting aside the ideologically driven revision process, the TEKS now operate to restrict the critical scope of Texas social studies education and diminish the larger democratic project of public education. Thus, a major concern of Texas educators should be the ways in which they participate in or resist the false consciousness perpetuated by the Texas State Board of Education. Are they cognizant of and resistant to SBOE curricular manipulation? As Freire (1973) asked, do they engage students in the construction of shared knowledge? Moreover, what can be done through policy to prevent further ideological decay of Texas pedagogy and praxis?

*(Un)Making the Neoliberal Agenda*

There is no other country [United States] in the world where there is such a large gap between the sophisticated understanding of some professional historians and the basic education given by teachers. (Ferro, 1981, p. 225)

Despite research spanning five decades demonstrating that critical pedagogy and non-sexist multicultural education increase student engagement, achievement, and empowerment (Apple, 1990; Banks, 1996; Gibson, 1976; Kincheloe, 2001; Nieto, 2000), ideologically narrow high school social studies standards were implemented in Texas. Given the likelihood that teachers will temper knowledge presented to students (McNeil, 1988) and reduce rigor because of accountability pressures (Salinas, 2006), the purposeful dumbing-down of high school social studies content by the SBOE should not be taken lightly. Far from a progressive standpoint, in 2010 the SBOE presented itself to the nation and world as an anachronism. Rather than embrace broad-based criticality on economic, sociopolitical, and cultural issues focused on the *long term* of education (Freire, 2005), the SBOE handicapped Texas students who when graduating from high school will be underprepared for basic dialogue about history, culture, and political economy. Yet if Texas students fail,

the SBOE has the neoliberal mantra to defend itself—Those who succeed are more capable, while those who do not have themselves to blame.

This mantra is unacceptable. Curriculum and pedagogical praxis must challenge the notion that wealth, individualism, and US military might are the only ideas celebrated within the US and abroad. A failure to do so limits the social imagination of students to the detriment of global society. We must educate our youth to be critical, reflective, and involved citizens who do not shy away from public deliberation. Moreover, curriculum must incorporate “experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse [and gender non-conforming] students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” and for instilling high expectations (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

Teaching is political—period. As *cultural workers* (Friere, 2005) and public servants, we have a responsibility to teach the difficult, but relevant issues of the day—as the fate of the United States is inseparable from other nations and world events. The promise of US democracy necessitates that community stakeholders examine the lack of social justice for the historical *Other*. While currently missing from the high school social studies TEKS, critical pedagogy directly challenges hegemonic structures that historically rationalized the failure of students from disadvantaged backgrounds as the result of either inherent personal deficiencies or problems within family environments. As a form of social justice-minded resistance to the false consciousness imbued in the TEKS, Texas curriculum and pedagogy must be redirected by educators and rights groups to support the development of students who are politically active agents of social change.

I do not presuppose that the 1997 TEKS were superior in their critical stance. Rather, they were preferable to the revised 2010 TEKS. Although the TEKS will not be re-reviewed until 2019, redirection can begin locally within individual classrooms. Texas educators also should participate in SBOE election politics and seek ways to amend Board procedural processes. Without changes to SBOE procedure and political make-up, Texas students receive factually inaccurate and ideologically biased curriculum not only through the TEKS, but through the adoption of social studies textbooks. This role cannot be stressed enough since despite an outpouring of public criticism over textbook content and approval processes, all well documented by Texas and national news outlets, the SBOE conservative majority recently approved factually inaccurate and politically slanted middle school and high school social studies books (see: Texas Freedom Network (2014) for textbook content specific reports).

Although operating in a non-union state, teachers and curriculum specialists can quietly subvert the TEKS via the creation of critically-orientated lesson plans and curriculum resources. Since Texas school districts are not required by law to use the SBOE approved textbooks, district leaders can seek curricular alternatives and supplements. Rights groups can assist this process by making alternative resources available to educators, while also petitioning textbook companies to resist ideological and inaccurate content changes to textbooks. Free online educational materials from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN),



National Association for Multicultural Education, Rethinking Schools, and Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance are just a few places educators can look to build inclusive curriculum for students. Finally, educators outside Texas can petition their state government for legislation restricting Texas curriculum standards from having an undue influence on their state curriculum, as well as be mindful of using textbooks that were changed to align with the Texas standards.

In contemplating the linkages between public education, ideology, and social action Apple (1990) asked educators a simple question, “For whom do schools work?” (p. 81). By examining the neoliberal discourses within the SBOE policy and TEKS curriculum standards documents, my research suggests that in its current form, the Texas high school social studies TEKS restrict social imagination, demote teachers from intellectual status, and benefit a power elite whose every aim is to manipulate the system to work for them. If other educators reach the same conclusion, then I ask that they think long and hard about how they can help (un)make the neoliberal agenda and its regimes of truth currently suffocating Texas public education and its students.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The political documentaries *Precious Knowledge* (2011), directed by Ari Palos, documents the banning of Mexican American Studies in TUSD; *The Revisionaries* (2012), directed by Scott Thurman, covers the SBOE 2009-2010 science and social studies TEKS revision processes.
- <sup>2</sup> While SBOE members are not entitled to salaried compensation, most work-related expenses including travel are reimbursed.
- <sup>3</sup> 2009 SBOE Members: Don McLeroy (R, District 9; Chair for the first part of 2009), Gail Lowe (R, District 14; Chair for the second part of 2009), Rick Agosto (D, District 3), Lawrence A. Allen, Jr. (D, District 4), Mary Helen Berlanga (D, District 2), David Bradley (R, District 7), Barbara Cargill (R, District 8), Bob Craig (R, District 15), Cynthia Dunbar (R, District 10), Pat Hardy (R, District 11), Mavis B. Knight (D, 13), Terri Leo (R, District 6), Ken Mercer (R, District 5), Geraldine Miller (R, District 12), and Rene Nunez (D, District 1)  
2010 SBOE Members: Gail Lowe (R, District 14), Lawrence A. Allen, Jr. (D, District 4), Mary Helen Berlanga (D, District 2), David Bradley (R, District 7), Barbara Cargill (R, District 8), George Clayton (R, District 12), Bob Craig (R, District 15), Marsha Farney (R, District 10), Carlos “Charlie” Garza (R, District 1), Pat Hardy (R, District 11), Mavis B. Knight (D, 13), Terri Leo (R, District 6), Don McLeroy (R, District 9), Ken Mercer (R, District 5), Thomas Ratliff (R, District 9), Michael Soto (D, District 3)  
2011 SBOE Members: Gail Lowe (R, District 14; Chair), Lawrence A. Allen, Jr. (D, District 4), Mary Helen Berlanga (D, District 2), David Bradley (R, District 7), Barbara Cargill (R, District 8), George Clayton (R, District 12), Bob Craig (R, District 15), Marsha Farney (R, District 10), Charlie Garza (R.), Pat Hardy (R, District 11), Mavis B. Knight (D, 13), Terri Leo (R, District 6), Don McLeroy (R, District 9), Ken Mercer (R, District 5), Thomas Ratliff (R, District 9), Michael Soto (D, District 3)  
2012 SBOE Members: Barbara Cargill (R, District 8; Chair), Lawrence A. Allen, Jr. (D, District 4), Ruben Cortez (D, District 2), Donna Bohorich (R, District 6), David Bradley (R, District 7), Marty Rowley (R, District 15), Martha M. Dominguez (D, District 1) Pat Hardy (R, District 11), Mavis B. Knight (D, 13), Tom Maynard (R, District 10), Sue Melton (R, District 14), Ken Mercer (R, District 5), Geraldine Miller (R, District 12), Marisa Perez (D, District 3), Thomas Ratliff (R, District 9)

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- <sup>4</sup> Testimony was heard from far right and corporate entities including for example, the Liberty Institute, PF&E Oil and Gas Co., Texas Pastors Council, Texas Tea Party, Texans for Life, Texas Eagle Forum, and WallBuilders.

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## 4. DOMINATING EDUCATIONAL POLICY

### *The Normative Harms of Military Recruiting under NCLB*

#### INTRODUCTION

Within educational policy, the US military has been leveraging its influence to gain access to high school students and their directory data—access often on better footing than other third parties (e.g., commercial advertisers, college recruiters, corporate recruiters, and/or civil associations). For example, when lawmakers renewed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, redubbing it the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), an included amendment (Section 9528) enabled a greater presence of military recruiters in and around high schools. This piece of legislation highlights a general trend within our current political climate, where the military is increasingly taking on a “policy advocacy role” and immersing itself within neoliberal policies and rhetoric to advance its own agenda (Feaver et al., 2001; Janowitz, 1971). This article shows the military’s influence on the construction of educational policy and illustrates the market-model framework within which military recruiters act in schools.

The structure of NCLB section 9528 enables a sophisticated direct marketing campaign, rather than the simple narrative of a career counselor who introduces students to the military as “just one option out of many.”<sup>1</sup> Recruiting frames schools as markets, students as sales calls, and recruiters as sales representatives. Therefore, in this chapter, neoliberalism or a neoliberal frame refers to its most dominant theme:

that free markets in which individuals maximize their material interests provide the best means for satisfying human aspirations, and that markets are in particular to be preferred over states and politics, which are at best inefficient and at worst threats to freedom. (Crouch, 2011, p. vii)

Most importantly, market logic is the best model for social interactions, not simply those of commercial context, and market principles begin to serve as the standard of judgment for other social institutions (e.g., maximizing efficiency). Therefore, we can look directly at human practices and norms through observation and dialogue to discover if a neoliberal worldview has permeated any given social field (e.g., K-12 education in general and military recruiting in public schools specifically).

For example, one general critique of the neoliberal expression of NCLB involves curriculum design and teaching. Teaching becomes providing education services

to consumers who shop in a competitive education market as selfish, rational individuals. To rank schools in the market, designers create a standard curriculum that highlights schools making adequate yearly progress and shames those who do not. Some savvy consumers can use coupons (vouchers) to make private schools more affordable or tap into the growing market of charter schools. Inside schools, teachers labor to increase student test scores. Federal law connects funding to these scores, holding schools accountable. District officials can also use these scores to hold individual teachers accountable (see Turque, 2010). Middle management (principals and vice-principals) sort through test data to shape employee focus for the following month. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators all interact in the education field as consumers behaving in their own best interests.

For one to consider the market model as the common sense understanding of educational relations, policy should habitually show neoliberal tendencies in other smaller policy fields.<sup>2</sup> The more people's practices follow the market metaphor, the greater chance the metaphor is normalized as "the" mode of social relations and gains its strongest hegemonic influence. So, school as marketplace is a dominant theme in: curriculum politics and textbook sales (Apple, 2006); Race to the Top reforms including expanded charter schools and teacher merit pay (Obama, 2009); data management regarding test scores and achievement (Au, 2009; Clarke & Newman, 1997); and, more explicit projects from soda machines to Channel One advertising (Apple, 2000). In these school policies, education is a service for efficient schools to provide to youth who are positioned as consumers and targets for aggressive marketing, as future workers, and increasingly, as future soldiers who will provide muscle to the invisible hand. Current education policy, which enables a market-based relationship between students and the military, a relationship that commodifies a military career and then markets that commodity directly to youth in high schools, is detrimental to both education and military service. This normative claim speaks directly to currently contested policy reform.

In particular, Section 9528 requires schools to follow two provisions: the *data collection provision* and the *equal access provision*. The *data collection provision* requires high schools to give student directory information to the local military recruiting offices or else the school will have its federal funding revoked. Parents and students can withhold directory information if either party completes an "opt-out" form. The transparency of the opt-out process has generated much debate among parents, school administrators, teachers, and policy makers (Lagotte, 2012a). The *equal access provision* requires high schools to provide military recruiters with access to campuses equal to higher education and private sector recruiters. Thus, NCLB creates a context that military recruiters can exploit to advance their own interests (i.e. reaching contract quotas).

We argue that current military recruitment practice, expanded by Section 9528 of NCLB, is an undemocratic means of recruiting—specifically because it constitutes a form of bureaucratic domination. Bureaucratic domination occurs when any governmental agency uses its institutional power to influence policies

or procedures to advance its interests over (in our case) the interests of children. Furthermore, bureaucratic domination occurs when an institution unjustly limits the deliberative freedom of individuals, thereby subjugating them to the arbitrary rule of law (Lovett, 2010). We illustrate bureaucratic domination as it occurs on the formal and informal levels. First, at the formal level, the military's influence shaped NCLB—an educational policy—to include Section 9528. Second, at the informal level, military recruiters have used the data collection and equal access provisions to saturate the educational environment with recruiting messages that may drown out other interests.

We do not argue that military recruitment within schools is inherently undemocratic—in fact, we believe the opposite. Our main point is the data collection and equal access provisions, both in enactment and execution, fail to meet the democratic standard of public justification (the process for determining when laws are arbitrary). To make this argument, we first briefly explain the methodological focus of critical social science and define the parameters of the argument. We then unpack the nature of bureaucratic domination, particularly the link between bureaucratic domination, democracy, and children's rights. Next, we show how individuals and institutions become fiduciary guardians within the deliberative process of a representative democracy. After, we show why and how the military gained its current position within educational policy and why the implementation of Section 9528 within NCLB continues to reflect military interests. We then explain how military recruiters exploit the data collection and equal access provisions to overwhelm the day-to-day practices of schools with military recruiting messages, which undermine the ability of parents' and schools' to make reasonable and well-informed decisions concerning children's well-being. Finally, we provide policy reform suggestions for how the military could recruit within high schools and meet the democratic standards we introduce.

#### SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We proceed from a framework of Critical Social Science (CSS), which allows two critical scholars—one anthropologist and one normative philosopher—to combine different skills for making educational policy suggestions. Social scientists have been skilled at critiquing forms of domination for some time now, but may not have a well-defined normative foundation to make “ought” statements about reforming oppressive conditions. Normative philosophers provide the conceptual groundwork to establish which structures “ought” and “ought not” belong in a democratic society, but tend to create hypothetical arguments for and against these positions and “bracket” the actual arguments within the deliberative process. A CSS approach, on the other hand, starts from *an explanatory critique*, which is a tool to normatively criticize false beliefs, social practices, and arguments. In addition, an explanatory critique explains how and why false beliefs, practices, and arguments are held together to produce forms of domination (See Sayers 2011, pp. 221–223).



In our case, the explanatory critique takes the form of criticizing the false beliefs perpetuated by the military and explaining how such beliefs are mobilized to gain an unjustified presence within educational policy as it happens on the ground.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, our goal is *not* to conceptually clarify tensions in values, such as: “Does military recruiting conflict with parent’s rights?” or “What happens when fiduciary guardians disagree over the degree to which military recruitment ought to be allowed within schools?” While these questions are valuable, they are not the focus of this project. We are combining normative theory and empirical research in order to describe the *actual harms* being perpetrated when the military recruits with neoliberal logic. Our concern, then, is to normatively explain why current military recruiting practices constitute a form of bureaucratic domination; specifically, (1) how the military used its bureaucratic power to evade deliberating over the moral tensions of its recruiting practice and (2) why such evasion resulted in a military recruiting policy that advanced the military’s interests over the well-being of children. Then, we provide suggestions for how current policy *ought to be reformed* to decrease these negative practices.<sup>4</sup>

The strategy of connecting empirical evidence with normative analysis reconnects social research and the social good. CSS applies the power of philosophical examination to real world conditions, providing conceptual foundation to make specific suggestions to change oppressive structures. And, unpacking the false beliefs and practices often associated with structures of domination requires empirical evidence. For example, to accuse the military of distorting the democratic process and threatening the well-being of children, we must empirically detail the false arguments put forth by the military and empirically explain how these false beliefs were translated into policy that provided the military with a domineering position within educational policy. Connecting those real processes with the expectations of actors in a deliberative democracy opens space for positive policy reform. To that end, we close this section by briefly describing the type of empirical evidence and the collection process.<sup>5</sup>

The data consist of ethnographic interviews conducted from 2009 to 2011, corroborated with an assortment of media articles and three key research documents specifically on NCLB and military recruiting. The interviews were a part of a multi-sited study, with participants coming from four different high schools, three different school districts, and two different states (see [Table 1](#) below). The participants themselves represent the variety of actors that military recruiting affects: parents, students, teachers, guidance counselors, principals, district staff, recently returned veterans, and a Navy recruiter. Participants were invited in two ways: through basic community networking (sometimes referred to as snowball or opportunistic interviews) and a blanket email sent to administrators throughout the school districts explaining the research. In this article, we focus primarily on school staff to discuss the influence of the military recruiting mandates on practices within high schools. Our claims below about activities in and around schools do not solely come from

*Table 1. Summary of Study Participants*

<i>District (Schools)</i>	<i>Participant Title (Name)</i>
Weston (Turtle Creek, Chelsea)	Guidance Counselors (Davenport, Fairchild) Parents (Martin, Valentine, Knightly, Reynolds, Morris)
Edmonville (Yellowbrook)	Principal (Anderson) Guidance Counselors (Bradford) Chief Academic Officer (Kirkpatrick) Communication Director (Jenkins) Strategic Planning Director (Peters) Recruiter (Anderson) Veterans (Watts, Thomas, Elliot, Stanford)
Central City (Rockport)	Principal (Newcomb) Guidance Counselor (Henderson)

the interviews, however, and we ensure our strongest claims triangulate with the archival and media sources mentioned below.

The strongest claims we make about recruiting as sales and the overboard behavior of adult recruiters around school children is normally corroborated from the transcripts of all members involved; i.e., the recruiter himself confirms many of the aggressive techniques parents, principals, counselors, popular media, and government evaluations report and critique.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, we look three-dimensionally. Horizontally, we triangulate data from multiple perspectives within a particular level (e.g., the academic literature). But, we stretch vertically, asking members of different social positions to reflect on what the others are saying about them. First, we asked parents a series of factual questions to check the claim in literature and the media that few parents know about section 9528 or military recruiting in general. Then, we began to introduce explanatory claims from media and academic reports—about their lack of knowledge—so parents could comment on the feasibility of the claims from their perspective. Many of these conversations actually eliminated several practical recommendations we thought would be no-brainers. When research participants from a variety of social positions were invited into a consistent conversation about the particular research question, rather than being merely sources from which one extracts data, the resultant findings proved much richer.

Beyond the standard use of academic literature, especially focused on the normative philosophy underlying the argument, we connect the above interview data with media reports and transcripts of major press conferences with recruiting representatives. We collected these reports through a search of the Lexis-Nexis database from 2000 to 2012, covering the year immediately before the renewal of NCLB and the time Section 9528 has been active. Finally, the ethnographic data and media reports also triangulate with the previous three main research documents on this issue, each of them coming from different perspectives: a Governmental

Accountability Office (2006) report on recruiting irregularities, an American Civil Liberties Union (2008) report on recruiting youth in high schools, and a Rutgers Law School study on the implementation of Section 9528 (Venetis, 2008). Therefore, when we describe the practices and conditions that we critique as normatively harmful, the observations come from a range of sources representing a variety of different interests.

#### DEMOCRACY, CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, AND BUREAUCRATIC DOMINATION

The military engages in practices of bureaucratic domination when it uses its institutional power, or instrumental power, to leverage policies and practices that advance the military's interests over the interests of democracy (Richardson, 2002). However, to clearly explain how the military engages in practices of bureaucratic domination within education, we need to briefly sketch the relationship between "deliberative democracy" and "children's rights." In particular, we shall focus on two issues: how third parties ought to democratically deliberate on behalf of children and why the failure to correctly deliberate on behalf of children constitutes a form of domination. In explaining these two issues, we clarify the exact democratic values the military undermined when it pushed through Section 9528 of NCLB.

Deliberating on behalf of children is different than deliberating for oneself. When deliberating for oneself, ideally the individual is considered to know, or at least have a relative understanding of, what is in his or her best interest. Consequently, they are considered capable of fairly and effectively representing themselves within the democratic process. Children, on the other hand, are not yet fully capable of fairly and effectively representing themselves within the deliberative process because they are not completely capable of reasonably determining what is in their own long-term interest. As a result, children depend upon third parties to deliberate on their behalf: in other words, they depend upon fiduciary guardians.

As Harry Brighouse (2003) argues, since children are not completely capable of deliberating on their own behalf, they have a different set of democratic rights as compared to adults. Adults have *agency rights*, which means they are given duties and responsibilities based upon their own ability to represent themselves within the democratic process. Children, on the other hand, are given *well-being rights*, which means they have rights, but these are based upon their right to become autonomous agents (Purdy, 1992; Raz, 1988). Moreover, since children cannot represent themselves within the democratic process, their well-being rights are established and protected when fiduciary guardians act to secure and advance those rights. For instance, when the military and parents deliberate on behalf of children, they must put aside their personal interests to ensure the "public justifications" behind policies and procedures affecting children legitimately advance the children's well-being. In other words, children are legitimately represented within the democratic process when fiduciary guardians implement policies and procedures generated through public justification.

*Public justification*, simply put, rests upon two standards: *deliberative freedom* and *democratic generality*. Public justification is established when all individuals affected by a policy or procedure have a real and effective opportunity to engage in the public deliberation behind the formation of a particular policy and the policy meets the standards of democratic generality (Anderson & Honneth, 2005; Bohman, 1996; Forst, 2012). *Deliberative freedom*, therefore, is the ability to effectively engage in the public deliberation behind the formation and implementation of a policy which affects one's life. Effectively engaging means having the ability to gather information, learn how the policy will affect one's life, hear perspectives different from one's own, and give public reasons for individual perspectives on a policy (Rostbøll, 2008, p. 188). Most importantly, deliberative freedom requires individuals to engage in "the public use of reason," which is engaging in the intersubjective process of giving and taking reasons and collectively rationalizing social practices to oneself and others. *Democratic generality* is established when all valid basic norms of a democratic decision are shareable among all those affected by a decision (Habermas, 1996). That is, a policy is democratically justified when no parties affected by said policy can "reasonably reject" that said policy is justifiable (Forst, 2012). When a policy meets the standard of democratic generality, we can say individuals are no longer subjected to the arbitrary rule of law.

A policy relating to children, then, meets the standard of public justification when two conditions are met. First, all fiduciary guardians affected by a policy must use public reason and influence both the formation and implementation of the policy (deliberative freedom). Second, no fiduciary guardians affected by the deliberative process should be able to reasonably judge the policy as being against the best interest of the children (democratic generality). When these two conditions are upheld, children's well-being rights are legitimately established. For example, a military recruiting policy would uphold the standard of public justification if citizens, including parents and school administrators, were given an effective opportunity to have their public reasons included into the formation and implementation of a recruiting policy (deliberative freedom) and the recruiting policy could not be reasonably rejected as being against the best interest of children (democratic generality).

Bureaucratic domination builds on this connection between "deliberative democracy" and "children's rights." First of all, domination occurs when an arbitrary power is wielded over others (Scanlon, 1998). An arbitrary power is one that does not meet the standards of public justification discussed above (Lovett, 2010). Bureaucratic domination, then, occurs when an institution uses its instrumental power to leverage policies and practices that advance the institution's interests over the interests of democracy (Bohman, 1996; Richardson, 2002). In our case, bureaucratic domination occurs when the military uses its institutional power to limit the deliberative freedom of other fiduciary parties—particularly parents and school administrators—and implements policies and procedures that do not meet the standard of democratic generality.

DELIBERATIVE FREEDOM, REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY,  
AND FIDUCIARY OBLIGATIONS

Before proceeding we need to make a slight detour and explain the connection between deliberative freedom, representative democracy, and fiduciary obligations. More specifically, how individuals and institutions, like the military, *become* fiduciary guardians within the deliberative process. First of all, deliberative freedom is a reflexive process, and within a representative democracy this reflexive process entails deliberating upon who should be elected into office as well as the issues citizens wish their representatives to address (See Olson, 2006). Within a representative democracy, “representation” is a form of mediation: representation is the process of translating concerns and interests raised in the informal public sphere into laws and policies within the formal public sphere, which represents the interests of the citizens. As Melissa Williams (1998) explains, “every scheme of representation must offer citizens a rational basis of trust in government, a set of reasons why institutional representation will function to make government responsive to their essential interest” (p. 33). She goes on to argue, representation

... is a two-sided affair, creating “trust and obligation” for both the representative and the represented. On the side of the representative, it incurs the obligation to advocate policies that will serve constituent interest. On the side of the represented, representation creates an obligation to obey the laws so long as government has acted in good faith. (p. 31)

Within a representative democracy the decision-making process, at least over large issues, takes place at the formal level of democracy. At this level, the standards of public justification are met *not* by including all fiduciary guardians within the deliberative process, but when those deliberating on behalf of citizens consider the interests of the citizens and make policies which best represent those interests.<sup>7</sup> In our case, decisions made at the formal level should expand the deliberative freedoms of citizens at the informal level; and specifically, when dealing with children, representatives should implement policies that expand the deliberative freedom of fiduciary guardians who are best suited to protect the well-being of children. For example, decisions made at national level should properly empower schools administrators to make decisions that advance the well-being of children at the local level. We shall expand upon this point shortly.

Deliberative processes dealing with children’s issues can have multiple fiduciary actors, each with different, and sometimes divergent, interests. For clarity, we can identify at least four fiduciary actors within this saga of military recruiting: (1) the military, (2) parents, (3) schools (i.e. teachers and administrators), and (4) representatives within the formal public sphere (i.e. senators and congressmen/women). Ideally speaking, all of these actors should deliberate with each other and create policies in the best interest of children. And when deliberating on behalf of children, by definition, all of these people are acting from a fiduciary position, and

thus trying to determine how to coordinate their different interests into policies which protect the well-being of children. In this regard, once the military enters into the educational policy arena they become *bound* by fiduciary responsibilities which require them to reasonably consider how their actions impact children's well-being. Now, we are not saying the military as a whole is a fiduciary guardian; only that they *become* bound by fiduciary responsibilities once they act within spaces where children's best interests are at hand. The military's actions within these spaces, then, would meet the standards of public justification if the actions which directly impact children were also done in a manner that protected their well-being.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the military's actions should expand the deliberative freedom of fiduciary guardians who are best suited to protect the well-being of children.

Since public justification is met when policies expand the deliberative freedom of fiduciary guardians who are best positioned to protect the well-being of children, let us focus on the issue of being "better positioned to protect children's well-being." In clarifying this point, we shall also show how the military undermines its fiduciary obligations within the educational arena. First of all, parents are not the only individuals who have fiduciary rights over children. While parents have *primary* fiduciary rights over their *own* children, they have these rights only because they are better positioned to advance and protect the well-being of their children as compared to other third-parties. In other words, we provide parents with primary fiduciary rights because they are often best positioned to advance and protect their child's well-being.<sup>9</sup> However, in different situations different fiduciary responsibilities will be given to different parties. For instance, within the context of the school policy more responsibilities should be given to schools administrators because they are better positioned to protect the well-being of the aggregate total of schools/students under their control.

Our main point here is when dealing with multiple fiduciary actors we want to give greater fiduciary responsibilities, and consequently greater deliberative freedom, to the individuals and/or institutions better positioned to protect the well-being of children. As a general scheme, we argue: policies aimed towards children are more likely to meet the standards of public justification if they expand the deliberative freedoms of those parties who are better positioned to protect the well-being of children.<sup>10</sup> In terms of military recruiting specifically, we argue: recruiting policies taking place within schools (e.g., the equal access provision) are more likely to meet the standards of public justification when they expand the deliberative freedoms of school administrators because they are better positioned to protect the well-being of children within the institution of education than the military. Furthermore, recruiting practices focused on the individual child (e.g., the data collection provision) are more likely to meet the standards of public justification when they expand the deliberative freedom of parents because parents are better positioned to protect the well-being of their own child than the military. In either case, domination occurs when the deliberative freedom of the better positioned fiduciary guardian is subverted and a child's well-being is threatened.

We took a brief detour through the role of fiduciary obligations, deliberative freedom, and representation to illustrate three claims: First, the democratic process should be reflexive, and in our case, expand the deliberative freedom of the better positioned fiduciary guardians in order to ensure they are able to voice their opinions and impact policy matters relating to children's well-being. Second, conflicts between fiduciary responsibilities and children's well-being must be addressed through the democratic process and decided in a manner that is in the best interest of the child or children.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the military becomes a fiduciary guardian once it enters into the deliberative processes where children's issues are at stake. In moving forward, we want to reiterate that the aim of our paper is not establishing a rubric for weighing conflicts between fiduciary guardians: i.e. conflicts between the interests of the military and parents or between parents and school administrators. Instead, we are explaining (1) that the military's recruiting policies failed to meet the standards of public justification because they neglected the need to expand the deliberative freedoms of fiduciary guardians better positioned to protect children's well-being, and (2) such neglect constitutes a form of bureaucratic domination. We can see the military's push toward bureaucratic domination within education at the formal level, which is where we now turn our attention.

#### FORMAL PRACTICES OF BUREAUCRATIC DOMINATION

Our legislative example begins when Congress provided the military with a privileged status in higher education in the mid-1990s. At that time, law schools restricted third parties, which included military recruiters, from accessing their campuses if the third parties did not adhere to a school's antidiscriminatory policies. The military had its Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy in place, and law schools rightly claimed they had a democratic obligation to prohibit military recruiters from visiting the career centers or other offices because the DADT policy was institutionalized discrimination towards homosexuality (Taylor, 2006). The military countered the law school's policy by arguing: laws schools were discriminating against the armed forces; such policies were unpatriotic and unsupportive of the nation at times of war; and, the policy's decision was a fairly banal application of established guidelines (Biskupic, 2005; Richey, 2005; Slobodzian, 2004; Taylor, 2006). In 1994, these arguments culminated in the Solomon Amendment, which sanctioned higher educational institutions that restricted military recruitment or ROTC programs. Such sanctions took the form of the government taking away federal funds if law schools did not allow recruiters access to their career center offices.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Solomon Amendment targeted higher education, the spirit of the amendment soon found its way into K-12 educational policies in 2001. David Vitter (R-LA) led an aggressive campaign to include Section 9528 in NCLB. Although he and Pete Sessions (R-TX) brought the amendment to the House and Senate floors, much of the final debate went on behind closed doors (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2004; Zgonjanin, 2006). As Walsh (2007) explains, "... the military provision made it into

the final versions only weeks prior to closed-door negotiations between members of the House and Senate.” Vitter claimed, without evidence, that military recruiters “face daunting challenges in beefing up our military with good, new, young recruits” (Zgonjanin, 2006, p. 171), and he blamed this on rampant discrimination the armed forces supposedly faced within education. “What is going on clearly, Mr. Chairman, is pure, old-fashioned bad political correctness and antimilitary ideology being shoved down the throats of our young people.”<sup>13</sup> In an interview, Vitter stated that he “simply objected to high schools being able to deny a recruiter access to their students” (Goodman, 2004), and his amendment would “...simply offer them fair access to secondary schools that accept federal funding” (Zgonjanin, 2006, p. 171).

The military, and the senators acting on behalf of the military, undermined the deliberative freedom of other fiduciary guardians for two reasons. One, holding the final debates behind closed doors decreased available information in the public record. Two, even in the “closed doors sessions,” the military’s justification for adding Section 9528 to NCLB paid little regard to the well-being of children. For example, young adults during the ages of thirteen to eighteen (usually the age of high school students) are just beginning to develop a sense of independence; however, they still need adult guidance, support, and monitoring—primarily because they are more likely to ignore the potential consequences of their actions and tend to see themselves as invulnerable to future penalties (Waldfoegel, 2006, pp. 157–76). As a result, children should have limited exposure to advertising and other messages which have potential long-term implications because children are not at the age at which they can make reasonably informed decisions about their long-term career options. During these years, therefore, children need fiduciary guardians to help filter what information is relevant and irrelevant and decipher the information received. The public record, however, is relatively empty of any real discussion on the effects of military recruiting on children’s well-being rights in schools.

#### INFORMAL PRACTICES OF BUREAUCRATIC DOMINATION

##### *The Data Collection Provision*

As explained above, the data collection provision requires high schools to give student directory information to local military recruiting offices each year or have their federal funding revoked. In addition, the only way student directory information can be withheld is if parents or students complete an opt-out form. The data collection provision constitutes a form of bureaucratic domination because of the opaque and weak notification requirements. When the data collection provision was implemented, schools were ill-informed about the notification process. For instance, when schools did find out about the provision, few staff members knew exactly what the mandate required; therefore, they could not properly inform parents of their right to opt out (Lagotte, 2012b). Our interviews show staff members were



often unclear on how to properly implement this policy; furthermore, many district administrators were also unclear about specific requirements for execution.

Second, the notification process does not ensure parents are given a real and effective opportunity to make an informed decision about their opt-out options (deliberative freedom). For instance, schools can meet the all notification processes by merely placing a blanket paragraph in a newsletter or in the back of a student planner saying: “parents should exercise their privacy rights for their children’s data under FERPA.” The military claims this notification sufficiently informs parents of their rights to withhold the release of student information. However, parents are not well-educated about the opt-out form (Lagotte, 2012b). Parents are not given the necessary information to connect the notification process with the military’s access to student data. Therefore, the opt-out mechanism was not designed to ensure parents had the maximum deliberative freedom necessary to make informed decisions about their children’s well-being.

For example, when I asked Bonnie Valentine the second question on our survey, what is the relationship between NCLB and military recruiting, she quickly responded with an accurate description of NCLB. “From what I understand, through NCLB the military is allowed to gain access to contact information for recruiting purposes” (Bonnie Valentine, personal communication, June 10th, 2009). She was one of the few parents who answer that question with any accuracy. Bonnie is a parental activist in Weston, and her main goal is increasing the amount of parents who understand what the opt-out form is all about. In her child’s school, Chelsea, she has either spoken directly to, or at events attended by, several of the mothers in my interview group. The mothers in my group, then, have all heard about the opt-out form, and most have filled it out.

Moreover, Chelsea High’s Counselor Fairchild allowed Bonnie set up a table during registration to distribute and describe the opt-out form. Parental access for counter-recruitment at this level is rare, so one might assume that those mothers closest to Bonnie might have the most information on recruiting in high schools. One mother said “one of the reasons I knew about it is that Bonnie made it a point to bring everyone’s attention at Chelsea” (Eleanor Knightly, personal communication, June 13, 2009). At the least, we argue that this group of mothers, an activist and others around her, should have a slightly above average understanding of what opting-out does and does not do regarding military recruiting. Unfortunately, though awareness of the opt-out form may fluctuate from district to district and parent to parent, knowledge about what policies are attached to the document is consistently low. More specifically, even parents who are aware of the opt-out document lack knowledge about military recruiting practices around high school age children.

In this regard, the design of the weak notification process constitutes a form of bureaucratic domination because it decreases the deliberative freedom of parents by unreasonably limiting their ability to control the information conveyed to and about their children. Consequently, the opt-out option fails to meet the standard of public justification because this policy does not uphold the standard of deliberative

freedom or democratic generality. To uphold deliberative freedom, the military would have to provide parents and schools with a more effective opportunity to become informed about the data collection provision. On the other hand, to uphold democratic generality means the policy itself protects or advances children's well-being. The provision meets neither of these standards.

To meet the standards of public justification, the military should have adopted an "opt-in" rather than opt-out policy. An opt-in policy would allow the military to acquire student data only if parents signed a release form to give away their children's information. The stronger notification would provide parents more deliberative freedom to determine who receives their child's directory data. Furthermore, when compared to the military, parents are more likely to ensure their children engage in the necessary reflection before making a long-term career choice. Lastly, an opt-in option would free schools of the burden of informing parents of the form and rightfully place the burden on the military to inform parents of the data collection process. For these reasons, an opt-in policy advances children's interests greater than an opt-out policy.

An opt-in provision would not bar military recruiters from acquiring student data from high schools. Instead, opting in establishes a reasonable balance between the right of the military to recruit in high schools and children's well-being rights, thus meeting the standard of democratic justification. The military, however, has adamantly opposed an opt-in provision. In fact, when Section 9828 was initially argued, the justifications for the data collection provision did not even mention parent's rights or children's well-being. Moreover, when school districts tried to interpret the language in Section 9528 as allowing an opt-in process, the DOD quickly informed schools districts that it was opt-out only, and if schools failed to abide by the data collection provision, they would lose their federal funding (Lagotte, 2012a). The design of the data collection provision unreasonably limits the deliberative freedom of parents and thus subjects parents and children to the arbitrary rule of law.

#### *The Equal Access Provision*

The equal access provision requires high schools to provide military recruiters with "equal access" to high school campuses, meaning the military is allowed to enter high schools with equal privileges of university or industry recruiters. We use quotes around equal access to note that, as a result of the current recruiting strategy and abundant material resources of the Pentagon, recruiting in schools now resembles a contract sales process rather than vocational guidance (Lagotte, 2012a). For example, the United States Recruiting Command (USRC) has actually written the book on entering, occupying, and controlling the school environment, and little within the handbook pertains to recruiting in a democratic manner. In 2004, USRC published the School Recruiting Program Handbook (SRPH)<sup>14</sup> for all new recruiters in the field and exhibits a neoliberal frame (Lagotte, 2010a). As the handbook explains, the intent of SRPH is to assist recruiting programs:

in penetrating their school market and channeling their efforts through the specific task and goals to obtain the maximum number of quality enlistments. The SRP [School Recruiting Program] is also an important part of an integrated recruiting prospect lead generation program that ensures total market penetration. (Morris, 2004, p.2)

The neoliberal logic here is: the school is a market and school visits are attempts to “maximize quality enlistments.”

To justify their presence in schools, the military uses “market choice” rhetoric and practices, treating children like consumers rather than individuals whose well-being should be looked after. First, according to the handbook, the recruiter’s goal is to “totally penetrate the school market, in order to meet recruiting quotas.” Recruiters start by establishing cordial relations with staff by offering a “pen, calendar, or cup,” and they always “remember secretary’s week with a card or flowers.” During one interview, we asked counselor Samantha if she witnessed these types of overt “buttering up.” She looked around her desk and quickly found three different pens from the armed services. These practices are in line with the first steps of the recruiting manual: “first to contact is first to contract.”

Second, recruiters “volunteer” within schools to gain access for recruiting. As the manual advises: “be so helpful and so much a part of the school scene that you are in constant demand.” Such volunteerism includes, but is not limited to: leading calisthenics for the football team; providing government class presentations on “the electoral process and how the Army serves a vital role in the security of our nation” establishing basketball games between faculty and recruiters; escorting the court on homecoming; and, presenting awards at graduation ceremonies.

Third, to maintain a “competitive advantage,” as quoted by the manual, recruiters provide perks on a larger scale, including flashy vehicles and exciting trips. Recruiters can “obtain a tactical vehicle from a local USAR troop program unit and drive it” onto a high school campus (vehicles like Humvees, helicopters, tanks, or race cars). Adults get toys too. Recruiters mark teachers and encourage them to organize Educator/Centers of Influence (E/COI) tours. The program includes “tours of Army installations to educators and other COIs,” and in return, these adults will “improve access to schools, obtain directory information ... and, refer potential prospects to the local Army recruiter.” The recommended itinerary ranges from a guided tour of the military museum to attending graduation ceremonies to weapon simulation activities.

Thus, the high-powered sales process, exhibiting overwhelming resources and aggressive techniques, distorts the democratic function of education. According to the US recruiting manual, the military representative is not providing objective information to help students decide between the armed services, entering the civilian workplace, or attending college (McCarthy, 2005). The recruiters are in essence high powered sales personnel (Lagotte, 2012a). In all of these cases, the military is converting legitimate recruiting practices into market-driven recruiting schemes primarily intended to benefit the military.

While we can provide a number of reasons why the military's neoliberal recruiting practices do not meet the standards of public justification, we only have space to note two. One, since schooling is compulsory, children are not given the "choice" to listen to the military messages; therefore, the military is democratically unjustified in treating schools as a "market place for third-party vendors." Schools should not be saturated with recruiting messages; instead, recruiting should occur within schools in a manner that provides children the necessary time and information to reflect upon their long-term career options.

Second, since schooling is compulsory and educators are given the fiduciary responsibility to protect the well-being of children, any access to schools by third parties must be regulated. By this we mean access should be restricted to maintain equality among institutional practices. As an illustration, observe how two schools within our study manage military recruiting. As mentioned in the introduction, please note that these two schools are not used to generalize what the "majority of schools are doing" but as analytical examples of how the military is or is not exploiting equal access. The following cases merely exemplify the normative argument that military presence occurring within schools can range from a legitimate use of equal access to illegitimate use of equal access. School A, which represented a minority of schools studied, had a career fair one night in the fall semester and one "junior night" fair of similar content in the spring semester. University, career, and military recruiters came, set up tables, and passed out pamphlets outside of school hours. In this case, each participant was given an equal opportunity to visit the school, an equal amount of time, and an equal use of resources. The school is given the deliberative freedom to set a reasonable schedule for third-party recruiters to enter schools—such as one visit each semester during a recruitment day.

In school B, which represented a majority of the schools studied, any third-party recruiter is free to visit the campus whenever they have the time and resources to do so (i.e. equally unlimited access). Furthermore, the visits can occur during school hours, in a variety of locations, and on different scales. Military recruiting in School A meets the standards of public justification because such recruiting practices provide children with valuable career information in a reasonable and regulated manner. Military recruiting in School B represents a form of bureaucratic domination because the military is exploiting the equal access provision to treat education like a commercial market, with the intent to maximize their contract quota interests.

A current problem is School B is the norm, rather than the exception, primarily because the equal access provision of Section 9528 is defined vaguely enough to encourage, if not promote, that type of recruiting. As our interviewees report, not all military recruiting treats education like a market place for third-party vendors. Nevertheless, in all the cases where schools are treated like the target market, the military is engaging in practices of bureaucratic domination because such recruiting practices undermine children's well-being rights. However, in the rare cases where military recruiters have equal but limited access, like seen in School A, the military is acting in a more democratically justifiable manner.

## TWO POLICY OPTIONS

Before concluding, we suggest two different policy directions: one is desirable and the other achievable. The *desirable* alternative would mostly likely help eliminate the domineering role military recruiters have within education. However, as Erik Olin Wright (2010) argues, because of social circumstances and current power configurations, not all policy options that are desirable are *achievable*; the latter necessitates the potential to mobilize the social forces to implement certain options. Specific to our cause, the suggestion for a legislative change to an opt-in policy is the desirable option, while a clearer opt-out form and regulated equal access seem most achievable.

### *Desirable*

As noted, we do not desire a complete ban on military recruitment in schools—in fact, we think such a ban would be undemocratic. We do believe the military is an essential aspect of democracy and a career in the military can provide individuals with meaningful options. Nevertheless, the desirable policy option would entail establishing a reasonable balance between the best interest of children and the military’s right to recruit within schools. Changing the notification process in the data information provision to an opt-in rather than opt-out option would expand the deliberative freedoms of parents and school administrators and provide another mechanism to ensure children are given reasonable information and the proper time to reflect upon a career in the military.

### *Achievable*

Considering the legislative climate and the Pentagon’s active resistance, the above suggestion is potentially politically unfeasible. Therefore, we present an achievable—if not optimal—alternative, which would still expand the deliberative freedom for parents, students, and school staff. First, rather than relying on vague, broad privacy notifications in school handbooks or newsletters, school districts can design a simple, one-page notification to be sent directly home to parents. We would suggest, rather than one overarching question, the district have three or four simple “circle yes or no” type questions specifying the kind of third party to receive private information. An example question may be: do you want your child’s directory information sent to universities/colleges? Questions should specify other parties as well: to sales companies (e.g., ring or yearbook companies); to local media (e.g., sports or academic stories); or, to military recruiters? Our research shows that these four easy yes/no questions, with a signature line on the bottom of the letter, sent directly home, can increase the transparency of the military data collection process and allow parents to have active management of which third parties get their children’s data.

Second, districts ought to regulate “equal access” in Section 9528 to provide institutions equal visits rather than equally unlimited access. Visits could entail: once each semester, in the evening, the armed forces can come to the gymnasium and set up tables to distribute flyers and describe the opportunities of their institutions with colleges and companies. Visits are thus equal in the sense that each third party is allowed two visits per year. The scheduled arrangement would conform to the NCLB legislation, provide schools/parents greater democratic capability, and trim the excess military visits from the school day. Therefore, we suggest school districts avoid “equally unlimited access.”

#### CONCLUSION

With the passing of Section 9528 of NCLB, military recruiters have increasingly free access to high school children and their directory data. All in all, the military has gained an undemocratic and dominating place within educational policy through a two tiered process: first, at the legislative level, deliberately shaping Section 9528 of NCLB to implement the data collection and equal access provisions; second, at the local level, where military recruiters have used the data collection and equal access provisions to immerse the educational environment in recruiting messages that benefit the military.

As we argued, at the formal level the military intentionally limited the deliberative freedom of individuals. Consequently, the implementation of the policy fell short of our standard of public justification. The bureaucratic domination occurring at the legislative level impacted the democratic mission of education in two regards. First, the data collection provision undermines the deliberative freedom of parents because it unreasonably limits their ability to protect the type of institutions that receive their children’s data. Second, the equal access provision undermines the democratic function of education by unreasonably taking away the power of school districts to regulate the frequency and type of third parties allowed to recruit within schools. Moreover, the military’s engagement in bureaucratic domination is even more prevalent because they have blocked attempts to change the data collection provision to an opt-in provision, and they have consistently threatened to take away school’s federal funds when districts showed interest in placing restrictions on the equal access provision.

Tackling these issues from a Critical Social Science perspective provides tools to be more prescriptive in policy analysis and clarify alternatives during neoliberal critique—yes, there are indeed alternatives. First, we have begun to reintroduce a normative foundation for how we “ought” to set policy by focusing on deliberative democracy. Instead of stopping at the descriptive critique of the problems of military recruiting in a neoliberal frame, we move to prescribing policy within a democratic frame. This move pushes the debate from “neoliberalism is inherently bad” to a more nuanced discussion on the ways neoliberalism undermines democratic principles; moreover, it opens powerful discursive avenues for those seeking greater

social justice in policy design. By normatively grounding our critique of military recruitment with neoliberal logic, we call on the proponents of neoliberal-based military recruiting to explain how their free market approach to recruiting embodies basic democratic norms—an argument we feel they cannot make. Finally, the normative analysis helps puncture the common sense that neoliberal principles will strengthen democracy in the end.

Once one has an alternative view for comparison, cutting through the common sense of neoliberalism as the hegemonic view of social interaction becomes a bit easier. In our chapter here, self-interest vs. children's interests exemplifies the behavior adults ought to illustrate when in the school space. In the neoliberal ideology, society is composed of rational individuals optimizing their own self-interests; i.e., adult recruiters, embodying the model of contract sales representative, legitimately should place their own interest first out of respect to the free market mentality they inhabit. We have argued that in a rich democratic society, school is one physical and social space where adults must suspend their own interest when interacting with children and place the students' interests first. Social spaces exist then, where the neoliberal mode is at odds with democratic practices, and we ought to avoid the former and strengthen the former. In the most general sense, critical social science can remind people that neoliberal theory is often not compatible with deliberative democratic practices, and that tension is one of the main reasons we ought to move on to other alternatives in organizing social life.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Initial pieces of this argument appear in Lagotte and Apple (2010).
- <sup>2</sup> We are using both common sense and hegemonic power in a specifically Gramscian frame.
- <sup>3</sup> While we located our paper within the tradition of CSS, our argument does not depend upon the reader agreeing with this tradition. We simply clarify why our argument proceeds in a manner atypical to Rawlsian and/or analytical philosophical approaches.
- <sup>4</sup> We acknowledge that CSS is a diverse tradition with various methodological approaches. Our approach builds from the Critical Theory tradition, which combines normative philosophy with empirical research (see Horkheimer, 1975).
- <sup>5</sup> Since this piece is a normative argument highlighted by empirical evidence rather than a traditional ethnographic paper, some readers may find the data and methodology description light. For a more comprehensive description in a more traditional social science format, see Lagotte (2012b).
- <sup>6</sup> All names of interviewees, schools, and cities are pseudonyms in this chapter.
- <sup>7</sup> For a discussion on how the informal and formal sectors of democracy ought to relate to each other, see Habermas (1998, pp. 286–315).
- <sup>8</sup> Our intent is not to explain how to weigh children's interest versus the military's interest in recruiting. Our intent is simply to explain why the military should have considered the well-being of children when designing its recruiting practices, and why failing to do so constitutes a form of domination.
- <sup>9</sup> Our discussion on fiduciary rights and responsibilities is influenced by James Dwyer. The difference between our approach and Dwyer's is his development of a constructionist approach versus our placing fiduciary rights within a larger framework of deliberative democracy. However, we both agree that children's interests ought to precede the interests of fiduciary guardians (see Dwyer, 2006, 2011).
- <sup>10</sup> We realize we set a high bar for democratic legitimacy. The debate over the threshold of democratic legitimacy is beyond the scope of this chapter. Our point is, even if we loosened the threshold of

democratic legitimacy, the military's influence within education would still fall far below any reasonably set threshold.

- <sup>11</sup> Here, we are arguing that well-being and deliberative freedom are coextensive ideas, especially in regards to children's well-being.
- <sup>12</sup> Although the recent repeal of DADT has eliminated some of this tension, the Solomon Amendment still maintains that if universities attempt to eliminate military access to campuses in any way—even if merely attempting to regulate the military equal to other third parties—they lose federal funding.
- <sup>13</sup> Congressional Record #147, page H2535
- <sup>14</sup> The quoted material in the next four paragraphs comes from the SRPH, which can be found at [http://www.usarec.army.mil/im/formpub/REC\\_PUBS/p350\\_13.pdf](http://www.usarec.army.mil/im/formpub/REC_PUBS/p350_13.pdf).

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**SECTION 2**  
**PROFITING FROM HIGHER EDUCATION &**  
**TEACHER EDUCATION**

KYSA NYGREEN, BARBARA MADELONI  
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## 5. “BOOT CAMP” TEACHER CERTIFICATION AND NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION REFORM

### INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have been marked by a rapid expansion of so-called *alternative* and *fast-track* teacher certification programs. A primary aim of such programs is to certify new teachers as quickly as possible and with the minimum academic work required by state education departments. Compared with traditional university-based teacher education, fast-track certification requires less formal preparation prior to paid teaching, and emphasizes on-the-job training rather than theoretical knowledge of the university classroom (Zumwalt, 1996; Baines, 2010). Perhaps the best known alternative or fast-track route into teaching is Teach For America (TFA), which bypasses university-based preparation entirely and requires just five weeks of summer training before sending recruits into public schools where they assume full responsibility of classrooms (Labaree, 2010). But beyond well-publicized routes like TFA, fast-track teacher certification exists in a variety of forms—offered through for-profit entities (such as online private universities) as well as other credentialing agencies that are loosely connected to school districts, state departments of education, and/or universities (such as Relay Graduate School of Education) (Baines, 2010; Zeichner, 2010).

Although alternative and fast-track teacher certification programs are frequently framed as being *outside* the traditional university-based system of teacher preparation, Baines (2010) argues that university-based schools of education have been quick to create their own fast-track programs to compete for students (and their tuition dollars). Faced with competition from TFA and other alternative routes to teaching, schools of education experience pressure to offer faster, paired-down certification options that enable prospective teachers to begin paid teaching as soon as possible and with a minimal amount of university-based coursework. Many have responded to this pressure by creating fast-track programs of their own, or increasing the pace of their existing teacher education programs. Although university-based fast track programs undoubtedly vary in length, format, rigor and quality, they all reflect a similar trend toward minimizing coursework preparation prior to paid teaching, and emphasize on-the-job training rather than university classroom-based theoretical knowledge.

In this chapter, we theorize fast-track teacher certification programs as a “boot camp” model of teacher education, and situate this model within the larger sociopolitical context of neoliberalism. Then, we critically reflect on the limits of this model for the project of preparing critical, antiracist, and social justice-oriented teachers. Finally, we argue that the trend toward boot camp teacher certification—both outside and within university schools of education—exacerbates the institutionalized racism that is already embedded within schooling and teacher education. Despite the rhetoric of service and social justice that sometimes surrounds these programs, we argue, the movement toward boot camp teacher education represents an injustice to the predominantly low-income communities of color where these programs (almost exclusively) operate. In developing this argument, we draw insights from our own individual and collective experiences working as teacher educators in a variety of institutions and programs, but including a university-based “boot camp” program. We use examples from our experience as a way to ground our arguments in the actual work of teacher educators rather than abstract statements; however, we emphasize that our practice-based examples should be read as representative of broader trends rather than specific arguments about the program(s) in which we have worked. Our aim is to theorize from our lived experience as teacher educators—to reflect on and interpret these experiences through the lens of critical theory and in dialogue with critical scholarship on neoliberal education reform (e.g., Lipman, 2004, 2011) and neoliberal racism (e.g., Roberts & Mahtani, 2010).

#### RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY, THEORY & METHOD

We are three white women teacher educators who met while working at the same university, where each of us taught (or co-taught) courses in a fast-track teacher certification program. We occupied different positionalities in relation to this work: as a tenure-track professor, a non-tenure-track lecturer, and a doctoral student. Each of us brought prior teaching experience in a variety of institutions including public schools, higher education, and community-based adult education. What brought us together was a shared commitment to critical multicultural pedagogy and a self-identification as white anti-racist educators. In this chapter, we use the term *critical multicultural pedagogy* to describe the general approach that each of us strives to practice in our classrooms. This approach is informed and inspired by literatures such as critical pedagogy (Freire 1999; Giroux 1983); critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987); decolonizing pedagogy (Tejeda, Espinoza & Gutierrez, 2003); critical multiculturalism (Nieto, 1999; May & Sleeter, 2010); anti-racist pedagogy (Lee, Menkart & Okazawa-Rey, 2007); anti-oppressive pedagogy (Kumashiro, 2000), and social justice pedagogy (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). While distinctive in their particular histories and emphases, these pedagogical traditions all share a basic *critical* orientation in that they are attuned to issues of power, focused on critique, and geared toward social change. As white female teacher educators, we are situated

within multiple identities, occupying multiple positions of privilege. At the same time, we are subject to practices of silencing, status degradation, and surveillance that are characteristic of the neoliberalizing university (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). We write from these many positionalities, attentive to how they shape our perspectives and experiences.

In 2011, we initiated a collaborative self-study to reflect on and strengthen our pedagogical practice. In particular, we wanted to support each other with implementing critical multicultural pedagogy in our teacher education courses. Our plan was to articulate individually, and then collectively, the core pedagogical goals and values motivating our teaching. Then, through regular self-reflexive writing, we would share classroom practices and experiences of success, failure and surprise. For the 2011-2012 academic year, we agreed to write *practitioner memos* each week about our teacher education courses. In these memos, we would summarize what happened in class, recount relevant conversations and interactions, document our feelings and thoughts, and reflect on the overall classroom experience. We agreed to make every effort to write these memos on the same day that we taught our classes—before going to sleep for the night—on the assumption that same-day writing would capture a higher level of detail and more of the raw emotion that we all experienced with our teaching. We posted our memos to a shared online folder, and we read and commented on each other’s writing continuously throughout the semester. We also met in person once per month to discuss the memos and our experiences. Before our in-person meetings, we committed to read (and preferably also to comment on) all previous practitioner memos so our meetings could focus on identifying salient themes, patterns, and episodes. These conversations were a space of collective analysis in which we not only identified recurring patterns and notable events in our memos but also discussed their meaning, significance, and implications by drawing from theory and literature on teacher education, critical and multicultural pedagogies, and neoliberalism.

In the subsequent summer, we went back to our practitioner memos and read through them again from start to finish. Our focus, still, was the practice of critical multicultural pedagogy in teacher education courses. As such, we mined the memos for details on how we (attempted to) practice this pedagogy in our classrooms, what happened, how students responded, and what emotions were invoked. From our in-person conversations during the academic year, we had identified three major themes: (1) the challenge of working within a fast-track program context; (2) the disjuncture between our pedagogical ideals and practice; and (3) the emotional labor of this work. We agreed to re-read the memos with these themes in mind, but also to remain open to whatever else we might uncover while reading. One of the most salient recurring themes to emerge, again, was the challenge of working within a fast-track program context, or what we came to describe as a *boot camp* model of teacher education. In the following section, we explain why we have chosen to continue using the metaphor of boot camp, and identify how this model both reflects and reinforces neoliberal logic.

BOOT CAMP TEACHER EDUCATION & NEOLIBERAL LOGIC

The metaphor of boot camp is commonly used to describe fast-track teacher education programs by both advocates and critics. In our collective analysis conversations, we found this to be a helpful one for naming and making sense of our experience. Like most fast-track teacher certification programs, the one we taught in was based on a partnership between our university and a high-poverty, under-resourced urban school district serving predominantly students of color and low-income students (Zeichner, 2010; Baines, 2010). Prospective teachers who enrolled in this program earned their initial certification and a master's degree in two semesters' time (with no orientation or summer session included). They were placed in a secondary school and paired with a cooperating teacher, with whom they worked for the entire academic year. They spent school days at their placement schools all day, before traveling to attend evening classes that lasted another 2-3 hours. Over the course of the school year, they gradually took on a greater degree of teaching responsibility and ultimately assumed full responsibility for several class periods a day in the spring semester. Although we did not collect official data on the demographics of the preservice teachers in our classes, we were able to infer—through class discussions, individual conversations, a survey administered in one of our classes, and reflective writing assignments about identity and multiculturalism—that they were roughly representative of the national teaching population: predominantly white, middle to upper-middle class, from racially homogeneous suburban or small-town communities.

When we began sharing our written self-reflections on our practice, we immediately noticed a similar pattern: each of us observed that preservice teachers in the fast-track program were struggling with (and more so than other undergraduate and master's level students we had taught) the workload demands of our courses as well as the critical multicultural perspective we employed in our teaching. The fast-track students also appeared to struggle with the physical and emotional demands of the program. They routinely arrived late and unprepared to our classes, and submitted written work that was disappointing in quality and effort. When confronted on these issues, they complained that the workload was unreasonable because they were exhausted, overwhelmed, and emotionally drained from teaching. In class discussions, students often talked about feeling rushed, two steps behind, and without sufficient time to reflect on their practice, plan lessons carefully, complete coursework assignments, or take care of their physical selves. They shared feelings of fatigue, anxiety, self-doubt and inadequacy. They complained about the lack of time for sleep, exercise, and self-care. They felt pulled in too many directions, overwhelmed by the physical and emotional demands of teaching. Some students expressed frustration that our courses seemed to offer interesting material but they could not make time to read, digest, or reflect on it.

The preservice teachers in our classrooms endured long, exhausting, and emotionally intensive workdays. The demands of their day were made even more intense by the fact that they were working in some of the most challenging school

environments in the country—high-poverty, under-resourced urban schools—and provided minimal preparation before taking on full responsibility of classrooms. Some of our students experienced a form of culture shock, confessing to us that this was their first experience working in a high-poverty urban environment or with any community of color. Most lived in white suburban communities and knew little if anything about the city’s neighborhoods, community-based organizations, civic leaders, local histories and local resources. Often they were not emotionally prepared for the verbal assaults that students subjected them to, and they arrived to our classes feeling hurt and abused by students who did not appear to appreciate their good-faith efforts to help. We found that most of our students did not possess an analysis of institutionalized racism, classism, or social reproduction that would have helped them contextualize and interpret the “failure” of urban schools and their students.

As teacher educators committed to critical multicultural pedagogy, we longed to work with them in a more systematic way to deepen their understanding of race and racism, the sociopolitical context of urban schools (Nieto, 2000), and the cultural funds-of-knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) present in the communities where they worked. However, due to the fast-paced nature of the program, there was insufficient time to support these students in developing a political analysis of inequality and racism that might have helped them make sense of these experiences and approach their teaching from a less deficit-oriented perspective. Excerpts from two practitioner memos capture some of the above points:

During break-out groups, I overheard three white students talking about race. One of them said, “Our students see us as white,” to which another responded, “that’s not even right because we’re supposed to be called Caucasian.” The third member said there was too much emphasis on race and that political correctness had gone too far. The first student said she thought it was “insulting” to describe someone as “African American” because it distinguished them from “real” Americans. “We are all just Americans! Isn’t it insulting to call them something different?” she wondered aloud. It got me thinking about the discomfort and anxiety that gets kicked up in conversations about race. Perhaps students just don’t have any experience talking about it and are terrified of saying the wrong thing. I need to address it head-on in the next class. As always, though, it feels like there is so much to cover and not nearly enough time. We are starting from the very basics. We can never do more than scratch the surface. I feel this sense of urgency because these students are already in classrooms teaching mostly students of color.

The first fifteen minutes of class were consumed with students venting about stress, anxiety, insomnia, and fatigue. One woman said she hadn’t been able to sleep through the night in weeks. They all seemed to agree there was too much to juggle—their own teaching primarily, but also learning how to handle discipline issues and parent conferences, managing relationships with their cooperating teachers and colleagues at their school sites, meeting the

requirements of the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) and negotiating technological difficulties with video recording and uploading work to a web-based data management system, and then the university coursework is just layered on top of everything else. They said there were so many things to do, that it felt like it was not possible to do any one of them well. They felt as if they had to do a half-assed job at everything, or else figure out where to focus, what was really important and what could be let go. Now they are also feeling stressed about whether or not they will get jobs next year, and there is a weird competitive dynamic because some have received job offers from their placement schools while others have not. They were so overwhelmed that I found myself feeling badly for giving them assignments or making them come to class. It was as if the most compassionate thing I could do was send them home to rest and take care of themselves I felt torn.

The combination of the fast pace, lack of time, workload, and emotional demands of teaching combined to create a kind of “boot camp” culture within the program. In this culture, the implicit purpose of the certification year was to *survive* it—to tough it out, endure its grueling schedule, withstand the challenges of the urban school setting, stay strong in the face of ungrateful and unruly adolescents, and prove oneself to be strong enough to make it as a teacher in an urban school. Surviving the year meant that one possessed the requisite perseverance, will, and backbone to make it in the profession. The certification year was reduced to an obstacle course designed to weed out the faint-of-heart. In our reflective writing, we noted the militaristic, boot camp-like language that students used to describe their experience:

I expressed some disappointment in class about students not keeping up with course readings. I asked them to tell me what this was about. They seemed defensive. One said they were in “survival mode” now. One said the readings were interesting but she couldn’t afford to take time with them because she was “under the gun” every day to prep her own classes. It got me thinking about another discussion, from a few weeks ago, when a student dismissed the whole reading assignment because, he assumed, its author had no idea what it was like to be “on the front lines” of teaching in an urban school.

Militaristic language like being “in the trenches” and “on the front lines” became normalized as a feature of classroom discourse, suggesting the extent to which students were interpreting their experience of learning-to-teach as a form of military basic training, and their experience of teaching as an aggressive advance into hostile territory. While the use of such militaristic metaphors may be so commonplace as to sound unremarkable, we contend that it is significant, and particularly so in the context of fast-track teacher certification in high-poverty urban schools. This way of framing, understanding, and experiencing teacher certification sends a powerful message about the meaning of teaching and the role of teachers. Moreover, it overshadows other possible ways of framing the purpose of teacher certification—for



example, that it might actually develop and nurture new teachers who are complex critical thinkers, intellectuals and civic participants.

We must ask ourselves what is lost when “survival” becomes the goal of teacher certification. What implicit messages do these programs send about the work of teaching, the value of long-term experience in the classroom, and the value of the intellectual labor needed for teaching and learning-to-teach? Although some fast-track programs may (rightly, in our view) use language that challenges artificial divisions between theory and practice, the high-intensity boot camp model that has become the norm necessarily leaves little room for the kinds of deep discussion, reading and reflection that expand knowledge beyond the immediate demands of the classroom. In our experience, students were simply too exhausted and emotionally drained at the end of their day to be bothered with college-level reading assignments or the invitation to think critically about, and problematize, dominant constructions of teaching and schooling. This is not to blame the students, who were put in an impossible position by the structural constraints of the program. It is, rather, to raise questions about why we put preservice teachers in such conditions in the first place. What is the logic here? Who is it serving? And who is harmed in the process?

Several scholars have linked the growth of fast-track teacher certification to the broader neoliberal assault on public and teacher education (e.g., Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). By neoliberalism, we mean the application of market-based principals (such as privatization and deregulation) to all areas of public life and public institutions (Harvey, 2005). In public schools and higher education, market-based logic has served to justify and accelerate movement toward the privatization of educational services, as well as “standards and accountability” reforms like high-stakes testing, audit culture, the use of incentives and rewards to evaluate teachers and schools, and the elevation of “data” (defined in the most limited, quantifiable terms possible) as an end of education in and of itself (see Lipman, 2011; Hursh, 2008; Burch, 2009; Ravitch, 2011). The proliferation of boot camp teacher education responds to the neoliberal pressure on universities to attract student revenue dollars in the context of public disinvestment. Under neoliberalism, universities have experienced a drastic reduction in public funding and must increasingly rely on private funding sources such as donations, faculty grants, and student tuition dollars (Clawson & Page, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009; Tuchman, 2009). This has created a situation across higher education where “revenue generation” has become a buzzword, and a non-negotiable for academic departments and programs.

Teacher education has long been a source of revenue for schools and colleges of education, so with the increased competition from alternative certification providers, schools of education risk losing a valuable revenue source at precisely the moment when they are under pressure to generate revenue or close their doors. These circumstances have prompted a kind of “race to the bottom” in teacher education as universities and outside providers compete to offer the fastest, easiest, most flexible path to a teaching certificate (Baines, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). In short, the structural limitations on universities caused by massive public disinvestment from higher

education—a feature of neoliberalism—have created conditions in which boot camp programs not only “make sense” but may appear like the only way for university-based teacher education to continue existing at all.

At the same time, boot camp teacher education programs supply high-poverty schools with ample numbers of young, inexperienced, low-paid, and compliant teachers. This is attractive for schools that are undergoing a neoliberal assault of standards and accountability based reforms. Under neoliberal education reform, districts and schools are increasingly reorganized to conform to the business model: teachers are positioned as deliverers of curriculum who carry out orders from above. They are expected to follow pacing guides, deliver canned curriculum, raise test scores, and comply with mandates of all kinds regardless of whether or not these conform to their own professional judgment or sense of ethics (Lipman, 2004). Teachers who question, challenge, or resist the logic of neoliberal reform are not welcome and may risk losing their jobs. Moreover, young and inexperienced teachers are highly valued in the neoliberal paradigm and cast as saviors, while veteran teachers are cast as scapegoats (Kumashiro, 2012; Ravitch, 2011). This makes sense because young and inexperienced teachers are cheaper, more compliant, and easier to control. They are more likely to take on very long work hours and a heavier workload, and then leave the profession before their salaries become too costly or they start to collect pensions. For high-needs districts facing public disinvestment and escalating costs, it makes financial sense to staff the schools with teachers like this. Boot camp programs that churn out annual cohorts of young, inexpensive, compliant teachers for high-poverty, tightly-controlled urban schools are responding brilliantly to neoliberal imperatives—even if, or *especially* if, most of these teachers leave the profession within a few years.

The implicit message of boot camp teacher education is that teaching is basically technical work, as opposed to intellectual work, and that the most important qualities for good teaching are a willingness and ability to work long hours, endure a grueling workload, and “tough it out” in a hostile setting. From this point of view, teacher certification is primarily a technicality, a paperwork requirement of the state, not really connected to anything meaningful about learning-to-teach. This view positions schools of education and education faculty as irrelevant at best, rather than sources of knowledge with something of value to bring to the conversation about teaching, learning, and learning-to-teach. Not surprisingly, this is precisely the view of teaching, teacher education, and schools of education that is advanced by proponents of neoliberal education reform (Kumashiro, 2012; Ravitch, 2011; Weiner, 2012).

In boot camp teacher education, preservice teachers find themselves needing to just get the job done without any time for reflection. Learning-to-teach is devalued as a process. Teaching is easy, after all, if all it requires is following directions. Under neoliberalism, teaching has undergone deskilling as a form of labor (Zeichner, 2010). In this context, teacher education is reduced to a hurdle to overcome. The emotional and physical labor of this model can mislead students to not appreciate the degree to which they are being schooled in compliance and technocracy. In our

classes, we found that student-teachers often felt proud of themselves for bearing up, and came to know themselves as somehow more alive for their suffering. The sphere of control given students, staying awake with inadequate sleep, doing without healthy food, exercise and relaxation, works as a shield against the areas of control they are giving up: complex understandings of teaching, learning, difference, and the purpose of education. Boot camp teacher education reflects and reinforces these neoliberal assumptions.

We might imagine any number of alternative ways to think about the aims of teacher education beyond mere survival or proving oneself. We might imagine, for example, that teacher education should aim to develop teachers who think deeply and critically about the purposes of public education, the sociopolitical context of schooling and its relation to institutionalized oppression, and their role within this complex interconnected educational system. We might imagine the goal of preparing teachers who are experts in child and adolescent development, can think about the needs and interests of the whole child in their full socio-cultural and family-community context, who exercise judgment and make choices in their classrooms and schools on the basis of this knowledge and understanding. We might imagine the goal of preparing social justice oriented teachers who bring a critical perspective and critical pedagogy into their classrooms. We might imagine the goal of preparing teachers who are advocates and allies for children and families. We might imagine that our purpose is to slowly, carefully, deliberately nurture the qualities and dispositions of a critical, reflective practitioner. Rather than proving oneself, the purpose of teacher education might be to nurture and support new teachers as fully and completely as possible. We might further imagine that the goal of teacher education is to prepare teachers who view this work as a career, and are encouraged to make long-term commitments to the schools and communities where they work.

All of these possible paradigms, and countless others, are rendered secondary or even invisible in the context of a boot camp program, where the fast pace and heavy workload demands place students in an impossible position, in which their only option is to buckle down and try to survive. If they are successful, they can get the thing they came for—a teaching job. If the role of teacher education is to prepare prospective teachers for jobs in public schools *as they currently exist*, then the boot camp model makes sense. As we show in the following section, boot camp programs lack the time and space for deep critical reflection. They lack time and space to immerse preservice teachers in theory and research about teaching, learning, adolescents, and the sociopolitical context of schooling. They lack the time and space to engage preservice teachers with knotty philosophical questions about the role of education in a democracy, or the reality of institutionalized racism in schools. These programs simply cannot, in the time and space available, cultivate teachers who are intellectuals, who might challenge the wisdom of corporate-backed neoliberal reform, who might feel in themselves a sense of entitlement and authority to speak out. We explore these points further below.

UNDERMINING CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL PEDAGOGY

Each of us identifies as critical, antiracist, and social justice teacher educators. Although we each have different histories and our own individual teaching styles and philosophies, we share a commitment to pedagogy that deconstructs, critiques, and challenges institutionalized oppression. In all of our teaching, we aim to help students make connections between macro structures of oppression and the micro lived experience of oppression. In teacher education courses specifically, we aim to help students think critically about, and question, their taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching, schooling, curriculum, pedagogy, and adolescence. This means helping them draw connections between the sociopolitical context of schooling—including the neoliberal assault on education, the history of white supremacy, and increasing economic inequality—and the dynamics of their own schools and classrooms. It means helping them become conscious and thoughtful about the hidden curriculum of their schools and classrooms, the cultural funds-of-knowledge present in their students' communities, and the pervasiveness of deficit thinking. It means pushing them to think in a nuanced, careful way about their own positionality as raced, classed, gendered, embodied selves and the meanings that are attached to these identity categories. For our overwhelmingly white preservice teachers, we specifically hope to impart a basic understanding of white privilege and institutionalized racism, while cultivating a stance of solidarity rather than false generosity (Freire, 1999). And lastly, we strive to develop teachers who see themselves as insurgent intellectuals (Peters & Lankshear, 1997) and critical pedagogues (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; hooks, 1994) in the broadest sense of the word.

This is difficult work, even under the best of circumstances. The teacher education literature is filled with articles about just how difficult this work is.<sup>1</sup> Our own teaching experience resonates with what we have read in this literature: While many of our students welcomed these questions and relished the opportunity to reconsider deep-seated cultural assumptions, others resisted content that challenged their existing worldviews. Many struggled to see the relevance of critical theory to their own teaching practice, felt these topics were too abstract or too theoretical, and not practical enough. White students often denied that anything such as white privilege exists. For some, the whole exercise of critique struck them as irrelevant and a waste of time. They begged us to stop burdening them with extra work and meaningless questions, and instead to prepare them for the actual teaching jobs that existed. An excerpt from a practitioner memo speaks to this resistance:

I couldn't believe the resistance to today's reading [excerpts from the book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* (Tatum, 2003)]. Wow! We entered into the discussion cautiously because the online posts had been very defensive and critical. The students were throwing around terms like "reverse racism," the idea that whites were hurt by affirmative action, and that

people of color “play the race card” too often. They did not seem to understand the structural analysis of racism that was being presented in the reading, or its psychological analysis about the significance of race in adolescent identity development. We have a lot of work to do in the coming weeks as we explore identity, racism, prejudice, white privilege, and oppression. I felt discouraged by students’ immediate defensive reaction, especially after all the work we did to scaffold, prepare, and build up to this text in prior weeks. There is one group of four white students who always sit together. They were snickering and rolling their eyes through the whole class. I feel sad knowing they are already teaching in classrooms of predominantly students of color, given their (apparent) refusal to even consider the possibility that racism is a reality.

Critical multicultural pedagogy almost always engenders some student resistance because it strives to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and ideologies (hooks, 1994; Picower, 2009; Garrett & Segall, 2013; Tatum, 2003; Singleton & Linton, 2005; Howard, 2006). This can be unsettling for students, especially if they have not previously explored or wrestled with such ideas. The literature on critical multicultural pedagogy is clear that this work requires a tremendous amount of effort and time. In particular, it takes time to build trusting relationships in the classroom that enable students (and instructors) to make themselves vulnerable, share personal experiences and beliefs as well as challenge one another in meaningful ways. It takes time for students (and instructors) to unlearn habituated ways of teaching, learning, thinking, and performing their identities. It takes time to construct a classroom culture that fosters honest personal sharing, and enables the kind of dialogue that pushes toward a deeper and deeper analysis. In addition to time, critical multicultural pedagogy requires a willingness to explore the unknown, sit with uncertainty, appreciate nuance, and engage deeply with questions that have no clear answers. It requires a willingness to be challenged, to look at things in a new way, and consider alternative perspectives. As such, it requires that students’ full selves be present in the classroom—their bodies, minds, and hearts.

A long and robust tradition of scholarship has advanced our understanding of both the necessity and complexity of critical multicultural pedagogy in teacher education (Banks, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Nieto, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Gay, 2010). But under the boot camp model, this type of teacher education is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to practice with integrity. This is not due to a lack of desire or pedagogical knowledge on the part of faculty, but to the structural constraints of the boot camp model—its fast pace, its long and arduous workday, its privileging of on-the-job training over university-based education. In our experience, these factors combined to create a context in which there was inadequate time for the critical work we wanted to do with students. When they arrived to our classes at the end of their long workday, students were unprepared, exhausted, and emotionally drained. On their minds were the papers they still had to grade, the lesson plans they still had to prepare, and

perhaps the challenging student that was keeping them awake at night. They needed encouragement, affirmation, and TLC. It was neither the time nor the place to engage in the difficult, challenging work of unlearning and questioning. Our attempts to do so—even in the most gentle, encouraging, and positive ways that we knew how—were so often met with resistance or indifference. Students complained that they just didn't have time: no time to read; no time to write; no time to sit in class; no time for all the demands of their workload. In our practitioner memos, we each expressed concerns about what came to feel like a distinctly anti-intellectual culture in our classrooms.

I am thinking about how groups protect each other, of how norms are established so quickly and read so quickly. The norm we face is a belief that ideas, theories, challenges to perspective, and the thick and uneasy complexities of teaching and learning are all just so much nonsense. The norm is established that this program is about survival, and getting through classes is just one of the steps. So that even students who want something else, who think something else, really struggle to let themselves and others know this about them.

In our experience, when we shared these concerns with colleagues, we found general support for our aims and sympathy for our situation; many acknowledged and appreciated just how difficult it is to teach in the context of a fast-track program. But instead of challenging the conditions that make the teaching so hard, we heard that, unfortunately, there wasn't enough time to add additional coursework to the program and that, ideally, critical multicultural content should be integrated across the existing curriculum. We support the idea of integrating a critical multicultural perspective across the program as a whole, but we found in our experience and reflected through our writing that it was not possible to do this with integrity since the curriculum was saturated with required assessments for external mandates from accreditation agencies—itsself a product of neoliberal education reform (see Madeloni, 2014; Taubman, 2009). Our preservice teachers were already stretched so thinly that any work not directly tied to an assessment for an external mandate was seen as “extra”—like an onerous tax, and students had to be convinced of its value. After all, since it wasn't being mandated by external accreditation agencies and assessed on a web-based data management system, how could they be sure of its value? Was it really necessary? They had so much on their plates already, they insisted, and everything was moving so quickly. There just wasn't enough time.

In addition to creating an unnecessary and problematic *scarcity of time*, boot camp models of teacher education convey a hidden curriculum that actively counteracts many of the core values of critical multicultural pedagogy. For example, critical multicultural pedagogy frames teachers as intellectuals who must, through long-term commitment and investment, cultivate an empathic understanding of the students, community, cultural funds of knowledge, and sociopolitical context in which they work (Nieto, 2000; Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). But,

as discussed in the previous section, boot camp teacher education frames teachers as technicians who deliver standardized curriculum. In this technocratic view of teaching, teachers do not need to possess cultural, community-based knowledge or a long-term commitment to any community. The technocratic view frames teaching as a set of decontextualized “best practices” that can be transplanted from one context to another, like interchangeable parts. Because of these contradictions, when we attempted to make space for critical multicultural pedagogy in our courses, we found ourselves teaching “against” the very messages that our own boot camp program was conveying about the nature of teaching, learning, and learning-to-teach. We felt like we were swimming against a current. In our written self-reflections, we often described feeling like we had to convince our students that we had something of value to offer them in their preparation as teachers.

I’ve been thinking about how important it is, in this class more than others I have taught, to deliberately and carefully construct (and continuously nurture) a classroom culture of intellectual inquiry and rigor. It feels like swimming upstream, going against the current that has been set in place before me. Before I started this work, I really didn’t anticipate how much effort it would require to establish these basic classroom norms and expectations. I didn’t anticipate how much effort I would need to put in just to establish my own “cred” in the classroom. I didn’t anticipate that I’d have to spend so much time and effort convincing graduate students that I, as their professor, am a person with relevant knowledge and something to teach them.

The hidden curriculum of boot camp teacher education conveys that university-based courses are little more than a hoop to jump through. At best, the courses exist solely to support students in passing externally mandated assessments. When we expected something more from our students—something approximating a masters-level graduate school course—we were met with resistance and confusion. Rather than simply struggling with *how* to best teach the content of our courses, we had the added struggle of having to convince students that the content had value, and we had a right to be teaching them at all. As they questioned our authority and our role and the trustworthiness of the content we were teaching, it sometimes led us to question ourselves. Two practitioner memos speak directly to these feelings of self-doubt:

I left class tonight feeling exhausted and somewhat defeated. I felt invisible and disempowered. There was so much I wanted to say to the students that I did not say. I wanted to tell them that their comments on the [mid-semester course] evaluations hurt me, that they were rude and ungrateful and needed to learn how to give constructive criticism in a courteous and respectful way. I wanted to address the comments that talked about their graduate education as a commodity to be purchased, the evaluations that listed the dollar amount they were spending for our class and complaining that they should not have to be paying for activities they didn’t like.

I notice myself this semester being apologetic all the time, not taking a strong assertive stand on anything. I am doing all this retracting, all this reassuring, because I am afraid. Intimidated. Scared of the resistance that I anticipate. Fearful that students will hate me and reject everything I'm trying to do. So I try to be the "nice white lady" all the time, and in the end, I don't end up challenging them or owning my own knowledge. My fear is partly based on last year's course evaluations: the hatred and vitriol that students expressed toward me, their demeaning tone, it haunts me still and silences my voice, weakens my resolve.

Under neoliberalism, the work of learning, teaching, and learning-to-teach is being redefined as a set of technocratic and decontextualized skills that can be measured, quantitatively, as data points. This redefinition of teaching along technocratic lines imposes itself in our classrooms in insidious ways; increasingly, neoliberal definitions of teaching, learning, and learning-to-teach become taken for granted as "commonsense." The boot camp model of teacher education becomes normalized, and it becomes more and more difficult to articulate a critique against it. Like many teacher educators, we were trying to "make do" even as the space to do the kind of teaching we believed in got smaller and smaller.

Throughout our collaborative self-study, we were trying to navigate that narrow space between meeting the demands of our students and those of mandated external assessments, while simultaneously maintaining our commitments to critical multicultural pedagogy and a framework of antiracism. However, as we shared our experiences with each other and developed a collective critical analysis of them, we started to feel even more compromised in our practice. Not only was our work in the classroom made ever more difficult by the structural constraints of the boot camp model, but we were positioned in a way that forced us to bear witness to the structural violence that is the neoliberal assault on public education. We were acutely aware of what our students were not getting, the deficit-oriented ideas and practices that many were bringing into their public school classrooms, their limited preparation, and how much more there was to be done. In our self-reflections on practice, we acknowledged feelings of guilt and shame about our own complicity in enabling the reproduction of educational practices, ideologies and systems that we knew to be harmful and damaging to public school students—especially those who are Black, Brown, and poor.

I got home feeling guilty that I had allowed some of those [student] comments to stay in the air, to sit unchallenged. There was so much to unpack, so much to question about what they were saying—the deficit constructions of students, the comments about reverse racism, how some cultures are "less advanced" or don't value education very much, how they feel pity for the poor, how racism no longer exists even though some of their extended family members make racist comments a lot. It all felt overwhelming to me, like I didn't know where to begin. Each time I tried to interrupt the discourse, to turn it back to



students with a question aimed at challenging or problematizing a statement, it backfired because other students would jump in to confirm, expand on, and offer support for the original statement. It feels like we have to go back to the very basics; there is so much to unlearn, and so little time. It feels downright icky leaving class tonight with the feeling that students’ deficit-oriented racial stereotypes may have been solidified rather than destabilized as a result of my class, and my teaching.

One student [a preservice teacher] was sharing about a lesson she did in which she taught about how Irish and Italians in the US used to be classified as nonwhite. Her students then made the leap that because [the preservice teacher] is Italian, it meant she would have been classified as a person of color back then. Her students went on to say, “So, Miss, does this mean that we are all people of color in this room?” And it seems [the preservice teacher] was so tickled and pleased by that, she agreed with them! She said she taught them the term WASP, and none of them knew what it was. It seemed to me that she was bringing up the term WASP in order to differentiate “the real white people” from people like herself, who are Italian. Never once did she talk with her students about the white privilege she enjoys. She said the students asked her if Puerto Ricans might be classified as white in the future and she responded yes, as if that was a wonderful possibility. She didn’t mention the racism and prejudice that Puerto Ricans currently face in the US, or the fact that there are huge numbers of Afro Puerto Ricans who will never pass as white. She shared all of this with us very proud and smug, and sort of tickled and amused with her students’ comments. I wanted to find a way to jump in and gently challenge some of her blind spots, but I bit my tongue because this student already dislikes me and I didn’t want to exacerbate that dynamic. Now I am feeling uneasy about letting her story go completely unchallenged. I feel I’ve been complicit in reproducing a racist discourse.

One practitioner memo sums up feelings that all of us shared, at least some of the time, when reflecting on the work of teaching in a fast-track program:

There is something about this class that just feels like a lightning rod. It is like the formula for the reality show “Survivor”: Take a bunch of people and put them in a situation where they are bound to create conflict due to stress and impossible conditions, and then watch them squirm. I’m sounding dramatic, I know, but this is how I am feeling as I get home from class tonight (Take note: raw emotion!). There is a very similar dynamic each time I teach this class, and I’m increasingly convinced that it is not the students’ fault. Each time, there comes a point in the semester when I ask myself: “Why are these students so mean to me? Why do I feel so embattled?” Each time, a visible group emerges who resist in similar ways, coming to class with a smug, “I don’t give a damn” attitude. Each time, I start receiving emails from students that I can only

describe as odd—accusing their classmates of having bad attitudes, secretly confessing that they like the class even if they never speak up, or spilling interpersonal conflicts to me as if it’s a soap opera. The parallels from year to year are striking. I’m increasingly convinced this can’t be a coincidence. It’s got to be structural.

Throughout our self-study year, we kept coming back to the same set of questions, introduced earlier in this chapter: Why do we put preservice teachers in these conditions in the first place? What is the logic here? Who is it serving? And who is harmed in the process? Over and over again, we came back to this question of harm. We asked ourselves who, (besides the student-teachers in our classrooms), was harmed by all of this? And what was the impact of this boot camp model on the high-poverty urban communities and schools that we ostensibly “served”? Our inquiry into these questions led us to a deeper understanding of the ways in which boot camp teacher education reproduces white supremacy. We turn to this argument in the following section.

#### REPRODUCING WHITE SUPREMACY

Boot camp teacher education programs reproduce white supremacy at many levels including how we value the learning of Black and Brown and poor children, how we construct what it means to work within urban settings and how this shapes our understanding of the children in these schools, and how we construct the teaching and teachers who work with these students. Most boot camp teacher education programs are situated in high-poverty, under-resourced school districts serving students who are predominantly Black, Brown, and poor (Baines, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). It is hard to imagine affluent schools tolerating being used as training or testing grounds for large batches of inexperienced new teachers each year. Black, Brown and poor children can, the boot camp model tells us, be used for practice teaching; do not require sophisticated, well prepared teachers, but only require teachers who mean well, and want to do good. The narrative about “doing good” through working as a teacher in high-poverty urban schools is a prominent feature TFA promotional materials (Labaree, 2010). Labaree (2010) argues that TFA has successfully popularized this narrative, and perfected the use of this narrative as a way to recruit potential new teachers by tapping into their sense of idealism. He also notes that TFA has perfected the narrative of “doing good by doing well” to tap simultaneously into potential recruits’ idealism as well as their personal ambition and self-interest. The idea of “doing good” by working in an urban school has broad popular appeal. It taps into the “white savior trope” which has a long history in Hollywood films, and the white teacher-savior is a common variation of it (Sirota, 2013; Hughey, 2014). The white savior trope silences the stories of people of color and presents individual whites as the solution to their problems.

The narrative of “doing good” through working in an urban school is targeted at whites in order to recruit them and congratulate them for doing this work. No attention is paid to the communities of color who are ostensibly “helped” by these teachers. The benefits for the recipient community are not even laid out; they are not a stable feature of the narrative. It is not necessary to speak to these communities, nor to hear from them; they have no say in the matter but are positioned as recipients of the good will of the white saviors. This narrative constructs the communities and students as passive and helpless. And this construction impacts how the novice teachers come to understand their students, themselves, and teaching through what Freire (1999) calls “false generosity”—that is, engaging in acts of service or charity that actually serve to perpetuate domination. False generosity does not address the root causes of oppression. It allows the oppressor to feel good about him/herself without actually challenging the essential relationship of domination. The continued existence of injustice provides the oppressor with continued opportunities to exercise or perform generosity: “The generosity of the oppressed is nourished by an unjust order, one that must be maintained in order to justify that generosity” (ibid. 42). Freire contrasts false generosity with solidarity. True solidarity means fighting at the side of the oppressed in their own self-liberation struggles. Freire also states, “Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression” (p. 39). White saviorism is a form of false generosity; it maintains and embodies white supremacy; it frames the white outsider as the savior and hero and the people of color as too oppressed, too downtrodden, too powerless to help themselves.

Not only does the boot camp model encourage white saviorism, but it implicitly suggests that teaching Black and Brown children is something whites can learn with speed and efficiency. This denies the long-term struggle of antiracist work, reproduces white racial domination and further devalues Black, Brown and poor children, for whom (it is presumed) no specialized knowledge is necessary in order to become their teacher. As critical multicultural teacher educators, we believe teacher education programs must explicitly name and address the institutional racism that is deep in our schools and other institutions. The many layers of white supremacy, from the personal to the political to the social-cultural aspects of schools as institutions, must be uncovered in antiracist teacher education (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Gay, 2010). Student teachers need not only to develop an understanding of their personal privilege(s), but also of how institutional structures are enactments of white supremacy. In order to counter white supremacy in our schools and curriculum, student teachers need to learn to listen to and honor the knowledge and experiences of their students, as well as the students’ families and communities.

However, in boot camp models of teacher education, the pressures on students undermine their ability to confront their privilege, name institutional racism, engage the community, and feel empowered to enact critical pedagogy in their classrooms. Preservice teachers in these programs are consumed by imperatives to raise test

scores, “manage” classrooms, and “deliver” instruction. These technocratic versions of teaching themselves are reproductive of white supremacy, but there is little time or space to challenge these institutional practices; there is only time and energy to survive. The very notion of “surviving” teaching Black, Brown and poor children positions those children as problematic, as difficult, as a challenge to be met rather than as human beings to be known and understood. When combined with the militaristic language that is so often a part of these programs, implications of occupation and colonization cannot be dismissed. Who is making decisions for whom? Who has power? To what end?

Boot camp teacher education conveys a hidden curriculum about what it means to teach. It frames teaching as a set of discrete skills or “best practices” that one can learn, and then apply in any context. TFA structures the discourse on this idea. The assumptions are that teaching is easy and all it takes is idealism and motivation. Teaching is skills based, methods based, and there is one way to do it. But when our students enter public school classrooms as student-teachers, they are face to face with real human beings and trying to negotiate that, but with no support. There is no space to do the real work of learning to be a teacher, especially a white teacher working with students of color; so it is left as an unexamined space. Even for the students who come to us with a critical consciousness—who understand that race and class matter, and want to explore how they impact teaching and learning—there is no space within our programs for them to wrestle with these questions and apply them to their own developing practice. Even the most critically conscious boot camp programs convey the message that student teachers not only *can* learn-to-teach under high levels of stress, but that they have a *right* to. The very act of placing inexperienced student teachers in high-poverty urban schools to “survive” their first year of teaching while simultaneously completing graduate coursework undoes our best intentions.

One way to understand the impact of boot camp models on Black, Brown and poor students and the teachers who work with them is to consider alternative models. What would it look like to place new teachers into urban schools with *so* much support, time and space that they could truly develop and blossom as reflective practitioners with all of their selves to offer—mind, body, heart, with time for self-care and self-reflection of all kinds? How much time would that take? How would the student teachers be introduced to the community? Whose voices would they hear? What would they read and when would they have time to talk, write, and reflect on the intersection between reading and experience? How would they, and when would they have time to, encounter community and student activism in order to learn from the community and discover the power of alliances? It doesn’t even take a strong antiracist perspective to see how considering the real care and time needed to develop teachers makes sense from a basic equity perspective. But boot camp programs do the opposite. So we, again, return to the same questions from before: What is the logic here? Who is it serving? And who is harmed in the process?

### CONCLUSION

Boot camp teacher education programs reproduce neoliberal logic and neoliberal subjectivities through how they construct teaching, learning, and the workplace. As with other aspects of the neoliberal project, boot camp teacher education also reproduces white supremacy. These programs are an injustice to the low-income communities of color they ostensibly “serve,” while placing severe limitations on the possibilities for critical, social justice-oriented teacher education. University based teacher education programs that have adopted boot camp models find themselves in the bind of the neoliberal regime. Squeezed by increased demands for accountability, under resourced universities, and the financial competitive edge of fast-track programs like TFA, they have adopted a model that undercuts a broader mission of critical multicultural pedagogy and reflective teacher development. As a result, we are compromising away our values and core beliefs. Even a good one-year program is not doing what we should be doing: providing time for student-teachers to come to know themselves, their students, and the political landscape of education; to seek community connections that are real, authentic, and entail democratic accountability. Our integrity demands that we ask ourselves the questions we have raised throughout this chapter: Why do we put student teachers in these impossible conditions? Who do these programs serve? Who do they harm? As teacher educators, the challenge we face is to be honest about the compromises we have made and to name the neoliberal context of those compromises. We must be willing to examine the impact of these compromises on our work, our students, their students, and the goals of public education. Then, we must determine together what we will fight to protect, what we will demand to be necessary to our work, and how our work might be positioned in democratic solidarity with the children, parents, and communities in our public schools.

### NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> For examples: Gay (2010); Ladson-Billings (2006); Buehler, Gere, Dallavis and Haviland (2009); Bartolme (2004); Lea and Griggs (2005); Picower (2009) Garrett and Segall (2013).

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STEVEN M. HART AND JAMES MULLOOLY

## 6. FROM STUDENT TO STEWARD OF DEMOCRACY

### *Developing Teachers as Transformative Change Agents*

#### INTRODUCTION

For decades a neoliberal agenda has dominated public school reform, driven by principles of privatization, standardization and accountability. Some scholars have argued that these efforts are a direct assault on the relationship between schools and a democratic society (Giroux, 2012; Lewis & Young, 2013). These arguments contend these neoliberal reforms redefine effective citizenship in terms of self-interest and economic productivity, which is in sharp contrast to the collective, participatory social transformation necessary for an equitable democratic society (Chomsky, 1999; Giroux, 2002; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). As such, this conceptualization of citizenship positions schools as sites to foster economic development at the expense of political empowerment (Apple & Beane, 2007; Goodlad, Soder, & McDaniel, 2008; Rose, 2009). Such policies that emphasize high-stakes testing on a standardized, narrow curriculum have worked to erode opportunities for any civic agency, especially for low-income and minority students (Gagnon, 2003; Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

A just democratic society depends upon the civic competence of its citizens, characterized by informed deliberation and collaboration to address public problems and work toward common goals (Apple & Beane, 2007; Bowen, 1977; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007). Schools and teachers have been positioned as the frontline of defense in protecting public education as a space for critical democratic education (Bauman, 1999; Giroux 2010, 2012). Identified by labels such as, “stewards of democracy” (Parker, 2003), “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, 1988), “cultural workers” (Freire, 2005), “civic agents” (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and “civic professionals” (Wilkinson, 2007), teachers are viewed as important forces for educating young people in the critical habits of mind and practices of a sustainable democratic society.

Precisely because teachers are recognized as critical democratic change agents, corporate and political factions have now converged to attack teacher preparation programs to ensure compliance in producing future generations of technocratic pawns of political manipulation and domination, devoid of transformative agency (Giroux, 2010; Sleeter, 2008). Following the same tactics that have deprofessionalized and demoralized current classroom teachers, the neoliberal attack on teacher education is



comprised of carefully orchestrated strategies that work in tandem to blame teacher educators for the woes of society, increase accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance to ideological practices, and promote corporate privatized alternatives as remedies to the woes (CAEP, 2013; Ginsberg & Levine, 2013; Hernandez, 2013; Kelly, 2013; Lewis & Young, 2013; NCATE, 2010; NCTQ, 2013; US Department of Education, 2011; Washington Post, 2013).

Giroux (2010) argues that “at the heart of such reforms is an attempt to create colleges of education that will largely train teachers rather than give them a rigorous critical education” (p. 345), for fear that critical pedagogies may create future generations of teachers equipped with the knowledge, skills and agency that will help them prepare their future students to be active critical change agents. Indeed, this agenda is far from implicit, as NCATE (2010) notes, “The education of teachers in the United States needs to be turned upside down” (p. ii). Through a concerted public and political campaign to upend teacher education, these efforts have created conditions that force teacher education programs to comply and compete for both resources and status.

At a time when multiple political, social, and economic forces are constructing an agenda of conformity and constraint, teacher educators have found it difficult to provide spaces that empower future teachers to identify with and develop as transformative educators. As such, teacher educators have called for more research to explore the types of experiences and program elements that work together to shape and sustain teachers’ development and commitment to transformative education (Mirra & Morrell, 2011; Ritchie 2012; Jarrett & Stenhouse, 2011).

Thus, in this chapter we aim to add to this dialogue by exploring how teachers develop the agency to enact a transformative professional identity. For this study, agency is viewed as one’s understanding of self-determination, or the realized capacity to act upon the nature and quality of one’s life (Bandura, 1997; Inden, 2000). Agency and identity are complementary co-constructions that shape and are shaped by social contexts (Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In this view, teachers’ professional identities are represented by actions that demonstrate the type of teacher they want to project. However, agency shapes and drives how teachers enact these particular identities within particular contexts; perceptions of power and control guide their decision-making and actions.

Through an analysis of a new Minor in Urban Civic Education (UCE) we examine how particular experiences, social positions, and interactions facilitate emerging teachers’ agency to construct and enact their transformative educator identities. UCE is a specially designed program of interdisciplinary courses linking *urban*, *civic*, and *education* studies with active community engagement through specific service-learning experiences. The program actively engages students in urban community and educational settings to examine and critically analyze education’s place in a broader social context and the economic, political, and social structures impacting schools and the diverse urban cultural communities they serve.

#### FROM STUDENT TO STEWARD OF DEMOCRACY

Through interview and observation methods, we followed several students as they moved from undergraduates in UCE to teacher candidates in the credential program, and through the initial stages of their professional teaching career to uncover how such experiences shaped their enactments of transformative, civically engaged educators. We developed a multicase study of these recent graduates of UCE to examine how they conceptualized their role as a transformative educators, the influences on their identity development, and the supports and hindrances they encountered attempting to enact their view of transformative education in the current neoliberal context.

We start by describing the framework that guided the development of UCE; this description provides a connection between the specific components of the program and the relevant literature. Next, we describe the methods of our study. We then present two vignettes to provide diverse perspectives of the graduates' conceptual understandings and enactments of transformative education. These vignettes, in turn, provide a lens through which to reflect on how teacher education practices might be improved to develop teachers' empowerment and agency to engage in transformative education. We conclude with a set of recommendations for ourselves and other teacher educators who are dedicated to supporting new teachers in developing the skills and knowledge to empower their own students in active social transformation.

#### MINOR IN URBAN CIVIC EDUCATION

Through a grant from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the two authors collaborated with a team to design and implement UCE. The team consisted of local school district leaders; community-benefit organization leaders; university service-learning coordinators; and students and faculty from a variety of disciplines across the campus. The goal of this collaborative project was to construct a unique comprehensive and interdisciplinary program of study that would provide students opportunities and experiences to develop the capacity and agency to address substantive issues facing local communities and global society. Specifically, and most germane to the relationship between schools and a democratic society, we sought to develop an academically and experientially enriched program that would develop students' deep understanding of education's position within a broader social context, the resources and assets within diverse cultural communities, and innovative ways to develop community-education partnerships forged for social change. We believed that constructing a distinct field of study would provide students a critical lens to analyze other course experiences and to also provide elevated status to the important role teachers play as transformative agents.

Building from previous transformative education program models (Chávez-Reyes, 2010; Stokamer, 2013), we designed UCE around principles of interdisciplinarity, critical pedagogy, and service-learning pedagogy. This model is built on a premise that these guiding principles mutually reinforce the knowledge, skills, dispositions,

and actions of transformative educators. The unique contributions of *urban*, *civic*, and *education* studies coalesce to form the framework of UCE. Critical service-learning serves as its linchpin, providing experiences to enhance students' exploration of the structures, processes, and issues of diverse urban cultural communities and also providing a concrete pedagogical tool to apply in future professional roles.

### *Undergraduate Critical Education*

The rationale for developing a specific undergraduate Minor stemmed from our analysis of present research on teachers' enactments of critical transformative pedagogy, coupled with the analysis of our own context. Researchers have recognized that developing teachers, who are committed to social transformation and empowered to develop their future students' agency for social action, requires extended time; isolated assignments, experiences, and courses have not proven successful in sustaining teachers' transformative practices in their professional careers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Iverson & James, 2010; James & Iverson, 2009; Whipp, 2013). These researchers have suggested that providing preservice teachers with critical education experiences across multiple courses and field experiences may prove more successful in sustaining teachers' transformative practices. However, we questioned whether the limited space and duration of our teacher preparation programs would allow for such extensive transformative work.

Given that Education majors tend to be the least politically aware and engaged students (Sax, 2004) and future teachers typically do not envision themselves as civic agents (Barton, 2012), we agreed with several colleagues that perhaps our students' undergraduate education could be a space of opportunity for such in-depth, longitudinal transformative work (Chavez-Reyes, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Compared to the three semesters they spend in professional preparation, our candidates experience substantial personal, moral, and intellectual development throughout their years of undergraduate education. We share McDiarmid and Clevenger-Bright's (2008) view that teacher candidates' capacity "depends, to some considerable extent on what [they] bring with them" into their professional program (p. 135). Moreover, another body of research has shown that teachers, who had cross-cultural and community engagement experiences prior to entering a teacher preparation program, maintain a stronger commitment to critical instructional practices (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Garmon 2004; Taylor & Frankenberg, 2009).

In addition, researchers have proposed that constructing a sequence of courses and experiences around a unifying theme of social justice may also serve to develop and sustain teachers' transformative agency (Ambe, 2006; Athanases & Oliveira, 2008; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; McDonald, 2007). As such, we collaborated with an interdisciplinary team of professors from ethnic studies, social sciences and education programs to select electives that would provide students with the breadth and depth of knowledge to critically analyze the political and social forces impacting

children, families and schools. Critical awareness of the larger structural conditions that create inequity is a key component in developing an empowered sense of agency (Freire, 1974; McLaren, 2000; Shor, 1993), and teachers who develop such critical consciousness demonstrate a stronger commitment to transformative education (Castro, 2010; McDonald, 2008).

### *Critical Service-Learning as Transformative Education*

Teacher educators have promoted critical pedagogy as a vehicle to develop preservice teachers' social and political awareness, commitment to social justice, and sense of agency to effect change (Barton, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Giroux, 2012; Kraehe & Brown, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008; Picower, 2011; Whipp, 2013). However, awareness of the ways structural systems create oppressive conditions and the commitment to social transformation are not sufficient to develop future teachers' agency to engage in transformative practices. Future teachers need tangible guidance in how such critical pedagogical practices can be situated and contextualized in schools and communities (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Fecho, 2000; Gomez & White, 2010; Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010; Milner 2003; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003).

Similarly, service-learning has gained prevalence in teacher education as a pedagogy to develop future teachers' understanding of diverse communities and commitment to social change (Baldwin et al., 2007; Conner, 2010; James & Iverson, 2009; Mitton-Kükner, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2010). Teacher educators have applied service-learning for philosophical and instructional aims. As a philosophy, service-learning promotes the belief that education should develop social responsibility and prepare students for active democratic participation. As an instructional approach, service-learning actively engages students in meaningful community service that is directly integrated with and supports academic learning (Anderson & Erickson, 2003). However, service-learning experiences that lack specific attention to social structures and ideologies may not help address systemic issues of inequity facing communities and actually work to perpetuate deficit perspectives (Boyle-Baise, 1999; Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Herzberg, 1997; Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Wade, 2000).

To address these critiques, several scholars have theorized a union of service-learning and critical pedagogies to construct *critical service-learning pedagogy* (Hart, 2006; Butin, 2003; Daigre, 2000; Schensul, Berg, & Brase, 2002). In a critical service-learning framework, the critique, questioning and vision of social transformation promoted by critical pedagogies (Freire, 1974; McLaren, 2000; Shor, 1993) serve as the theoretical lens guiding service-learning experiences. Reciprocally, the application of active democratic civic engagement promoted by service-learning serves as a concrete enactment of the theory buttressing critical pedagogy.

It is through a confluence of service-learning and critical pedagogies, working together, that UCE utilizes critical service-learning to create conditions for

transformative learning that are not enabled through classroom and clinical experiences typically found in teacher preparation programs. Critical service-learning situates teacher education in broader social contexts and moves students from traditional observer roles to empowered actors. Through two core required courses students are provided opportunities for direct interactive experiences engaged in social action with schools and communities.

The first service-learning course engages students in direct work with local community-benefit organizations (CBO) to explore collaboratively and address community concerns. The purpose of this course is to help students deepen their understanding of the practical applications of critical pedagogy and the role of civic engagement for social and political transformation (Souza, 2007; Yep, 2011). Working directly with CBOs allows students to build upon the knowledge, experience and expertise of local community agencies. CBOs are deeply connected with communities and offer a wealth of knowledge to assist new teachers in gaining awareness of the community needs and the actions being taken to address these concerns. CBOs also have a history of working for social transformation at local and broader political levels, and students can gain a deeper understanding of the skills used for collectively organizing community members to affect change (Hong, 2011; Warren, 2005).

The second service-learning course is the capstone course for UCE and is focused on developing students' understanding of service-learning as a transformative instructional tool. Students collaborate with classroom teachers to design and implement service-learning projects with the K-12 students. The classroom teachers are specially recruited based on their experience with service-learning instruction and their commitment to transformative education. The goal of this course is to prepare students with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to work with schools, nonprofits, and public agencies as social-change agents capable of developing and implementing partnerships between schools and communities. Providing future teachers with opportunities to actively develop service-learning projects with children and youth can develop an empowered agency, further their commitment to transformative education, and allow them to experience the value of service-learning as a pedagogical tool for promoting social action with future students (James & Iverson, 2009; Jarrett & Stenhouse, 2011; Ponder, VanderVeldt, & Lewis-Ferrell, 2011; Wasserman, 2010).

### *Community of Practice*

Sociocultural theories of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and Discourse theory of identity development (Gee, 1996) provided additional frameworks to guide the design of UCE. These frameworks hold that learning is facilitated through a process of active interaction with members of a particular situated community, denoted by a shared repertoire of specific ways of doing things and viewing the world. Learning involves appropriating practices

valued by a particular community. Through interaction and socialization in situated contexts constituted by the community of practice, knowledge of the social practices is gained. Once enough knowledge is gained and social practices are understood and enacted, recognition of these abilities shifts positioning to being identified as a member of a particular community. This identity shift represents the Discourse, or socially situated identity, that mediates cognitive processes, and in turn, action.

As such, we viewed transformative educators as a unique community of practice denoted by a critical consciousness, reflective problem-posing skills, and an empowered agency to work for equity-oriented sociopolitical transformation. In line with these theories, UCE was viewed as a broad space to empower future teachers to identify with and develop the habits of mind, cultural practices, and agency to become active critical change agents. UCE was designed to provide extensive interactions with multiple members of this community—teachers, professors, community organizers, students, and peers—to immerse students in the community of practice and facilitate their shifting of Discourse, or identity: moving from margins to membership.

As our description conveys, we worked to avoid essentializing the identity of teacher-as-change agent. Rather, we attempted to provide our future teachers with the experiences, interactions, and cultural resources that would allow them to develop their own identities as transformative educators. We recognize that UCE represents one particular community of practice, which is socially, politically, and physically, interconnected with multiple communities including schools, districts, and educational policymakers. It is at the intersection of these communities where identity development is negotiated. This study provides an analysis of how participation across these communities led UCE students to negotiate a professional identity through reconciling boundaries in a nexus of social contexts and neoliberal policies.

#### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Because this study was exploratory and aimed to generate factors that contribute to the development of transformative educators, we chose an interpretive method of narrative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), using a small group of graduates from UCE as case studies (Stake, 2010), to address these research questions: (1) How do UCE graduates conceptualize their role as a transformative educator? (2) What personal and professional experiences do they describe as influences on their identity development? (3) How do UCE graduates enact their view of transformative education in the current neoliberal context? (4) What barriers and supports do they encounter?

The aim of the narrative inquiry was to capture the lived experiences of UCE students' journeys on the road to becoming teachers. Informed by the concepts of communities of practice and Discourse identity theory, we recognized that the participants' perspectives and practices are associated with particular identities,

and these identities are dynamic, contextually situated, and transferred across contexts (Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Through this lens, we believed that narrative inquiry would allow for multidimensional stories to emerge as participants described the supports and constraints on their identities across the multiple spheres of interaction.

Although interviews provided the primary data sources for our inquiry, we also collected reflective journals and field observations from the capstone service-learning course. The additional data were used to identify congruence and inconsistencies between participants' beliefs and practices, and they served as content to guide the interview conversations. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant across phases of their academic and professional pathways. These interviews were guided conversations aimed at engaging participants in narratives about their past and present understandings of critical democratic education in general, and about themselves as transformative educators more specifically. A follow-up member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) conversation was conducted in which participants reflected on that narrative accuracy of transcripts and the interpretive validity of their respective vignettes.

This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1999) to analyze all of the data that were collected. The basic premise of CDA is that what people say and write helps constitute who they are being at a given time and place within a given set of social practices; these situated beliefs, actions, and practices represent the associated situated identity. Through CDA, we studied the data to examine the ways that students took up particular worldviews and patterns of talk and action as they engaged in the various spaces of this study, from undergraduate experiences through their professional teaching contexts. We applied a systematic procedure for the data analysis. We conducted the first iteration of analysis independently, beginning with repeated readings and coding for the particular practices and roles participants associated with teachers, the potential identities these descriptions were attempting to represent, the potential influences on these representations, and the emergence of patterns across time and context.

For example, Chloe's statement, "Teachers need to use more than books to make a difference in children's lives," was coded for the cultural tools that identify teachers' practices (i.e., books). Here Chloe identifies two models of teacher identity, and positions "difference-makers" in a more esteemed position than that of "information-disseminators." Although influences are not explicitly stated within this single utterance, previous experiences as a primary grade student, student teaching field experiences, or even course readings were coded as potential factors. These initial interpretive codes were then confirmed or revised through subsequent analyses across the complete data set.

The results from the initial coding were collaboratively examined as an interrater reliability check. Through an iterative process, coding discrepancies were discussed to reach consensus. Patterns of Discourses were identified for each case. A cross-

case analysis procedure compared students to seek convergent views across cases as well as divergent views among cases.

There are several potential limitations to consider for this study. One limitation may be sample bias. Since the participants were all volunteers, the sample is not likely to represent the general population of students completing UCE; instead the sample represents a pool of participants who were willing to talk about their experiences in UCE and their current professional experiences. However, as a critical case sample these participants experienced a unique program and hold great insight regarding the experiences and structures that support the development of transformative educators.

In addition, both authors are the key organizers of UCE and committed to critical democratic education in our scholarly work and our own practices. Steve (first author) has worked to counter neoliberal policies and promote educational justice and social change through research investigating how critical literacy and service-learning can converge to impact children, youth and their teachers. Jim (second author) has worked on successful approaches to minority, urban education and has similarly attempted to focus attention on educational injustice through applied educational anthropology.

Thus, our roles as the researchers may have produced interviewer bias and researcher bias. As the participants are our former students, there may have been a propensity for them to construct responses that aligned with our public critical democratic education beliefs. Also, the lens through which we view the data risks being influenced by our perspectives. However, the trustworthiness of narrative inquiry data and interpretation relies on the “credibility of portrayals of constructed realities” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 157); it depends on the perceived coherence of the researcher’s questions, theoretical framing, and data collection and analysis designs. The present study employed a number of strategies for maximizing the overall trustworthiness of the study, including member checks and the use of independent coding coupled with comparing codes for agreement to enhance interrater reliability.

#### VIGNETTES

##### *Chloe*

Chloe self-identified as a White female in her early 20s, who grew up in a small town surrounded by the agricultural landscape of the region. Her family has owned and operated a large farm in the area for several generations, which she noted, provided her a “middle-class upbringing.” Chloe achieved her aspirations of returning to teach in her hometown, and is presently teaching First Grade in her childhood elementary school.

*Caring “good” citizen.* Chloe’s desire to teach began early in childhood: “I’ve always been into teaching. Even in elementary school, I would play teacher with



friends.” Her desire to teach continued into high school, where she enrolled in an education and child development career pathway program and joined the Future Teachers Club. The career pathway program integrated education specialization courses with field-based experiences in elementary classrooms. Chloe credits these early experiences with solidifying her passion for teaching, “It was great to get out and be with the kids in the classroom. I loved the atmosphere and seeing all of their excitement about learning new things. I was like, ‘Yes! I’m going into teaching!’”

Chloe cited these high school experiences as positive influences that helped her understand the importance for teachers to value diversity, “I learned that you have to be familiar with all the students backgrounds, to take everything into consideration. From their parents, to languages, you have to take it all in, and help them learn that way.” Her initial perspective emphasized the responsibility teachers have to gain a deep awareness of the cultural funds of knowledge students’ bring from their own lives. Although this perspective values students’ diverse lived experiences, there is an emphasis on individual students and a lack of attention to the broader social and political structures.

Chloe’s initial perspectives on the teacher’s role to prepare students for democratic participation also lacked attention to broader social and political contexts. Reflecting back on her view before entering UCE, Chloe stated, “I felt that it was important to emphasize good citizenship and lead by example. I felt like I should be that positive role model and show good character, loyalty, and most important, respect for others.” In this view, citizenship education is positioned as a process developed in the classroom through adult modeling of good personal character. Individual behavior is promoted, and citizenship is viewed as being a good, responsible and respectful member of society. The collective nature of participatory democracy and developing students’ skills to examine broader social and political contexts are not present.

*Developing agency.* Chloe’s primary interest in UCE was to “get more interaction with children and to work in schools.” She believed that these experiences would better prepare her for the teaching credential program after she completed her undergraduate studies. Accordingly, she selected electives that correlated with her interest in young children: a social work course on the history and development of child welfare services, a course on multicultural perspectives of children and families, and a sociology course examining contemporary social and political issues.

During Chloe’s first service-learning experience she collaborated with a local CBO focused on issues of child and family well-being. Through this experience, she assisted in the development phase of a community school readiness project. The goal of the project was to work with residents of low-income communities to create a grassroots family literacy program, which would prepare residents to work with families in their own community. Chloe worked with a team conducting interviews with residents to determine material needs, accessibility and logistics concerns, and community interest.

In the subsequent semester, Chloe collaborated with a first grade teacher at an elementary school in an underprivileged neighborhood to design and implement a service-learning project. She developed a “Giving Gardeners” unit, in which students collaborated with local master gardeners and health professionals to explore the environmental and health benefits of regional flowers. The students grew flowers at their school, explored basic plant necessities, components and structures, and monitored their flowers’ growth through observations, pictures and journal entries. Students then donated the flowers to residents surrounding their school to display in yards or on porches as a way to beautify their community.

As Chloe discussed the influences of these experiences on her professional and personal identity development, the direct interactions appear to have provided structures to raise her critical awareness and develop her sense of agency.

At first, I was a bit unsure about going into [the neighborhood] and knocking on people’s doors to interview for the [CBO] project. At first, I thought it was really going to be a waste of time; nobody would be interested. But after hearing their ideas and concerns, like work schedules, buses, doing something with their babies, I started to think that this project could really make a difference. And they were excited about it starting, too!

The direct interaction with families in the neighborhood provided Chloe the opportunity to confront her previous held view that low-income families do not care about addressing issues in their lives. This new awareness allowed her to consciously notice the broader historical social factors that challenged families. In turn, her awareness gave more meaning to the project and she developed a stronger sense of her agency in working to address social issues.

This process of developing a sense of agency was also evident when Chloe spoke about her experiences implementing the service-learning project at the school. Her journal entries prior to beginning the project were marked by uncertainty and a lack of efficacy for carrying out the project, reiterating how “doing service-learning is different than leading a project.” However, as she collaborated with the teachers, the tone of her entries became more optimistic. This difference was raised during the interview, and she responded,

Well, at first, it [service-learning] was something I was just learning to do myself, and I thought ‘How am I going to teach this to someone who’s been teaching a while.’ But then we [Chloe and classroom teacher] talked with the principal, and she was all ears. She loved our ideas and pretty much just told us we could do what we wanted. That was a relief. And then Ms. C [teacher] was great too! At first I thought she was going to be like, ‘Oh you just do this and that.’ But she really cared about my input. We worked well together. She didn’t know about service-learning, so she counted on me to lead the project. We planned a lot together, and she was really good about helping me with planning and organizing the parts of the lesson.

Chloe initially attributed her lack of confidence to her novice status. However, her elaboration suggests that she also perceived that the principal and teacher posed challenges to her agency, thus diminishing her efficacy. It was through direct collaboration that she came to understand that these individuals valued her ideas, and she was empowered to reposition herself as an active agent, 'leading' the project. In turn, it was this sense of agency that allowed a mutually reciprocal partnership to evolve, where she and the teacher individually contributed equally to collectively moving the project forward.

As Chloe prepared to transition from student to student-teacher, her concept of citizenship education appeared to have shifted in ways more aligned with a critical democratic pedagogy. Moving from a focus on developing personal moral character, Chloe believed "that teachers should develop instruction that provides students opportunities to learn how to take care of the world, and each other." This new perspective extends the purpose of education beyond individual student development to one aimed at developing students' understanding of their interrelationships within the larger society.

As Chloe elaborated on the means to achieving this educational aim, her responses suggest that her service-learning experiences played a role in influencing her perspectives. In the same way the community engagement facilitated her critical awareness and prompted her agency, Chloe emphasized that,

Teachers can help to mold the minds of the future; to teach them to see what is unfair in the world and how it can be changed. Using service-learning would give students the chance to see these ideas in action, or else they just are concepts they won't get.

Rather than positioning students as observers of a teacher's modeling good citizenship, Chloe's new stance positioned teachers with the responsibility to create conditions to empower students to actively critique society and work to transform it. Chloe experienced how simply interacting with the broader community is not necessarily empowering. Feeling her ideas and actions were valued during these interactions was what empowered her agency and sustained her work. Building from these experiences, Chloe believed that valuing student voice throughout the service-learning process was essential because students would see "that 'Oh, I have a voice here? If I have a voice in the classroom, I should have a voice everywhere else I go!'" Lastly, as she commented on how she envisioned teaching for critical democratic participation, Chloe drew on the collaborative nature of her experiences and noted, "You cannot do it on your own. Communication with fellow teachers and just getting a team together will make it stronger and more effective."

*Loss of agency.* Chloe reported that she didn't engage in any transformative education work during her student teaching experience. In contrast to her teaching experience in UCE, Chloe had very little voice in the instructional practices she deployed in the classroom. She explained that the program was very structured and

her experiences emphasized lessons that the program and her professors required. In addition, Chloe felt that the interactions with her mentor teachers did not provide any space for her voice to be recognized nor valued. She described the planning process for most of her student teaching experiences, “It was like the teachers basically wrote the lessons and I taught it.” Even when she was the main instructor, Chloe believed she had no power in the decision-making process, “They basically determined what we taught. The teachers just said, ‘Here’s the unit that we are working on. Here’s the books. Use these.’”

Chloe was aware of and could identify the structures that limited her agency. However, her efficacy to change the situation was influenced by the number of forces working to shape her experiences.

You’re not really the teacher. You have to try and balance what the courses require and what the teacher tells you to do. Like we had this Science unit. We were only able to do the Science unit because our course required a content area unit- either Social Studies or Science. But the teacher said that we had to make sure it included Language Arts standards.

Recognizing that the curricular demands of these two institutional forces created a space that did not align with her view of teaching from a critical democratic stance, Chloe reflected on critical action to address the issue. She described how she saw space within the Science unit assignment to reconstruct her situation.

We got to work in groups on the unit; it was Earth Science, so we did soil, rocks and fossils. The teacher was in charge of the school garden, so when we were planning, I was thinking this would be great for service-learning. They could have planted vegetables discussed hunger issues in the community and donate them to a food bank. But we were time restricted on when it needed to be completed, the specific strategies we had to demonstrate. Plus my partners didn’t get service-learning and didn’t see the connection and didn’t want to add to our time.

Although Chloe eventually accepted the status of her situation, this attempt demonstrates that she possessed the capacity to recognize, critique, and develop a plan of action to transform the curricular demands of the social context.

Chloe’s description of the beginning of her professional teaching experiences were similar to those from her credential program. During the interview, she lamented.

Unfortunately, I haven’t been able to do the things I want to do. I think it was hard for sure at first. I know I want to implement everything I know. Because, I’m not happy not doing it, knowing that I could be. I’m not doing it because I don’t have time. I want my kids to get the experience that I want to give them.

When probed about the issue of time, she elaborated,

Just taking so much time to get used to teaching. You know learning all the requirements of the job- lessons, certain things you have to do. There’s not

really much time in the day. As you know with a project, it's not easy. There's a lot of time involved to get out into the community and do that kind of work.

*Julianna*

Julianna self-identified as a Latina Mexican immigrant in her early 20s. Julianna and her family immigrated from Mexico to the United States when she was seven, and she spent her childhood in a very remote rural community, surrounded by the citrus groves where most of her family worked. Julianna was the first member of her family to attend college, and she expressed great pride in her persistence to be successful, despite the challenges she faced from poverty and learning to speak English. Julianna is presently teaching fifth grade in a small rural school in the vicinity of her childhood community.

*Transformative agent.* Julianna's passion for teaching was ignited by the realities she observed within her family and community as a young teen. Her early teacher identity was strongly associated with a desire to effect change.

I definitely wanted to impact the community. That was major for me. Because I was seeing what was going on in my community. The dropout rate, early teen pregnancies, gang issues. A lot of my family members, they would drop out of school. They would say that school isn't relatable to them.

Her initial teacher identity was shaped by a critical stance toward the disconnection between schools and students' lived experiences. Julianna believed in a student-centered approach to teaching that focused on connecting student classroom experiences to their own communities.

We're doing all these things in school that don't relate to kids, or make kids want to drop out of school. So that was a big issue for me. I knew we had to address this. I wanted kids to want to come to school, and to be involved in their community.

Julianna's critique of schools represented her vision of education as a means to transform local communities. In turn, she believed teachers were responsible for creating the conditions that develop students' capacities and agency to engage in such transformation.

*Student agency.* Julianna was interested in UCE because she believed it would provide her with the tools to enact her vision of teaching, "I knew I wanted to do something like this [community engagement]. I envisioned something like this. I just didn't have a name for it, or exactly understood how to do it." In line with her value for local community transformation, Julianna completed electives that addressed contemporary social issues for schools and society, with a particular emphasis on Chicano/Latino perspectives.

During her first service-learning experience Julianna collaborated with a university-based Science Outreach program. The goal of the project was to engage students from underprivileged communities in hands-on science explorations as a way to generate interest in science and encourage their pursuit of future careers in science fields. Through this service-learning experience, Julianna collaborated with university professors and peers to design and deliver a variety of engaging science activities. A key aspect of this project was the direct outreach to schools, and Julianna had the opportunity to visit dozens of schools from within the local urban center to remote rural communities.

In her final semester, Julianna collaborated with a team of second grade teachers at an elementary school in an underprivileged neighborhood to design and implement a gardening service-learning project. Over the course of the project, students collaborated with the local food pantry to examine hunger issues in their community and what various organizations were doing to address the issue. Guests spoke with the classes, the students toured the facility, and the project culminated with the students donating their harvest to the pantry.

When Julianna reflected on how participating in UCE influenced her, she drew heavily from her service-learning experiences. “Service-learning provided me opportunities to see myself as an active member of the community, and I enjoyed working with the different levels of the community—children, teachers, and organizations—to make our community a better place.” The prominence Julianna gives to these experiences illustrates the important role active engagement within the community played in her conceptualization of transformative education.

Julianna emphasized how experiencing service-learning from both the student and teacher perspectives allowed her to learn “how teachers can not only teach curriculum, but teach other things like citizenship.” Julianna makes a clear distinction between traditional teaching and her vision; implementing the service-learning project allowed her to test her pedagogical stance in action. In addition, both of her community engagement experiences provided Julianna with concrete examples through which she came to “understand what the benefits are and how it [service-learning] allows students to apply what they learned in the classroom to real life situations.” These experiences strengthened her value for a student-centered approach.

Julianna’s reflective journals provided further evidence of her value for putting students’ interests at the fore of the education process. Throughout the initial weeks of the hunger project, Julianna’s entries focused on the resistance from one of the team members. During the interview Julianna recounted,

Part of the issue was that one of the teachers wasn’t letting go enough. She was trying to control every little piece, and it created a lot of problems. She felt like she had to do everything for the project, just not willing to let go, didn’t let the students take control over it.

Throughout her early entries, Julianna reflected on how this encroachment on student ownership and voice diverged from her student-centered pedagogical beliefs, and the ways she understood service-learning experiences to support student democratic participation. Julianna persevered through this resistance, assessed the challenges, and reflected on actions to overcome the hurdles. She explained, “I just figured the other teachers were on board, so I just continued working with their classes. It was great. The teachers were so supportive.” Rather than continue to battle the teacher, she sought allies to move the project forward. Julianna’s approach to seek allies to navigate through this challenge demonstrated her value for the collective nature of democratic education. It appears Julianna’s agency sustained her commitment to strategize alternate routes, and simultaneously, through this successful navigation, her agency was strengthened.

*Marginal member.* When Julianna described the ways her student teaching experiences influenced her understanding of critical education, she emphasized that she “didn’t get to use service-learning at all. It was kinda like, ‘Here’s the curriculum, let’s get through that.’ So, just sticking to the book.” In comparison to the agency she demonstrated throughout her experiences in UCE, Julianna didn’t question the directives of her mentor teachers.

Although Julianna did not to use service-learning methods during her first student teaching experience, she felt it was a very positive and influential experience.

My first teacher, she pretty much told me how it was. She was like, ‘Julianna I want you to see the teachers who do the bare minimum, I want you to see how it is. I want you to see who’s here for the kids and how they respond.’

Julianna’s vision of education placed students at the center, and working with a master teacher who shared this vision provided validation of her teaching identity. This experience also provided her an opportunity to critically analyze the role and responsibility of teachers. The master teacher guided Julianna’s critical awareness. This guidance provided Julianna a model for how critical educators can nurture students’ critical insight to read the world, something Julianna envisioned as part of her teacher identity.

Shortly before our interview Julianna had been hired into her current position. She was extremely excited about beginning her professional career. Julianna felt that her vision of education was valued and promoted by the district in general, and her principal in particular.

I think there will be a lot of support. Our district motto is to develop character in a safe learning environment. It’s in our statement, so I would think that it’s a major component of what they are trying to do. And during my interview she [principal] asked about how I would promote character in my class; that’s when I talked about my service-learning project, and her [principal] interest really peaked! She was very interested.

Julianna had also participated in a district workshop on social and emotional learning, which she viewed as a tangible action to match both the rhetoric of the district's vision and also her student-centered perspective. "They emphasized that, 'We're not here for anything else but the students,' but they really want to support the teachers, too. It [training] showed that they want to make sure the teachers understand what this [social and emotional learning] is and how to do it."

Julianna also identified several conditions that meshed with her beliefs that collaboration and collective work were key components of critical education. "At the training, they emphasized 21st Century skills. They kept saying, 'We need teamwork; no more closed door classrooms. We need to work together.'" Julianna was also enthusiastic that her school would be utilizing a team teaching approach, where she would be delivering Language Arts and Social Studies instruction to the whole grade, and her partner would focus on Science and Math. Julianna made direct connections to how this structure would support her enacting service-learning pedagogy, "It's nice because you're not doing it on your own. You get additional resources, additional collaboration; that other mind is there with you, working on the same things you're trying to do."

The combination of these factors empowered Julianna, and her agency was visible as she elaborated on how she planned to enact her vision of critical education.

I definitely feel confident going into the classroom and knowing how to do these things. It's just like what I did for the service-learning project. I think as a teacher we have to provide these opportunities for students to be active in their communities. Allowing them the opportunity to create their own ideas, execute a plan and work together. Kids have the desire to make the world a better place. We just have to help them along in being productive citizens in the community.

Julianna conceptualizes herself as a transformative teacher, propelled by an agency to affect change and promote this same disposition within her students. For Julianna, education is a process that places students' concerns and inclinations to better their world at the fore. In this educative process to prepare 'productive citizens,' Julianna positions the teacher with the responsibility to create conditions that allow students to engage in active collective work beyond the classroom.

In our final interview, Julianna explained how her vision did not unfold as she had predicted. The team had met often prior to the start of school to plan a thematic unit. Initially, the team planned to read a story from their basal reader as a model of children solving issues in their community and then guide the students through a similar process for their own community. Julianna further explained that her colleague wanted the unit to culminate with students' analysis and proposed solutions—without actually doing any work with/in the community. Julianna described how she tried to negotiate the situation and how her ideas were redirected.

She [colleague] wasn't sure that it would work out right and be beneficial. It takes some trial and error. She really thought 'It has to be perfect! You have to know



all of the answers!’ I’m like, ‘No it’s okay! You can learn with your students.’ It’s about letting go. Letting students have the responsibility, that’s what the whole social and emotional learning and Common Core is about; they’ve been saying we’ve been doing all of the thinking for the students, and that’s been hindering them. We have to let them think! Then she said that it was a great idea that fit well with the Character Education program, but encouraged me to do it as an after-school club. She told me not to waste my time planning a big project because I should be spending my time focusing on learning the new standards.

Julianna didn’t push the issue of extending the unit because she was “new” and “didn’t want to rock the boat.” As opposed to the agency she demonstrated in navigating a similar situation during her experiences in UCE, Julianna, accepted the situation. “I guess it wasn’t realistic to use this approach my first year.” When probed about her stance, she responded, “Well I did feel like I needed to learn the new standards, and the time commitment would not have really fit with all of the other teacher duties I had to learn, like planning and grading papers.”

The vignettes illustrate how Chloe and Julianna constructed transformative educator identities that were driven by a responsibility to develop their students’ understanding of their connections with their local communities and broader society. These identities espoused student-centered empowering pedagogy that valued student voice and active engagement in social transformation. The ways these identities were enacted differed as Chloe and Julianna participated across different contexts. The enactment of their transformative educator identities was highly influenced by their sense of agency. Chloe and Julianna enacted a Discourse of Empowered Agency during their experiences in UCE. This Discourse is marked by a strong sense of self-efficacy, self-worth, and empowerment associated with the UCE service-learning experiences. Chloe and Julianna both reported enhanced agency through directly contributing to community transformation and guiding the service projects with the children. In contrast, a Discourse of Marginalization was most prevalent during their preparation programs and professional teaching contexts. This Discourse is marked by a low sense of power and voice, and a periphery position within the community. Both Chloe and Julianna expressed a lack of agency to enact transformative educator identities within their teaching contexts due to institutional curricular and scheduling mandates, as well as limited collegial collaborative spaces.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this inquiry was to explore how participating in an Urban Civic Education Minor program influenced future teachers’ development and enactment of transformative pedagogy. Tracing Chloe and Julianna’s experiences from students in UCE to professional teachers provides a deeper understanding of the structures and experiences that work together to shape and sustain transformative educators’ practices. UCE combined critically-oriented coursework with service-learning

experiences to engage the students in enacting critical forms of transformative civic education; however, in line with Barton's (2012) stance, our findings demonstrate that these elements do not guarantee teachers will appropriate these practices into their professional careers.

Similar to Liggett's (2011) findings, this study indicates that agency is a key component that influences whether and/or how new teachers implement transformative pedagogy. Although negotiating conflicts has been found to facilitate teachers' sense of agency (Norton, 2001), our findings indicate that empowerment determines whether teachers will strategize and persevere to work against constraining factors. As Chloe and Julianna moved across spaces, the different ways they enacted their identities as transformative educators was highly contingent on the ways in which they positioned themselves and how they were positioned by others within these contexts

Applying concepts of communities of practice and Discourse identity theory (Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), we were able to trace how these unique Discourses of Position were activated within different spheres of participation and identity several factors that fostered an empowered agency for transformative pedagogy. The service-learning components figured prominently in the ways Chloe and Julianna described UCE influences on their transformative educator identity. Engaging in service-learning from both the student and teacher roles appears to have been a significant factor in supporting their agency for transformative education in the UCE context. Through serving within the community, both developed a strong capacity for civic action, which was facilitated through a perceived value for their contributions.

For Chloe, this recognition came from the community residents' enthusiasm toward the school readiness project; Julianna felt appreciated by the children's reactions in the science outreach project. Likewise, facilitating a service-learning project in a school setting also provided both with a sense of empowerment. These experiences provided opportunities to see their pedagogy in action. Service-learning appears to have provided a tangible tool that made the theoretical aspects of transformative education visible. This realization led to a position of competence, which enhanced their agency to engage in democratic work themselves, and influenced their agency for enacting such practices in their future careers. Although these experiences occurred outside of the official preparation program, creating space to include service-learning as a transformative tool may enhance teacher education programs aimed at developing transformative educators.

Although Chloe and Julianna maintained a sense of competence in their capacity to engage in transformative education along their journeys, this belief alone did not sustain their practice. Researchers have noted that as prospective educators become more involved in professional experiences they move into assimilation modes, abandoning their transformative education pedagogical identities to gain acceptance as newcomers into school communities (Kelly & Brandes, 2010; Picower, 2011). However, we argue that Julianna and Chloe were both 'newcomers' into the schools in which they participated during their UCE service-learning projects, and despite

challenges they demonstrated agency to fight for enacting their transformative education practices. On the surface, the extent of collegial support from mentor teachers was a valuable resource in sustaining agency in the UCE context. Through these supportive relationships, Chloe and Julianna were able to develop lessons and construct strategies to address unsupportive colleagues. Such networks of allies are vital for transformative educators to engage in their work (Agarwal et al., 2010; Philpott & Dagenais, 2012; Picower, 2011; Puig & Recchia, 2012; Ritchie, 2012; Whipp, 2013).

We believe the significance in such relationships is more than just having a sense of solidarity; rather, the ways newcomers are positioned by supportive allies is the key to agency. Chloe and Julianna were empowered by the actions of their colleagues in the UCE experience, not solely by comfort in knowing someone was in their corner. Being positioned in a way that acknowledged their voices and validated their knowledge, led to empowerment. Rather than feeling that acceptance is contingent on compliance, new teachers need to feel that their transformative values can be a part of the continual reshaping of the community of practice.

These findings highlight the ways teacher preparation programs intersect the boundaries of university and school contexts. This intersection is most recognizable through the physical connections constructed within clinical experiences; however, broader social and political forces also influence this shared space. As such, neoliberal policies guiding school practices have a significant impact on the practices within teacher education. Chloe and Julianna's experiences illustrate how powerful transformative learning can be diminished as emerging teachers' intensity of participation with neoliberal-dominated school contexts increases.

Teacher educators have started to challenge oppressive neoliberal assaults that directly impact their practices; many teacher preparation institutions, including entire systems (i.e., The California State University, The State University of New York, and University System of Maryland), refused to participate in the NCTQ teacher preparation program review. However, these findings imply that solely resisting neoliberal reforms focused on university contexts, or even transforming undergraduate education programs, are insufficient. Teacher educators also need to counter and transform the ways neoliberal policies impact broader educational contexts. Service-learning may provide a vehicle to facilitate the collective action required for such defense and reconstruction. Through critical service projects aimed at social transformation teacher educators can develop strategic networks of transformative educators and community leaders. Further, engaging emerging teachers in the collective action of these networks early in their career holds great potential to develop and sustain their commitment to resisting and reshaping neoliberal reforms.

## CONCLUSION

As novice teachers, Chloe and Julianna have assumed positions at the margins of the school community. Perhaps they have developed false perceptions that their voices

are not and will not be valued for their novice status, or the cultural norms may be too intimidating to challenge. In either case, neither feels the agency to shape the practices of the community to align with their transformative pedagogical beliefs. It is our hope that as we continue to follow Julianna and Chloe that their critical perspectives, coupled with their previous experiences in strategically navigating constraining contexts, may make it likely that they will enact their true pedagogical beliefs as they feel they have become more established members of their respective communities.

The Minor in Urban Civic Education is a new program and may serve as a model for other teacher educators to adopt and adapt in their own contexts. The potential of this program is the ways critical pedagogy coalesces with service-learning experiences to expose future teachers to the broader social and political forces that create inequities in a direct and deep manner. In the same manner that service-learning provides a concrete application for critical transformative education, UCE may serve as a concrete model for translating transformative teacher education into practice. Hopefully, our approach will assist other university faculty, and those who are responsible for teacher education in particular, in preparing future teachers to become stewards of transformation for their students, their profession, and the sustainability of a democratic society.

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STEPHANIE DAZA, SHARON SUBREENDUTH,  
JEONG-EUN RHEE AND MICHELLE PROCTOR

## 7. FUNDING RE/DE/FORM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### *Diverse Points of Engagement*

#### INTRODUCTION

In trying to navigate the politics and policy of difference and contemporary school reform, we have experienced how competition for funding has become a policy practice that is re/de/forming higher education. Competition for funding knowledge production is never simply a meritocratic or linear activity but a political process. Policy practice is the dynamic sociocultural and economic histories, experiences and investments of each person, institution, and funding agent in an on-going, interactive process of power re-negotiation, -appropriation, and -creation. This construct is what we label the “politics and policy of difference” in an effort to demonstrate how policy-based funding in higher education results in contradictions between rhetoric and goals of funding re/de/forms and actual policy practice re-negotiated, -appropriated, and -created through embodied lived experience. By using slashes in “re/de/form,” we question emerging formations and their meaning; and we call attention to funding shifts in higher education as reform and deform (Arnové, 2005; see also Huckaby, 2014) and also *forms* of what Daza (2012; 2013a; 2013b) calls “neoliberal scientism.” Further defined in the section below, scientism is an anthropocentric, dogmatic worldview that the physical world can be studied and harnessed by (hu) mans for (hu)man benefit and progress. The “hu” in parenthesis also indicates its androcentricism, which is well-captured by Lather’s (2004) provocative title, “This is your father’s paradigm” (for more on androcentricism, see also Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lipinacci, 2011).

Rather than approaching the physical planet and social world as relational and interconnected, scientism separates the physical, then conflates and reduces meta/physical and social phenomena to its value-laden version of rational, objective reason. Neoliberalism capitalizes on this skewed version of knowledge production as nonpolitical and non-ideological to support its ability to determine the rules of the academic research game according to a liberal business model in light of global capitalism. While our conceptual discussion of relational onto-epistemology is limited in this chapter, we point readers to Gregory Bateson (1971/2000), Chet Bowers (2011, 2014), Charlene Spretnak (2011), and Alfred Whitehead (1978/2010). As Bateson (1971/2000) writes, “[Onto-]epistemological error is all right, ... up to

the point at which you create ... a universe in which that error becomes immanent in monstrous changes of the universe that you have created and now try to live in (pp. 490–491).

In this chapter, we share distinct but interconnected “realist tales” (Van Maanen, 1988) about our complicity in the education re/de/form industry. To do this, we draw on our diverse points of engagement with funded projects as both tenured and untenured academics, proposal writers, program evaluators, principle investigators, collaborators, teacher-researchers, and colleagues across different higher education contexts, such as a community college, two teaching institutions, a research extensive university, an aspirational research university in a large university system, and a highly ranked research-driven institute located within a large university. Our analysis also reflects our research and experiences in higher education in multiple US states, as well as Belgium, China, Colombia, Korea, South Africa, and the UK. Although we agree with Erickson (1985), and our external reviewers, that more details about the roles and statuses of the characters and intuitions involved in a narrative might produce different levels of meaning (Erickson 1985), to different degrees we purposely obscure data in this article to deter to some extent connections among characters, roles, and institutions. This move is bifocal (Weis & Fine, 2012; 2013) in that it shifts the focus from our local/micro examples to the global/macro material and discursive conditions of educational re/de/forms. Likewise, although we do not utilize subjectivity as static and write away from such philosophy of consciousness, we do recognize that we actually take up subject-positions and are positioned as subjects in the tales we tell. Thus, we identify here as academic mothers, US citizens, and two of us as immigrant woman, in our 40s, who completed doctorates in education between 2002 and 2006 at The Ohio State University. Even in identifying these subject positions, we also note the fluidity of subjectivity and how we constantly re/negotiate who we are/can be and what we do from different birth, geographic, family, health, religion, political, class, race, ethno-linguistic, and other locations and affiliations. Therefore, taken together, our empirical analyses across diverse settings provide a provocative account of competitive funding re/de/form in contemporary higher education.

We use (post)critical methodologies, such as critical race theory (Rhee, 2013a), postcolonial/decolonizing and social justice frameworks (Subreenduth, 2013; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), and anthropology of policy practice (Shor & Wright, 1997; Levinson, Sutton & Winstead, 2007) to situate our analyses within broader dynamics of power. Knowledge production is as much an effect of historical-material conditions as an innovator of them (De Walt, 2009). As we have written about elsewhere, global capitalism, climate change, and an oligarchy of owning class rule over the global majority of peoples under the guise of democratic nation-states are contemporary effects of long-time oppressive, forced and coerced labor of peoples and enclosure of minds, lands and other resources and spaces under colonial/imperial conditions (Daza & Rhee, 2013; see also, Daza, 2013a, 2013d; Rhee, 2013a; Rhee & Subreenduth, 2006; Subreenduth, 2006, 2013).

Higher education, teacher education, curricula, and educational and social policies are always reproduced through (colonial) local/global power dynamics and often politically mobilized to promote, modify, or resist various agendas (e.g., Proctor & Demerath, 2008). These dynamics are multi-sided complexities that challenge binary views of national de/skilling for workforce development in the name of global competition; language un/training as citizen assimilation; and dis/investments in public education as re/de/forms, for examples. Recognizing the impossibility of a return to a “pure set of uncontaminated origins” that never existed anyway (Hall, 1996, p. 246-7), the authors of this chapter challenge the basic foundational argument of neoliberal scientism that the best educational reform can happen only through apolitical, meritocratic competition. Every step of the policy process is a social act that depends on how subjects play the politics of difference within an infrastructure that also limits or empowers certain subjects. Therefore, the very idea of neoliberal scientism that the best ideas will win attention and subsequent funding based on their own merit in an evidenced-based even playing field, and not on historical-material hubris and social capital is inaccurate, and a cultural illusion that often deludes research/ers, funders, and re/de/formers.

Relying on post/critical race theory (Rhee, 2013a), we argue that the deconstruction of such sacred myths, which we try to do herein by the pointing out of complicities, paradoxes, ambiguities, and mis/appropriations of race, gender, and other differences within policy practice, offer new possibilities for change that considers, rather than ignores these dilemmas (Subreenduth & Rhee, 2010). Thus is our aim in sharing our challenges of trying to make ethical-political change and choices in our practice as participants on grants, review committees, proposals, and funded projects.

The chapter is organized into the following sections: a brief introduction to the digital age of neoliberal scientism as the contemporary context of our work as academics in post-secondary institutions; three empirical tales from the field that connect our micro-level practices to macro-level policy-based funding as re/de/form; and a conclusion that draws connections among the tales and offers implications for policy-based funding re/de/form practices.

#### DIGITAL AGE OF NEOLIBERAL SCIENTISM

*Neoliberal scientism* is Daza’s term for the uneven, albeit worldwide, convergence of material and discursive worlds of business and pre-Kuhnian views of science (Daza, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Scientism<sup>1</sup> has deep roots. We begin the story in the early 17th century, when long-established intellectual foundations based on the analysis of ancient Judeo-Christian and Greek philosophical texts were challenged and replaced by the anthropocentric belief that (hu)mans could study, master and use the natural/physical world for (hu)mans’ benefit and progress. (Hu)mans (i.e., the Englishman Francis Bacon, the Frenchman Rene Descartes, and the Italian Galileo Galilei) created a version of science that they proposed was objective, but their ideas of natural, objective, material, and mechanical were value-laden

with their own (hu)man subjectivity and hubris. This version of reason and logic was promoted at the expense and of other ways of knowing, replacing religion in the enlightenment and bridling imaginations, and laying the groundwork for positivism and logical positivism in the 19th and 20th centuries respectfully. Sadly, the Western idea that humans could harness the physical world through science to save themselves from their own self-destructive tendencies has become a vicious circle, arguably contributing to the climate change crisis and planetary destruction instead (Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lipinacci, 2011). Although Bacon, Descartes, and Galilei intended to work against the dogmatic religious beliefs of their time, and some scientists rightly continue to work against religious dogma, Sheldrake (2012) shows how scientism itself is a dogmatic faith that closes minds, rather than a science that finds truths (Burnett, 2014) and “comes out” about its own uncertainties (Adams, 2012). Scientism is a worldview that hinders, and can be distinguished from, a more robust relational science that does not disconnect the mind, brain, and body or the meta/physical and social world (Daza & Gershon, in press; see also Bateson, 1972/2000; Daza & Huckaby, 2014; Whitehead, 1978/2010).

Despite the proliferation of science (Lather, 2006), neoliberalism capitalizes on scientism’s version of knowledge production as objective and thus, nondogmatic (e.g., “scientific” and/or “evidenced-based”) to shape the rules of the academic research game according to a liberal business model in light of global capitalism. It relies on, and is heavily invested in, white, patriarchal, heterosexual, North/West imperialist norms of global capitalism (Hill & Kumar, eds. 2009/2012; Fischman, 2009; Ong, 2006; Lipsitz, 2006; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005; 1999). Yet, neoliberalism builds silently on the structural conditions of historical inequities while disabling the very categories of their recognizability (Rhee, 2013a; Subreenduth 2013a; Subreenduth 2013b). So, the funding re/de/form rhetoric in higher education presents itself as a redeeming narrative that offers “simply rational-technical solutions” to complex societal, governmental, educational, and science/research activities and challenges (Fischman, 2009). However, decisions, choices, and opportunities are never neutral nor simply rational-technical. The reregulation and rationalization of private interests and neoliberal value hierarchy has produced a vicious circle of reinvestment in positivist research norms, even in the face of a postpositivist world and decades of critical research (Lather, 2010).

While schooling has always been part of a process of reproducing the contradictions of larger systems (Foley, 1990; Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996) neoliberal scientism “has been very influential ... in defining the educational common sense ... [that] any society that wants to remain competitive needs to implement educational reforms emphasizing the development of a flexible, entrepreneurial teaching workforce ... and a teacher-proof, standards-based and market-oriented curriculum” (Fischman, 2009, p. 4). In higher educational settings, the effects of neoliberal scientism, particularly on subject formations, are also evident in the current emphasis on and push for a flexible and entrepreneurial research/er. Spivak (1999)’s analytic move can be instructive here as she examined postcolonial reason

(e.g., “a critique of postcolonial reason”) in order to theorize the double-bind of postcolonial subjectivities (for more on the double-bind paradox, see Bateson, 1971/2000). Similarly, it is through STEM Culture<sup>2</sup> (Daza, 2013d) and digital reason (Daza, 2013c; see also Ruthrof, 2005) that neoliberal and digital subjectivities emerge. (See also Rhee, 2013a, for the neoliberal racial project; and Subreenduth, 2013, for a neoliberal social justice.)

Funding awards may have always been valued but until recently academics were not obligated to engage in fund raising. Now, in addition to often increasing teaching, research, and service responsibilities, many academics must fund their own research, salaries, professional travel, and student/service programming by competing for financial support. Despite the rhetoric of policy-based funding that often calls for collaboration (e.g., cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, public-private, institutional partnerships), competitions for funding are happening inside our institutions and beyond. It is worth noting that insidiously nepotistic relationships to external sector funders, such as private philanthropic foundations, industry, and (quasi) governmental organizations, are not new for higher education institutions. However, it is also worth asking and examining how higher education may now have succumbed to being largely an enterprise of politically laden competitions under a thinly veiled meritocratic guise? Many in this quagmire loath and resist it. Yet, no matter how minuscule the amount of money, students and academics often spend an enormous amount of time and labor preparing funding proposals, in addition to and sometimes in place of, studying, teaching, and researching. In their book on the politics of inquiry by the same name, Baez and Boyles (2009) begin exposing this grant culture. Daza (2013a) further elaborates it as grant-science (see Daza below, this chapter).

As researchers and teachers who find ourselves deeply within these contours, we provide three empirical tales of grant-science. Our diverse engagements with funding re/de/form provide a provocative understanding of the magnitude of change that grant-science is having on higher education. Significantly, it connects micro-level, local practices with macro-level policies and global politics. Together, we examine the agentic challenge for academics in a digital age of neoliberal scientism.

#### RESEARCH HAPPENS HERE TOO: FUNDING AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE: PROCTOR'S TALE

Like my colleagues at other institutions, higher education at a community college is a complex social and cultural process influenced by many actors and policies, including a powerful neoliberal scientism. In fact, President Obama (State of the Union Address, 2014; State of the Union Address, 2013) lauded community colleges as the vehicle to provide access to higher education for the poor and thus, a way to strengthen the American economy and address social inequity. There are many new neoliberal initiatives that have affected community colleges from the Obama administration such as the American Graduation Initiative of 2009

and the 2011 Round of Grants that demands matching the needs of business with curriculum production and redefining the faculty role in learning (Lewin, 2012; “Obama Reaffirms”, 2014; “Obama Awards Nearly”, 2011; “American graduation initiative”, n.d.). For example, since the economy is struggling, the administration sees community colleges as a tool for retraining students/workers with skills that employers need rather than preparing students for the traditional mission of either a career OR a transfer academic path. This demonstrates how the emphasis on capitalistic economic needs in neoliberal thinking has, as Lave, Mirowski and Randalls (2010) argue, commercialized knowledge production in higher education and narrowed the role of faculty and the scope of faculty research.

I add the community college perspective to this conversation. I along with an additional colleague consist of the entire elementary, middle and secondary education department. I am the only faculty member who has a doctorate and theoretical training in the foundations of schooling and teacher education. This will prove to be important later in the narrative when discussing responses to policy and neoliberal norms. Reality College is a large, community college that serves a total of 20,000 students just outside one of the largest cities in the Midwestern US and has not been immune to the complexity of neoliberal education reform and its funding norms.

In fact, the State of Illinois, for example, has added completion rates at community colleges as criteria for funding. As a result, RC has emphasized the importance of helping students traditionally graduate at each orientation meeting for the last three years. The institution has also implemented organizations like Men of Vision or First Generation programs to help improve retention rates of marginalized students through social programs and visits to four-year institutions. However, this is an example of how the policy objectives are unrealistic and invalid and do not take into account the social and cultural process of policy practice, in the community college contexts. Since community colleges are not typically places where students follow a linear academic or career goal, using graduation rates as criteria for institutional or faculty research is not accurate. Along with this narrowing of thinking and policy practices resulting from neoliberal scientism, competition has redefined the role and culture of community college faculty in the very act of teaching by creating more demands on faculty time that impede our ability to teach for social justice and concurrently, facilitate culturally aware/relevant teacher candidates in my case, as a teacher educator.

Although the mission of community college is to empower its students through open access to education, the ways that knowledge/curriculum is influenced by broader forces (e.g., administration, funding decisions, standardization), and finally implemented, makes the institution a contested space for both faculty and students (Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lipinacci, 2011). This consequently limits student agency as the curriculum is narrowed and molded by capitalistic economic agendas (internal and external from the state), thus, contradicting the very mission of the institution by enacting education as a sorting tool for society. In addition, just as my colleagues argue below that what constitutes academic labor for tenure and

promotion has shifted under the market forces of neoliberal thinking at their various institutions, the role of a community college faculty member has also evolved under the pressure of grant science. As state funding for higher education and public schools as well continues to be cut, there is more demand from administration to do more with less in the pretense that since faculty don't contractually work a 40-hour week, that increased labor is hardly an unfair demand. This coincides with the traditional view of teaching described by Sadker and Zittleman (2012) as a feminized/service-based profession and therefore, teachers will gladly accept the hegemonic norm that good teachers sacrifice both economically and personally for the sake of their students and school.

As this chapter as a whole shows, reform policy builds on this norm of sacrifice when it does not consider non-positivist work or “creative labor” as quantifiable service and thus, important to the act of teaching and learning. In this increasing global and inter-dependent world, helping “at-risk” and/or “marginalized/disadvantaged” students at a community college not only gain access to but also be successful in higher education is more important than ever in order to create global citizens and powerful teacher leaders. However, as part of the new competition for funding and student enrollment between divisions within the college, faculty are distracted from this mission and expected to give increasing service to the college through participation on committees, some in which decisions about what is research directly impacts faculty research agendas, knowledge production and consequently, student learning.

This narrative aims to enlighten how the review process of faculty grant research in an influential committee at one large, Midwestern community college impacted teaching, college/department/division culture and curriculum. As neoliberalism creates a competitive culture in higher education among faculty for funding, it also influences how faculty at my institution define “real research” and in turn, differently support scholarship that impacts college teaching and student knowledge.

I will argue that the decision-making process regarding funding at *Reality College (RC)*, troubled interpersonal and inter-department relationships and that the conflicting views of committee members about what constitutes “real research” shaped knowledge production for students. I also add that each person's educational training and cultural/social positions transmitted certain cultural norms both implicit and explicit in the research evaluation process. However before addressing how power dynamics and committee positionality framed funding, it is important for me to name my own personal and professional locations.

#### *Personal Experience and Policy as a Social Process in Public Schools*

I became a public school teacher as a member in the National Service Corps, Teach for America in the early 1990s. I started in public education as an elementary French teacher in a small, rural Cajun and Creole community in Southwest Louisiana where I learned firsthand the transformative power of education for students and community.

I worked with community members, school administrators, fellow teachers to create several programs that ranged from after-school peer tutoring to the first soccer league in town for elementary to high school age students. Each of these programs taught me how local politics and individual personal beliefs influenced change along each step of the policy process. I had never thought that schools and communities were such complicated and messy cultural places until I became an actual teacher.

From my experiences in Louisiana, I continued to teach in under-serviced public schools for twelve years. However, even as public school teacher, there was an unrealistic and unforgiving discourse on the role of the teacher in the classroom and beyond. At my school in Ohio, I spent 60 percent of my salary on supplies for my students and after-school programs since there was no official district support for supplies and other needs. This ended when several colleagues on the local district union board asked me to stop creating student programs for free since it under-mined their work to create more equitable work environments between administration and teachers. It was an experience in how the disconnect between district policy and public discourse of good teaching impacted real classroom learning. This pushed me to learn more and exercise my agency in a doctoral program from a large Research I institution in the Midwest.

As a white, middle-class woman, my dissertation research explored how teachers were pushed by the testing policy of No Child Left Behind, what dilemmas of enacting difference in the classroom emerged from such tensions and what ways teachers pushed back at the policy constraints. For me, it was a natural sequence as a teacher/researcher to continue scholarship regarding teacher leadership, policy as a social process and the cultural processes of schooling as a teacher educator at a community college. However, some of my own committee members did not support my job choice and told me that it was a waste of my training as a researcher since tenure at a community college was not based on research and publications. I had one mentor who took me aside privately though and said that she was jealous because I would be doing the “real work” of teaching diverse and challenged college students. But she was the minority and her viewpoint was never voiced to the rest of my tenured, full professor committee at this highly regarded Research I institution. This is how I started my career as a community college education professor.

*We Don't Do Research Here, but We Do: How Neoliberalism Hurts Social Justice from a CC Perspective*

What makes a professor valuable at a community college? What content should be focused on in the beginning of an education program and what theories should frame such teaching and learning for teacher candidates? What research should be supported by the institution? Much of this conversation I believe is impacted by the different ways that community college faculty are trained. What I mean by this is that the academic credentials of faculty at Reality College vary between a masters and a doctoral degree in a specific content area. At RC, of 220 full-time faculty, only



24 percent have earned doctorates in their fields. In other words, differing academic training impacts how faculty view research, curriculum design and how to measure quality teaching and learning.

Even though the criteria for tenure and promotion at RC does not officially include publications and presentations, it is unofficially implied that scholarship and professional development will be part of a faculty member's teaching process. But this goal is not easy since faculty teach 5 classes a semester, hold ten required office hours each week and give service to the college through committee work. For example, a RC vice-president commented in a meeting that if people wanted to conduct research or be scholars, they should have gone to teach at four-year institutions. However, at the same time, a department chair, who was a highly published psychologist with a doctorate, brought much positive attention to her/his college, division and department. As a result, a dean stated that although scholarship was not a requirement for tenure, it would "... be great if faculty would be another \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of department chair)". The official policy of RC promotes one agenda for tenure while the administration promotes a college culture that transmits competing and thus excessive expectations. It is through navigating such cultural conflict on a college-wide committee that supported faculty development that I experienced the direct impact of neoliberal thinking on funding decisions about faculty research.

The committee was a faculty advisory committee for the college professional development center and included 11 representatives from across the colleges representing the various divisions and career programs. Some members were faculty and some were administrators. Three had doctorates- two in the social sciences and one in law. One committee member was ABD in her doctoral program, also in social sciences. The goal of the monthly meetings was to explore how faculty from our differing content areas viewed professional development and how the center could better support teaching. Most of the support came through in-services offered on campus but did include awarding two faculty research grants once a year.

I served on this committee from various times at RC. It is the semester of Spring 2013 that frames this narrative in particular. The grants supported either individual or collaborative faculty research through the award of class release time. The total number of release hours that could be awarded was six, meaning that one faculty member could have a project that used all of the hours or it could be split between several projects if the committee could not decide on one specific project. The only written guidelines given to committee members was that the research needed to be generalizable, directly impact quality teaching and subsequently student learning and not be work that should be supported by individual deans. What should be supported by individual divisions under their budgets and what should be supported by the financial budget of this committee was not clear in writing and as such, was the topic of much debate every year during this review process. No one seemed to be able to clarify though what projects/research deans should support or what work should be a "normal" expectation of a good faculty member. This is another example

of the confusing role of a community college faculty member and how vague policy guidelines promoted competition, tension and discord in college culture.

While I do believe that my colleagues all wanted to improve teacher quality and student learning as evident in our discussions throughout the years around professional development, the idea of what actually constitutes valuable research was not a shared value and caused much debate each year in the research evaluation meetings. The lack of understanding of what was research was also evident in the low numbers of proposals reviewed each year. For example, there were no more than five proposals to evaluate for the award each year that I served on the committee.

When asked why the number was consistently low, the chair commented that the large number of classes faculty taught made the application process a soft priority and that what work could be labeled as research seemed vague and misunderstood across the college. She charged us to help her better define what was useful research for other faculty. My positionality as a teacher/teacher educator /educational researcher frames research in the context of qualitative over quantitative criteria. Other members argued though that quality research needed to be relevant to the entire faculty (but did not name this as generalizability) in order to be worthy of our support and considered “real research”. When I argued that a thick description that helped one faculty member see his or her pedagogy and classroom climate in a new light would be positive for many students and thus, a case study for all to learn from, I met with much opposition from the team. The positivist view of research was alive and strong at the community college. I was told that case studies and non-generalizable research were not scholarship. In fact, there was no debate about the contributions of case studies or collective case studies but only a discussion about surveys and hard numbers.

The administrators on the committee wanted the supported research to translate into future professional presentations and scalable features, while the Science representative wanted research to be sample-driven and replicable, and to support the “hard” sciences. For example, when the college made an organized policy push towards becoming more “eco-friendly” and sustainable, the grant was awarded to the project that studied local life-cycles of butterflies, created a butterfly garden on campus and taught an in-service about it. Another awarded project surveyed faculty teaching online classes in an attempt to create a standardized template for quality online teaching. I did not vote for that project.

In the Spring 2013 process, the competition of neoliberal thinking around research funding (and the projects under review) also impacted professional relationships in my own department and between others when my department chair applied for a grant. When I noted that there could be a question of ethical conflict since she was my department chair, I was told that my doctoral training in research was more valuable and that I was needed and could not leave. It is important to note that my philosophies of good teaching and learning have also been the source of much tension between myself and the department chair so I personally was hoping that she would get the funding so I could avoid another work conflict. As I geared up for

another debate on what is real research and how that relates to good teaching for our students, the committee chair decided that since this project had not used the correct application, it would not even be discussed. We voted on three others and I breathed a premature sigh of relief.

Shortly afterward, my dean shared his anger on the rejection of the project by the committee and how it was an example of inefficient bureaucracy. I interjected that I thought it was more of an issue of different academic training and competing views on scholarship rather than a power play against our division. He did not know until that point that I served on the evaluation committee and I left the meeting reminding myself that I never wanted to be in administration and deal with politics in academia at that level. I was also unsure of how my committee membership would impact my professional relationship with my leadership since from that perspective, it seems I had not been loyal to my division. This raises broader questions about how proposals become projects: who votes for whom and why?

Two days later and a week past the committee decision, I sat in my first department meeting with the chair whose project was rejected, which she mentioned. I quickly realized that like my dean, she was not aware of my role in the committee. I commented that I wanted to be upfront and honest with the goal that it would not affect our working relationship. I said that serving on the committee was interesting because we all came from different divisions across the college and had varying views of research and policy. She moved on to other issues and I thought the tension was concluded. I was wrong.

Instead, she wrote an email to the committee chair stating that she did not want me to know of the email but that I had told her that her project was rejected due to a misunderstanding on what constituted “real research”. She continued to argue for an appeal citing that our “Yale trained doctorate holding dean” had signed off on her project's merits along with a scientist from a nearby medical company (her husband) and thus, her project was deserving of funding. I was confronted by this email minutes before the next committee meeting by the committee chair in order for her to have a context for her response to my department chair, whose project was still denied funding. As a result, I confronted my department chair about the ethics of her email and manipulation of our conversation to advance her own work. She later apologized but as a result, any trust I had in our relationship was lost. I learned I could not have an honest and forthcoming conversation with her about the politics of funded research. The policy process of funding grants was a political mess that re-framed inter-department relationship and interpersonal relationship between myself and others in the college. I realized that I had little agency on this committee and within my own small department and that neoliberal scientism was well entrenched in my college culture. I withdrew from the committee partially due to this tension but went on to experience similar tensions when another opportunity presented itself to help create policy on professional development around issues of diversity for faculty.

As noted in this narrative, funding policies and practices at RC demonstrate how policy is a social and cultural process but how neoliberal scientism does not even

recognize this relationship at all in the context of what is “real” research. In the latter framework, all learning, teaching, research is apolitical and never personal. It is, as argued by Giroux (2012), a reform/policy discourse driven by market forces and threatening the basic democratic nature of schooling. Like other institutions of higher education explored in this chapter, the educational policies of funding at a community college are just the beginning of a much deeper conflict over the purpose of education for all and not just the privileged few.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FUNDING FOR/AS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION:  
A CASE ON UNFUNDED PROJECTS: SUBREENDUTH & RHEE’S TALE

Kevin K. Kumashiro (2012), in *Bad Teacher! How Blaming Teachers Distorts the Bigger Picture*, illuminates how the logics of United States (US) neoliberal education reform have generated a conceptual shift that frames education as competition. In order to reveal issues of unequal power relations in this shift, he engages with three analytic questions: (1) who is winning and who is losing in this competition?; (2) who made the rules?; and (3) what is the story that we tell the losers to get them to want to continue playing? (pp. 3–5). We find his approach instructive for our own analysis on grant science, which is unavoidably structured as competition. We thus present the questions as a backdrop to our narrative of collaboratively working on (unfunded) grant projects. While we may not directly utilize the questions to tease out every element of our experience, we want readers to engage with our narrative along with them.

We set the primal scene of our narrative as the first time our grant proposal was recommended for, but subsequently denied, funding:

On our phone feedback session with the funding branch officer, we were strongly encouraged to re-apply for the women’s leadership institute grant project. We had proposed a program, entitled “Empowering women’s leadership: working toward global solutions by bridging time and diverse worlds,” that would take place in two different universities across two different regions. This was possible because of our unique long-term partnership with each other and we anticipated that this would be received as an innovative approach by the grant funding agency. While we did not receive funding for this project, we were informed that reviewers evaluated our proposal as “very competitive and outstanding” and unanimously approved our proposal for funding.

After this conversation, and having been encouraged to re-apply for the next funding cycle, we were optimistic about our competitiveness in the next round. For us, the unanimous reviewer recommendation of our proposal signaled their recognition on the integrity of our proposal and the labor and knowledge construction invested in the project. With such complimentary feedback we bought into the mentality that losing the competition now seemed to be the stepping stone to winning later. We were so motivated by this feedback that we were emboldened to plan as if we would

be funded the following year. So we enthusiastically sent out this e-mail (excerpted) to our collaborators in each of our universities:

Dear Women's Leadership Grant Proposal Collaborators

I have several updates on our grant proposal. Finally we received a formal letter on May 7 (see the attached). I still have no idea of why/how a letter stamped on March 13 was delivered to us on May 7 ...

On Tuesday (May 15), we were able to get in touch with the Branch Officer to receive reviewers' feedback on our proposal. An ironically wonderful news is that our proposal was one of the finalists!!

Reviewers evaluated our proposal as "very competitive and outstanding" and approved it for funding. Yes, they unanimously approved our proposal for funding!! However, since only one project in each region can be funded, the agency had to rank the finalists and we did not get the funding. S College and another university (which cannot be revealed at this point as they are still in the process of contract) are awarded the funding. Both of them are women's colleges ... Exciting news is that there will be another similar call for proposals this fall. We were strongly encouraged to reapply. Since it was recommended not to change anything in our proposal but to highlight the strengths of our approaches (e.g., having two institutions as host campuses etc.), our second attempt should be a little easier ...

So please expect to hear from me sometime early this fall again!! We'll pursue this project together. This could not have been possible without all of your contributions and commitments to this project. So Thank you, everyone.

At the outset we knew that our organizational, logistics and theoretical approach for the project was very different from traditional grant applications. We developed the proposal to take place physically and virtually in both of our higher education institutions (Midwest and a suburb area of New York City) and conceptualized women's leadership beyond Eurocentric and neoliberal models, diversified US women history, and emphasized embodied leadership development. Therefore, the positive feedback we received was both encouraging and legitimating of our different and critical approach. However when we applied the following year, our project was again recognized as "very competitive and outstanding" and not selected for funding.

The above context frames our discussion on neoliberal logics of competition and ranking for educational and academic work and the political economy of dominant and critical knowledge production and (dis)circulation. Additionally, we examine the implications of the nature and value of grant work/labor when proposals are not selected for funding and thus marked as unsuccessful (losers). More specifically, our collaborative work on two unfunded projects on women leadership serves as the nexus to interrogate the unspoken and invisible process of grant funding structure and culture with regards to program requests for integrating diversity, women leadership and US history focus for international participants from developing countries.

When the original call for proposals (CFP) for developing an academic and cultural institute on women's leadership for international undergraduate students from Africa and Middle East was posted, we saw this CFP as an opportunity for us to work with women of color from marginalized, developing and post-colonial geographies. Additionally, our current positions and workloads in our institutions does not allow for us to develop and teach such academic sessions as this project required, so it was a way to nourish our own post-colonial biographies. Working collaboratively to develop a proposal for this grant was also based on our desire to share what we built together for our own leadership as transnational women of color in US academia (Subreenduth & Rhee, 2010). Drawing from our long term partnerships that nurtured our personal and professional growth, connections, and leadership, we wanted to develop an academic, cultural, community-based mentoring program that would support and inspire both personal and professional growth of these post-colonial generation women from Africa and the Middle East.

The CFP required the following element:

The institution should aim to provide undergraduate women leaders an *introduction to women's leadership in the United States*, while strengthening their leadership skills and heightening *their awareness of US and global women's issues*. The Institutes should examine *the history and evolution of US society, culture, values, and institutions*, with particular emphasis on *women's roles* throughout US history. The Institutes should also incorporate a focus on contemporary American life and *contemporary women*, including the role of women in political, social, and economic issues and debates. The Institutes should address the *influence of principles and values such as democracy, the rule of law, individual rights, freedom of expression, equality, diversity, and tolerance on the empowerment of women* in the United States. (emphasis added)

We were enthused by the direct request for addressing the principles of “equality, diversity, and tolerance on the empowerment of women in the United States” and sought to integrate into our programming the representative and complex diversity of US women, women leadership models and conceptualizations of women and leadership in the United States. As transnational woman educators of color who ground our work in a decolonizing theoretical and political framework (Daza, 2013e; “Decolonizing Local/Global Formations,” 2013; Subreenduth, 2008; Rhee & Subreenduth, 2006), our approach for this project was to critically examine dominant (Eurocentric) leadership models and offer diasporic, transnational, and racial/cultural feminist perspectives in the US. We believed that this critical approach that integrated the complex diversity of women leadership in the US would provide an opportunity for these non-western international women to identify leadership models embedded in their own embodied relationships within their contexts and utilize them to transform the actual conditions of their and others' lives. Invoking Aida Hurtado (2003)'s “Theory in the Flesh: Toward an Endarkened Epistemology,” we

were working from interconnected scholarships of women of color, Third World feminists, and decolonizing projects (Anzaldúa, 1987; Erevelles, 2011; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Mutua & Swadener, 2004). We wanted to offer these women an opportunity to reflect on and recognize the validity of their own epistemology in creating and sustaining leadership models and initiatives grounded in their embodied relationships. This was the political knowledge economy that we were working from while still remaining within the requirements and criteria of the project.

Putting the framework to practice, we examined the strengths and weaknesses of developing an educational program for international audience across two different universities and came to the conclusion that this model could provide unique benefits for all our participants—not only target international women students but also other faculty, staff, students, and community organizers within and outside our universities who would participate in this project. However, the CFP expected one institution, one project, one project director, one budget, one syllabus, etc. A two-institution collaboration was not the mainstream expectation for this kind of grant; so, we checked with the grant agency if collaboration across two institutions might be a mark against our proposal. We explained our plan for integrating the virtual and physical components of our programming, as well as how we saw Midwestern and New York geographies as expanding the international women's understanding of diversity and that it allow us to offer access to diverse entities in both locations. We were informed that while they had not seen or funded such an approach in the past, and while they cannot as “part of the Q&A with prospective applicants,” sanction any such organizational/programming per se (as all proposals are sent to reviewers and decisions (apparently) are not determined by the funding agency) they would encourage us to develop this new approach. This openness and flexibility of the programming officer led us to believe that the game was fair, that we could still win, and therefore working for this grant competition was something that we wanted to do (Kumashiro, 2012, p. 4).

The encouragement was sufficient for us to move forward. The fact that they did not discourage us from pursuing this grant utilizing two hosting universities and a non-traditional framework was an initial indication to us that the agency was open to alternative models of collaboration and programming. What we now recognize in hindsight is how neoliberal guises of openness and flexibility (like the phone conversation and the CFP focus described above) successfully seduced us to be willing to be a part of game/competition in contrast to explicit discriminatory differentiations through colonial value hierarchy (Daza, 2013b; Rhee 2009, 2013). Once this was cleared up, we had worked to reach out to various faculty members within our institutions and across the country as speakers or instructors as well as local community organizers and activists whose work focused on women leadership. We were deliberate in our outreach—we wanted to capture the diversity of women leadership within the US and so tapped into individuals and organizations who could offer this. We made sure that our project instructors and staff (including students) represented as much diversity not only in their embodied identities and affiliations

but also in their epistemological and theoretical approaches. Simultaneously, we kept in mind the young women who would be participating in the project and how these sessions needed to offer opportunities for reflection and examination of their own leadership potential and development.

Our careful attention was put on how to challenge an already westernized and colonized discursive category of women as a monolithic, essentialized homogenous group both within the US and within the home countries of the participants (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Mohanty, 2004). We wanted to convey how immensely, conflictual and diverse the material and historical conditions of life have constituted women so differently (even within the US) that any universal approach to women leadership can un/intentionally perpetuate western/US imperialistic epistemologies (Rhee, 2006). For example, in discussing evolutions of women's roles in US society, in addition to second wave feminism, we included women of color feminism, Native American and First Nation and indigenous women. This introduced intersectional analysis that does not exclude other social differences such as race, class, sexuality, religion and borderland analysis that considers the geopolitical material power and capitalistic globalization (Anzaldúa, 1987). The same critical approaches were applied to every required element such as history, progress, democracy, contemporary life, and even diversity and embedded throughout the academic sessions so that attention to diversity in leadership meant paradigm shifts in theories of leadership that will explore how dimensions of diversity shape our understanding of leadership. By paying attention to the perceptions and expectations of diverse leaders by diverse followers, our program also included examinations on how the exercise of leadership is very contextual. For leaders to be relevant for the 21st century amidst new social contexts, emerging global concerns, and changing population demographics, we envisioned that they must attend to these complexities (Chin, 2007).

Not totally naïve to the politics of funding and knowledge production status quo, we discussed that our approach of programming could be read as too radical or too critical for the grant agency. Strategizing our move through Daza's (2012) complicity as infiltration for doing grant work in the age of neoliberal scientism, we decided to use a mainstream textbook, Kellerman and Rhode (2007)'s *Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change* as a way to align our project with the language of the call for program requests but offer workshops that focused on alternative models of women leadership. This was our transgressive political move and complicity with the status quo or necessary abiding by the rule of competitions—but as part of programming, this also would offer our participants an opportunity to engage with mainstream women leadership models.

In sharing parts of our institute focus here we are presenting our own academic and political investments in women leadership and (grant funded) knowledge generation. We utilized what we still believe on part of the funding agency to be flexible and fair language in CFP as it allowed us to interpret the expectations for our institute through an alternative programming and women leadership framework. Consequently, we interpreted the aforementioned feedback from the grant agency



after our first submission as an approval on the merits of our work and tried to use it as a way to improve any weakness. When the CFP was released the following year, we “chose” to pursue it again. While we had a blueprint for writing our application, it took another round of intense preparations, discussion, networking, budgeting, and writing as anyone who have done “re-applying” would know. Working on the second call for funding was way more time consuming than we anticipated. For example, the simple logistics of re-gathering support letters and updating participants as instructors and speakers required a lot of back and forth communications as some were no longer available, and revising the narrative including the budget elements was tedious. So our original note to our collaborators that the next round would be easier proved to be naïve.

Despite this intensive labor and time spent, we were still motivated by the possibility of enacting this diverse grant model of women leadership as a way to intervene in the homogenous renderings of women leadership within the US and abroad. It was also our own epistemic/political desire to interact with these women from marginalized regions and allow us to develop deeper understanding of women leadership with them as individuals within specific locales, geographies and politics. Our own universities are unable to offer such engagement so we sought such grant funding as a way to address our own personal and scholarship investment in women leadership.

After the intense several weeks of putting the second proposal together, we submitted our application and almost five months later with several inquiries on a decision, we were informed that we were not selected for funding but was highly competitive again. At that point, both of us felt completely drained emotionally and intellectually, disappointed, and burnt out. This time, we did not follow up although we now think we should have. The letter we received was very basic and non-committal with no details or suggestions. However it did encourage us to call and set up a phone conversation (as we had done for our first application). Maybe we were too tired as the letter came towards the end of the semester, maybe it was another lynchpin of neoliberal higher education competitions that we knew too well—which always have to have a winner and losers. Maybe it was too frustrating to re-hear how well our grant was articulated but no one is ready to bet on its success at this time because it has not being tried before (need for scientific proof!), maybe we simply recognized the futility of our labor to follow up and be encouraged. Whatever the maybe could have been, we did not follow-up. We gave up on wanting to hear the non-committal feedback, the encouragement, the try again for the next round of funding. Perhaps this was another reminiscent moment of how we have been often told that diversity, creative approaches, interdisciplinary frameworks, and collaborative efforts matter while they were rarely legitimized and validated by institutional recognitions in our academic careers (Brayboy, 2003).

As part of the writing of this chapter, we started to re-discuss our collaboration and experiences. Discussion became analysis as we started to piece together our conversations with our collaborators and the funding agency. Even after the two

year process of developing the women's leadership, we are still not sure how we can improve our proposal for funding. Could a critical and decolonizing lens to programming around these issues lead to unfunded projects? Did collaboration across two institutions for a project like this was too out of the box approach? How did the funding agency rank finalists? What are the assumptions and policing of required elements such as integrating diversity, women leadership and US history focus within US grant opportunities? We cannot tell as we do not know. Perhaps, Toni Morrison's "playing in the dark (1992)" at least metaphorically is how we can re-think about our relationship with free-market economics of grant operations and culture. Is a free-market open competition really free and open to all? While the CFP may be presented as if it is open to all and every decision would be made based on measurable merits and quality, our experiences tell otherwise.

If neoliberal education reform is about measurable accountability, high standards, and measured effectiveness, how is it possible that the rules, criteria, and decision-making process of the grant competition are so ambiguous, unclear, and even secretive? How can we navigate this unseen world of implicit rules, regulations and value hierarchy in order to become winners? What makes more problematic the increasing pressure on grant projects for US higher education faculty is that the logic of grant competition depends on (free-market ideology that requires) the surplus of disposable labour/ers like us who would be willing to put our time and efforts for no use. Despite raving feedback we received we remain losers and our proposed program is safely stored in our computers perhaps waiting for the next opportunity. Can there be other ways of selecting programs for funding if the purpose of grant competition is to develop and execute good programs?

What roles did the feedback session play? While we are aware of the politics embedded in this competitive process, we wonder if we were allured into staying in the game through the encouragement from the agency. Because of more than excellent feedback we received on our first proposal submission, we were baffled by the non-committal decision for the second round application. The branch officer had commended us on the integrity of the academic program we put together and noted that it demonstrated our long-term commitment to women's transformative leadership—a recognition we valued. Yet, what did this recognition really mean? When we asked what our project lacked compared to the funded projects, the officer was not able to pinpoint any particular element. After all, reviewers recommended funding for our project.

What became more instrumental in our understanding of the politics or rules of grant funding—who (re)makes the rule?—was the officers sharing of who actually received funding. This was not an open sharing on the part of the officer (again we understand the complex nature of this work with multiple applicants) but after many proddings from us about who was funded and if we could get access to the programming so that we could understand what we could do to make ours more competitive, the officer shared that since only one project in each region could be funded, the agency had to rank the finalists and we did not get the funding. No doubt

this is common practice but why is it not explained in the CFP? We also learned that funding went to two small liberal arts women's colleges. Where in the CFP did it state that women only colleges would get preference? Is it the coincidence that the two women leadership projects to get funded are women's colleges? Irrespective of the merit of their and our proposals, what assumptions and implications for such funding for those of us not in women only colleges yet committed to women's issues? Harkening to Kumashiro's question of who made the rules, we extend by asking how did the rules get re-made in the process of review, evaluation, ranking and funding?

During this first follow-up session, we were informed that the first round of application was more of a pilot and a continuation of previous grant initiatives with older women leadership. The second application process would be more open to various institutions and would also offer more funded projects. Our conversation ended with the officer adding that the only "minor" addition we probably need to make is to articulate further how using two institutional settings can be effectively managed. That we knew we could further clarify for the next application. While we cannot corroborate who was funded for the second round we did find at least two (out of the four projects to be funded) community colleges who seem to advertise that they are recipients of the women leadership grant. We think that this is a positive direction in grant funding as community colleges have been marginalized as potential sites of scholarship and faculty grant funding. We commend this as a political move on part of the funding agency to assert the value of community colleges and for us personally and professionally an intervention in the higher education monopoly on grant funding.

However, the invisibility of these criteria or expectations in CFP alludes to the omnipresent political agenda that irrespective of merit and innovation certain grant proposals will remain unfunded and will become the reason for funded grants—the winners. Had we known that each round of application has a preference for a specific type of higher education institution such as women's college or community college, we are pretty sure we would not have worked to stay in the competition. As much as free market based neoliberalism is always political and involves the state governing selectively to benefit certain segments of society (Olssen & Peters, 2005), we argue that there are always such hidden political components in grant competition as well.

So, how will our story be marked in political economy of grant work? Will it be the whining and complaining of losers? As much as that banal designation of "an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer" in US higher education institutions does not mean much in actually bringing equality and equity to hiring, retaining and promoting practices, universal calls, raving reviews, and encouragements to reapply may not mean much in grant competitions. They may simply be the story to be told for losers to continue the neoliberal path to become a winner or to legitimize the value of competition. When all these proposals do not get funded, do we need to see ourselves as losers? What outlets become accessible for this kind of unfunded grant work that are marked as outstanding but unfundable? With the significant change in culture of higher education and grant writing where universities emphasize

performativity, measurable outcomes, and academic audits, how would our labor exerted for unfunded projects be recognized—scholarship, service, or something else? What contributions can this type of labor make to the production and circulation of knowledge?

Another debilitating consideration for us is our inability to carry forward our collaborative plans because of lack of funding. The collaborations with scholars and community activists remain passively typed onto our proposal pages through the language that evokes passion and commitment. Lost potential for powerful collaborations between higher education and community entities remain. While such grant collaborations opened up conversational possibilities for shared commitments, the labor and trust that our collaborators invested in the project remain invisible and disposable to the funding agencies and our universities but weigh heavily on us. Particularly under the current economic conditions, most higher education institutions are not able to provide seed money to enact such unfunded projects. The grant agency is not interested in following up with unfunded proposals even with excellent reviews. What does it mean to labor in this way in higher education, for grant writing, for knowledge production and circulation? What does it mean for academics like us who want to do the grant work for the political desire?

Despite the lack of clarity, our ambiguous stance to grant writing/funding, we circle back to whether there is any value in continued work on and submitting proposals that challenge Eurocentric modes of epistemology, models of leadership and diversity knowing that we stand a great chance of not being funded. Despite our questions and narrative that allude to the futility of certain types of grant work, we frame our unfunded projects as a step toward transformational resistance (Rhee, 2013b; Shahjahan, 2012) to grant work as competition. We also invite readers to use our narrative on unfunded projects as a way to generate questions and discussions about what alternative frames may be possible in engaging with grant work. Rather than pursuing a story that may “fix” us/losers to be successful winners of the funding race, we now labor to explore how we can do continuous expansion of decolonizing work against, through, and within the aspects of funding for knowledge production, however messy, complicit, and laborious it is (Daza, 2012; Rhee, 2013b).

#### AMBIGUITY OF GRANT-SCIENCE LABOR: DAZA’S TALE

Beginning my doctoral studies in 2000, I have almost 15 years of post-graduate experience in four types of institutions. The institutions are in different geographical and higher education contexts, including a flagship Research I land-grant university; an aspiring research institution in a large state university system; a prestigious, highly-ranked research institution in the UK; and a public university known for teaching that prepares more educational professionals than any other US institution. Regardless of the context or my academic position, I have spent a significant portion of my time preparing proposals for internal and external funding, and this seems ever increasing. Under the guidance of Patti Lather, Peter Demerath, and Abril

Trigo, my doctoral program in Cultural Studies and Social and Cultural Foundations of Education in the School of Policy and Leadership at Ohio State University trained me well to conduct research, teach face-to-face, and provide public and professional service. Through my dissertation that studied globalizing trends in higher education (Daza, 2006a; 2006b), I also developed a global-local understanding of academic work. However, the higher education context I was prepared for practically no longer exists. Currently, academic labor in higher education is interpolated through this “history of the vanishing present” (Spivak, 1999a) and into a new regime of grant-science.

Much of what I have learned and utilized in my academic work, including an aesthetically trained imaginary for onto- epistemological performance, and especially grant-writing skills, however, has not come from academic study, theory, philosophers, or textbooks alone. Prior to entering graduate school, I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Bolivia, where I also spent a significant amount of time preparing funding proposals and working across various boundaries with governmental and non-governmental agencies, the Bolivian military, and teams of people on projects. While I had already learned how power dynamics and local/global politics come out to play as a subject of difference (Daza, 2008, 2009) and a public school teacher in California during proposition 187 (see Daza, 2006a), my experiences in Bolivia made the politics of policy-based funded work clearer. Thinking with/through these experiences has shaped my take on policy-based funded research in the digital age of neoliberal scientism as grant-science.

Grant-science is changing the nature of research and academic labor, as I have written about elsewhere (Daza, 2012, 2013). For US readers, by “academic labor,” I mean academic faculty labor; for UK and other readers, I am referring to academic staff labor. According to Fitzgerald, Gunter, White, & Tight (2012), some 800 years of university history has dramatically changed since the late 1970s and 1980s:

... in a relatively short period of time, academic work and academic identity has shifted from being largely autonomous, self-governing with particular privileges and public duties, to a profession that has been modernized, rationalized, reorganized and intensely criticised.... academics have been repositioned as managed professionals within a managed university.... the managerial environment and subsequent managerial demands are seductive as ‘they lay ground for new kinds of success and recognition’. (p. 2)

US-centric readers also may be surprised to learn that other higher education systems already do not have tenure. The UK abolished tenure in 1988. Grant-science challenges the tenability of tenure. In higher education systems without tenure, academics still have pathways to promotion and long-term, continuous contracts, which separate semi-permanent staff from flexible workers on short-term contracts, but which do not offer the same kind of preservation of autonomy or long-term job security as tenure. At the same time, other countries provide a basic safety net to the entire population (e.g., the UK National Health Service), whereas the

lack of similar rights to social services like healthcare in the US makes flexible, temporary academic labor more arduous and egregious. In Germany, for a different case, academics may acquire civil servant status, and consequently attending rights and benefits, but the process is different from tenure-track (in US) and tenure-stream (in Canada) processes (<http://www.eui.eu/ProgrammesAndFellowships/AcademicCareersObservatory/AcademicCareersbyCountry/Index.aspx>).

While the professional aspirations of individuals for both career advancement and sheer survival in a cut-throat competitive, global environment, certainly have contributed to the hegemony of an era of neoliberal scientism in higher education, this chapter shows that it is not always clear what counts as success, failure, or resistance. While higher education may have been (or may have appeared) relatively stable, compared to K-12 education, uncertainty of never static regimes means rules are continuously in flux. While such ambiguity is not necessarily fair, equitable, or predictable, it does open the possibility that something different could happen, and indeed is always already happening.

Beyond surviving, the challenge for academic labor is reimagining agency in grant-science and playing a role in shaping futures—new knowledges, knowledge producers, and a new kind of higher education for an un/imaginable future. As I have written about elsewhere (Daza, 2006, 2012), there is no noncomplicitous academic position; the power of the center to regulate the margins complicates resistance formations. Value neutral education is a myth (Kumashiro, 2008). Neither higher education nor academics have ever been apolitical. At its worst, higher education is a training ground for oppression under the guise of middle-class sensibilities that depends on maintaining discursive and material inequities of class, whiteness, heterosexuality, androcentrism, anthropocentrism, and so on, where resistance often results in ineffective identitarian politics (See de Oliveira Andreotti, 2014). As Shahjahan (2012) also argues, neoliberal logics colonized higher education.

I wonder whether or not (and how) higher education might exist in the future and how to shape the complicity of academic labor, including my own, as infiltration (Daza, 2012). But how do we re/de/un/train the imagination for epistemological performance? What might training for an unfixed mind be? Although she is not optimistic, Spivak (2012) offers aesthetic education as an approach. Despite higher education's faults, prejudices, and limitations, I publically wonder if ambiguities in higher education still offer some space and time for such aesthetic forms of knowledge production, for a more socially and ecologically just world, for research methodology and theories as practices of abstraction to help translate, synthesize and analyze local, personal, and physical world phenomena within broader power dynamics and macro-level policies and politics towards new forms of being, knowing, doing, and living.

As a neoliberal, digital subject-agent, a product of STEM Culture, and knowledge worker complicit in neoliberal scientism, I have moved my own work from investigation, resistance, and critique to trying to make and do new/different aesthetic approaches to knowledge production. For example, I am

trying to create digital-acoustic data analysis where data might be experienced both digitally and as a live performance installation, rather than summarized in a policy brief. Because this mode of knowledge production shares complicity with STEM Culture and digital reason, I am hopeful about funding it, but also see its aesthetic sense-embodiments as infiltration into STEM Culture and digital reason. Space prevents a more expansive discussion of aesthetic interventions into (digital) enclosures (Bateson, 1972/2000), but suffice it to say that these approaches worry less about standardization, understanding, repetition, certainty, interpretation, and comprehensibility; they might be more art than science or considered more science fiction than social science, although such divisions break down in ambiguities.

My contribution to this chapter looks particularly at the ambiguity of academic labor in grant-science. First, I provide a conceptual backdrop to academic labor in the digital age of neoliberal scientism. Then, I describe and analyze multiple examples of grant-science practice. Finally, I discuss the implications of ambiguity in grant-science labor.

#### *Conceptualizing Academic Labor*

Arguably, academic labor has always been ambiguous and stratified across and within institutions, such as by gender, rank, discipline, salary, type of institution, location, etc. Perceptions, policies, and actual practices of academic labor often fail to capture the hidden intellectual and emotional labor involved in knowledge production, especially for female scholars of color (Brayboy, 2003; Rhee, 2013b). Although teaching and service labor are also knowledge production, how academic labor is conflated and divided, as scholarship, service and teaching, may offer insight into how academic labor is being re/de/formed in the digital age of neoliberal scientism as grant-science.

A myopic focus on teaching as content delivery and/or a display of knowledge content (in policy and often in practice) re/de/forms knowledge production. Although contested, this logic of replicability and generalizability is reflected in the proliferation of standardization and online content delivery systems to mass audiences (Daza, 2013a). Moreover, academic labor today includes email, blogging, various forms of social media (twitter, facebook, etc.), heightened image management, and increased participation in digital surveillance of labor through online research information management systems (e.g., <http://www.symplectic.co.uk/>, Google scholar, etc.) designed to track academic labor. Monitoring systems are not innocent or objective. Designed to audit academic labor, they re/de/form labor to what can be counted (e.g., courses taught, citations, funding amounts), and ignore aesthetics, bodies, affect, minds, and nuance. The turn-and-burn, fast food method of the re/de/form industry reproduces certain knowledges, and it also re/de/forms academic labor for its purpose.

From early childhood to graduate school, educators have always spent enormous amounts of time and energy doing hidden labor: collecting data (whether formally

or informally, educators are always collecting information, analyzing it, and making decisions.); reading; thinking; analyzing; synthesizing; preparing courses and materials; monitoring, mentoring and caring for students; marking/grading work; attending activities; writing reports; and providing service to facilitate institutions. Academics of color have an additional burden to diversify institutions (Brayboy, 2003; Subreenduth, 2008). As Proctor's narrative in this chapter shows, all scholars who advocate beyond institutional norms may also experience additional, often emotionally stressful, labor.

Creative labor may also be overlooked as activities unrecognized as intellectual work (e.g., Labor is perceived as toil not joy.). For example, daydreaming, yoga, traveling, listening/playing music, and other such activities produce, and may creatively enhance, knowledge production, but might be dismissed as play, instead of intellectual labor (see Daza & Huckaby, 2014). Also, even when some activities, such as reading email or journal articles, and even writing funding proposals, are recognized as intellectual labor, the amount of time needed to do these activities may be grossly under-estimated.

A digital efficiency model of neoliberal scientism holds academics, and all institutions, workers, and students, accountable to do more of certain kinds of labor (often with fewer resources). The model is seductive in its ability to map on to middle-class sensibilities (e.g., meritocracy) of higher education research/ers. It offers rewards to some but also blames the victims of deficient conditions and inefficient structures when they do not succeed. Or their labor cannot be digitally tracked. So, what about all the labor academics do that is not digitally captured? What about all the new hegemonic accounting labor academics already do in (self) monitoring and reporting? (i.e., How can we track the labor we spend reporting our labor?) What about the labor of social justice and diversifying institutions, or the labor of thinking? Arguably, academic labor has never been a free-for-all (or fair and meritorious) but until recently academics had more say in determining what counts. Although not completely unambiguous, new and early career faculty could usually count on the academic capital of peer-reviewed publications, teaching face-to-face courses, and being a "good" citizen via service to department, university, community and the profession.

In contrast, grant-science demands that labor be measurable. Labor is often recorded in percentages of time or salary as "work effort." A researcher might include one day per week for a year at their current salary rate to reflect their effort on a grant project. Of course, there is little provision for the amount of time it takes to write a successful funding proposal or the real costs of grant-science. Funding re/de/form of academic work also fails to understand that for many academics being an academic is a life not a job. AAUPs 1994 report states that academics work on average 45-52 hours per week. Just twenty years later, academics may be working closer to 61 hours per week (Ziker et al., 2014).

It is important to note that this kind of calculating of "work effort," as hours per week, reflects how the "complicity of Eurocentric and linear notions of time in the



colonial project finds its corollary in contemporary neoliberal logics in HE [higher education]” (Shahjahan, 2014). Indeed, being an academic is not a 9-5-Monday-Friday-gig; academics work nights, weekends, and holidays. For those of us who have finished PhDs in the 21st century, Shahjahan prompts us to examine this aspect of our own neoliberal subjectivity. Alas, being unproductive, or lazy (Shahjahan, 2014) may be an intervention, despite various consequences.

Albeit exceptions, senior colleagues, who might be in a position to mitigate grant-science, often seem shocked at the new labor expected of emerging scholars, but powerless or paralyzed to do anything about it. Was there really a time when academics had ample time to read books, discuss ideas, and meet with students or is this a romantic academic fantasy? It is a mistake, however, to not understand preparing funding proposals as an intellectual exercise itself, a welcome difference between UK and US at least in my experience, but for how long? I wonder what senior scholars and administrators, who make decisions about promotion, and tenure in the US, use indirects (grant monies) of our labor to fund other projects, and sit on funding evaluation committees, make of the academic labor of grant-science? Grant-science labor may be a choice for academics in permanent and tenured positions, but it is obligatory (at least de facto) for most new and emerging scholars who want a shot at an academic (research) career in higher education. Indeed, junior scholars may find themselves in the awkward position of being asked to train senior academics and teaching/practitioners how to write grants, or asked to do this labor for academic units, which can be met with various responses, some unwelcome.

Tellingly, grant writing and external funding was not even featured in the 1994 AAUP report on faculty work. While there is a long history of externally funded academic research, the increase in higher education costs coupled with the decrease in State/federal funds has created a situation where academics are forced to fund their own salaries, studentships/fellowships, laboratory costs, and so on (AAUP, 1994). The effects/affects of these changes are playing out and to come (Daza, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Shahjahan, 2014; see also the other chapters in this edited volume).

At best, an enormous amount of ambiguity surrounds what, and how, grant activity, is valued, or not. Below I analyze paraphrases that show the ambiguity of grant-science labor and also shed light on politics, policies, and practices of grant-science in higher education. The double-bind of ambiguity is the possibility that something will happen but no guarantees about what it will be. Ambiguity is not necessarily nice or fair; it is unfixable.

#### *Logics of Grant-Science in Practice: Ambiguity Matters*

I have applied for numerous internal and external grants of varying amounts and durations and I have been awarded various internal and external grants. I also served as a co-principal investigator (co-PI of nearly a million US dollars on two large multi-year grants from a major US federal funding source). The following are paraphrases that capture the spirit of some of the comments I have received from administrators,

senior academics, peer and early-career academics, and administrative support staff in grants and contracts offices. Data illustrate the ambiguity of grant-science on multiple levels. Although the policy practice of grant-science is context specific (Daza, 2013), the speakers and their locations are not identified here on purpose. This analysis shifts the focus from humanist conceptions of individuals/authors to the material and discursive conditions that construct grant-science and its ambiguities.

The following paraphrases capture the spirit of ambiguity reflected from administrators and senior academics. They show that: (1) the value of grant activity is ambiguous and subject- and context-specific; (2) ac/counting and naming practices may be more important than the actual research; and (3) the time and energy (“effort” in grant-science) spent on funded research may be in/visible from different views.

You need a really big grant...

Even if you have a big external grant, you still need to apply for the small internal seed grants every year.

Even though your grants are multi-year [3 and 4 years], a grant only counts once on your annual productivity report.

How are your grants benefiting your unit?

Grant activity may be valued differently across different levels, e.g., programs, departments, colleges/ faculties, institution, organization/ community/society, nationally, and globally. The meaning and value attributed to the kind (external or internal) and size (funding amount and duration) of grants may be relative and arbitrary. A major ambiguity of grant-science labor is the expectation that academics should always be applying for more external funding even if they cannot feasibly or legally do more labor. (e.g., Work effort at most institutions and funding agencies limits researchers from costing or buying out more than 100% of total time/salary with some allowances for summer salary on 9 and 10 month contracts in the US.) Not to mention, the real time and costs involved in doing funded projects is always more than what can be budgeted in Eurocentric and linear notions of time (Shahjahan, 2014).

You need to be PI, not co-PI...

According to the blue sheet, you are only Co-PI on the first grant, not the second grant...

You were just the diversity hire...

Before the process moved online, it seems the audit trail was on blue-colored paper. While labor and responsibilities on grants may stay the same, a different form and/or wording may raise questions about one’s role and workload. The value of the grant may not be in the practice of doing it (e.g., the research!) but in how it is named and (ac)counted for, and who is/can do it? Calling the same kind and amount of labor something different actually matters.

One implication of this kind of reasoning is an affect/effect of neoliberal scientism. A kind of narcissism in managerial forms assume individuals are always

deficient, lazy, and never doing enough. Despite the fact that chances are slim a new scholar without a funding track-record might score a major external grant as a PI, the expectation is that being co-PI is not good enough; the academic can always do more and better grant-science. The individualism and meritocracy embedded in neoliberal scientism (e.g., everyone has an equal chance in an equal playing field) assumes no need for induction or collaboration among junior, mid-career, or senior academics even though in practice large grant projects require multiple actors (see more on this below). While academic induction, mentoring, and collaboration among academics in higher education has never been value-free (Rhee & Subedi, 2009; Daza, 2012, 2013b), the current climate of grant-science both demands working together with multiple actors (often across disciplines, institutions, and fields) and makes it impossible at the same time as Rhee and Subreenduth discuss in their tale. A system, which only rewards individuals, challenges cooperation and parity (e.g., *Scientific American*, 2012).

You bought out your teaching with your grant money so you have free time ...  
 Since you don't have teaching, you should take this opportunity to read theory ...  
 Since you are just doing research, you can teach overload ...  
 You have to do 100% research, 100% teaching and 100% service ...  
 I'm not going to do [grants, productivity reports, etc.], it's time to retire...

These kinds of comments raised by senior academics and administrators prompts the following questions: What kind of understanding do colleagues have of the real labor (time, effort, emotion, intellect, etc.) it takes to do large-scale, multi-year grant projects and/or long-term empirical and ethnographic fieldwork today? How can academics reconcile the mathematical problem of laboring 300%? On one hand, funded research must not take much time or effort; on the other, some decide to retire rather than participate in grant-science.

The following paraphrases are from managerial staff, non-academics and sometimes accountants, who have been hired by universities to facilitate the additional workload of grant-science (calculating budgets, monitoring impact, auditing revenue):

My reading of the opportunity is that they are looking for XXXX rather than your idea ...  
 Priority is given to projects that generate income for the university. Your work won't be funded unless it has a potential income stream ...

Grant-science is very demanding on institutions of higher education. Institutions that aim to be competitive in generating external funding engage in capacity building of infrastructure to support grant-science and academics in searching for opportunities, writing proposals, developing budgets, and so on. While I agree that academics cannot do this work alone, and in this way value the support of this infrastructure, the roles support-staff play as gatekeepers and knowledge brokers are unclear. A full professor with a grant track-record, expressed the concern as paraphrased: "I'm

not sure I'll do any more grants. It's bad enough dealing with funders. Why is our institution's grant office so adversarial?"

Who has responsibility for the (intellectual) content of proposals in grant-science? I have written about the politics of proposal writing and how the proposal dictates the project (Daza, 2012, 2013). Preparing a proposal for an external funding can be very extensive. Federally funded projects might be 50-100 pages; some European Union projects are hundreds of pages. Some of the content on projects, such as impact statements, may be similar across projects. How is this knowledge and expertise owned, shared, and operationalized? As grant proposals and projects are developed, documents may be shared on cloud spaces, such as Dropbox. This information is hardly proprietary, although as researchers, who are modern-subject knowers, despite or in spite of a post world (Daza, 2009), we may struggle with a sense of ownership and/or alienation of our ideas and labor. Grant-science requires multiple actors to work together and this is an ambiguous endeavor every time, as actors and contexts of are always changing.

It is worth quoting Fitzgerald, Gunter, White, and Tight (2012) at length:

As the creation, production and dissemination of knowledge becomes increasingly influential in the globalised world (Appadurai, 2006; Roberts & Peters, 2008), importance is placed on more collective approaches to research and the need for collaboration between disciplines, fields, sites of knowledge production as well as between academics and practitioners, academics and the professions/industry as well as academics and 'end users' (Harney & Moten, 1998). Less clear is how academics negotiate their own spaces within these agendas to pursue and protect their scholarly interests. This might not be possible or permissible in a modernised university that seeks to preserve its own market share through an emphasis on making outputs calculable rather than memorable. Inevitably, academic values such as independence, autonomy, intellectual authority as well as prestige and status come into direct conflict with external demands for accountability, transparency, entrepreneurialism and economic regeneration. The cumulative effect of these new demands are:

- exponential pressures on time, workload and academic activities;
- an increased emphasis on performance, productivity and accountability that has led to changing work patterns;
- expanding requirements to pursue private sector funds and undertake consultancies and applied research;
- cultural shifts within universities as they seek opportunities for entrepreneurship, commercialisation and internationalisation;
- centralisation of administrative tasks and activities while there is a devolution of management and accountability to schools, departments and individuals;
- disproportionate numbers of women concentrated in lower levels of the academic hierarchy; and

- disconnection between academics and universities as a result of the pressure to offer specialised courses and meet the insistent demands of the educational marketplace.

These demands have essentially altered academic work and what it means to engage in productive academic work that is valued, recognised and rewarded.

...

The gains might well be efficiency, effectiveness and economic growth, but the cost is low staff morale, low staff retention, a devaluing of academic work and a sense of institutional loss as finance and policy officers take a larger role in university governance and management. (pp. 5–6)

Academic research and researcher training relies on humanist concept of individuals as authors, researchers, and knowers (Daza, 2009) not team research, shared knowledge, or the notion that ideas are either not owned or owned by everyone.

#### *Implications and Provocations*

In a different kind of analysis I might analyze each comment above more specifically to show how ambiguity plays out differently across different local/global and micro/macro contexts. However, the purpose of this analysis is to show that mixed messages and ambiguities of academic labor exist across contexts. My aim is to shift the focus away from individuals and to the material and discursive conditions of grant-science that produce new ambiguities in academic labor. The point is to show the kind of reason—logics of grant-science—through which academic labor is made in/visible. Of course, there always has been local/global and micro/macro power dynamics through which meaning is made and meaning making is always ambiguous, but in my part of this chapter, I am looking specifically at how the rules of success, failure and resistance in grant-science are very much emerging and in flux. While local, context-specific differences certainly exist, ambiguity of grant-science labor is a global trend across different contexts of higher education.

Like the other tales told here, mine also raises questions:

- What is the response ability of academics to infiltrate grant-science?
- What is the responsibility of academics in training (new) researchers (doctoral students) for grant-science and a continuously changing research and higher education context?
- Why do we (and should we) continue to prepare researchers as we were trained (e.g., in traditional doctoral programs, resulting in the doctoral dissertation, and modern-knowing-subjects, etc.)?
- What is our ability, and that of senior academics and even administrators, to effectively mentor new and early career researchers in these new contexts? As well as adjudicate promotion and tenure decisions?

- Are (and how are) faculty of color, women, and minorities, and those with minority views disproportionately impacted by grant-science?
- Since grant-science as a normative practice is unsustainable under current conditions of external funding-based policy practice, how can we reinvision higher education futures? Is this the end of higher education at least as we know it?
- And what is the role of academic labor and research within and beyond higher education to help future publics live with uncertainty and change?

Living in a post-world but clinging to positivist edges, the impetus in a standards-based regime of neoliberal scientism is the desire to shut-down ambiguity, resulting in calls for transparency, increased guidelines, and better monitoring. So, let me be clear: by examining these ambiguities I am not calling for more guidelines and accountability. Because of grant-science in a digital age of neoliberal scientism, it is difficult to write anything that will not be mis/construed and shoehorned into these prevailing frameworks as a call for the technocratic labor of control and accountability rather than the recognition of uncertainty in knowledge production as generative (see Daza, 2013a). Instead, I argue that uncertainty, albeit not always fair and equitable, may be fertile ground. While there is no guarantee what exactly will happen, something is always already happening. Ambiguity offers hope that something different is on the way; the present is always already becoming the future (Daza, 2013a). Living peacefully with uncertainty and change is easier to say than do.

Grant-science has changed knowledge production and academic labor, but will it be the end of higher education? Perhaps “necessity **is** the mother of invention.” Out of re/de/forms of grant-science there may be new ways to be, live, know, do. This is not a utopian view. What’s next will not be outside of power dynamics. It’s hard to imagine the end of higher education or grant-science. My own intervention is to try to get external funding for basic, inquiry-based research. Not only is basic research waning as funding agents place strict restrictions for application and impact on calls for proposals, basic education and social research has been disparaged within the field itself and this has contributed, I argue, to the neoliberal re/de/form industry and its calls for “(best) practice” and “what works,” rather than more open ended pursuits (see Daza, 2013a).

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we provide three points of engagement with the policy, practice, and politics of the re/de/form industry in different post-secondary contexts of education. As our tales show, academics across contexts are trying to work within and against the re/de/form industry of neoliberal scientism. To speak through/to/with trepidation is what it means to speak truth to power. Put this way by Audre Lorde (1980):

I was going to die, sooner or later, whether or not I had even spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you .... What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? ...

With the rules of the grant-science game in constant flux and ambiguous, neither success/failure nor reaction formations can be clear-cut. Unfortunately, and perhaps sobering for us academics, for most of the world and its laborers uncertainty is nothing new. What then do these tales produce? We present these tales as one mode of unearthing the hidden rules of grant-science within and outside higher education institutions. Probably a more profound expectation for us is to fracture the discourse around grant-science within this digital age of neoliberalism and create a space within to generate further ambiguities. These embodied tales defy traditional analysis and theorizing of the role of policy-based funding in higher education. It challenges readers to rethink about the ways in which academic laborers experience, play, and implement grant-science. These individual tales testify the impact of grant-science hegemony at the core of higher education—its faculty and students. At the end of the day, if nothing else, we invoke the spirit of Antonio Gramsci (1831–1937), and dare to speak difficult truths in the hope that we too can experience Lorde’s (1980) conviction that not speaking is more frightening:

Because the machine will try to grind us into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned, we can sit in our safe corners as mute as bottles, and still we will be no less afraid.

...

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid .... For we have been socialized to respect fear ... while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. (pp. 14–15)

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> An in-depth discussion of scientism is beyond the scope of the chapter; Rupert Sheldrake’s (2012). *The Science Delusion* offers a provocative account. See also Bowers (2011, 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> By STEM Culture, Daza (2013c) means the acronym STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is becoming a globally recognized loaded concept on par with other organizing principles of society like capitalism. That is, while most people do not become engineers, computer programmers and mathematicians, we are all learning STEM Culture as it is embedded in the material and discursive fabric of our societal structures (i.e., business, government, military, research and development, school policy and curricula). The myopic focus on STEM to the detriment of other disciplinary lenses, and a more aesthetic education (Spivak, 2012) is training future imaginaries to think, be, act/do, and reason a STEM world, not unlike colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism have done.

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**SECTION 3**  
**NEOLIBERALIZING SITES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION**

JEANNE CAMERON

## 8. “GIVE ME A 3, TELL ME I’M EFFECTIVE, AND LEAVE ME ALONE”

*Portrait of an Urban Teacher under the Assault of Education Reform*

The system which makes no great demands upon originality, upon invention, upon the continuous expression of individuality, works automatically to put and to keep the more incompetent teachers in the school. It puts them there because, by natural law of spiritual gravitation, the best minds are not especially likely to be drawn to the places where there is danger that they may have to submit to conditions which no self-respecting intelligence likes to put up with and where their time and energy are likely to be so occupied with details of external conformity that they have no opportunity for free and full play of their own vigor. (Dewey, 1903, p. 3)

### INTRODUCTION

In US public schools today we face a paradox. Although there is widespread agreement that teacher quality is the most important in-school factor affecting students’ learning and achievement (Hightower et al., 2011; McCaffrey et al., 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rowan, Correnti & Miller, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997), neoliberal education reform works to repel the best teachers from the profession while simultaneously discouraging promising individuals from entering in the first place. Somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of US teachers leave their jobs within the first five years (Ingersoll & Perda, 2012). The situation is particularly dire in urban schools:

The data show that high-poverty, high-minority, urban, and rural public schools have among the highest rates of turnover. Moreover, the data show there is an annual asymmetric reshuffling of significant numbers of employed teachers from poor to not-poor schools, from high-minority to low-minority schools, and from urban to suburban schools. (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2013, p. 18)

Citing the research of Montimore and Sammons (1987), Delpit notes that “for children of poverty, good teachers and powerful instruction...[have] *six to ten times* as much impact on achievement as all other factors combined” (2012, p. 73, original emphasis), making high teacher turnover in urban schools an especially urgent challenge.

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Although the reasons for today's high teacher turnover rate are numerous and complex, the factor taken up by this chapter is neoliberal education reform's assault on teachers' *freedom of intelligence*, defined as "freedom of observation and of judgment exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worthwhile" (Dewey, 1938, p. 61). Neoliberalism is characterized by "the insertion of market values into nonmarket sectors of human activity" (Tuck, 2013, p. 326). Neoliberal encroachment into the arena of public schooling is not new, but under the Obama Administration it has reached an unprecedented apex. Rather than making a robust commitment to all schools and all children, the blood and bone of equality of educational opportunity, the Obama Administration unapologetically adopted a capitalist metaphor for public education, *Race to the Top*, invoking the market values of competition, winners, and losers. Recession-starved states had to *compete* for Recovery Act money to help fund their public education systems. To "win" the competition, states had to adopt a number of policies explicitly designed to open the door—more widely than ever before—to the corporate education industry (US Department of Education, 2009), not only the industry's products, but also its management philosophy. In this brave new world, for-profit producers of educational products and management systems enjoy wildly unconstrained opportunities to orchestrate the entire content and process of public education at all levels.

Among the countless consequences of this corporate takeover is the systematic deskilling of teachers. Stripped of their professional judgment and autonomy, teachers' work is reduced to following a corporate script, and a corporate accountability scheme is imposed to insure that they do so. In short, rather than supporting teachers' *freedom of intelligence*, the very thing that would keep good teachers in the classroom and invite promising recruits to join them, neoliberal reforms demand the "deliberate restriction" of it and the consequent "imprisoning of [teachers'] spirit" (Dewey, 1903, p. 2). Unless and until teachers control both the conception and the execution of their work, quality teaching and learning will elude us.

#### PORTRAITURE

To reveal this paradox, I use Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's method, *portraiture*, a form of narrative inquiry that examines closely a single case. In *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (co-authored with Davis, 1997), she describes its aims:

With [portraiture] I seek to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor. The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences. The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3; see also Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005)

Situated within the broader landscape of qualitative research, portraiture is a form of narrative inquiry with several distinguishing features. First, the relationship between researcher and participant is more intimate and reciprocal than is characteristic of most social scientific research. Believing that the “formalized distance” typical of traditional research relationships is “disrespectful” and “may undermine productive inquiry,” portraitists see relationships as “more than vehicles for data gathering, more than points of access,” as, in fact, “central to the empirical, ethical, and humanistic dimensions of research design” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, pp. 137–138).

Second, in sharp contrast to much social scientific research, especially research on schooling, portraiture seeks to document “goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9 and p. 141) or “health and resilience,” rather than “pathology and disease” (p. 8). Similar to critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), portraiture offers a *counterstory* that resists victim blaming, cynicism, and the “facile inquiry” required to simply “identify a disease and count its victims” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9).

Third, the portraitist strives to communicate with a broader audience: “The attempt is to move beyond the academy’s inner circle, to speak in a language this is not coded or exclusive, and to develop texts that will seduce the readers into thinking more deeply about issues that concern them” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 10).

Fourth, the portraitist aims to bridge the universal and particular in order to generate an experience of resonance for the reader: “[T]he portraitist seeks to document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 14).

Finally, the purpose of portraiture is not simply to document and analyze human experience. It is done, rather, as an act of solidarity, with the aim of social transformation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11; see also Cameron, 2012; Smyth & McInerney, 2013).

The particular portrait offered here is an example of what Lawrence-Lightfoot calls “human archeology”, an “intensive, probing method” that depends on a particularly close relationship of long duration between researcher and participant, and employs an “eclectic, interdisciplinary approach, shaped by the lenses of history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 15).

The subject of this portrait is my partner of 30 years, Will (a pseudonym). For three decades, while making a life together and raising children, our separate careers have served as an ongoing source of collaboration and co-reflection. The first urban elementary school Will taught in was the site of my year-long ethnographic field study for my Ph.D. research (Cameron, 1998; see also Cameron 2000). I have been a volunteer in his classrooms and he has been a guest speaker in mine. Both of us work and learn with marginalized populations. He teaches young children of color in urban schools. I teach working class and working poor community college students, black, brown, and white (Cameron, 2013). Teaching is an act of social justice for us both.

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In a conversation with our daughter about a year ago, she observed that I'm one of the few people she knows who truly loves her job. "But what about your father?" I asked, incredulous. "Dad? You're kidding, right?" she responded with incredulity rivaling mine. "He loves his *students*. But I don't know anyone who's more unhappy with his job!" she corrected me. In that moment, I realized not only the gap in her historical memory and mine, but also how prolonged the assault to Will's autonomy and efficacy has been. This made me *profoundly* sad. Sad for our daughter who does not remember the boundless joy her father once felt for his work. Sad for my partner and for all teachers who have been so senselessly robbed of such joy for so many years. Sad for all of their students who have had stolen from them the infinitely rich learning made possible when teachers are allowed to work with purpose and freedom. Although this portrait is about one single teacher, the only thing separating Will from countless others is that he lives with someone who has the time and training to document and co-analyze his experiences. He would not—in fact could not—have written this on his own, because the energy required to persevere in the quagmire of neoliberal education reform leaves him demoralized and exhausted, in equal measure, at the end of each day. His portrait reflects my desire to honor not only Will's work, but the work of all public school teachers today. I hope that likeminded colleagues in higher education who still enjoy the freedom once known by our K-12 sisters and brothers will take up their cause as well.

#### *A Sketch*

Will, a 57 year old white male, has been teaching at the primary level in a mid-sized, northeastern US city since 1987. At 5'10", his long torso and round belly contrast with his short, heavily muscled legs; muscles fed by perpetual movement: skiing, hiking, rock-climbing, gardening, sailing, and squatting down low to make eye-to-eye contact with the small children in his classes. He sits only during meals. His deep blue, twinkling eyes and full beard, once a rich auburn and now almost entirely white, remind most who encounter him of an old hippie or Santa Claus. His gigantic personality explodes in a drama of movement and voice. Laughing with complete abandon, he is never invisible, always fully present; characteristics that regularly mortified our teenage children whenever he joined them in public.

Will's mind gives rich meaning to the steel trap metaphor. He is deeply knowledgeable about an extremely wide range of interests and possesses an extensive skill set. Like a computer upgraded regularly, his random access memory expands. His ability to recall small facts he heard listening to Morning Edition months ago, and to bring them bear on a current question or problem, is astounding. Among our closest friends, "Ask Will, he knows everything," is the standard response to any query posed. Will's ability to capture and process knowledge so keenly underscore two dispositions that bite him hard within the current education reform context: he finds excessive record keeping an enormous waste of time, and he suffers fools badly, particularly adult fools who wield more power than their knowledge justifies. Truth

be told, he can come across as painfully arrogant when confronted with anything that strikes him as nonsense.

For the first 25 years of Will’s career, he taught between two elementary schools in the same inner city neighborhood, a neighborhood whose official poverty rate has remained constant at around 90%, while simultaneously deepening with each passing year. In such neighborhood schools, the juxtaposition between the lived experiences of students and their teachers too often produce what Valerie Polakow refers to as a *pedagogy of the poor*: “a far-reaching set of negative sensibilities that contaminate the way children in poverty are seen and that shape their classroom experiences in multiple ways” (1993, p. 129).

Even the most well-intentioned white, middle-class teachers may lower their expectations for poor students of color, believing that they are incapable of achieving at high levels *given their circumstances*. Will’s expectations for both learning and behavior, in contrast, have remained stubbornly high throughout his career. Consistent with Lisa Delpit’s claim that “it is foolishness that keeps a person from learning, not the Western notion of mental capacity” (2012, p. 28), Will’s mantra—“We are all here to learn”—is *meant*:

I have *one expectation* for my classroom and *no rules*. And my one expectation is *we are all here to learn*. Any behavior that gets in the way of learning is *unacceptable*. It’s an all-encompassing expectation. If you’re acting like a fool, if you’re disturbing other people’s learning, it’s not okay. If you’re not doing your best to be a learner, it’s not okay. If you’re affecting my ability to learn as a teacher, it’s not okay. (Personal communication, August 9, 2013)

Calling himself a benevolent dictator, he embodies the two characteristics of *warm demanders*: genuine care and social support combined with consistently high expectations for students’ learning (see Delpit, 2012; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Lee et al., 1999; Ware, 2006). He understands, as William Ayers once wrote, that “Regard [for students] extends, importantly, to an insistence that students have access to the tools with which to negotiate and perhaps even to transform the world. Love for students just as they are—without any drive or advance toward a future—is false love, enervating and disabling” (2010, p. 157). Such wisdom is especially important in guiding teachers whose students are members of socially and economically marginalized populations and who are “school dependent” (Ladson-Billings, 2008) for learning, navigating, and ultimately challenging the white middle class culture and language forms that dominate US schools and society.

Based on both the authentic assessments Will creates and the vast majority of standardized tests he has been required to administer during his career, his students have consistently challenged the conventional wisdom that poor children of color can’t learn. Many factors have contributed to Will’s success, but one of the most important has been his commitment to building relationships with students, their families, and their community. He creates multiple opportunities for family members to come to the classroom and share in their children’s learning, and has always had



an open door policy about classroom visits. “You are welcome here. Any time,” he tells family members. “Don’t knock. Just come on in.” He shares his home and cell phone numbers with parents, and he goes into the community regularly to make home-visits to students’ families. The lion’s share of these visits are to bring good news of a student’s progress or to seek the expertise and insights of adult caregivers in order to better meet a child’s needs. His students’ families recognize that he sees them as resources, not obstacles, to their children’s education.

In trying to make sense of Will’s biography as a teacher, of what good teaching looks like in an urban context, and of how current education reform undermines it, John Dewey’s principles of *continuity of experience* and *interaction* emerged as organizing metaphors. Outlining these principles in *Experience and Education*, Dewey argues that good teaching is a remarkably challenging intellectual activity requiring a smart and reflective person who sees children clearly and has the *freedom* to employ “observation and judgment” on their behalf (1938, p. 61). A teacher’s freedom to exercise such judgment in her work is absolutely essential to inspiring and sustaining good teaching. It is also wholly absent from the neoliberal education reform agenda. When asked what he would do if he were just entering teaching at this moment in history, Will replied, “I’d change careers.” This is the tragic paradox unfolding before our eyes.

#### CONTINUITY OF EXPERIENCE AND INTERACTION

According to Dewey, “all genuine education comes through experience” (1938, p. 25). The principle of *continuity* speaks to the relationship between past, present, and future experiences: “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those that come after” (p. 35). Put another way, “Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further experiences” (p. 27). Not all experiences, however, are “genuinely or equally educative” (p. 25). According to Dewey, “Everything depends upon the *quality* of the experience which is had” (p. 27, original emphasis). Quality is gauged by what a given experience “moves toward and into” (p. 38), or, put another way, by “its influence upon later experiences” (p. 27). A “mis-educative” experience narrows the range and value of subsequent experiences, whereas an “educative” experience expands them and, at its best, “arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over the dead spaces in the future” (p. 38).

While *continuity* of experience is a given, its direction or quality is shaped by the *interaction* that takes place between the individual and objective conditions found in her external environment. More specifically, “An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 43). Interaction, in other words, speaks to what occurs between the internal make-up of the learner—who that person is in the given moment, based on her previous experiences—and the external “objective conditions”

that the teacher creates. What this means for the teacher, and why her freedom of judgment is so critical, is quoted at length:

Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience. The immediate and direct concern of an educator is then with the situations in which interaction takes place. The individual [student], who enters as a factor into it, is what he is at a given time. It is the other factor, that of objective conditions, which lies to some extent within the possibility of regulation by the educator.... [T]he phrase ‘objective conditions’ covers a wide range. It includes what is done by the educator and the way in which it is done, not only words spoken but the tone of voice in which they are spoken. It includes equipment, books, apparatus, toys, games played. It includes the materials with which an individual interacts, and, most important of all, the total *social* set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged.

When it is said that the objective conditions are those which are within the power of the educator to regulate, it is meant, of course, that his ability to influence directly the experiences of others and thereby the education they obtain places upon him the duty of determining that environment which will interact with the existing capacities and needs of those taught to create a worthwhile experience. (Dewey, 1938, pp. 44–45, original emphasis)

#### *An Illustration*

Will had been teaching for 23 years when he first met Tyrell, a seven-year old assigned to his class. Tyrell entered second grade reading at a mid-kindergarten level. During the first week of school, Will observed a significant gap between Tyrell’s oral language skills and his reading skills. As a talker, Tyrell was lively and articulate. As a reader, he was unfocused and disengaged. Will walked Tyrell home at the end of the week to have a conversation with his mother. Knowing Will’s reputation in the school and the community, Tyrell’s mom saw him as an ally and received him warmly. Together, with Tyrell, they worked out a plan to support him in school and at home. Tyrell was given the important task of relaying communications between mother and teacher. This was not framed as a punishment, but rather as a collective effort to help him learn. *Tyrell bought in.*

Will’s wide and deep knowledge of children’s literature, combined with his developing understanding of Tyrell’s interests and curiosities, allowed him to select engaging reading materials for Tyrell initially, and to—over time—surrender the choosing to Tyrell. Tyrell’s reading progressed steadily, but as it did so, Will came to suspect that he had a vision problem. As reading levels increase, text size decreases. Because Will relies on detailed running records and continuous conversations with his students, Tyrell’s inability to read known words in the smaller text stood out immediately. Will went to the dollar store, bought Tyrell a pair of reading glasses,

and tested and confirmed his observation. He then contacted Tyrell's mom who made an appointment with an optometrist. A less individualized assessment would have suggested that Tyrell should read below his actual level, resulting in boredom and creating a mis-educative experience.

Between the first week in September and the third week in June, Tyrell made two years of progress in reading. His experience has been played out by countless students who have learned with Will over the years. Will's success teaching students—students who too many teachers believe can't learn—is a product of Dewey's charge that the educator's responsibility is to determine “that environment which will interact with the existing capacities and needs of those taught to create a worthwhile experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 45).

First, Will's essential understanding of child development means that he has no expectation that all students should be at the same place at the same time because of chronological age or grade designation. Where some teachers see learning deficits, Will sees normal-range skills and abilities. The “wide ranges of students” in Will's classes challenge him to create “multiple entry points toward learning and a range of routes to success” (Ayers, 2010, p. 156). Moreover, Will's close observations in the classroom and extensive relationships with students' families and community allow him to see each child whole. Each child is held to the uncompromising standard of doing her own best work, but what and how individual children learn in his classroom varies. In short, Will follows Dewey's charge to observe closely and to make appropriate judgments based on the needs of individual children:

Responsibility for selecting objective conditions carries with it, then, the responsibility for understanding the needs and capacities of the individuals who are learning at a given time. It is not enough that certain materials and methods have proved effective with other individuals at other times. There must be a reason for thinking that they will function in generating an experience that has educative quality with particular individuals at a particular time. (1938, p. 46)

Second, Will provides “objective conditions” that nurture each student's efforts, including a multi-thousand volume library of authentic children's literature, rich in authors from around the world as well as US born African American, Latino/a, Asian, and Native American authors. This library, combined with Will's knowledge of individual student's interests, allows him to put the “right” books into children's hands. At the same time, each day Will animates the joy that reading can spark. He does not simply *read* books to his students, he *performs* them, becoming both Bimwili and the Zimwi as he renders Verna Aardema's Swahili story (1988).

The most important objective condition, however, is “the total *social* set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged” (Dewey, 1938, p. 45). Will's belief that relationships are the foundation for learning extends beyond those he builds with his students individually to intentionally nurturing students' relationships with one another. Within this context, Will has forever rejected two common classroom practices: skill-based groupings and exclusion. Because learning is a social process,

a variety of loosely structured and temporary groups emerge in Will’s classes all the time, but these are always based on an identified purpose, co-framed by the students involved; a purpose that transcends narrow designations of skills.

Moreover, rather than relying on threats of exclusion to bring children’s behavior in line with classroom expectations, Will creates a classroom community where each student has skin in the game, where each student’s agency is shaped by the power of their sense of belonging in the group as a whole. In his classroom, “the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work that is done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility” (Dewey, 1938, p. 56). There are two consequences of this social set-up. First, the artificial hierarchy of “smart” and “dumb” kids that skill-based grouping promotes is entirely absent. Children are able to focus on and appreciate how they are progressing individually. Second, every student identifies and is identified by others as a valued member of the classroom community.

Will’s own success employing the principles of continuity and interaction with his students is, I argue, a consequence of how these principles have animated his own experiences. According to these principles, the sensibilities a new teacher brings to the profession constitute the important internal factor that then interacts with the institutional context or objective conditions she encounters. Together, they shape how and in what direction she evolves as a teacher. When Will entered the profession at age 31, the seeds for becoming a wonderful teacher had already been planted. But what allowed for him to become increasingly better over time was an institutional context that continuously extended the range and value of his experiences and gave him the freedom to observe and act in ways that supported his “powers and purposes” (Dewey, 1938, p. 45) to do right by children. More specifically, for the first two-thirds of his career Will enjoyed administrators, instructional support staff, and a multi-year teaching structure that combined to create an environment for his own growth as a teacher. He, in turn, was able to create a rich parallel environment for his students. Good teaching in the classroom is intimately connected to the objective conditions in which it takes place. Neoliberal reform is an assault on both.

#### THE PORTRAIT: CONTINUITY OF WILL’S EXPERIENCES<sup>1</sup>

##### *Pre-teaching Experiences and Dispositions: 1956–1987*

Born in 1956, the third child of four, Will was raised in a time period, a family, and a community that provided quality educative experiences that nourished his developing agency, competence, and independence. His family owned an old home with two adjacent cottages that they rented out. All three buildings were in various states of disrepair, and Will and his two older brothers were raised to build and fix all kinds of things, using the skills of carpentry, plumbing, electrical wiring, and masonry. They learned to jack up foundations, put in footings, dig dirt cellars, install water and sewer lines, and insulate and sheet-rock rooms.

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This same fix-it-yourself disposition applied to his family's cars. By the time Will was a teenager, he had worked extensively on the upkeep and basic repair of a range of vehicles. At age 14, his father handed him the keys to the International Harvester Travel-All, said it needed a new exhaust, departed for work, and left Will to figure it out. And he did. As a consequence of this upbringing, Will learned not only how to do many "practical" things at a young age, he also learned purpose-driven applications of science and math—applications that stay with him to this day and that he regularly employs with his students.

In addition to these hands-on learning experiences, Will's close relationship with his grandmother, who lived next door, supported the development of his critical literacy. Part of their daily routine was reading the newspaper together, which fed a keen interest in the world beyond Will's back door while simultaneously generating significant dissonance with his father's "ultra conservative" Irish Catholic world view:

I was always a person who followed the news, even as a young kid. I was fascinated by the Vietnam War and by the Civil Rights Movement and all the stuff going on, and hearing my father's take on it, and then hearing what the news was saying and reading other things. My father, [who was a cop], coming home from the [Newark] race riots, working 12 hour shifts, and hearing all this stuff and then getting other information on it that brought into question these basic "truths." These basic truths aren't true. They're people's perceptions. (Personal communication, August 8, 2013)

Then, in 8th grade, Will's social studies teacher—a historian in the Howard Zinn tradition—taught US history from the perspective of the working classes. This, he notes, "really flew in the face of what I had been brought up to believe" (personal communication, August 8, 2013).

Interspersed over these years were numerous family trips, many occurring in the Deep South, where Will would encounter first-hand the Jim Crow practices that he was reading about in the newspaper:

Being in the International Harvester repair shop in Alabama, with the mechanic leaning over the car and asking this other man for a tool, and the guy hands him the wrong tool, and he looks at my father and asks, "You have dumb n—rs like that up north?" Seeing segregated bathrooms. Being told which bathroom to use, which fountain to use. This is in 1970! (Personal communication, August 8, 2013)

By the time he was a teenager, Will had begun reading the world through the intersectional lens of race and social class, and was on his way to becoming a tenacious social justice advocate.

He entered college as a criminal justice major, thinking he might want to be a cop, but his interests soon shifted from policing to juvenile justice. Working with "delinquent" teens in a group home, he realized that their placement was more

“GIVE ME A 3, TELL ME I’M EFFECTIVE, AND LEAVE ME ALONE”

a consequence of their lack of rights as children than any egregious behavior on their part:

They were there because they were sexually abused by their fathers, or something of that nature. And they made the only rational decision a human could make, not only a thirteen or fourteen year old, but any sane person. And they got locked up for it. (Personal communication, August 8, 2013)

Then, during his last two years as an undergraduate, Will encountered his most influential formal teacher: David. A brilliant criminologist by trade, David got his initial chops in the field doing time in Leavenworth Penitentiary for a drug rap in the 1970s. David affirmed for Will the value of “empirical thinking, of calling everything into question,” the value of “going deep” (personal communication, August 8, 2013).

Once Will completed his bachelor’s degree in criminal justice, David connected him with a job opportunity in Kentucky, where for the next five years he served as the program director for an outdoor education program serving public school students and teachers. The program’s funding was tied to federal court-ordered bussing to achieve desegregation. His experiences in Kentucky further fueled his anger over the treatment of young people of color, while simultaneously supporting his development as a future teacher of marginalized youth. Reflecting on these experiences, he says,

The whole racism issue in Kentucky, you know I saw kids of promise being knocked down because of their color and because they were mouthy. And it’s something that still flourishes today. The [Learning Disabled] classroom that services the fifth grade and sixth grade [in my current school] is 80-90% black males. Can you tell me there’s that high a level of LD behavior in that population? What’s going on here?

And it’s the same damn thing I was dealing with in Kentucky. I was instructed: “you need to become involved with special ed.,’ cause we gotta do stuff to get these black males out of [special education] classrooms and into regular programs.” And some of those kids truly had [learning] challenges, but the percentages? You know, most of them were just a pain in the ass. And they were a pain in the ass because they weren’t living up to white expectations. They weren’t acting white enough.

I worked with thousands of teachers in Kentucky. Literally. And I got to see what good teachers were doing. I saw the teachers that were connecting with their kids and what they did. And the ones that just had a job. The ones that connected well with the white kids, but not the black kids. When we started working with school groups, with regular classes, we put it out there in our literature that we would not work with teachers who were leaving children behind for behavioral reasons, unless their behaviors constituted a clear and

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present danger to everyone's well-being. We put that out there. So I got to work with a number of really good teachers, because some teachers wouldn't work with us. (Personal communication, August 8, 2013)

Will's experiences in Kentucky inspired his decision to pursue elementary teaching certification. Working with young children, he hoped to disrupt the labeling and discarding process before it was in full swing. When it came time for him to student teach, he requested urban placements, entering the field with tons of hands-on skills using math and science, a keen interest in history and the world, a divergent mind, thousands of observations of excellent teachers, and a deep commitment to racial and social class justice. In short, he possessed the skills and sensibilities that are a necessary foundation for effective urban teaching. The objective conditions he encountered in his early and middle career supported his continuing development.

#### *First 5 Years of Teaching: 1988–1993*

Will's first five years at Everett Elementary, a school in the urban district where he student taught, served in multiple ways to affirm his choice to become a teacher. The circumstances of his initial hiring are a bit unusual. A crisis had resulted in a second grade teacher's reassignment to a non-teaching position, mid-year. The class needed a teacher—immediately. The principal at the school where Will had student taught called Everett's principal and told him that Will was well suited for the challenging situation. Charlie, the principal, interviewed Will and hired him on the spot.

Employing the skills and dispositions discussed earlier, Will quickly restored order, established supportive relationships with some extremely unhappy parents, and, most importantly, fostered significant academic progress with his students during the remaining months of that school year. Not only was he offered the full-time position at the end of the year, his success under the circumstances inspired a level of confidence on his principal's part rarely enjoyed by a new teacher.

During his first full year at Everett, Will and Charlie discovered in each other remarkably resonant views about the promise of poor children. Charlie, an African American who overcame significant race and social class barriers on his own educational journey, was not one to mince words with his teaching staff regarding his belief that their students, in spite of their poverty, could learn just as well as non-poor children if they encountered the right mix of high expectations and appropriate learning support. The majority of the school's teachers were white, middle-class, lived outside the community, and were not—truth be told—fans of Charlie. Most of them simply did not believe what he believed about their students. Will was one of a small handful of teachers who did.

Another member of Charlie's small circle of supporters was a veteran African American teacher named Stella, who taught fifth grade. A close and careful observer, she noticed how Will interacted not only with his own students but also with other students in the cafeteria, hallways, and playground. In Will, Stella recognized

someone who mixed that perfect cocktail: a tall shot of genuine respect and a short shot of no nonsense. In Stella, Will recognized someone who possessed the qualities he had most admired in the best teachers he had observed in Kentucky and the cultural expertise that was outside of his experiences as a white man. In her book, *Multiplication is for White People* (2012), Lisa Delpit offers the following advice to white teachers working with urban students of color: “one of the most effective and efficient [ways to become knowledgeable about one’s students] is learning from excellent teachers who already know the students and their culture” (p. 87). John was hungry to learn from Stella and within a fairly short time she became his informal mentor.

In addition to Charlie’s and Stella’s support, Will’s intuitive resistance to basal reading programs and skill-based groupings found traction with Everett’s instructional specialist, Henry, who was an advocate of whole language practice. In addition to connecting Will to various district-sponsored development opportunities in language-as-empowerment pedagogy, Henry unearthed funding to send Will to intensive week-long whole language workshops for several consecutive summers.

Also central to Will’s early development, Everett adopted a *Continuous Progress* reform model during his second full year as a teacher. Continuous Progress is often derided as a form of “social promotion,” because students advance with their age-mates, regardless of having “met grade-level achievement expectations” (Katz, 1992). But its aim is to shift instruction away from an arbitrary “graded” curriculum to the specific learning needs of individual children. The impetus for reform came from Everett’s history of low test performance and a belief that Continuous Progress could better meet the needs of all students, and especially the school’s most academically vulnerable population, African American boys, than traditional grades and retention practices.

At Everett, kindergarten continued to be organized as a self-contained year, but grades 1 through 6 were replaced by three units, vertically organized by age. Unit One consisted of children ages 6 through 8 (grades 1 and 2); Unit Two, children ages 8 through 10 (grades 3 and 4); and Unit Three, children ages 10 through 13 (grades 5 and 6). In theory, the entire curriculum for both grades within each unit would be in operation for the full two years in order to meet the individual needs of students in a class, such as the child who is reading at a second grade level, but whose math skills are at a first grade level.

To further support instruction geared to the specific needs of individual students, the practice of *looping* was employed: “sometimes called multiyear teaching or multiyear placement, . . . a teacher is promoted with her students to the next grade level and stays with the same group of children for two or three years” (Rasmussen, 1998). At Everett, children remained with the same teacher during their two years on each unit. Everett’s principal, in an interview with me, described the benefits of looping:

The fact that organizationally you have a particular teacher staying with the kid for say two years, to me has nothing but advantages. When you start that



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second year in September, I don't have to get to know you, I don't have to know, you know, what your mode of learning is. I don't need to know where you ended the year, because I was there. I know. So you can't fool me and play these games of you don't know this or you don't feel like doing this, because I've had a year of experience with you, so let's cut to the chase and get down to work right away. (Cameron, 1998, p. 101)

In short, looping was supposed to deepen teachers' knowledge of all of their students, allowing them to better meet each child's learning needs. In most classrooms, however, little changed. As one teacher told me, "what we did was we restructured everything, but we kept the guts the same and called it Continuous Progress" (Cameron, 1998, pp. 103–04). On Unit One, for instance, most teachers taught the first grade curriculum the first year, and the second grade curriculum the second year. The only modification was that, in the absence of retentions, teachers employed a larger number of skill-based groupings.

A few teachers *were* able to look beyond the graded curriculum structure to the children themselves. Will was one such teacher. Resistant to skill-groupings from the very start of his career, this disposition was reinforced by the master's thesis research he was doing at this time. While Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938) served as the philosophical foundation for his research and his practice, Rousseau (1979) and Vygotsky (1978) helped him to flesh out more concretely what he was learning about growth from Dewey. "The clearest thing I took out of [Rousseau's] *Emile*," Will says, "was intensely watching what children do and getting into their interests, but then also knowing what to feed them next, if they were willing to take it." Connecting Rousseau's ideas to Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development*, Will says that the aim is "being able to see exactly where a kid is and knowing what you can challenge them with that little level above, so that they can grasp that concept and move on to the next level" (personal communication, August 9, 2013).

Will's master's thesis juxtaposes his assessment of his students' development, based on close observation, with the assessment of them by the district's developmental testing program.<sup>2</sup> In his thesis, he notes,

It is not unusual for me to observe, within the context of the classroom community, a tested skill demonstrated by children only to later have them respond incorrectly to the test's measure of the same skill. "Errors" of this type penalize children throughout the test.

What accounts for such errors? Based on a content analysis of the developmental test, Will writes,

The majority (63%) of the items on the test measure [not children's "development," but rather] the level to which children conform to a prescribed hierarchy of language skills and concepts. Language development is assessed according to the sequential acquisition of discrete technical skills that are normed to middle-class standards.

Using the child-watching skills he was developing, Will discovered the many ways the test concealed his students’ actual development. When encountering decontextualized test items reliant on middle-class language forms and background experiences, his students consistently employed higher order divergent thinking skills, imaginatively making their own meaning. For instance, in a logical relationships test item, he writes, “The child is shown a series of pictures which the teacher names: tie, sandwich, barn, sink. I then tell the child, ‘My word is cow.’ Point to the picture that goes with cow.” Reflecting on the “wrong” answer—sandwich—he was repeatedly given, Will writes,

When I first started to administer this test, I would say to myself, “I can’t believe that s/he doesn’t know this. When I noticed that children kept responding to this item “incorrectly,” I started to question them. Their responses demonstrated that they were able to form logical relations between objects: “Sandwich, when I eat sandwich, I drink milk. Cow make milk.” And, “It sandwich. Cow hungry. Cow don’t eat, he don’t make milk.” However, the relationships these children were forming were divergent and, according to the test, wrong.

In short, Will’s assessment of his students’ development, based on his close observations of their learning in the classroom and his extensive knowledge of their lives outside it, contradicted the results they achieved on the district’s developmental test. He writes, “These tests do not determine if children can name their world. They test whether they can understand the names given to the world by middle-class psychologists and behave in testing situations like middle-class children.”

The consequences, Will observes, are two-fold. First, the biased test results work to deny poor children the instruction they are, in fact, ready for: “According to the testing guidelines, which exhort teachers to teach to the diagnosed level of development, these children’s inability to classify items based on middle-class background experiences preclude them from formal instruction in reading.” As such, “The Developmental Testing program denies poor children access to... rigorous academic work, the type of educational experiences that middle-class children participate in, while poor children are remediated in their ‘deficient’ use of language.”

Second, the developmental test reinforces the deficit lens through which many white, middle class teachers see their students. Describing this, Will writes: “The scene: a staff meeting; the issue—low test scores. A chorus chimes out from the teachers—‘What can we do if the children in this community enter kindergarten at the developmental level of C (four years old)?’” Within this context, Will argues, “The developmental test provides an ‘objective’ measure to legitimize class bias... [and] protects teachers, and the educational community in general, from taking responsibility for their roles in perpetuating the academic failure of urban poor children.” The analysis Will crafted in his master’s thesis served as a foundation for much of his thinking as he progressed as a teacher.

During Will’s first five years as a classroom teacher, the time frame in which 40 to 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession today, the objective conditions

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he encountered interacted with his internal disposition to continuously move him in the direction of teaching and learning experiences of a richer and more expansive quality. This environment included two years with children, a supportive principal and colleague, development opportunities that nurtured his emerging philosophy of teaching, and graduate scholarship that allowed him to make sense of what he was learning in a systematic way. In short, his external environment fundamentally supported his ability to provide a rich parallel environment for his students.

*The Middle Years: 1993–2007*

By his sixth year, Will knew all of the teachers at Everett well. In addition to his continuing relationship with Stella, he was now spending every spare minute he could in the company of a kindergarten teacher named Rebecca. He was drawn to her by her deep respect for children, her extensive knowledge of child development, and by the fact that, like him, she saw teaching as social justice work. Up to that point, kindergarten had been outside of the unit/looping model of grades 1 through 6 at Everett. As Will was readying to loop back to the first year (first grade) on Unit One, he and Rebecca proposed to Charlie that each of them begin teaching multiage kindergarten-first grade configurations. Specifically, they asked to have one half of Rebecca's kindergarteners remain with her as first graders, with the other half assigned to Will. The incoming cohort of kindergarteners who would have been assigned to Rebecca, would be split evenly between the two of them. Moving forward, at the end of each year, the second-year students would exit, the first-year students would become second-year students, and a new group of children would enter as first-year students.

One rationale for multiage practice is to “increase the heterogeneity of class composition and thereby liberate teachers and children from rigid achievement expectations linked to a pupil's age” (Katz, 1992). Such liberation makes possible a pedagogy more responsive to the wide range of development in young children. A second rationale is to “maximize the benefits of interaction and cooperation among children of various ages [with] different experiences and stages of development” (Katz, 1992). A multiage configuration presents an occasion for a particular “social set-up” (Dewey, 1938, p. 45) in the classroom, offering teachers a unique opportunity to encourage their students' developing independence, and to share, more broadly, authority with them. Children at a later point on the developmental continuum become teachers to peers at an earlier point. Second-year students become teachers of first-year students with respect to the norms and expectations of the classroom community. First-year students enter a classroom where relationships of trust between students and teacher are on display, allowing them to feel safe right away.

In spite of the fact that Rebecca and Will's proposal fell outside of the adopted Continuous Progress model employed in the rest of the school, Charlie recognized its promise and gave Rebecca and Will his blessing. The two of them taught K-1s joyfully and with remarkable effectiveness for the next four years.

In what would have been the fifth year of this arrangement, Charlie moved into a district level administrative job and Rebecca was hired as instructional specialist at Greystone Elementary, another school in the same neighborhood. Will remained at Everett for only one more year. Because most teachers at Everett had not, in fact, changed their practices under Continuous Progress, the reform had not resulted in significant gains in state test scores. Under pressure from the district’s central office, Everett adopted *Success for All* (<http://www.successforall.org>), a highly prescriptive instructional model (Delpit, 2012, pp. 34–35). Will went on the transfer list immediately, and was hired just as quickly by Rebecca’s principal, who was employing a Coalition of Essential Schools model at Greystone. During their interview, the principal gave Will a copy of Deborah Meier’s *The Power of their Ideas: Lessons for America from a small school in Harlem* (2002), telling him that it was *required reading* for all new hires. He could not have been happier.

In a painfully ironic turn of events, this principal was reassigned to a newly opening school the day after she offered Will the job. However, the new principal was happy to allow Rebecca, who remained in her instructional position, to take the lead in all things pedagogical. Will was teamed with a woman named Clara to teach K-1 configurations. They collaborated exceptionally well for the next seven years (1998–2005). Clara shared her knowledge of Alfie Kohn’s research with Will, and Will shared his knowledge of Dewey with Clara. To Will’s expertise in children’s literature and emergent literacy, Clara added her expertise in crafting and constructing activity centers. They had two very large rooms in the basement with an adjoining door. Roughly half of each room’s floor space was made up of hand’s-on learning centers, and roughly a third of each day was devoted to learning in these activity areas. During these times, children moved freely from one classroom to the next, depending on the learning they were engaged in. Will and Clara’s students consistently performed well on all district level assessments, and during their final three years together, they led district workshops on how to create literacy and activity rich programs, for all new hires in elementary education.

Over this seven year period, Will worked for two principals. The first one, as mentioned, left the job of instructional leadership to Rebecca, who supported Will fully. Both this principal and Rebecca left Greystone to take other positions in the district during Will’s fourth year there. His next principal, Laura, possessed not only considerable literacy expertise, but also the powers of observation and judgment Dewey identifies as critical to good teaching. She observed Will closely in the same way he observes his own students. Once she had a sense of what he was trying to achieve, she shared with him relevant expertise to support his purposes.

Importantly, two objective conditions sustained Will’s and Laura’s best work during this time. First, this was back in the day when struggling schools received additional support rather than sanctions. Due to a history of underperformance on state tests, Greystone enjoyed a well-funded Reading Recovery program, including staff development in the Ohio State principles; reduced class size; and an extended instructional day. Consequently, for several years running, Will and Clara had

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between 16 and 20 students in their classes. Moreover, teachers were paid an additional 15 percent of their salaries for working the extended day.

Second, at this time, principals in the district enjoyed wide discretion over how to deploy staff development funds. Laura deployed hers by bringing in the Lucy Calkin's-founded Reading & Writing Project out of Teachers College, a program whose mission is to "help young people become avid and skilled readers, writers, and inquirers" (<http://readingandwritingproject.com/about/overview>). While Will got his initial literacy training in whole language practice, it was the support of experts in Reading Recovery and The Reading & Writing Project that helped him to develop ways to more effectively—and critically—teach standard language forms to his urban students, without resorting to out-of-context instruction. During this time, he became highly skilled in running records assessment.

By the end of his middle career, Will had worked for four principals altogether. One, Charlie, had been an extraordinary cultural leader with intimate knowledge of the students and community. Another, Laura, had been a remarkable instructional leader. The other two, while not particularly strong leaders, had given Will the support he asked for and had otherwise stayed out of his way. To one degree or another, all four had, in Dewey's words, "encourage[d] individuality and thoughtfulness in the invention and adoption of methods of teaching and...wink[ed] at departures from the printed manual of study" (1903, p. 3). In Will's own words, "Really what's allowed me to do my thing my whole career is I had the respect of principals." But Dewey warns that short of a system intentionally designed to support teachers' freedom of judgment to act on the basis of observation, having such a principal is no more than a "personal and informal" bit of luck, and that this support "may be ruthlessly thrown aside by his successor" (1903, 3). This is what happened a few years into No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

#### *The Late Years: 2007-present*

Around 2007, the objective conditions that had supported Will's growth as a teacher for 20 years began to erode. In compliance with NCLB's Reading First mandate, the district adopted the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) for language arts. DIBELS is the antithesis of the comprehensive and balanced instruction and assessment Laura had been promoting through The Reading & Writing Project. To assess oral fluency, teachers must follow a script, use a stopwatch set for 60 seconds, and count the number of words a student reads from the DIBELS passage. Pausing, considering, and taking time to self-correct—the very practices Will encourages—are penalized. To assess comprehension, the teacher, again using the stopwatch, counts the number of words a student uses to "retell" what she learned from the passage she read. Speed and quantity, rather than reflection and deep understanding, are the order of the day (Shelton, Altwerger, and Jordan, 2009, p. 138). Laura could not in good faith support a literacy approach that violated everything she believed about teaching and learning. She retired.

Laura’s replacement, Jennifer, a young woman in her early 30’s who Will believed to have significant administrative ambitions, became a constant thorn in his side. To be fair, she was under considerably greater scrutiny than any of Will’s previous principals had ever suffered. Will continued to use running records and alternative assessments to document student progress that was invisible to DIBELS, but Jennifer flooded his and his colleagues’ inboxes with new requests for NCLB approved “data” each week. Moreover, worried that Will would be unable to deliver the state’s mandated curriculum for two grades, Jennifer eliminated his multiage class and assigned him to second grade, without even an opportunity to loop.

During the three years Will worked for Jennifer, each faculty meeting sent him home more demoralized than the one before. “We used to talk about kids, kids and their needs,” he told me. “We never talk about kids anymore. Data. All we talk about is data.”

Finally, in a classic example of what the creators of HBO’s *The Wire* refer to as *juking the stats* (Simon, Colesberry, & Nobel, 2002-2008), the district closed Greystone and reopened it as a middle school with a new name. In a bureaucratic sleight of hand, two schools with histories of low test scores—Greystone and a poorly performing middle school—were magically removed from the data driven universe, and the human beings who occupied these spaces were scattered carelessly in the wind.

Not wanting to leave the neighborhood and its families, Will reapplied to Everett. *Success for All* had proved no more effective in raising test scores than Continuous Progress, and Everett was now reopening as an expeditionary learning school, modeled on Outward Bound. Given his background directing just such a program in Kentucky and his extensive relationships in the community, he assumed he’d be a shoe in. However, during his interview, the principal noted that Everett was under fierce pressure to show achievement gains. “The number one priority here is raising test scores,” she told him. In his characteristic refusal to suffer nonsense, Will said, “No. The number one priority is children. That’s the only way to raise test scores.” He did not get the job. Moreover, he was reassigned to a school in one of the only remaining middle class neighborhoods in the city, about as far away as possible—geographically and culturally—from the neighborhood he was so invested in.

Initially assigned to a second grade class, just weeks before the start of the school year his new principal, Rob, phoned him to say that he would be teaching fifth grade! Due to multiple reform-fueled school closings, the winds had delivered to Rob several reassigned teachers. He made the smart-under-the-circumstances decision to place a successful veteran with a more challenging age-group. Just as Will’s ties to the Everett-Greystone community were disregarded in his reassignment, his 25-year record of early literacy instruction and the fact that he had zero experience teaching children above the second grade level were likewise ignored. I happened to be in our kitchen with Will when he took the phone call. Slowly returning the phone to its charger, he looked at me, the twinkle in his eyes now dead. “I’m just a piece of meat,” he observed.

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Now completing his second year in fifth grade at Davis Elementary, Will's experiences have been a mixed bag. On the plus side, Rob seems to know good teaching when he sees it, and Will suspects that he may possess pedagogical insights to rival Laura's. Unfortunately, his time is almost entirely consumed by the minutia of "reform" truly pressing issues must take a back seat to documenting and reporting mandates. Still, he has been supportive when Will has needed him to be. In one of the most contentious issues Will has faced since joining Davis Elementary, Rob backed his refusal to participate in his teams' longstanding practice of dividing their three classes of students into skill-based groups for math instruction, with each teacher teaching to one skill level.

Rob's support has also been instrumental as Will navigates, for the first time in his career, a stubborn mistrust of him by parents of color. Davis Elementary's population is composed of white, middle-class neighborhood kids and poor children of color bussed in from the other side of the city. Far too many of Davis's teachers attribute to the "bussers" what they perceive as academic and behavioral erosion in the school. Their relationships with the parents of these children are strained. By fifth grade, a good deal of damage has been done, and Will must build bridges with these parents on unfavorable terrain that has been years in the making. His ability to do so has been tied, in part, to Rob's support for disregarding zero-tolerance policies and mandated behavioral penalties. Alongside these circumventions, Will has employed the same strategies he's always used—welcoming parents to the classroom, being accessible, communicating progress, seeking expertise and support. In most cases, he's been successful. At the end of his first year at Davis, he received an email from one such parent, an email that made him cry:

First and foremost, I would like to thank you. For your patients used when dealing with James, @ times when he would run and hide under tables for hours at a time for instance, IT TAKES A SPECIAL PERSON to be able to tolerate and put up with behaviors like that ...:) Thank you for the amount of attention you gave to him. Thanks for the boost of self-esteem he grabbed on to from the many days of love and encouragement you provided him. I would like you to know that GOD DOESNT MAKE MISTAKES, he brought you into our lives @ exactly the right time ... I don't know quite where we would have been if we would not have had you SEPTEMBER 2012! His behaviors mixed with his lack of interest in learning, we were at the tip of the cliff almost bout to fall over ... I appreciate ALL you have done ... u helped me to see something in James, that I couldn't see or maybe that I allowed others persuasion to block me from seeing, about my own child, LABELS ON CHILDREN ARENT GOOD!

You have met James instructional, social and emotional needs at the most maximal of levels. He expresses himself now, instead of shutting down, he's more willing to get his needs met and speaks up for himself without crying. I seen an overall huge growth and change in him. Social interactions are no longer held at an arm's length. James looks forward to playing with others

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instead of sitting on the side line, which he was just doing a year ago ... I see so many good and positive changes in him, I ALWAYS KNEW HE WAS A GREAT KID, but you helped to feed a fire within him, that encouraged him to be CONFIDENT IN HIMSELF ...

My son entered into your class one way sort of like a catipillar does in its cocoon ... and hes leaving out flying like a butterfly ... I wish you could be James teacher next year and every year he's there at Davis. ... Thanx for shinning and smoothing the edges ... (Personal communication to Will; email, including ellipses and capitals, in original form)

In addition to her references to Will’s individual relationship with James, one of her observations speaks to the “total *social* set up”—what Dewey refers to as the “most important of all” objective conditions (1938, p. 45)—that Will creates in the classroom: “Social interactions are no longer held at an arm’s length. James looks forward to playing with others instead of sitting on the side line.” At Davis, Will has been challenged to devise effective ways to foster relationships and community across the divides of race and class, and among an age group more prone to forming cliques than young children. Random seating has been one of the tools he’s used:

There’s 29 seats in the classroom, ’cause there’s 27 children plus two kids that push in for social studies and science. It’s configured with 6 or 7 groupings of kids; all the desks at the same height so they can form tables. Seating assignments are random. Each table has a letter and each seat has a number, and I’ll walk around and students will pull a slip of paper with their seat....It’s a process that takes about 15 minutes once a month. At the beginning of the year, it happens after 3 or 4 days, after a week, after a week and a half.

The expectation is that everyone in the class is going to get along. Your behavior will not affect your seat assignment. You’re part of this community. This is a community and everyone is going to respect each other. (Personal communication, August 8, 2013)

Additional evidence that Will is successfully facilitating relationships and a sense of community comes from this year’s Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), conducted by his assistant principal. For *Creating a Learning Environment* “to build and maintain a culture of learning [and] to manage student social and emotional behavior to reach academic goals” (school district rubric), Will earned a 3.5 on a 4-point scale. Describing the learning environment, his administrator writes,

Students sitting quietly at desks, reading an assortment of books silently. Student desks arranged in clusters of 3 and 4 around the room.

Teacher tells students they have four more minutes before lesson starts, they should wrap up their reading, bring out their poetry packet and writing journals and materials. Students comply promptly.



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All students engage in the writing activity, writing busily in their journals. Teacher rotates to each group of students, checking their work, discussing quietly with students, giving immediate and specific feedback, asking questions and using prompts to scaffold them to complete their task accurately. He asks students to explain their thinking, to explain the reason for their statements, to cite evidence from the poem: “What in the poem makes you say this?”

All through the lesson, teacher and students are very respectful to each other. Teacher utilizes a countdown technique from 5-0 to facilitate students to stop working and transition to another part of the lesson. Transitions are smooth. Students follow directions promptly. There is no loss of time or disruption or interruption of learning.

In her learning environment summary, his assistant principal concludes that Will:

has great level of positive rapport with all his students. There are several very difficult and behaviorally challenged students in this class and yet teacher has been able to nurture these students to a level that has resulted in a substantial difference in their behavior and their ability to positively interact with their peers and staff. Teacher has done this through consistent and continuous firmness, mediation, conferencing with the students and parents, encouragement, incentives, role modeling, guidance, and reinforcement of positive interactions.

Then, in a striking example of irony, her glowing portrayal of Will’s *learning environment* is entirely divorced from her evaluation of his *teaching*, which earned him a mean score of just 2.3. It’s impossible to say whether she simply doesn’t recognize the critical connection between environment and teaching, or whether the evaluation template she is required to use precludes making such a connection.

Modeled on the Danielson Rubric, teachers are evaluated on: 8 planning items, 15 teaching items, 8 classroom environment items, and 6 reflective practice items, yielding 37 *discrete items* overall. For each item, teachers are given a score of 1 to 4. In order to avoid sanctions, including dismissal following three consecutive years of low scores, a teacher’s mean score for the 37 items must be a 2.5 or higher. Will achieved this, *barely*—2.6.

She offers two types of criticism of Will’s teaching. The first is related to content covered and time spent. Linking each criticism to the neglect of one of the 15 discrete teaching items, she asks Will to make mutually exclusive types of adjustments. On the one hand, she wants him to attend to more, as reflected in these directives: (1) “facilitate students to review their prior learning that the present lesson will build on” (2) “facilitate students to discuss how the skill/concept...is used in real life contexts or in various careers” (3) facilitate students to review and check off attained goals... toward mastery of unit goal.”

On the other hand, she wants him to go deeper with both the content covered and with opportunities for dialogue, as indicated in these directives: (1) “ask students to

explain or engage them in exact discussion about what the various poetic devices are—their definitions, functions, characteristics. The only [device you did this with] was rhythm” (2) “give students appropriate wait time to discuss or share responses with each other in their groups” and (3) “allow each student to share their perspectives with the class—this would generate copious student dialogue and learning from each other as students hear others’ perspectives and comment on these.”

She then ices the cake by asking Will to accomplish all of the above within the context of multiple skill groups, which constitutes her second type of criticism of Will’s teaching. She instructs him to “differentiate learning tasks for students to match students’ ability levels.” Rather than having the whole class work with the same poem, she recommends that Will “provide poems of differentiated complexity to students.” This echoes her criticisms of his planning, which earned him his lowest mean score of 2.1: “Create targeted or differentiated small groups,” and “plan instruction that will bridge the learning gaps of students in the groups that are below proficiency level as well as instruction that will enrich/enhance the learning of groups that are at or above proficiency.”

Taken as whole, she offers Will stunningly contradictory recommendations. On the one hand, she asks him to explicitly address all 15 teaching items, to cover more concepts, and to run several skill-groups simultaneously. On the other hand, she asks him to go deeper into the concepts covered, and to give students more time for reflective writing, discussion, and sharing. Moreover, she makes these contradictory recommendations while noting that “There is no loss of time or disruption or interruption of learning.” Perhaps time is a more elastic commodity in the universe she inhabits.

While she appears oblivious to the conflict between her teaching recommendations and the learning environment she so enthusiastically applauds, the contradictions are not lost on Will:

They say they want to raise the bar for everyone and say everyone’s going to get the same education, then they resort to skill based grouping. That’s the push right now. You’re supposed to introduce the lesson to everyone and then work intensely with the kids who don’t get it. What do you do with the other kids that’s going to be meaningful to them? What do they do? They get into trouble. It creates hierarchies in the classroom, and you’re segregating the lower kids so they don’t have higher end models to help move them along. Conflict and boredom come from skill-based groupings. I have always refused—and I’m gonna keep on attempting to refuse—to do them, but I don’t know how long I’ll be able to do that. (Personal communication, August 8, 2013)

The renewed “push” to use skill-based groupings reflects an impoverished understanding of the complexity of learning and community, and a factory model of education designed to “efficiently” teach large numbers of children, rather than to carefully attend to each one’s learning. Just as the developmental program that Will critiqued in his master’s thesis was based on a narrow view of learning, biased

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by class and race, so too is the current push to remediate the skills of marginalized populations. It assumes that normative academic skills—what folks refer to as “basic skills”—must be taught before children can engage in rich thinking and creating (Delpit, 2012). In *The Having of Wonderful Ideas* (1987), Eleanor Duckworth offers a more compelling and authentic approach:

Certainly, we would want each child to have the occasion to work at his or her own level. The solution for the teacher, however, is not to tailor narrow exercises for individual children, but rather to offer situations in which children at various levels, whatever their intellectual structures, can come to know parts of the world in new ways. (p. 48)

Will continues to love the work he engages in with his students. He continues to come home nearly every day with delightful stories about the learning he witnessed with this child or that one. If he still enjoyed the objective conditions that characterized his first 20 years as a teacher, I have no doubt that he’d continue in the classroom for another 8 to 10 years. At this point, however, Will is biding his time. He has three years until retirement, and plans to jump on a buy-out sooner if one is offered. Rubbing abrasively against the joy he continues to experience in his work with students, is an environment which “no self-respecting intelligence” is willing to put up with (Dewey, 1903, p. 3), an environment Will describes accordingly:

In the present configuration of how things are, free thinking is not part of the deal. Conforming to the Danielson Rubric is, coming up with all these artificial ways that you’ve met this one measure. [For instance], giving kids choices. I didn’t have any way to document that. It’s part of the ongoing way the room is run. I couldn’t [efficiently] document it, so I had to hand out a survey and waste 15 minutes having the kids take it. Or: considering children’s desires—that’s something I observe in the classroom all the time—but I had to put out this survey and tabulate all the answers and have it on file that I’m doing this. It’s a waste of fucking time.

I’m supposed to record all contact with parents. If you’re like me, you have about 12 contacts a day. Every time I see a parent, I try to have some meaningful conversation and communicate something of value. I’m supposed to document all that?! I don’t have time to document all this stuff. They gave me 27 kids in my classroom and pushed two more in. How much time do I have?

Now someone like me—I’ll do the bare minimum and I’ll hand that in. But someone else is really going to pay attention to that crap, and waste all their time with it. Instead of watching the kids! It’s the biggest cluster-fuck you can imagine. I mean, there’s people in tears. I’d say on our staff there was at least six teachers I remember being in tears over trying to do this stuff. Taking it so seriously that they were just getting [trails off]. Now I’m just looking at it like how do I get over on this, and not taking it personally, but some people

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aren’t strung like that. They want to be a four. I don’t give a fuck if I’m a four. I wanna be a three. Give me a three, tell me I’m effective, and leave me alone. (Personal communication, August 9, 2013)

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

All other [educational] reforms are conditioned upon reform in the quality and character of those who engage in the teaching profession.... If any scheme could be devised which would draw to the calling of teaching persons of force of character, of sympathy with children, and consequent interest in the problems of teaching and of scholarship, no one need be troubled for a moment about other educational problems. But as long as a school organization which is undemocratic in principle tends to repel...those of independent force, of intellectual initiative, and of inventive ability, or tends to hamper them in their work after they find their way into the schoolroom, all other reforms are compromised at their source and postponed indefinitely for fruition. (Dewey, 1903, p. 3)

This portrait could have been drawn differently by, for instance, highlighting the most common mainstream critique of contemporary education reform—that it’s happening too fast, that teachers (and students) have not been given enough time to “adjust.” Certainly Will’s experiences over the last few years have been replete with examples of what has been referred to as a “botched roll-out.” Standards that seek Common Core depth without a requisite scaling back of information coverage. Hastily and poorly constructed, nonsensical assessments full of errors. Woefully inadequate technology—especially in urban schools—to support mandated “evidence” gathering and cataloguing. A climate of anxiety and fear. Yes, the most frequently leveled criticisms of education reform have been daily animated in Will’s school district. But that portrait misses the more important point that Dewey makes in the preceding passage. Teachers do not need *more time* to “adjust” to corporate sponsored reform. Teachers need *more freedom* to observe and make judgments with the aim of creating, in partnership with their students and other teachers, meaningful and valuable educational experiences. Until that occurs, “all other reforms are compromised at their source” (Dewey, 1903, p. 3).

#### *Postscript*

I teach Foundations of Education to community college students planning to go into teaching. Each semester, as I consider my students, I worry that too many of them, having come up through schooling under neoliberal reforms, are ill-prepared to engage in the rich teaching that is needed. So much of their own schooling has been a casualty of impoverished and disjointed pedagogy designed to support corporate curricula, tests, and profits. But every semester, I have one or two students who have

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somehow managed to avoid the worst consequences of bad schooling, one or two students who I believe will enter the profession with the skills and sensibilities that have served Will's students so well over the years.

I ran into one such student, Zeke, a few nights ago at a talk LeAlan Jones, co-author of *Our America* (1998), was giving at Zeke's transfer school. Realizing that he was just month's shy of completing his B.S. in education, I said,

"So this is your last year, right? You graduate in May?"

"Yes, indeed." Pausing, he added. "But, Jeanne, I changed majors."

"What?!" In retrospect, why was I so stunned?

"I can't do it." He shook his head. "I just can't."

Reading the crestfallen look on my face, he smiled and added, "I'm still gonna work with kids, Jeanne. That's still my passion. But there's no way I can do it in schools."

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In addition to years of informal observations and conversations, this portrait draws on recorded interviews and various artifacts: Will's master's thesis, my dissertation, Will's most recent Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), and parent emails. All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> All quotes that appear in the section on developmental testing come from Will's master's thesis.

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JEAN A. PATTERSON

## **9. 21ST CENTURY LEARNING INITIATIVES AS A MANIFESTATION OF NEOLIBERALISM**

### INTRODUCTION

For the past decade or so, public schools in the US have been critiqued by business organizations, think tanks, and policymakers for their outmoded curriculum and teaching methods, for not embracing advances in technology, and for not preparing students for their futures (Business Roundtable, 2013; Committee for Economic Development, 2003; Dede, Korte, Nelson, Valdez, & Ward, 2005). One of the most influential groups to proffer such criticism is the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). In 2003, P21 published a report calling upon teachers, administrators, parents, and business leaders to ensure every student who graduates from a US high school demonstrates the skills needed to be successful in the 21st Century. P21 identified three broad categories in its framework for 21st Century learning: (1) life and career skills; (2) learning and innovation skills; which includes critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity; and (3) information, media, and technology skills. Proponents argue these skills are necessary to help students make the transition from high school to college, and to prepare them for the workforce, as contemporary work environments need employees who can set goals, demonstrate leadership, and work collaboratively. The cover page of P21's report states:

The Partnership for 21st Century skills is a unique public-private organization formed in 2002 to create a successful model of learning for this millennium that incorporates 21st Century skills into our system of education.

The public-private partnership P21 venerates is an example of the neoliberal agenda to privatize public services. Although both partners are thought to have equal status, the private side of the hyphen is presumed to be more efficient and effective than the public side (Linder, 1999). Indeed, the P21 public-private partnership is largely one-sided; with P21 members almost exclusively comprised of technology hardware and software corporations (e.g., Apple, Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Dell). The US Department of Education is listed as a "Key Partner." Corporate interests are clearly the force behind 21st Century learning initiatives being embraced by many US public schools. Given the nature of the corporations associated with P21, it is not surprising that technology is high among the valued 21st Century skills. In this chapter, I argue that seemingly benign 21st Century learning initiatives, like the one being promoted by P21, are another way for neoliberal ideology to be inserted



into US public education. As this study illustrates, 21st Century learning is another iteration of the repurposing of public education for private, and profitable, ends.

My objectives in this chapter are to present findings from a qualitative case study of a comprehensive high school attempting to integrate 21st Century learning skills into its curriculum and instructional practices to illustrate how the discourse of neoliberalism was pervasive throughout the school. The intent of this analysis is to (1) locate current and popular notions of 21st Century learning within the discourse of neoliberalism and (2) analyze P21's discourse and the neoliberal ideology embedded within it. The study was conducted at the request of district administrators who were interested in learning how leadership, faculty, and students were implementing 21st Century learning in their brand new high school. The chapter is the result of a re-analysis of the data from the original study using a critical discourse analytic approach. The four themes identified from the secondary analysis constitute a critique of P21 as a pervasive neoliberal educational reform. The themes illustrate P21's emphasis on educating students for jobs and to meet the needs of business, consumption of technology, using project-based learning pedagogy to teach soft skills, and preparing the global citizen.

#### *Neoliberalism and Public Education*

According to Fowler (1995), the shift to contemporary neoliberal educational policies in the US took place with the election of Clinton in 1992, when Democratic party neoliberals gained power. The Clinton administration popularized neoliberal ideas promulgated during the Reagan administration (Harvey, 2005). Among these were such notions as "reinventing government" (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), which proposed privatizing public services while keeping them under government regulation (Spring, 2008). Reinventing government led to efforts to privatize education and to the formation of public-private partnerships, thus legitimizing market and corporate values in the operation of public schools. Neoliberalism transcends partisan politics in the US as both political parties have embraced and eagerly supported neoliberal education reforms.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was the logical progression of neoliberal educational reforms initiated by the Democrats (Hursh, 2007). Although NCLB appears to be sympathetic to the needs of poor and minority youth, its policies favor privatization and promote business-friendly reforms (Burch, 2006; Giroux & Giroux, 2006). The election of Barack Obama in 2008 and his selection of Arne Duncan to serve as secretary of education did little to alter the neoliberal policy and political landscape of public education (Giroux & Saltman, 2009; Porfilio & Carr, 2011). The Obama administration's educational policies are premised on the same neoliberal discourse of market, competition, and choice as previous administrations (Ravitch, 2013). Proponents of high school 21st Century learning initiatives have capitalized on the persuasiveness of this discourse.

*Critical Discourse Analysis*

I used a critical discourse analytic approach to examine the manifestation of neoliberal ideology found in the language of P21's 21st Century learning initiative (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 2010; Luke, 1995). Luke (1995) defined discourse as recurrent patterns of written and spoken text that articulate identifiable systems of meaning, fields of knowledge, and beliefs. Texts are located in important social institutions and developed to serve institutional purposes and projects. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is primarily concerned with examining the relationship between texts and power in order to "critique and challenge dominant institutional practices" (Luke, 1995, p. 10). CDA acknowledges that humans constitute and are constituted by text. That is, humans use text to make sense of their worlds, but texts also position and construct individuals through provision of various meanings, ideas, and versions of the world.

Discourse also has a hegemonic function, with dominant discourses appearing natural and normative, thus disguising the power relations resulting in the inequitable production and distribution of resources, both material and symbolic (Fairclough, 2010; Luke, 1995). CDA is a useful tool for analyzing spoken and written narratives to expose the inequities, domination, and subordination in seemingly benign text. CDA can make transparent the devices with which texts position and manipulate individuals. Neoliberalism has become a powerful discourse, a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980), which has infiltrated many facets of public education, and for purpose of this chapter, commonsense notions of 21st Century learning.

Partnerships like that of P21 have the power and financial means to circulate the neoliberal discourse, which lends it greater authority. The crux of the discursive message is public education is inefficient, the United States is in a crisis because students are not acquiring technical skills, and the most viable solution is partnership between the state and technology corporations. This analysis of neoliberal discourse embedded within P21's educational reform agenda illustrates its power to persuade administrators, teachers, and students at this Midwestern high school of the importance of implementing 21st Century learning. There was, however, some resistance to the reform from a few teachers and administrators. The resistance was not directed toward the neoliberal ideology, however, but toward some of the educational practices required to accomplish its goals.

## STUDY CONTEXT AND METHODS

*State Priorities and P21*

The state department of education (SDE) of the Midwestern state where the study was conducted became a P21 partner in February 2008 when its application was approved at P21's Board Meeting. To become a P21 partner state required a commitment from the governor, state legislative leaders, state agency leaders, higher

education, K-12 education, state education organizations, and corporate partners. According to SDE documents, becoming a P21 partner “solidified the state’s commitment to 21st Century teaching and learning.” Since becoming a partner, the state has annually received a Best Practice award from P21. All of the Best Practice awards were related to the state integrating 21st Century learning into various aspects of the public education system. For example, the SBE’s profiles of the 21st Century Learner (described below) and Technology-Rich Classrooms were honored in recent years as exemplary models of 21st Century learning environments.

The state made 21st Century learning central to its educational philosophy. In 2008, the state board endorsed what it called profiles of the 21st Century learner and the 21st Century learning environment. The profile of the 21st Century learner incorporates 10 unifying themes: (1) creativity and innovation, (2) critical thinking and problem solving, (3) communicating and collaborating, (4) ICT and media literacy, (5) flexibility and adaptability, (6) initiative and self-direction, (7) social and cross-cultural skills, (8) productivity and accountability, (9) leadership and responsibility, and (10) employment and career development. The language embedded in these 10 themes is consistent with P21’s framework for 21st Century learning.

The profile of the 21st Century learning environment is premised on five unifying components: Relationships, Relevance, Responsive Culture, Results, and Rigor. Under the Relationships component are staff, students, families, and community. Relevance includes curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and technology. Responsive Culture encompasses leadership, early childhood, district climate, and nutrition and wellness. Results covers achievement, growth, gap, and other measures of student performance. And, Rigor entails career and technical education, professional learning, resources, and data. This learning environment profile is the result of an effort that combined P21’s framework with the International Center for Leadership in Education’s (ICLE) Rigor/Relevance framework. ICLE’s core beliefs reflect the neoliberal discourse of public education’s inability to keep pace with changes in the global marketplace. Its founder, for instance, recently presented a conference paper proposing the Rigor/Relevance framework as a solution to preparing students for careers and college in the 21st Century (Daggett, 2013). In 2011, the state board formally incorporated these profiles into its new 21st Century accreditation model.

SDE representatives advocate a 21st Century vision of student success tied to knowledge acquisition, skills, and competencies needed to live, learn, and thrive in a 21st Century environment. Thriving in this high tech environment is defined and linked to understanding technological advances, understanding how to acquire background knowledge quickly, the ability to sift through new information quickly and apply it to new situations, the ability to communicate both interpersonally and electronically, and the ability to participate in a global society.

The SDE took several measures to implement P21’s framework for 21st Century learning. For instance, it established a Career Pipeline, which is operated by a

non-profit organization with the mission of engaging students in using the state's educational system to reach their career and life goals. The SDE seeks to accomplish this mission through a collaborative online effort between various state agencies and representatives from the state's business and industry. The non-profit operates a web portal where high school students can measure their career interests, skills and work values, explore occupations, establish educational strategies, and ultimately connect with employers who need their talents. The pipeline provides resources to raise career awareness to help students make informed career choices. In addition to college and career readiness, the state's 21st Century learning initiative emphasizes technology-rich classrooms.

Another way the state supports 21st Century learning is through the Governor's Career and Technical Education (CTE) bill, which was passed into law in July 2012. The law requires the state's 2-year community colleges to work with high schools to make a smooth transition from K-12 to careers in high demand occupations. Key provisions of the law are tuition reimbursement for high school students enrolled in college-level CTE courses, transportation reimbursement to school districts transporting high school students to off-campus college level programs, and a marketing campaign to promote the positive impact of CTE on education and the workforce.

#### *Flint Hills School District*

Flint Hills (a pseudonym) is a rural-suburban district that, at the time of data collection, was in the process of implementing 21st Century learning throughout the district's schools, especially its new high school. The community, which is largely white and middle class, had supported a \$5 million bond to build a new high school for its 783 students in grades 9-12.<sup>1</sup> The new school opened its doors in August 2011, and the study commenced shortly thereafter. District leaders planned the new high school with 21st Century learning in mind, including "all of the bells and whistles," as one school board member put it. The district had invested monetarily in the technology to support 21st Century learning, but also embraced its ideology and discourse. District and school leaders encouraged faculty at the newly constructed school to move ahead with 21st Century learning, thinking they were being innovative in meeting students' needs. The school was not low performing according to test scores, but administrators wanted to see students more actively engaged in lessons and were concerned about their lack of preparation for life after high school, especially students who were identified as lacking the motivation or aptitude for college.

#### *Research Design and Methodology*

This qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009) was conducted at the request of district leaders who desired to get a sense of the school's progress with integrating

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21st Century learning skills into classrooms. The overarching questions guiding the study were: What are Flint Hills HS stakeholders' (students, teaching staff, administrators) experiences with 21st Century learning and how do those experiences reflect the neoliberal discourse? Specific research questions were: (1) What are Flint Hills HS stakeholders' perceptions of 21st Century instruction? (2) How do Flint Hills HS students experience 21st Century learning? And (3) How do Flint Hills HS teachers experience the change process from traditional to 21st Century learning/teaching styles?

Assisted by a team of five doctoral students, I collected data at the school during Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 through the use of traditional qualitative methods, which included individual interviews, focus groups, observations, and review of documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Study participants consisted of representatives from district leadership, high school building leadership, teachers, and students.

*Researcher positionality.* I am a Professor of Educational Leadership at a regional university. A hallmark of the doctoral program is to conduct studies for districts with students who are participating in the program. Doing so affords doctoral students the opportunity to gain valuable experience conducting research under the supervision of a faculty mentor. The district in turn receives an independent study on an issue of interest to them. Therefore, the needs of the district rather than my scholarly interests drove these studies. I have over 15 years of experience working with doctoral students on these qualitative research projects. Studies have addressed a range of topics related to educational reform and program implementation.

My students and I did not go into this study with the intent to critique neoliberalism in educational reform. During our initial meeting with district leaders, it was apparent they had enthusiastically embraced this notion of 21st Century learning. They were proud of their brand new, state-of-the-art high school and were focused on forging ahead with infusing this rather abstract, ill-defined idea of 21st Century learning into the school. During the meeting, they mentioned being guided by the work of P21 and brought this group to our attention. District leaders were primarily interested in gauging where teachers and students were in the process of changing teaching and learning to align with the principles of 21st Century learning.

We framed the study using Fullan's theory of educational change (2007) in order to examine how teachers embraced and/or resisted changing their instructional practices to be consistent with their understanding of 21st Century learning. It was not until about halfway through the study that I began to see neoliberal discourse in the data. The hegemony of the discourse became apparent when district leaders, building leaders, teachers, and students all expressed a normative view of the purpose of schooling being to prepare students for their future employment. A few teachers questioned some of the 21st Century learning practices, including technology integration and project-based learning, which are key principles of 21st Century learning. I had to wrestle with teacher resistance to changing their

pedagogical practices to incorporate technology and project-based learning as they represented 21st Century learning at this high school. It eventually became clear that teachers' rejection of these instructional methods did not stem from a critique of the overarching ideals of neoliberalism embedded in 21st Century learning, but from being convinced their traditional methods would better prepare students for college and careers.

*Data collection.* The research team conducted individual interviews with two board of education members, three district level administrators (superintendent, assistant superintendent, and technology director), and the three high school administrators (principal and assistant principals). District and building administrators provided the vision, direction, and oversight for the implementation of 21st Century learning at Flint Hills, therefore it was important to capture their insights on what they believed about 21st Century learning and what they thought was or should be happening at the high school.

The research team also moderated five focus groups with 25 of the school's 41 teachers. Twenty-two of the teachers invited to participate taught a core subject in language arts, mathematics, social studies or science. We selected core subject teachers because they were expected to be incorporating 21st Century learning skills into their classrooms, as the P21 framework suggested. Three business teachers also participated in a focus group because they were responsible for Career and Technical Education (CTE), which is a key component of the state's vision for 21st Century learning.

In addition, we moderated four focus groups with 26 students in grades 9-12. A maximum variation sampling strategy was used to ensure a broad representation of the student body participants in this study (Patton, 2002). Flint Hills High School staff members were asked to select students balanced by gender and academic performance with a range of lowest to highest performing students in each grade level. However, it became apparent that all of the students were high achieving and highly involved in school activities and were not representative of the student body. Their views are thus presented with a note of caution.

Finally, we conducted observations in core content and business classrooms to see what instructional strategies teachers were using to teach 21st Century learning skills. At the suggestion of district personnel, we also observed some elective classes, including music, automotive technology, and broadcast journalism. A total of 31 observations of classrooms were conducted, with extensive field notes taken throughout the full 50-minute class period. Documents examined consisted of public information available on the district and school's website, including the district's Technology Plan.

*Data analysis and interpretation.* Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcripts, sets of field notes, and documents were reviewed to develop categories, which, in turn, led to the development of key themes.

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Interview and focus group data were unitized and entered into an excel spread sheet for further analysis (Meyer & Avery, 2009). An inductive approach to analysis was used in which the data were searched for patterns to develop a coding scheme. Once all data were coded, the next step was a process called axial coding where potential relationships between the theoretical framework and data codes were explored and documented (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Interview and focus group data were compared to classroom observation field notes. For purposes of this chapter, the codes were reinterpreted in light of critical discourse analysis. For example, the various meanings of 21st Century learning as job readiness, meeting the needs of business, the importance of technology, and project-based learning were apparent in the original analysis, but were re-examined with neoliberal discourse in mind, as the talk about 21st Century learning at the school was for the most part unquestioned.

#### NEOLIBERAL DISCOURSE AND 21ST CENTURY LEARNING IN FLINT HILLS

We identified four main themes suggestive of neoliberalism's recurrence throughout P21's logic for 21st Century learning from the discourse analysis. The first theme was a general belief that 21st Century learning meant meeting the needs of business, which was closely related to preparing students for their futures, whether via higher education or going directly into the workforce. The mantra of college and career readiness was evident throughout the state's current discourse on K-12 education, and Flint Hills was seen as a leader and innovative with its explicit focus on incorporating 21st Century learning throughout the high school. A second theme was the calling for technological saturation. The use of technology was viewed as a critical component of 21st Century learning at Flint Hills High School. The third theme, project-based learning, would be used to facilitate technology integration into the learning environment and for teaching 21st Century learning skills as teachers understood them. While project-based learning, in general, has been demonstrated repeatedly to reinforce learning, P21 offered a narrow definition of this approach. Preparing the global citizen was the final theme. District administrators talked about this idea, as they took a more global view of 21st Century learning than teachers. Each of these themes is presented in the sections that follow.

##### *21st Century Learning Means Prioritizing the Needs of Business*

It was evident at the outset of the study that Flint Hills' district and building administrators had embraced the discourse of 21st Century learning as college and career readiness. A subtext running through the data expressed a belief that the primary purpose of K-12 education was to meet the needs of business. One district administrator's remark represented the prevailing belief that 21st Century learning was a charge to K-12 public schools to "align and match the skills necessary that the job and the workforce is saying our kids are going to need once they leave us."

An assistant principal also described 21st Century learning as a “more current model to link to jobs available now, skills needed, being more connected with what students will face when they leave their K-12 education.” Teachers tended to echo administrators’ descriptions of 21st Century learning. One teacher, for instance, explained his understanding of 21st Century learning as coming from the administrators who wanted “to get the kids ready for a job no matter whether that may be through college or not going to college.”

Some teachers expressed a concern that what they had been doing in the past was insufficient and they had graduated students who, as one teacher put it, “that maybe weren’t as prepared as they could have been.” Although most of their students performed well academically, the neoliberal discourse contributed to teachers questioning themselves and discounting their work. Students noted what was different about their academic experience in the new school. They described how more of their teachers were talking about careers during their classes and describing the skills they would need to pursue specific jobs. For example, a student commented his math teacher explained what kind of jobs used the math equations the class was learning, “and if you’re interested in that job or good in a certain type of math, in what type of job you would use it.” Another student explained how teachers were now telling them “what you are going to need for this career in case you want to go into it.” Flint Hills High teachers were making conscious and deliberate connections between their subject matter and possible jobs, which would better prepare students for their futures.

Internships and work opportunities outside of school were regarded as critical to 21st Century learning because they offered relevant, “real world” experiences. One district administrator expressed his admiration for another high school in the state where students “are actually doing work for businesses.” Even though these students “work for the businesses for free,” he felt the students were “empowered,” because “they are actually working with high ups at these companies.” The administrator explained how the companies approach the school and request, for example, “a new website.” Then the school’s “graphic design department will create the look and feel of it and then go over to the [school’s] programming team and have the programming team create the code for it and then they go back to the businesses and ‘say this is what we created for you.’” The administrator was enthusiastic about this being “real relevant learning because they are making a product for a company.” There were real life lessons to be learned if the “company comes back and says no, ‘I don’t like that. You need to make it either this way or this way.’” The fact that students were performing work for a company without compensation was not viewed as problematic or exploitive of their (and teachers) labour because it was seen as valuable learning experience.

Flint Hills High administrators oversaw the initiation of the school’s internship program under the tutelage of the Business teachers. Seniors who had completed enough credits toward graduation could perform unpaid work for local businesses to get experience. District leaders were keen about the school’s internship opportunities



that provided students with work experience. The superintendent said with pride, “You’ll see internships where we’re matching kids with businesses.” An assistant superintendent saw the potential for expanding their internship program “where our kids have mentors and are actually going out in the field and learning skills.” We had to reschedule the time for the interview to accommodate “four people from the business world coming to talk about Human Resources” with their interns, “talking about those skills that are necessary if they were to go and get a job right now.” A student explained the internship program allowed them to “go out into the real world and get involved with a job or something you might think you want to do for college or a career.” Even though she was working for no pay, the student thought it was “really neat to experience that.” None of the participants expressed concern about uncompensated work representing “real world” experience. This narrative thread about the importance of relevance and real world experience presumed that academic activity in schools was not relevant and did not represent the “real world.”

The Career Pipeline, a state initiative to support 21st Century learning, was described in a number of interviews. It was touted as a vehicle for providing students with guidance on determining whether they have the aptitude for certain fields and what type of classes or activities they need to be involved in to successfully pursue a given career field. An assistant principal explained it this way,

The Career Pipeline I believe was created for students to be able to say, “Okay if I want to be in this career field then here is what I need to do” and it incorporates 21st Century skills into that pathway.

According to the assistant principal, Flint Hills High was “in the initial phases of getting that introduced throughout the student body.” Students were required to go to the Career Pipeline website and register for the program, where school personnel were able to track their choices. Students were encouraged to sign up as early as middle school. An assistant principal supported the idea of the Career Pipeline because, “Students will be able to see a career path, that if they want to go into engineering then these are the types of classes and activities you need to be involved in, and would you have aptitude in this type of field?” The assistant principal explained how the state was “focusing on more career development through career pipelines,” and the district’s plan was to have discussions with teachers and students about career choices “on an earlier, younger and younger level.” The Career Pipeline also came up as a topic among teachers who connected the school’s 21st Century learning initiative to getting students “more involved with Career Pipeline and career search,” as one teacher said. Another teacher expressed hope that “The Career Pipeline might help some of the kids look at their interest and careers.” This teacher thought it was important for students “to open their minds a little bit to [say] ‘Omigosh, I am going to have to figure out about what I want to do.’” Most of the teachers interviewed supported the idea that students should start thinking about their future careers; again solidifying education’s work preparation focus.

The SBE's Career Pipeline created the expectation students were to not only be thinking about their future, but they were to make a commitment to a career path. A senior student explained through the Career Pipeline, they were able to "learn what our interests are by taking these tests and stuff." She felt better prepared for "going out into the real world," and knowing "what to expect and like researching colleges and ... finding all the stuff you need to do." The notion that school was a precursor to "the real world" recurred persistently throughout the interviews.

In this district, and perhaps elsewhere, 21st Century learning has resulted in redefining community involvement to mean business involvement. Partnerships with business and internship experiences for students were deemed important. Sometimes community involvement and business involvement were used interchangeably. A building principal shared how the school was turning to "outside resources" to help them develop their definition of 21st Century learning, saying "We're looking to outside businesses and outside resources to help us define that. So we come to kind of more of a community approach for these skills." A district administrator made a similar observation, noting that when it comes to defining 21st Century learning, "We can't do that alone. We have got to bring kids, parents, and businesses to the table to help us define what direction we go. Because to me it is ... college and career readiness."

To summarize, prioritizing the needs of business at Flint Hills meant focusing on preparing students for careers in business. This was to be accomplished through teachers showing how their subject matter led to potential jobs, encouraging students to pursue internships and other "real world" experiences, putting a system in place that requires students to start making career decisions at a relatively early age, and allowing businesses to dictate how the school should define 21st Century learning. Being college and career ready also meant being fluent in the use of technology hardware and software.

#### *Technology Hardware and Software are Highly Valued but Contested*

Although technology certainly has its place in schools and can be an effective instructional tool, given the interests of the large-scale technology hardware and software firms supporting P21, it is not surprising P21's framework for 21st Century learning has placed a high value on technology integration. The new Flint Hills high school was outfitted with a considerable amount of state-of-the-art-technology for teachers and students to use. A passionate and excited board member boasted, "We moved to the new high school and it has all of the bells and whistles. Classrooms have all kinds of technology, from the Smart Boards, laptops, and basically anything they need." The district also hired a Technology Director and created a Technology Plan that outlined objectives for what students should be doing and ways to accomplish the objectives. The plan included three technology goals: infrastructure, curriculum integration, and professional development. Representatives from all district schools,

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including teachers, parents, and students participated in developing the plan, which was approved by the Board of Education.

The technology plan was created to direct the district's technology efforts and emphasized the acquisition of 21st Century learning skills through the proficient use of technology; there were some contradictions evident at the school as it concerned technology. For example, the presence of a computer lab, which is considered an out-dated method of technology integration, was a bit unexpected. Also surprising were other remnants of a traditional high school, such as classrooms with desks lined up in rows and departments located in separate wings, which did little to facilitate collaboration across disciplines. An assistant principal insightfully made this comment about the new building:

As beautiful as it is, and expensive as it was, it is still a very traditional school. It is broken up into wings with subject areas over here and each classroom of 25 to 30 students, and teachers are somewhat isolated.

Although the design of the new building was to be technologically advanced to facilitate 21st Century learning, in many ways its design was quite typical of a traditional comprehensive high school. It is perhaps no surprise that Flint Hills' administrators and teachers had mixed feelings about the use of technology. The use of technology was central to the school's implementation of 21st Century learning, but there was little consensus among school and district stakeholders or discussion among the staff about how to use it to accomplish their 21st Century learning goals.

Flint Hills' district leaders described technology as having the potential to keep students interested and engaged in school while also preparing them for the workforce. They observed students using technology ubiquitously outside of school, but were rarely allowed to use their technology at school. For instance, a school board member commented on how his own children "play their Xbox with people from all over the world, so when we talk about 21st Century we have to engage them the way technology engages them when they are not at school." Another school board member, when asked to describe 21st Century learning, stated it was using different instructional methods which allowed students to incorporate "cell phones, smartphones, tablets and PCs and televisions that are high definition, a lot of hands on," noting, students "learn quickly how to operate those pieces of equipment." The Technology Director made it clear that technology integration was not teacher use of technology, but it was "seeing it in the hands of kids." Seeing technology in the "hands of kids" is consistent with the neoliberal discourse regarding the importance of consumption.

Most Flint Hills High School core subject teachers expressed little understanding of how to integrate the technology effectively into their instruction. A few teachers had received training through professional development provided by IntelR, however the expense and time involved precluded more teachers from participating. Teachers described the potential to integrate smart phones, iPads, flip video cameras,

laptops, and smart boards into their instruction, yet classroom observations revealed PowerPoint presentations being used in conjunction with lectures, videos being shown, and graphing calculators being used to solve math problems.

Students, however, described an increase in the use of technology and computers in the first year at their new school building. They noted the presence of more technology, and as one student put it, there was more use of “technology and computers than what we did last year.” Another student mentioned teachers who used websites like Edmodo, explaining, “It’s kind of like Facebook. We can all interact on that website. So that’s really helpful and useful. You can see what’s going on in a class. That’s another way we use technology that’s different than last year.” Students spoke about teachers using Smart Boards, and students described having netbooks and engaging in projects where they used flip cameras to make videos and prepared PowerPoint presentations. Unfortunately, during the study, scant evidence of these activities was observed in core classrooms. In several classrooms, students were observed logging in to Edmodo, and using it as the medium for taking notes and to electronically submit assignments, which is scarcely tapping into the potential of Edmodo’s interactive capabilities. Teachers and students were promised free accounts through Edmodo, but then discovered fees for additional “premium” services, including onsite professional development. Like the Intel training, money and time were issues that prevented teachers from developing their technology integration expertise.

The only example of technology use observed in a classroom that was consistent with what students told us was a new music and media class. A student explained how the music and media class was now being offered “because of all the technology.” She went on to describe how students “get to work with iPads and Mac computers in the music department with like Garage Band .... We were able to kind of like create songs with them ... and we got to perform those during one of our choir concerts.” Students with a wide range of abilities were indeed observed using iPads to learn basic keyboard/piano skills whereas others used the technology to compose their own music. Flint Hills High staff highlighted the new music and media class as an example of 21st Century learning because of what they saw as its creative use of technology.

In most classrooms, technology was used for the purpose of augmenting traditional instruction and was not being used in an innovative or creative way. Most of the more innovative technology integration observed occurred during electives, such as music, broadcast journalism, business, and auto shop classes; it was seldom observed in core subjects. Even though district leaders recognized technology in itself was not the sole focus of 21st Century learning, but was a tool for enhancing instruction, the Technology Director acknowledged, “The technology part of it is pretty important.” Students were viewed as users of technology they had previously purchased; the consumption of technology was a driving force at Flint Hills High School. A common understanding among teachers was that implementing 21st

Century learning in their classrooms meant using more technology. As illustrated in the following paragraphs, some teachers embraced this notion of technology consumption whereas others found it unsettling.

Some teachers expressed enthusiasm about giving their students access to technology and saw it as a way to differentiate instruction. For example, one shared, “You can do a Prezi, you can do a PowerPoint, you can do a Movie Maker. And it really fits the needs of each individual; you have that differentiated instruction.” For other teachers, the emphasis on the consumption of technology was problematic. A language arts teacher expressed concern that technology was such a “key piece” of their 21st Century learning initiative that other skills were “being left behind, even though they are just as valuable.” Teachers grappled with the notion that technology was not a panacea and technology itself would not improve student learning. Another teacher shared this insight:

Technology is great, but technology is not the thing that’s going to solve all of our problems! It has to be how are you going to use it, you have to be wise about where you’re going to put it, things along those lines. So I think that all needs to be taken into consideration with 21st Century learning. Because you shouldn’t just look at it and go, “Well if I put iPads in my classroom, that will make all of my kids better learners.”

Still others felt they were being asked to use technology for the sake of using it without a meaningful instructional purpose. For example, a science teacher shared, “Some of the administration has come down with 21st Century learning is technology. That means you have smart boards in your classrooms, you have iPads at the desk, you know, you’re constantly using that type of technology.” Another teacher described 21st Century learning as “a push for incorporating technology into the way students learn.” For these teachers, the rationale, expectations, and specific strategies for incorporating technology into the classroom were unclear.

District and building leaders recognized that some teachers were going through the motions of using technology and had little understanding of its potential for enhancing instruction. An assistant principal shared an example of how, in many classrooms, the use of a laptop was “just a digital version of a big chief tablet and 3 x 5 cards. The student really has not broadened the learning experience just because they are now typing it on a laptop.” Merely moving an assignment or activity from paper to computer did little to enhance or alter the student’s learning experience.

Some teachers expressed that technology was not ethically neutral and brought up the need for students to learn to use technology appropriately, such as when to text during class, and how to manage social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook. They believed students were proficient with technology and used it extensively outside of school. Yet, as a social studies teacher pointed out, “They’re spending hours and hours and hours on technology, but it’s not focused on learning, it’s focused on social issues and gossip and that type of thing.” Many teachers felt students did not use their technology for educational purposes. According to a science teacher,

“With regards to technology, they want to use their toys, but they don't necessarily want to use them for the purposes we want them to use them for.” Tensions existed between students who wanted to use their everyday technology and teachers who felt they needed to control and patrol its use at school.

A few teachers astutely observed that the 21st Century learning technology component was a money-making opportunity for vendors. As one pointed out, “It seems be kind of profit-driven.” When asked to elaborate, he explained, “Well, I think a lot of the technology and stuff that we use, I think comes down the pike because someone is making some money on it. Because it seems to change. And I know it's going to change fast, but it seems to flip-flop a lot, our priorities.” Priorities were established on which vendor was able to provide the best deal or incentive in the education marketplace. At Flint Hills, the consumption of technology almost seemed more important than its potential to be used for educational purposes.

*Project-based Learning to Teach P21's “Soft Skills”*

Throughout the study, project-based learning instructional approaches were linked to the use of technology and the implementation of 21st Century learning at Flint Hills High School. Project-based learning approaches were believed to facilitate teaching many of the student outcomes in P21's framework, what participants referred to as “soft skills.” That is, the problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration, and creativity skills P21 says are needed for living and working in a 21st Century global context. A district leader believed learning subject matter content was no longer the primary goal of public education, noting, “What our kids will be needing when they leave us, our K-12 system, isn't just content. They need those process skills; they need the thinking skills that are crucial in a very changing world.” Consequently, Flint Hills High teachers were encouraged to use team-oriented, project-based learning methods that integrated technology, because, as one board member put it:

All of the projects they do is (sic) helping our kids because they also have to learn to work in teams and groups. That's what employers want them to be able to do in the future .... Because businesses are always solving things as a team.

Teachers and administrators expressed a belief that it is important for students to be able to work on team projects to enhance their chances for employment. In turn, they believed that teaching these skills would make Flint Hills' graduates more competitive in the workforce. One teacher, for instance, expressed, “I think the 21st Century learning skills also include things like time management, collaboration, being able to get along and work in a group.” Another teacher added, “It's communication, collaboration, it is adaptability, creativity, and all those different things.” A business teacher related teaching these kinds of 21st Century skills was important to prepare students for “work in the real world. Instead of spoon feeding information to them they're working with people and figuring things out on their own, problem solving.”

Even students talked about the importance of teamwork to their future work, as one observed, “In the real world you’re going to have to work with other people. You’re not going to be able to do everything by yourself.” Nearly all students mentioned they participated in team, partner, or group work in their classes. In spite of teachers’ rhetoric about the importance of students’ learning these skills, not much explicit teaching of them was observed in classrooms.

Some teachers actively resisted using project-based learning methods, insisting that many students did not want to be taught using these methods. They acknowledged that moving to project-based instruction not only meant teaching differently, but required students to learn in a different way; that students would have to be retaught how to learn, how to take control of their learning. One teacher mentioned the challenges they encountered when “we attempted to teach students how to collaborate.” Some teachers talked about their “difficulty in getting ideas across to students” and communicated an uncertainty of how they could evaluate student individual and group projects efficiently, because “it takes a lot of time.”

Teachers also indicated that lecture-style instruction was the dominant delivery method students experienced in higher education, which raised concerns about using other pedagogical approaches. According to one teacher, a student asked, “Are we going to know what we need to know when we go to college? If you’re letting us design this experiment and do this activity, what are we learning?” Another teacher reported that he had a student tell him, “We want you to lecture to us more.” Another student told a teacher that project-based learning “isn’t the knowledge that we think we need.” Consequently, some teachers expressed they were fearful that if they abandoned their more traditional teaching styles, students would not be ready for college. These anecdotes ran counter to what the students shared with us.

Students said they enjoyed working on projects and liked being actively involved in the learning process. They described feeling that their teachers were working hard to assign projects to increase their learning and participation. A student confirmed this by stating, “Every year we continuously add on more projects. It helps the learning process, it makes learning really easier because it is hands-on all the time.” A number of lessons were observed where teachers used games and other activities to engage students, but they hardly approached the level of teacher-facilitated projects requiring the 21st Century higher order thinking, critical thinking, or problem solving skills businesses ostensibly desired. Students were sometimes observed working in groups, but they tended to be unstructured instead of each member having a purpose structured to learning content. These efforts were a blend of traditional instruction with teachers’ understanding of what project-based instruction should look like.

Consistent with our observations about the use of technology, little evidence of genuine project-based learning was observed in classrooms. Instead, instruction in most core classes was primarily teacher-led, where students were directed to complete worksheets, study guides, and to silently take notes while the teacher

lectured. For example, the new science classrooms all had state-of-the-art lab tables and lab equipment, yet were seldom used when classes were observed. In a freshman physical science classroom about 20 students sat at the lab tables, but spent almost the entire 50-minute class session reviewing a worksheet they had completed on Newton's laws. Students in an advanced chemistry class did not sit at the lab tables, instead they were crowded around three tables at the front of the room where the teacher was reviewing algebra problems related to the conversion of moles from one substance to another. Nonetheless, the 12 students in the class were following along with the teacher, who apologized ahead of time, noting that this particular lesson did not call for the use of projects or technology other than graphing calculators.

As teachers at this high school struggled with figuring out how to incorporate 21st Century learning into their content areas, it was not always apparent what students were learning. Games, activities, and busy work might be engaging and fun for students and are possibly preferable to lectures and note taking, but what students actually gained in terms of depth of knowledge was unclear. Most Flint Hills teachers had very little, if any, professional development in either technology integration or project-based learning. District administrators admitted state budget cuts in recent years had devastated the professional development budget. Consequently, teachers were largely left on their own to incorporate 21st Century soft skills into their instruction, along with anticipating what the business community might need for their graduates.

### *Preparing the Global Citizen*

Twenty-first Century learning at Flint Hills was also linked to an idealized notion of global citizenship, one intended to foster cultural diversity and understanding. To illustrate, when asked to talk about the meaning of 21st Century learning, a school board member told me,

I think it speaks to the preparation of the young people in a more global society and their ability to be more introspective in terms of what is it they want to accomplish and where do they want to go and how do they get there?

Although this view has lofty intentions and there is nothing inherently wrong with the ideal, in reality, it promotes a naïve and superficial understanding of globalization. The technology available for videoconferencing allows for ease of communication across borders, which can create a false sense of cultural exchange. A district administrator commented on the importance of their students becoming global citizens, saying, "There's just so many things they can learn from other countries. You know, whether it is collaborating with somebody in Africa on how their climate is different from ours." While neoliberal policies ease the way for goods and service to cross borders, they also, ironically, regulate the ability of individuals to do so; therefore, cultural exchanges are mediated through technology.



DISCUSSION OF THEMES

Neoliberal discourse embedded within P21's framework for 21st Century learning was evident at Flint Hills High School and was presented as commonsense, normative ideas about the purpose of schooling and what the high school should be doing to better prepare students for the future. In particular, the language of college and career readiness and "real world" experience were frequently mentioned as two primary goals of 21st Century learning initiatives at Flint Hills High School. This type of language communicates the notion that the primary purpose of education is to prepare students for going directly into the workforce or pursuing a college degree.

Learning job skills took primacy over other benefits of attending a public school, including developing intellect and character, becoming informed citizens, providing opportunities for social mobility, and creating avenues for social justice (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002). A key assumption embedded in this language is that the school was not adequately preparing its students for their lives beyond high school. Therefore, the system logic underscores how implementing a 21st Century learning initiative would provide students with the work skills they had previously been lacking. This message was communicated via P21 through the state's department of education and district administrators down to the building administrators, teachers, and students, all of whom articulated this narrow purpose of public education.

If education in a public school is not part of a student's "real world" experience, then one has to wonder what is. In this case, the answer was unpaid internships working for local businesses. While there is nothing inherently wrong with students volunteering some of their time to get work experience, the idea that volunteer work represented the "real world" was never questioned. Neither administrators nor teachers were troubled by the embedded logic of the reform model that students were being asked to make career decisions at a rather young age. Particularly problematic is the likely potential for the Career Pipeline to start tracking students in middle school and directing them into particular career or vocational paths based on some measure of "aptitude." How this plays out in the state has the potential to prevent students of colour and low income students from pursuing Bachelors degrees, as the state will provide technical courses such as welding or automotive technology for free at community colleges, whereas students have to pay for general education and liberal arts classes. Because of the monetary incentives involved, two-year technical degrees are being stripped of courses that would enable students to transfer to a 4-year institution. Administrators and teachers at Flint Hills seemed unaware of the Career Pipeline's tracking and sorting function that sets students on a career path as early as middle school.

Mccafferty (2010) has referred to embedding business values into schools, such as that represented by P21's framework for 21st Century learning, as neoliberal pedagogy, one that is uncritically examined. Examples of neoliberal pedagogy she

offers are giving students access to work experiences and internships and projects conducted in partnership with employers. Considerable evidence of a neoliberal pedagogy exists at Flint Hills High School. The fact that many students will not go on to work for or own private businesses or corporations was not part of the career and college readiness narrative. Left unspoken is where professions like teachers and other school personnel, social work, school and public administration, to name a few, fit into the picture.

Neoliberal educational reformers celebrate the market and criticize public services, including public schools (Apple, 2000; Mccafferty, 2010). This was certainly the case in this Midwestern state and in this high school, where many of the critiques levied against their school came from the participants themselves. For this to happen at a school that, according to many measures, has performed well, demonstrates the power of neoliberal discourse to convince school personnel they are not doing their jobs and must change (Ravitch, 2013). Indeed, the blame for the failure to successfully integrate these skills fell back on teachers (Kumashiro, 2012). This discourse is likely shared among K-12 parents, community members, and students.

There was a great deal of talk about technology among building administrators, teachers, and students, but much of it seemed focused on the consumption of technology more so than the educational purpose of the technology or even how it was to be used to attain the goals of career and college readiness. Study participants did not directly speak to the use of technology as an expectation of employment, perhaps because it was assumed technology was ubiquitous in business and there was no need to state the obvious. There was, however, a sense that students were more knowledgeable about the technology than the teachers and should be allowed to use their personal technology in the classroom. Again, though, the classroom emphasis was on the consumption of technology that students already owned as a means of keeping them engaged in school.

Discourse about the use of project-based learning and technology to teach “soft skills” indicated its intent to make students more employable. Teachers certainly felt the pressure to use technology and to change their pedagogy, even when it might not serve the lesson. Whereas advocates for technology integration have allied themselves with constructivist pedagogy and project-based learning, it is a pedagogical philosophy not all teachers were comfortable with nor felt it was appropriate for all lessons, all topics, or all students.

District administrators talked about the importance of globalization and global learning and have unproblematically touted its ideals are to foster intercultural communication and cultural understanding. Proponents of global learning, however, fail to acknowledge its deliberate agenda to promote the interests of multinational corporations who need employees capable of working in settings outside the United States. Globalization and 21st Century learning in concert highlight how neoliberal school reforms have been “designed to promote the interests of rich nations and powerful multinational corporations” (Spring, 2008, p. 335).

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This project also provided lessons learned for the research team. Revisiting this study and reanalyzing the data using a discourse analysis through the lens of neoliberalism was a challenge. Even in making the final revisions, I have struggled to come to terms with my and my doctoral students' biases about 21st Century learning, technology integration, and project-based learning. It was apparent in re-reading the classroom observation that field notes were written from our own assumptions about what constituted effective instruction, which tended to be from a constructivist philosophy. Some of the graduate students, all of whom were practicing school administrators, had embraced the state's vision of 21st Century learning. They were eager to bring in resources and materials they were using in their own districts. Consequently, it was difficult for us to adopt an impartial, even if critical, stance toward this idea of 21st Century learning that was becoming part of their educational practice. As scholar-practitioners, it was difficult but necessary for us to work on setting aside our preconceptions about 21st Century learning. In the future, I will be more deliberate about helping my students identify and deconstruct the neoliberal ideology embedded within 21st Century learning and other contemporary educational initiatives.

#### *Neoliberalism and P21's Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning*

P21's learning framework (2003, 2006) is premised on the age old argument of the failure of US public schools to keep pace with their international counterparts. According to their published reports, the world is changing at a rapid pace, and shifting economic, technological, information, demographic, and political forces have transformed the way people work and live. According to the arguments, US public schools are unable to keep pace with these rapid advancements, that is, the world changes quickly and US schools are not able to adapt (Ravitch, 2013). Consequently, a significant gap exists between the knowledge and skills students learn in school and what they need in 21st Century communities and workplaces. The argument merges the (poorly-evidenced) consequence of the US losing its competitive edge with a belief that successful businesses need employees who can adapt to changing needs, juggle multiple responsibilities, and make decisions independently. According to P21, today's economy values broad knowledge and skills, flexibility, cross-training, multi-tasking, teaming, problem solving and project-based work. P21's report reifies the pervasive, commonsense belief that the purpose of public education is to train students for jobs to serve private, corporate ends. This belief has marginalized the belief in the purpose of schools to educate students for constructive citizenship in a democracy as a public good (Bartlett et al., 2002).

In their 2006 report, P21 emphasized "the facts" supporting their claims that US high schools are failing miserably, citing 40% of high school graduates in 2004 felt unprepared for college or the workplace and 84% of employers in a 2005 survey reported K-12 schools were not doing a good job of preparing students for the

workplace. The report laid out the challenges facing US high schools and proposed the framework for 21st Century learning as the solution to the problem.

*The P21 Framework.* P21's framework for 21st Century learning has evolved somewhat since the publication of its first report in 2003. The final version of the framework published in 2009 contains four elements described as 21st Century student outcomes. These are presented as the knowledge, skills, and expertise students need to master to be successful in work and life in the 21st Century. The *21<sup>st</sup> Century Themes*, which that partnership has identified as the foundation for all other learning, call for infusing and prioritizing such topics as global awareness, business and entrepreneurial literacy, productivity and accountability, into core subject curricula. These priorities are based, loosely, on demands from businesses that have called for more "employees who can continually update their skills, communicate effectively and work independently to get things done" (2003, p. 13). The Business Coalition for Education Reform, an organization that proclaimed that if business in the US is going to survive, it requires employees "who possess a wide range of high-level skills and abilities, such as critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and decision-making skills" (p. 13).

P21's documents contain consistent themes of appealing to state departments of education and the public to support reforming schools to be positioned to better prepare students for the workforce, to meet the needs of business, to provide students with "real world" experiences, and to use technology and project-based learning to accomplish these goals. Discourse about these goals and how to accomplish them were evident at Flint Hills High School. Even though school personnel fell far short of achieving them, there was a pervasive belief among district and school administrators and board members that P21's goals were worth pursuing.

#### *Critique of Partnership for 21st Century Learning Discourse*

The dominant narrative driving P21's 21st Century learning, that US schools are falling behind and causing America to lose its supremacy in the global marketplace, is not a new one. It is, however, evocative and persuasive. The 21st Century learning initiatives P21 is pushing have their origins in critiques of public education and calls for reform that have occurred with some regularity over the past 100 years (Cuban, 1988; Foster, 1986; Senechal, 2010; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). These appeals for reform have echoed familiar refrains that high schools are not relevant and are not preparing students for their future endeavours (Kent, 1987). The latest call for high school reform via 21st Century learning is premised on neoliberal ideology, particularly the idea that the purpose of schools is to prepare students for their places in a global economic system (Hursh, 2007; Spring, 2008). Underpinning the free market discourse of neoliberalism is the notion of students as human capital and future workers, which is also evident in the language of 21st Century learning initiatives. Demands for 21st Century learning are situated in the discourse

of technological advances, an interconnected workforce, and the inevitability of globalization (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

Education economists (Hanushek, 2005; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008) maintain that the quality of education provided by US schools is strongly related to economic growth and development. Their observations have led others (Childress, 2012; Dede et al., 2005; Wagner, 2008, 2010) to highlight a new crisis in education directly related to US public schools falling behind their international counterparts, with 21st Century skills, especially the infusion of technology, identified as the solution. Indeed, P21 advocates for high schools to reform themselves by incorporating concepts of 21st Century learning. Consistent with neoliberal discourse, the press for change is driven by fear and dire consequences if US public schools maintain the status quo (Davies & Bansel, 2007). P21 has created a sense of urgency that US students are ill-prepared for college and career, with the result being the US losing its edge in a globally competitive society (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006).

P21 and other proponents of technology, including vendors such as Intel<sup>R</sup>, have aligned the push for the integration of technology with constructivist, project-based pedagogy (Vannatta & Beyerbach, 2001). This move initially came in response to criticisms that teachers were using sophisticated computer-based technology to teach in traditional ways. For example, worksheets simply moved from paper and pencil to the computer screen. Early studies found that giving teachers access to technology hardware and software did not result in it being used effectively during instruction (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001).

The co-optation of an effective instructional practice by P21 and other technology advocates creates particular tensions in high schools where the purchase and use of technology is being pushed on the one hand, but is challenging teachers to shift away from more traditional forms of instruction (e.g., lecture and note-taking) on the other. Some reformers have questioned the abandonment of lecture for the sake of active student engagement, noting that student engagement and involvement in a lesson might not always be visible (Senechal, 2010). The discourse of 21st Century learning contains many elements of school reform proposed by conservatives and other advocates of neoliberal policies, but it also has a few elements favoured by progressive reformers. Therefore, 21st Century learning has appeal across political and philosophical educational orientations and states throughout the country have embraced what P21 has to offer, as 19 states have signed on as partner states.

#### CONCLUSION

Because of its normative nature, that is, its largely unchallenged acceptance as the way society should operate, neoliberalism's manifestation as 21st Century learning is perhaps more insidious than the "tension between democratic values and market values," which is how Giroux and Giroux (2006, p. 21) characterized the "crisis" of neoliberalism. In the case of 21st Century learning, corporations create non-profit

groups like the Partnership for 21st Century Learning, which allow them to hide their corporate identities and agendas. The corporations behind P21 are unproblematically and unreflectively viewed as assuming their rightful roles in influencing public education, with public schools expected to be responsive to their interests and needs.

Behind-the-scenes corporate influence over public education in the guise of creating 21st Century learning opportunities masks the fact that students are reduced to engines of economic progress. While it may be relatively easy to mount arguments against educational reforms such as vouchers and privatization, 21st Century initiatives being promoted by partnership organizations such as P21 are operating almost invisibly and without challenge or being held accountable. Public school decision-makers frequently adopt initiatives such as 21st Century learning that contain some progressive and innovative elements without taking into consideration the hidden agendas behind them or examining who is really benefitting from them.

Within the 21st Century learning discourse, a tension exists between the problematic aspects of the co-optation of technology and project-based pedagogy to enhance student learning and engagement with the notion that the purpose of schools is to meet the needs of business. Teacher resistance to change, which was evident when it came to both integration of technology and project-based learning, emerged from a belief that students would not be prepared for the transition to higher education. In fact, this state's policy context privileges career over college, with incentives to encourage students to pursue 2-year technical degrees or go directly into the workforce.

Although students in the focus groups indicated they enjoyed participating in projects and being actively involved in learning, teachers shared several examples of student resistance to this style of teaching. It is perhaps ironic that many teachers rejected these effective teaching methods, but not the neoliberal discourse to which those methods have become attached. Ultimately, in spite of the neoliberal rhetoric of 21st Century learning and college and career readiness through technology integration, and project-based learning, little had actually changed at this high school. The physical structure of the new building was touted as innovative, but was traditional in its appearance. As federal and state educational policies continue to press for neoliberal, market-based approaches, it remains to be seen whether the discourse of 21st Century learning can penetrate the entrenched structure of public schools to influence any kind of genuine change.

This study of a high school 21st Century learning initiative demonstrates the power of neoliberal discourse to influence the thinking of administration, teachers, and students. The neoliberal discourse associated with P21's framework for 21st Century learning was articulated as truth and not questioned. It also reveals the contradictions and tensions that still exist between century old traditions of schooling and the desire for change to that includes innovative use of technology and more progressive instructional methods. The rhetoric of neoliberalism and 21st Century learning does not match the reality of everyday life in schools or the needs of future students.

NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> The largest proportion (86.6%) was classified as white, 7.2% identified as Hispanic, and 5% other. The school employed three administrators, three counsellors, and forty-one teachers.

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MARY ROAF

## 10. CULTURES OF COLLABORATION AND BLAME

*The Complexities of Neoliberalism's Impact on Charter School Climates*

### INTRODUCTION

I stood, swaying on my feet, as I walked around the silent classroom. My students, 30 in total, looked at me with expressions of shock. One of them finally asked me, “Are you asleep, Ms. Roaf?” I shook my head as much to respond in the negative as to wake up fully. This was a first: falling asleep on my feet. I couldn’t believe that I was serving as a charter school teacher on the front lines of 21st century education reform who literally taught to state standardized tests. This class session was one of several devoted to conducting practice standardized tests during the four to six weeks leading up to the actual date of official testing. My fatigue resulted from working ten to eleven hours a day, and working on weekends as well as from the indescribable boredom of maintaining total order and silence during the practice test. I felt more like a prison warden than a teacher. How had I fluctuated from creating my own English Language Arts curriculum in collaboration with the charter school director with whom I worked, to completing intensive professional development in learning and implementing a highly-scripted reading intervention program, and now to teaching to standardized tests, all in the span of seven months?

I investigate questions that delve into the highly complex and often contradictory impact of neoliberal policies on practices in charter schools that shape their cultures in important ways. I frame my research with an equal emphasis on theory and practice by integrating my perspectives as an educational anthropologist focusing on charter school education reform, and my hands-on roles as a teacher and administrator with two of the largest charter school networks in the country.

Since charter school legislation’s inception in 1992, nearly 7,000 charter schools operating in 42 states and Washington, D.C. serve more than 2 million attendees, or about 3 percent of the nation’s public school students (Center for Education Reform, 2010; Osborne, 2012). This legislation has shifted the paradigm for public education reform from one of dismantling institutionalized discriminatory practices in the desegregation of public schools, to one premised on neoliberal tenets. Core neoliberal ideas assert that free-market autonomy from state regulations and bureaucracy guarantees greater efficiency, and increased innovation and competition

in private and public sectors (Harvey, 2005). These ideas have been transferred into the realm of public education reform by positing improvement in educational access and quality through notions of choice, competition, and semi-autonomy of public schools from state and local school district regulations (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2006).

My interest in studying charter school reform stems from my own experiences as a K-12 public school student, my subsequent doctoral research on charter school education reform as an educational anthropologist, and my first-hand experiences as a teacher and administrator with two of the largest national charter school networks in the country. As an African American growing up in the southeast US in the 1970s and 1980s, I benefited tremendously from attending desegregated public schools as mandated by the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Topeka Education* ruling. In fact, my siblings and I were the first generation of African Americans to attend and graduate from desegregated public schools from kindergarten through high school. I experienced and observed the powerful transformation between my generation and my father's generation as the last one to attend Jim Crow-segregated schools.

Subsequently, I witnessed the exponentially increased opportunity for and attainment of social mobility as well as holistic growth by African Americans during this short-lived period. This instilled my commitment to ensure the highest-quality, free public education for all students regardless of race or socioeconomic status. I have pursued this objective as an active participant in ongoing efforts at education reform, including teaching public school as a Teach For America corps member 20 years ago, serving as a youth outreach volunteer in a girls' group home, and focusing on social justice through equitable education as a long-time public policy worker and researcher. My most intensive work in education reform has been as a founding teacher and administrator with two of the largest charter school networks in the country.

My research on charter school reform emphasizes anthropological theoretical and methodological frameworks. Specifically, I draw on grounded theory in order to analyze ethnographic and autoethnographic data for key themes that emerged in my research. I also use organizational theories to foreground connections between state and local charter school policies with school organizational cultures. Finally, I utilize critical race theory to identify and explore significant links between charter school community demographic and socioeconomic makeups and state charter school legislations' influence on intensive race- and class-based segregation in the schools where I researched and worked in particular, and charter schools across the country in general. This combination of approaches ensures an intensive analysis of how macrostructural factors of charter school legislation and policies based on neoliberal tenets across the nation influence charter school cultures in consistently complex and contradictory ways.

Key features that I examine that show this connection between neoliberalism and charter school practices are the decentralized nature of hiring and firing non-unionized staff by principals, and the freedom for individual schools to choose

curricula as well as the length of the school day and school year. I also identify factors that mandate charter school accountability in meeting specific performance benchmarks as measured by standardized test scores and financial auditing. The key themes I identify in my research are: state charter school legislation's role in creating race and class-based segregation in charter schools relative to the schools' community composition, higher teacher dissatisfaction and attrition rates due to increased pressures to improve standardized test scores, and the complex continuum of cultures of collaboration and blame stemming from neoliberal edicts that promote competition among both charter and traditional public schools.

Moreover, analysis that foregrounds qualitative data and descriptive interpretation of statistics enables the zoom-lens perspective necessary for understanding the connection between overarching neoliberal principles and charter school climates in specific ways. The qualitative data I collected in three schools consists of observations of hundreds of classes, extracurricular clubs and events; countless conversations with staff, families and students; and a total of 40 semi-structured, formal interviews with school and district-level staff, students and families. I frame my analysis using grounded or emergent theory in order to minimize my own preconceptions as a researcher. Instead, I allow the data to "speak to me" by identifying recurrent themes or concepts that emerged as my collection and analysis of data evolved over time (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Simmons, 2011). In this way, I pinpoint critical issues that arose from the emic, or insider perspectives that show the link between neoliberal ideology and charter school reform.

This interdisciplinary, qualitative study, that draw on theoretical frameworks of anthropology of education, organizational effectiveness and management, critical race theory, and critical autoethnography, enables me to synthesize my observations as both an in-depth researcher of and an immersed practitioner in charter schools. It also enables me to analyze key themes and issues from a social justice perspective that situates current education reform in terms of how it impacts long-standing inequity based on race and socioeconomic status. Thus, my positionality yields the most complex and nuanced findings on neoliberalism's impact on charter school cultures that incorporates critical elements of both theory and first-hand experience.

#### NEOLIBERALISM IN ACTION: KEY FACTORS THAT SHAPE CHARTER SCHOOL "CULTURES"

The specific components that characterize charter schools' autonomy vis-à-vis traditional public schools are as follows: they determine their own budgets, class and school sizes, staffing, curricular choices, and the length of the school day and year (Blazer, 2010). This reform emphasizes the elimination of bureaucracy and an increase in parental influence in education decision-making (Frazier, 2011). Similar to their traditional public school counterparts, charter schools are held accountable to student achievement as measured by state standardized tests. Charter schools are also accountable for producing certain financial results, while attempting to fulfill

an underlying tenet of the reform movement to produce greater improvements than traditional public schools with less money (Blazer, 2010).

An inherent contradiction stems from neoliberal constructions of charter schools as being independent from the aforementioned regulations while being accountable in areas of academic performance and financial oversight (Hankins & Martin, 2006). Neoliberalism reinforces an economic and quantitative approach to public education reform that ignores the earlier focus on quality public education as a civic right that equips students to serve as both good citizens and good workers. In fact, an entire “education industry” has been created in which governance by democratically-elected officials has been replaced by private charter school contractors who use public funds with little public oversight (McNeil, 2002). Identifying the specific sites of autonomy versus accountability in charter school policies illuminates important elements that affect school cultures, or “the shared beliefs of those in the school’s community that drive the actions of that school” in practice (Vasquez Heilig, Julian, Lindsay Butterfield, Priscilla Canales, Sonya Horsford, Becky Cohen, Su Jin Jez, Philip Cortex, Scott McLeod, Heather Cole, Victor Saenz, Katherine Jackson, Richard Reddick, Sylvia Jauregui, Mehan Lehr, Melinda Lemke, Dongmei Li, Allen McMurrey, Lindsay Redd, Gregory Russell, Bo La Sohn, Ruth Vail, Amy Williams, 2013, p. 5).

While numerous studies that focus on charter school outcomes in the aggregate have found mixed results in student achievement, the number of charter schools created, the number of students attending these schools, and the amount of funding allocated to these schools continues to increase (Land, 2002; May, 2003; Miller, 2004; Zimmer & Gill, 2004). Moreover, little is known about how charter schools operate, especially in terms of how governance structures and existing accountability measures impact school cultures in specific ways. One common claim of charter school proponents was articulated by the Louisiana Education Policy Research Center in 1996:

Charter schools offer the best of what alternative education has to offer (e.g., smaller schools, experiential learning) and teachers who want to work with students in nontraditional settings with the added features of true site control, and limited rules and regulations to follow.... (Frazier, 2011, p. 2)

In order to ascertain the accuracy of this claim, research that focuses in-depth on the connections between governance and accountability measures, school operations, and school climate is essential. Furthermore, the primary reasons for charter school closures of financial mismanagement, administrative and governance issues, and lack of student achievement call for a scrutiny of how organizational policies and practices produce school cultures that either aid or hinder charter school success (Hessel, Terrell & Kowal, 2006; Allen et al., 2009).

A dearth in literature that goes beyond general observations to more in-depth analyses of how charter policy affects practices requires a close look at school operations. As an educational anthropologist, participant-observation allows me

to intensively examine and analyze the multidimensional nature of charter school daily practices and their connection to policies at school, district, state and federal levels. As a teacher and administrator in charter schools, my research has added a rich understanding of both quantitative and qualitative data. This level of analysis stems from my first-hand experiences with complex and contradictory practices that result from having autonomy in certain aspects of school operations while fulfilling top-down, rigid accountability mandates in others. Thus, having the position of both researcher and practitioner provides a means of understanding charter school education reform in particular, nuanced ways that integrate theory and practice equally.

My in-depth, ethnographic study examining three different charter schools over the course of four years as a researcher, teacher and administrator has yielded the key finding that a continuum of cultures of collaboration to cultures of blame characterize charter schools in distinct ways. This continuum of cultures is shaped by neoliberal tenets that promote competition and consumer choice within particular economic, demographic community and school contexts. My analysis goes beyond identifying and describing school cultures to suggesting strategic ways that current accountability and governance policies can be deployed to shift practices to consistently and proactively foster more holistic, positive school cultures.

Understanding *how* charter schools operate on highly-localized levels equals the importance of determining *what* their outcomes are based on overarching, quantitative measures. This type of research can provide solutions to the current “crisis in accountability” of charter schools identified by David Osborne: “Hundreds of school districts have authorized charters then failed to invest in oversight. Even some statewide authorizers report that they have insufficient data to make merit-based renewal and revocation decisions” (Osborne, 2012, p. 2).

Osborne’s study also asserts that an “authorizing crisis” exists in the entire charter school sector in which “corrupt governance structures,” along with financial mismanagement, lead to more school closures than inadequate academic performance. (Osborne, 2012). As both a researcher and a charter school educator, I have first-hand knowledge of how policies that promote autonomy and accountability actually yield more complexity and confusion in the oversight and operations of charter schools. Thus, the simplistic notion that fewer regulations leads to flexibility and freedom has not been realized in practice. Compiling comprehensive portraits of how charter schools operate as characterized by how school cultures promote or impede success provides critical insights into why governance structures become “corrupt” as a logical outcome of neoliberal policies. More intensive analyses also lead to the formulation of strategies to create more effective governance structures by understanding specific ways that policies influence practices on classroom and school levels.

A framework that enables a holistic evaluation of charter school cultures is the Community-Based Accountability (CBA) model. This framework facilitates a locally-based, intensive analysis of charter schools through studying the following

measures: career readiness, community engagement, curriculum, educator quality, high-stakes tests, higher education, school climate, school safety and discipline, student progress, and technology integration (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013). More important, this framework proffers an asset- versus deficit-based approach due to its inclusion of community stakeholders such as families and local leaders as well as state and federal officials in decision-making and evaluation processes.

The first step to applying a CBA model is to examine to what degree existing accountability and governance structures in charters foster collective, more consensus-based school climates rather than hierarchical, “top-down, one-size-fits-all” environments (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013). The second step consists of identifying the ways that specific components of charter school governance and accountability affect school practices. Finally, the third step entails determining how to modify current practices and/or policies in order to meet the measures of a CBA model.

In this chapter, I analyze charter schools’ cultures by examining how the community economic contexts and school- and community-based engagement affect notions of choice and competition. School climate encompasses “the subjective experience that an individual, student, or staff has within the school” as well as the school culture, defined as “the shared beliefs of those in the school’s community that drive the actions of that school” (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013, p. 5). I emphasize school culture in my research because it directly influences all other aspects of school operations. In fact, school culture constitutes a central prerequisite for success in any educational setting: “In order for learning to occur in a school setting, it must have a positive school climate and culture” (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013, p. 5).

Additionally, understanding the community economic context shapes what specific strengths and challenges charter schools encounter. I focus on median household income, families living in poverty, and the unemployment rate as well as the demographic makeup of each community in order to compile socioeconomic and ethnic profiles that inform student makeup and local resources available to charter schools (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013). Finally, I ascertain the types and degrees of student, family, and community engagement in order to analyze how effectively charter schools build upon local resources and encourage local, more democratic school operations and governance. Establishing such networks can offset many of the challenges that charter school staff confront while strengthening school cultures, and increasing community investment and collaboration outside of the schools.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Charter school literature explicates the plethora of accountability and governance structures that exist across states and districts (Frazier, 2011; Osborne, 2012). Subsequently, the variation in charter schools calls for both qualitative, anthropological studies along with the broader, empirical studies that currently predominate the charter school body of research. Such studies can identify and analyze the policies

and legislation that give rise to the consistent ways that diversity and commonality play out in charter school practices.

While tremendous variation characterizes charter school operations, existing research also delineates two key factors that apply to all charters. First, performance measurements consist primarily of charter schools' outcomes on state standardized tests. Second, charter school funding nationwide comes from per-pupil state expenditure. These factors intersect with the neoliberal tenets of choice and competition to create similar dynamics in charter schools' cultures (Wells, Slayton & Scott, 2002). My research foregrounds these universal policy mandates in order to explore how they impact charter school cultures in both particular and predictable ways.

I situate the three charter schools I studied within a charter school typology comprised of six distinct formats: start-up nonprofit, for-profit corporate managed, conversion (e.g., the conversion of traditional public schools into charter schools), community partnership, development schools, and national network charter schools. My three sites consist of one start-up nonprofit, and two national network charter schools. Collectively, the three organizations to which these schools belong enroll nearly 47,000 students in 140 schools located in 20 states and the District of Columbia (KIPP, 2013; Lighthouse Academies, 2012; The Notebook, 2012). In fact, about one third of all US charter schools are managed by for-profit or nonprofit education management organizations (EMOs) that make up an increasing share of all charter schools due to the ability of national networks to establish schools across state and school-district boundaries (Miron & Urschel, 2009; Molnar et al., 2009). The three schools are located in different locations, with the two national network schools based in the same state. The sum total of my research period spans fieldwork, and professional work as a charter school teacher and administrator in all three schools completed over four years.

I conducted in-depth qualitative, anthropological research of the start-up, nonprofit charter school in a large, northeastern American city over the course of four years, beginning in the school's second year of operation, and ending in its sixth year. Specifically, I completed 18 months of fieldwork consisting of semi-structured interviewing of staff, students, families, and district personnel. I engaged in the anthropological method of participant observation as a summer school teacher during the school's first summer school program, and as an observer of classroom instruction, extra-curricular activities, parent committee meetings, student-staff meetings, board of trustees meetings, and school events and performances. I refer to the start-up nonprofit charter school site as start-up charter school one (SCS 1).

I also draw on my professional experiences as a teacher and administrator in two national network charter schools, both in my home state, and one of which was founded in my hometown. Moreover, while both sites were members of national charter school networks that had already established regional bases in a south central state in the US, I began and ended my tenure with them in each school's first year of

*Table 1. Charter School Backgrounds*

<i>Type of School</i>	<i>General Location &amp; Duration at Site</i>	<i>Qualitative Data Sources</i>
CMOS1= First Charter School operated by a Charter School Management Organization (CMO) studied	Small southern state; 7 months	Archival Authethnographic Conversations Semi-structured interview Policy Documents
CMOS2=Second Charter School operated by a CMO studied	Same state as CMOS1; 18 months	Archival Autoethnographic Conversations Semi-structured interviews Policy Documents
SCS1=Start-up Charter School studied	Large, northeastern State and city; 4 years	Archival Conversations Semi-structured interviews Participant-observation Policy Documents

operation. I refer to these schools as charter management organization schools one and two in this chapter (CMOS 1 and CMOS 2).

I review existing charter school literature in order to identify trends in the last 20 years of the movement. I also analyze archival data on all three schools that includes network and school descriptive materials, newspaper and magazine articles, reflexive and ethnographic depictions drawn from deep participant-observation, and interviews of staff, students and families from all three sites. Additionally, I examine secondary data from the US Census Bureau to compile community economic and demographic descriptions, and state charter legislation in order to delineate state-based governance and accountability mandates. I also utilize descriptive statistics to identify key characteristics of the community contexts and the specific charter schools. I use triangulation of data throughout the study to verify findings and enhance the credibility of results (Patton, 1990). I also compare information from all of my data sources in order to identify consistencies (Hepfl, 1997).

Another research methodology I draw from is critical autoethnography in order to explore my experiences as a community-based, charter school teacher and administrator. This framework situates “interpersonal experiences of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, and orientation within larger systems of power, oppression and social privilege” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013). Furthermore, it reflects my own positioning as an engaged, community-based educator and public school advocate, as well as my status as a researcher-in-action by challenging the hegemonic dichotomy of distant, objective researcher versus passive, “studied” subject. It does this by “challenging canonical ways of doing research and representing others and



treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography” (Ellis et al., 2011).

A critical race theory (CRT) approach integrates an essential element in education research. With the US Census Bureau projecting that children of color will make up the majority of American youth by 2018 or 2019 (Kurtz, 2013), critical race theory’s articulation of race and equity in educational policy research foregrounds the need to examine how ongoing education inequities persist in race- and class-based segregation of charter schools under new guises of “choice” and “competition” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Haney-Lopez, 2000; Tate, 1997, 1999; Tate, Ladson-Billings & Grant, 1996). Moreover, similar to anthropology in general and autoethnography in particular, critical race theorists encourage the use of stories and narratives that bring “voice” to marginalized groups in making sense of and critiquing the laws and policies aimed at addressing inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

I integrated a CRT and autoethnographic approach in ways that enhanced my analysis beyond a simple quantitative description of the vast majority of students of color and those eligible for free and reduced price lunch who attended all three charter schools. First, my positioning as an African American woman observing as a researcher and working as an educator at the schools meant that I experienced marginalization and exploitation even as I witnessed the dismal academic preparation of predominantly poor, African American students. A sense of “separate but equal” schooling circa *Plessy vs. Ferguson* prevailed at the schools and directly shaped school cultures in terms of available resources, and demands made on staff, students and families to try to overcompensate for years of substandard academic performance. In every instance, outside reformers and administrators adopted paternalistic attitudes when imposing their vision of change on the communities they sought to serve as well as the teachers they charged with this mission. So, I became both observer and subject in a back and forth dance between chronicling and bearing witness to the racialized aspects of current public education reform practices that are largely ignored in policy.

I integrated a management-oriented approach to augment my primary frameworks in order to focus on how governance and accountability measures play out in schools’ organizational systems and processes, thereby assisting with the crafting of institutional ethnographies (Frazier, 2011; Griffith, 1995; Smith, 1987, 1999). This perspective also highlights how strongly charter school legislation and policy influence school cultures and relationships among staff, and between staff, students and families. A further dimension of this management focus shows variation in levels of bureaucracy and oversight between different types of charter schools, specifically start-up versus charter school management organization schools. This multifaceted approach to analysis yields very specific and nuanced ways of understanding how policies actually impact daily operations and the overall effectiveness of charter schools.

COMMUNITY CONTEXTS AND CHARTER SCHOOL CULTURES:  
RACE, CLASS AND SEGREGATION IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

According to the Community-Based Accountability framework (CBA), the economic context index is one of ten measures that helps to describe challenges and resources in communities by identifying various economic variables (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013). I specifically describe the influence of each charter school's community median household income, percentage of families living in poverty, and unemployment rate on how each school's governance and accountability policies operate in practice. Additionally, I examine the ethnic makeup of each community in order to examine the role of charter schools' neoliberal policies in offsetting or exacerbating race-and class-based segregation of public schools.

The 2010 US Census Bureau provides both economic and demographic data on the communities of charter management organization schools one and two (CMOS 1 and CMOS 2), and start-up, nonprofit charter school one (SCS 1), as shown in the table below.

*Table 2. Economic Index Indicators (US Census Bureau, 2010)*

<i>Economic Index Indicators</i>	<i>CMOS 1</i>	<i>CMOS 2</i>	<i>SCS 1</i>
Median Household Income	\$30,743	\$30,067	\$36,957
Percentage of Families in Poverty	29.2%	27.8%	25.6%
Unemployment Rate	11.7%	10.1%	10.6%
Ethnic Composition	White=38.8% African Am=55.9% Latino=3% Asian=0.8%	White=21.8% African Am=75.5% Latino=1.45% Asian=.63%	White=36% African Am=44.3% Latino=13% Asian=6.8%

The United States as a whole has an unemployment rate of 7.60% (Fedec, Anna, 2013, US Bureau of Labor Statistics). [Table 2](#) provides school-wide statistics on student ethnic composition and socioeconomic status in order to compare school demographics with that of their local, or host communities.

According to numerous studies on comparing charter schools' rates of segregation with that of traditional public schools, charter schools show persistent patterns of segregation along axes of race and class more intensive than that found in traditional public schools (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Buras, 2011; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley & Wang, 2011). Thus, applying a critical race theoretical lens to studying rates of segregation in charter schools as compared to their localized contexts helps provide an in-depth look at how and why schools interact with and position themselves

Table 3. School-based Demographic Chart

Demographic Indicators	CMOS 1	CMOS 2	SCS 1
Student Ethnic Composition	White=1% African Am=97% Latino=1% Asian=1%	White=1% African Am=99%	White=<1% African Am=93% Asian=<1% Other=5% Latino=1%
Rate of Free or Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility	86%	85%	78%

(KIPP, 2013; Lighthouse Academies, 2012; The Notebook, 2012).

in relation to community social, cultural, economic and political forces. All three charter schools I studied and worked in demonstrated the national trend of intensified race- and class-based segregation in charter versus traditional public schools. For example, comparing the student ethnic composition in each school to the community ethnic makeup shows that each school has significantly larger numbers of African Americans than that within the local settings.

Specifically, CMOS 1 has an African American student population that is 41.1 percent higher than that of the local community; CMOS 2 has an African American population that is 23.5 percent higher than that of its local community; and SCS 1 has an African American population that is 48.7 percent higher than that of the city in which the school is located. Even starker statistics that illustrate the disparity in socioeconomic status of charter school students when compared to poverty rates in the local communities as a whole foreground the intensified class-based segregation of these schools. The CMOS 1 has a 56.8 higher percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch than the poverty rate of the local community, and a 57.2 percent and 52.4 percent difference in the same measure for CMOS 2 and SCS 1, respectively.

Policymakers, stakeholders and researchers must continue to foreground issues of segregation and equity in public schooling since minority segregated schools correlate to a wide array of educational and life disadvantages (Braddock, 2009; Linn & Welner, 2007). After 20 years of reform, charter schools have failed to fulfill neoliberalism’s promise of unrestricted choice as a means to foster integration and quality in public education (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley & Wang, 2011; Gewirtz, Ball & Bove, 1995; McEwan, 2008; Morphis, 2009). My research illuminates some of the reasons behind this failure from a perspective equally grounded in practice and theory. One vehicle that drives charter school segregation is how state legislation sometimes preferences the creation of charter schools in districts consisting of largely at-risk students, and/or districts currently failing to meet academic performance

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standards. Not surprisingly, the state charter school legislation that dictates statutes and regulations for CMOS 1 and 2 explicitly emphasizes such a strategy:

Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as low-achieving. (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013)

This stated outcome in CMOS 1 and 2 state law helps to explain why students

who qualify for free/reduced price lunch are two and one half times that of their community poverty rates. Additionally, state charter legislation also privileges establishing schools in certain districts that meet the following criteria:

The state board shall give preference in approving an application for an open enrollment public charter school to be located in any public school district:

When the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunches is above average for the state;

When the district has been classified by the state board as in academic distress under 6-15-428; or

When the district has been classified by the Department of Education as in some phase of school improvement status or some phase of fiscal distress and if the fiscal distress status is a result of administrative fiscal mismanagement as determined by the state board. (AR Public Charter Schools Act of 1999)

Such state-based governance stipulations powerfully demonstrate how charter school legislation can affect the location of charter schools in each state, by either authorizing charter schools in certain locations (e.g., certain types of districts) or by providing incentives to serve a certain demographic group (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley and Wang, 2011).

Another critical insight illuminated by applying a critical policy and qualitative perspective to this intersection between policy and practice shows how state governance mandates can cause charter schools to stress community economic challenges versus strengths by targeting the poorest students in already struggling contexts. The degree of struggle entailed in founding and establishing a new school in such an environment can lead to tremendous collaboration *and* intense pressure on staff.

My own experiences as a teacher and administrator in CMOS 1 and 2 over the course of two and a half years reveal how these policies create cultures of both blame *and* collaboration in complex, often contradictory ways. For example, my work as a 5th grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at CMOS 1 unfolded in various phases in which I alternated between teaching writing and reading comprehension. Practices that greatly improved the quality of my instruction across specific subjects were my close work creating lessons with the other ELA teacher and school director, and my weekly, one-on-one professional development meetings with the same director. Working

together in these ways helped to create bonds of collegiality and to meet the challenge of effectively teaching struggling readers and writers in proactive and positive ways.

Conversely, the tremendous pressure to produce dramatic results among struggling students set by state accountability measures coupled with charter schools' neoliberal prohibition of teacher unions generated a culture of blame and exploitation in administrator-staff interactions:

Because charter school employees do not have union protections, they are subject to the same labor abuses, systems of favoritism and cronyism, and lack of job security as non-union workers in other sectors. (Lipman & Hursh, 2007)

The national networks that oversaw and sponsored CMOS 1 and 2 set highly ambitious benchmarks for standardized test results as much to outperform each other and to procure more funds in order to expand as to meet accountability requirements. In a telling article that highlights the high turnover rate of charter school staff in the host state of CMOS 1 and 2, administrators from both of these schools' national and regional, state-based networks reveal some of the underlying reasons for such pressure:

In most charters there's also great pressure to meet the goals and quotas stipulated in the charter itself. By the end of the year, teachers have to move classes 1.5 grade levels (e.g., 150% growth) ahead, basically to be retained... A former charter school principal who helped to found a charter school stated that 'teacher turnover is a necessary evil of fostering it (accountability). (Jones, 2012)

Despite the fact that these organizations, two of the largest charter school networks in the country implement significantly different approaches to instruction. These include state-based mandates for accountability as well as the intense competition that now exists between these two networks in a small state supersede local and school-based influences by generating what can be an antagonistic culture of blame. Additionally, charter schools also must often confront competition from local school districts. Such competition has not conclusively brought about neoliberalism's promised improvement in student achievement and innovation in traditional public schools, but it has helped to produce challenging and divisive school environments.

Such a constellation of semi-autonomous elements combined with intense competition to deliver the highest standardized test scores in the shortest amount of time in order to outperform other charter school networks and public school districts often generate a contradictory mix of collaboration in some aspects of school governance juxtaposed with traits of a culture of blame and professional isolation in others. For example, as an administrator in CMOS 2 who worked very closely with teacher professional development and test-based data, I planned weekly individual and group training with the most minimal input from the school principal or regional administrators. I was able to exercise tremendous creativity, innovation, and in-and outside-of class support in my approach to teacher professional development.

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Contrasting my ability to craft collegial, supportive working relationships with teachers were the principal's and regional administrators' interactions with staff, which largely consisted of negative criticism and pressure to work longer hours and bring about vast improvements in student standardized test scores. Such pressure resulted in me and teachers working eleven- to twelve- hour days, six to seven days a week.

As a teacher in CMOS 1, I also experienced the full range of a culture of both collaboration and blame in working long hours five to six days a week. On the one hand, I was able to foster close, cooperative relationships with students and their families that contributed to interpersonal support and impressive standardized test scores. On the other hand, a fellow teacher and I weren't allowed to leave the school building at any time during the extended school day. This critical autoethnographic detail matches a finding in the literature, which highlights the sometimes oppressive power dynamics imposed on vulnerable, non-unionized teachers by administrators within the neoliberal context of charter school reform (Lipman & Hursh, 2007).

Thus, I found that CMOS 1 and 2 conformed to the overall pattern of schools operated by charter management organizations (CMO) experiencing more intense pressure due to a push to expand and compete with other CMOs:

We've done a lot of work on charter management organizations, and we've found that a lot of them get into serious problems when they grow too quickly (*italics added*). They get into financial difficulties, lose control of quality, and so on. (Osborne, 2012, p. 25)

The founder of a successful charter school in New Orleans confirmed this widespread practice among staff by proudly stating that his teachers work 80- and 90-hour weeks (Vanacore, 2012). In fact, this founder stated that he "scours the country looking for recruits to put up with all this..." (Ibid).

The start-up nonprofit charter school has a lower percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced price lunch as well as a student body that more closely reflects that of its host community. Again, examining the state charter school legislation shows how governance measures affect charter schools' preferred locations and student populations. This legislation only stipulates a preference for students it characterizes as "at-risk," but refrains from targeting specific types of school districts:

A charter school may limit admission to a particular grade level, a targeted population group of at-risk students... 'At-risk student' shall mean a student at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, community factors, truancy, academic difficulties, or economic disadvantage. (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2009)

Thus, while SCS 1 does serve students whose eligibility for free/reduced price lunch far exceeds the community's poverty rate, its race- and class-based isolation is not quite as stark as that of CMOS 1 and 2.

Another critical component of SCS 1 that distinguishes it from CMOS 1 and 2 is its status as a community-based, startup charter school that does not answer to a national network and that does not compete with other networks in trying to greatly increase the numbers of schools it operates, which currently total three in number. Consequently, SCS 1 adopted a much more localized, grassroots approach to establishing itself that seeks to fill needs specifically identified as community-based. I conducted one and a half years of fieldwork at this site, and identified numerous instances of collaboration among teachers and administrators, students and staff, and families and staff. Moreover, the co-founders were themselves long-time residents of the large, northeastern host city.

An example of this more locally-based distribution of decision-making among teachers, administrators, families and students was my first interview with school staff to propose my research. The three school co-founders and ten teachers attended the meeting in the teachers' lounge. There was no set agenda; instead, individuals asked me questions in a loosely-structured fashion. A main co-founder and administrator granted me open access to the school for the full duration of my four years of involvement, which encompassed my direct involvement with helping to create and teach in the school's first summer-school program, and intensive participant observation on a daily basis for 18 months. Thus, this locally-based, start-up charter school illustrates a substantive culture of collaboration in which staff addressed significant challenges by working more closely together and reaching many decisions through consensus. Additionally, this direct experience with the charter school staff illustrates that power asymmetries do not always characterize actual practices and relationships within a neoliberal context.

Ultimately, the school's expansion over the course of four years resulted in more intense pressure to improve student achievement on standardized tests, and to ensure that more students graduated from high school and gained acceptance to universities. School administrators adopted a college preparatory focus and data-driven approach that resulted in more autocratic and less consensus-based decision-making processes pertaining to curricular development, instructional practices, and disciplinary policies. Still, SCS 1 demonstrated a greater culture of collaboration than CMOS 1 or 2 due to the more general nature of its state charter legislation's policy of not targeting fiscally distressed school districts for charter school sites, and its status as a more locally-based, individual start-up charter school.

#### CHARTER SCHOOL POLICY AND SCHOOL CLIMATE: TEACHER DISSATISFACTION IN A NEOLIBERAL REGIME

One component that influences school climates in charter schools is their semi-independence from state and local regulations. Another key element that impacts school cultures is charter school legislation at the state level. The charter school legislation in both states of the three charter schools studied in this article call for

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greater community engagement on the part of teachers, families of students, and community stakeholders:

Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;

Accountability of the open-enrollment charter school application must include: a proposal to directly and substantively involve the parents of students to be enrolled in the open enrollment charter school, the certified employees, and the broader community in carrying out the terms of the open enrollment charter. (AR Charter School Act, 1999)

It is the intent of the General Assembly, in enacting this article, to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently from the existing school district structure.... (PA Charter School Law, 2009)

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Despite state-based legislation's call for charter school accountability, the market-based model of privatization that correlates deregulation with greater competition has yielded less transparency in charter schools. According to Molnar and Garcia's 2007 article, for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMOs) that manage or operate a significant number of charter schools drive competition and short-term economic gains through lack of transparency to monitoring agencies. Additionally, EMO-run charter schools often employ high-pressure strategies of enrolling larger numbers of students than traditional public or non-EMO charter schools, drill and practice instruction, and the hiring of inexperienced, often uncertified teachers. My



research unveils how these strategies are commonly used in non-profit EMOs as well due to increasing competition among these organizations to garner contracts with state legislatures.

Thus, applying both critical policy and critical autoethnographic frameworks facilitates determining to what degree the three schools fulfill this mandate in actual practice. Moreover, examining the schools' practices by utilizing a multidisciplinary theoretical approach enables a close look at the complex and often contradictory ways that charter school autonomy and accountability play out in practice. Establishing the connection between macrostructural elements delineated in legislation and microstructural elements of school-based governance yields key insights about common traits of charter school cultures across national charter school networks, states, school districts, and individual charter schools.

One key indicator of school climate, or "the subjective experience that an individual, student, or staff has within the school," is the rate of teacher satisfaction, and teacher attrition in a school (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013). First, I examine national trends in rates of teacher satisfaction before looking at the attrition rates of CMOS 1 and 2. I do not have attrition statistics for SCS 1. Based on the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, teacher satisfaction has decreased by 15 points since the last survey conducted two years ago. More important, this number reflects the lowest level of job satisfaction of teachers seen in the survey series since it began more than two decades ago (Jensen, 2012, p. 5). The percentage of teachers who state that they are "very" or "fairly likely" to leave the profession altogether has increased from 17 percent to 29 percent since 2009 (Jensen, 2012).

The biggest change in teachers' attitudes and perceptions occurred in their belief about job security, with 34 percent feeling that their job is not secure, a 26 point jump from eight percent in 2006 (Jensen, 2012). An examination of the underlying reasons for such a significant growth in teacher dissatisfaction can inform how neoliberal charter school policies impact educator experiences on school-wide and classroom levels.

First, teachers who reported the highest satisfaction rates cited their schools helping parents to better understand their role in their children's academic achievement, and their schools devising specific plans for parental and community engagement as primary causes for positive work experiences. Such a finding illustrates how a qualitative approach that equally integrates theory and practice, coupled with already-existing legislative policies that foster greater familial involvement and community engagement, contributes to teacher retention and job satisfaction.

Conversely, teachers who reported the highest rates of dissatisfaction primarily work in high minority, urban schools, in which greater challenges often exist based on a mismatch between school-based needs versus available resources. Research specialist and author Dr. Nate Jensen observed that teacher evaluation and accountability in education "seems to be used more to *find fault and pass blame* (italics added) than to reward hard work and excellence in the classroom" (Jensen, 2012). He foregrounds the importance of fostering cultures of collaboration versus

cultures of blame in schools when he states that “evaluation can be done in ways that are *growth-promoting* instead of *blame-casting*” (Jensen, 2012).

While this survey shows attitudes of teachers in traditional and charter public schools, a closer look at teacher attrition rates in the charter school networks that sponsor CMOS 1 and 2 reveal how turnover in charter schools far outpaces that in many traditional public schools. According to statistics taken in the state in which CMOS 1 and 2 operate, between 20 to 40 percent of charter school teachers leave each year, as compared with a 16 percent attrition rate of teachers nationwide (Jones, 2012).

While the regional network for CMOS 1 reported a 30 percent overall turnover rate in the state, the network for CMOS 2 reported a 69 percent attrition rate for teachers who were retained for more than one year. Subsequently, I calculated the attrition rates of full-time teachers for both CMOS 1 and 2 in their first year of operation in order to compile individual portraits of school culture and teacher job satisfaction:

*Table 4. Teacher Attrition Rates*

<i>CMOS 1</i>	<i>CMOS 2</i>
100%	45%

According to the same article, reasons for such high attrition rates stem from the fact that:

[M]ost charter schools require extra work from their teachers: longer hours, fewer breaks, more lesson plans, all for about the same pay as traditional schools. Add to that the greater needs of poverty-stricken areas ... In most charters there’s also great pressure to meet the goals and quotas stipulated in the charter itself. (Jones, 2012)

Such high turnover rates demand a closer scrutiny and understanding of the lived experiences of staff, students, and families attempting to function in a context rife with pressures brought about by top-down mandates of governance and accountability that disproportionately impact communities and charter schools facing the greatest challenges with the least amount of resources. How do teachers and administrators describe their experiences? What types of school climate and overall culture develop due to particular conditions that characterize many charter schools across states and districts despite their great variation in curricula, teaching methods, and mission statements?

The concept of “group think,” introduced by Janis in 1972, captures the connection between organizational structures and processes with culture. According to Janis, group think is “a strong concurrence-seeking tendency that interferes with effective group decision-making” (Forsyth, 1999, p. 40). Consequently, poor group decisions result from group members being encouraged, pressured, and coerced into thinking

alike for the sake of conformity versus effectiveness. Moreover, an organizational culture of blame often develops because members with differing opinions are “rebuked, shamed into compliance, or ejected from the group, and individuals who do not share the group’s ideals aren’t even allowed to join” (Frazier, 2011).

Forsyth (1999) makes an explicit connection between how organizational responses to structures and policies create a particular culture when he says that an organization’s culture emerges when “group members do things to and with each other, and these interactions become interconnected, and organized patterns form that produce relationships and identify roles members play” (Frazier, 2011, p. 7). Thus, teachers’ and staff perceptions about interactions, school dynamics, and the roles of staff, students, families and community members illuminate the interplay between top-down policies and bottom-up responses that create school culture.

What I found through my own experiences, as well as by analysis of themes from 41 interviews of school staff, students, and families was that a pervasive culture of blame often takes root in charter schools, especially those working with high-needs students in resource-starved communities. Two teachers who worked with the national charter school network that sponsors CMOS 1 reveal this dynamic:

[T]eachers normally work for 60 to 90 hours a week in a total compliance organizational setting that constantly reminds teachers and students alike that they are not trying as hard as they can in either their work or in their behavior/attitudes. Some teachers tell of nightmares and flashbacks that are consistent with post-traumatic stress... We lost 70 percent of our staff—either they were fired or they quit by the end of this past year. (Horn, 2012)

The teachers and students are literally in school for 11 hours a day. I saw numerous teachers experience nervous breakdowns from the extreme pressure and harassment of administration... There was a 50 percent turnover for staff each year. (Guerrieri, 2012)

The consensus that former teachers from the national network that sponsors CMOS 1 maintained was that the workload and expectations for teachers in this network is *unsustainable* (italics added) over a normal career span for anyone (Horn, 2012). As a founding teacher for a new charter school in this network, I experienced firsthand how a culture of intense pressure led to a grueling work schedule. I usually woke up by 4:30am most mornings and was the first to arrive at the school in order to clock in an 11 to 12 hour day. More telling than the time spent at school was that I was not allowed to leave campus for any reason, served lunch duty after teaching intensively all morning, and frequently lost planning periods to other duties such as being the school’s family liaison as well as staying after school to tutor students until 6:00pm to 6:30pm. Often times, I could not reach students’ family members once tutoring was done, so I prolonged my work day even further by taking students home. My work also extended to teaching specialized classes for students every other Saturday. The result of a fully-packed, long work schedule within a culture of

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pressure and blame was a steep decline in my health that contributed to my need for major surgery.

Another byproduct of cultures of intense pressure and blame was that teachers I worked with in SCJ 1 and CMOS 2 felt an acute sense of insecurity in their positions. Due to the universal nature of non-unionization at charter schools nationwide, job insecurity adds an extra dimension of anxiety in an already high-stress job. One teacher who did lose her job, only to be rehired and re-fired, believed that she was being spied on by other staff to make a case against her. She asserted this claim despite being told by administrators that low student enrollment was the reason for her job loss:

My expectations going inside that classroom were really high. This is what I wanted to do—having my own classroom. And it got taken away. It got snatched away. They snatched it away. The administration. The team. I actually had dealings with one. The reason I say her (Catrina) is because she would go to everybody's class to see what they were doing and go tell. She was sent down there for that. Mrs. Sommers would do the same—she would come to my class to check on it. (CMOS 2 teacher 2 interview notes, 2013)

I compared the characterizations of a staff member's experiences at CMOS 1 with the testimonies of teachers from across the school's extensive national network and found striking similarities in their accounts despite wide variation in state charter school legislation and individual school practices. Moreover, this administrator was only one of two returning members from the first to second years of the school's operation, who described her experiences after nearly two years of intensive, close work with the school's principal:

My duties included nurse, counselor, back-up transportation director, cafeteria manager, recruiting, maintaining student records...It's too much for one person to do. Then they have this false fantasy that this is how the real world works. That either you do it or bye. You know, when you go to a regular public school, up to 10 people do what I did. I just feel like (CMOS 1 network) didn't give you an opportunity to master anything. And they expect you to not make mistakes. But working like that, you're going to make mistakes. (CMOS 1 administrator interview notes, 2013)

I also analyzed comments of teachers from CMOS 2 to examine whether or not school cultures evolved in similar ways *across* as well as *within* national networks:

I was very disappointed—hurt and disappointed. Initially I was told that everyone would be supportive... I was left on my own at first, and then it became very competitive and catty—once the children responded to me...It was unclear who was my boss...different teachers would power trip—because they were told by administration (that they had authority)—they would try to exert their authority in my classroom decisions; when that didn't work they

would bully me. This was supported by the administration. And we were trying to teach kids NOT to bully. Even the principal was being bullied by the superintendent and the regional director. And the principal, in turn, would bully the staff. (CMOS 2 teacher 1 interview notes, 2013)

The environment of the school itself... It wasn't a welcoming, 'Oh-I'm-glad-to-be-here environment.' It was, 'Oh God, what the hell is going to happen today!' For my feelings at the end, I felt an injustice. I felt mistreated from the top to the bottom...I was destroyed mentally. (CMOS 2 teacher 2 interview notes, 2013)

The most pervasive aspect of pressure imposed on teachers and staff to spare no effort in order to improve standardized test scores, and the job insecurity engendered by non-unionization and no due process is the instilling of cultures of blame. As two teachers surmised, collaboration was undermined so that situations that could have led to support and professional development instead devolved into intimidation and job loss:

If your class wasn't set up according to them, they would say let me help you. But you got no help. Our help was an Action Plan. You have two weeks to get this (the classroom) together or you're out. They wrote you up. The TLF's (teacher leader fellows) were supposed to help set up the classrooms. They didn't. (CMOS 2 teacher 1 and 2 interview notes, 2013)

Such common experiences across charter school organizations and geographic locations reveal a troubling pattern of how administrative reactions to pressures exacted by accountability mandates and the drive to compete across national networks shape intensely negative, inhospitable school cultures. Moreover, group think prevails in clear ways due to the push to make dramatic increases in student standardized test scores in the shortest amount of time.

While teacher retention was higher at SCS 1, as the school expanded by adding grade levels, and incorporated a college-preparation component in response to accountability mandates, staff expressed higher degrees of dissatisfaction. Still, SCS 1's more localized approach facilitated more community-based decision-making processes that primarily stemmed from the school administration and board of directors versus from a national network.

Finally, SCS 1's tendency to foster a greater culture of collaboration than that of CMOS 1 or 2 yielded demonstrable results since it was the only school in my study to receive national recognition for its' achievements in being awarded the following: first charter school in the state to receive the National Title I Distinguished School award, 2010; EPIC Silver Award for Student Achievement, 2011; US News & World Report, Best High Schools Bronze Award, 2012; 4-time winner of Keystone Award for Academic Excellence; and 21st Century Community Learning Center grant recipient (The Notebook Fall Guide, 2012).

Both short- and long-term ramifications of school cultures of blame in charter and traditional public schools alike have yielded unprecedented rates of teacher

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dissatisfaction and attrition. As another teacher from a third charter school network stressed in an interview in which she insisted upon anonymity, she predicted the ultimate consequence of high-pressure and demanding school cultures:

The teachers are overworked. The demands are so high no one can realistically meet them. The turnover rate will continue to be high, and they (CMO networks and administrators) will continue to lose really great teachers unless they start to go above and beyond to take care of their own. (Jones, 2012)

#### STRATEGIC POLICY & COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES: FOSTERING CULTURES OF COLLABORATION IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

Currently, serious challenges plague renewing or revoking charters for many of the nearly 7,000 charter schools that operate in the US. One way to address the need to understand the charter school movement in its true complexity is to conduct more holistic, qualitative analyses that synthesize theory and practice in order to address governance and accountability issues affecting charter school cultures (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2013). The research illustrates the complex ways that the meshing together of charter school policy and community makeups provide the cultural tools for the production of cultures of collaboration and blame. This is done by giving rise to high rates of teacher dissatisfaction and exhaustion, and intensified challenges confronted by staff, students and families in under-resourced and segregated schools.

Based on the key themes of state charter school policies' and community demographic and socioeconomic makeups' influence in creating contradictory school cultures and high teacher attrition rates, I have provided an in-depth, nuanced look at three charter schools that represent two of the largest charter school networks in the country. Moreover, I have found that state charter legislation establishes governance and accountability mandates that individual networks and schools apply in complex ways.

One way to ensure that state charter school policy actually fulfills its focus on community engagement and input from teachers, families and community members in decisions is to include specific benchmarks for inclusion of these stakeholders in various aspects of school operations. For example, in CMOS 2, the national network has adopted a policy of appointing a school parent on each school's board of directors. In order to fine tune this practice into one that encourages greater community engagement, each school should hold elections among families for this position instead of having an administrator unilaterally select the parent board member.

Another example of cultivating greater community engagement across CMOS 1 and 2, and SCS 1 is to include students' families' input in decisions about curriculum and discipline policies as well as participation in social, extracurricular, and fund-raising activities. State charter school policies already demand that charter schools devise, implement, and monitor community engagement plans. Thus, modifications of existing policies present more feasible options for integrating more inclusive

practices and evaluations that help build cultures of collaboration on school- and community-wide levels.

A critical issue I have identified through my research and hands-on experiences in charter schools partially results from their need to market themselves. The core neoliberal tenets of increased competition and choice have created a practice of inadequate surveying of teacher, student and family attitudes about the schools. Since charter schools must recruit staff and students, the need to portray a positive, problem-free environment often overrides transparency in communicating actual policies and results. Many charter schools already conduct surveys of staff and students who remain at the school. This often yields skewed positive results. In order to get a balanced portrait of school climate, surveys of staff and students who leave must also be conducted in order to understand reasons for attrition as well as retention. Furthermore, these surveys should be done by an impartial entity so that respondents are more likely to report honest responses, as stressed by researcher David Osborne: “Create at least one politically-independent, single-purpose organization dedicated to authorizing charters throughout the state” (Osborne, 2012).

Another measure that states should adopt includes evaluation processes in which authorizers go beyond checking for compliance, and conduct in-depth assessments of schools based on quantitative and qualitative data. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers explains the benefits of such comprehensive analyses:

Site visits provide authorizers with a mechanism for verifying and corroborating information collected through reports, gauging the culture and climate of a school (*italics added*), gathering evidence of performance from a range of perspectives, and demonstrating the commitment of the authorizer to authentic accountability. To achieve these purposes, a site visit must be much more than a passing drop-in or a compliance check. Rather, a quality site visit takes a holistic look at the school to determine how it is performing academically and organizationally and the extent to which it is serving the students who are enrolled. (Osborne, 2012, p. 22)

Consequently, applying a qualitative framework enables this type of multi-faceted, intensive assessment while also encouraging state-based and school-wide integration of more community-based, positive participatory decision-making and evaluation of school policies and practices. This approach also identifies and promotes key factors that promote greater teacher satisfaction and cultures of collaboration through familial and community engagement in student learning both at home and in school (Jensen, 2012). As a result, charter schools and their host communities could more effectively address challenges in sustainable and deeply humanistic ways. A primary concern I have as a public education researcher, practitioner and advocate is that charter schools will buckle beneath the pressures of narrowly-proscribed achievement mandates measured mainly by standardized test scores, and the increasing push to expand national charter school networks that prioritize scores and enrollment figures over the actual students these schools purport to serve.

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**SECTION 4**  
**COMMUNITY & SCHOOL RESPONSES TO**  
**NEOLIBERAL REFORMS**

AURORA CHANG

## 11. FLATLANDS CHARTER SCHOOL AND THE COMMON CORE

*A Love Story*

As some of you know, every Thursday I read to some of our students in the library. The book I read is one of my favorite stories from when I was teaching 5th grade back in 1992. The book is called *The Light of Winter*. The story has become a favorite. One 4th grader sent me the following letter (exactly how he wrote it):

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I want the book *The Light of Winter* because I want to read it ahead instead of waiting every Thursday. Also the carpet is not that comfy on my bottom. (Which now has cramps half the time at recess) And when my teacher asks me to read at home I have no books that suit me. I then will have to sit out of recess for not doing a book report, and you already know recess is precious for 4th graders like me. Well, my pencil broke.

Bye,  
Andre

I gave him a brand new copy of the book.  
(Personal Communication, Mrs. Jones, 05/01/2012)

### INTRODUCTION

Mrs. Jones, CEO of Flatlands Charter Elementary School, has stories. In fact, conversations with her always involve a story about the children in her school. It is not unusual for a student to write her personal notes (like the one above) or to find her bent down, eye level with students in a classroom discussing the reasons why they are feeling down that day or why they are refusing to complete an assignment. The students trust her with their feelings, needs and concerns, and this is no accident. Mrs. Jones' authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999) and love for her students is embedded in a larger unwavering political urgency to educate Flatlands' children in ways that will equip them with the necessary capital to live intentional, meaningful and social

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justice oriented lives. Fomenting the kind of culture that encourages children to dare to question, speak out confidently and readily express their needs involves the kind of critical pedagogy that engages the present circumstances of the community, not what might or should be in some imaginary future. As Freire (1970) notes:

The humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, [her] efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. [Her] efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in [wo]men and their creative power. To achieve this, [s]he must be a partner of the students in [her] relations with them. (p. 75)

However, partnering with students can lose its simplicity in the educational context of neoliberal reform efforts such as Charter Schools and Common Core Standards. Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). In the context of schools, this translates to increased privatization, where corporate expansion is the goal and “the role of government shifts from regulating markets to enabling them, and replacing public services with private enterprise, in the process, weakening the nation-state and public political participation” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 1947).

Initiatives such as Common Core State Standards and the expansion of the Charter Schools movement continue to be developed and implemented under the guise of educational equity and access, all the while lining the financial pockets of corporate America, primarily publishers, testing companies, for-profit test preparation businesses and the like. So, what does a school leader do when things such as Common Core Standards are so highly valued, so high stakes, that they become the central focus of schooling? How does a Charter School leader contend with the reality that public funds support private endeavors? And, most importantly, what drives an educational leader to carry forward with a pedagogy of love amidst an educational system “under siege” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 1947)?

In this chapter, I detail the ways in which one educational leader’s focus on pedagogical love not only trumps the web of trappings involved with running a Charter School while adhering to Common Core Standards, but strategically incorporates these often-conflicting demands to advance and advocate for the Flatlands community. Using observational and interview data from an ongoing four-year ethnographic study, I draw on critical pedagogical principles (McLaren, 2003) to demonstrate how one school successfully navigates neoliberal reforms for the benefit of children.

Critical pedagogy attempts to provide teachers and researchers with a better means of understanding the role that schools actually play with a race-, class- and gender-divided society, and in this effort, theorists have generated

categories or concepts for questioning student experiences, texts, teacher ideologies, and aspects of school policy that conservative and liberal analyses too often leave unexplored. (p. 189)

While I briefly discuss the macro issues surrounding neoliberal reforms, I am more interested in the micro issues of how one educational leader enacts political agency in daily situations within an urban educational context.

This chapter is not about defending or denouncing Common Core Standards and Charter Schools; rather, it is about providing a glimpse into one Charter School leader that successfully leveraged the parameters of a Charter and Common Core Standards in the spirit of progressivism and love to educationally “do right” by students and their families. I use the term love in a pedagogical sense, as Antonia Darder (2003) articulated it:

I am neither speaking of a liberal, romanticized, or merely feel-good notion of love that so often is mistakenly attributed to this term nor the long-suffering and self-effacing variety associated with traditional religious formation. Nothing could be further from the truth. If there was anything that Freire consistently sought to defend, it was the freshness, spontaneity, and the presence embodied in what he called an ‘armed love—the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce.’ (Freire, 1998, p. 42) (p. 497)

This chapter also uses one case study as a symbolic defense and testament to administrators who champion our most underserved students and decide to take a stand against neoliberalism in less than straightforward ways. They are not among those who are refusing to adopt standards, protesting through a community-organized effort or theorizing about their impact in writing. Rather, they employ improvisational strategies to reclaim power from a seemingly powerless vantage point and use it to advance the very things that neoliberalism undermines—the meaningful everyday interactions with students which embody that which money can never buy: the intangible nuances of human kindness, critical pedagogy and genuine care.

Flatlands Charter Elementary School, the subject of this chapter, emerged from a legal fight, a responsibility to give back to a community that had been ravaged by environmental (among other forms of) racism (which I describe in the description and context section) and the duty to decry naysayers who claimed that Flatlands children were deficient and hopeless, to announce a new possibility of hope and real educational outcomes. Flatlands is the example that neither side of the neoliberalism argument can co-opt completely because it possesses elements that uphold both sides of the two “C”s arguments. On the one hand, it can be touted as an exemplar Charter School that has effectively adopted Common Core Standards. On the other hand, it is an internally rebellious Charter School advocating for public causes using Common Core Standards in an effort to highlight the diversity of its students, rather

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than standardize them. It is one thing to conceptualize the strengths and weaknesses of any entity from a relative distance as we tend to do in academia; it is quite another to experience a school, day in and day out, in deciphering the merits of a pedagogical endeavor.

Seeing Black and Brown kids enjoying, growing and benefitting from everyday school practices and a school paradigm of empowerment is a joy to behold and an experience that mutes, at least temporarily, the back and forth banter of feuding sides and instead focuses on what Nel Noddings (1992) referred to as our main educational aim—to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people. Returning to Darder's (2003) articulation of love, Noddings' suggestion is hardly a soft goal. Rather, it is a charge of the utmost rigor, integrity and respect, for to be loving and lovable, especially in today's cynical world of education, are perhaps the most pain-staking and labor-intensive exercises we can engage in especially if we envision love as bell hooks (2000) does:

Awakening to love can happen only as we let go of our obsession with power and domination ... A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well. To bring a love ethic to every dimension of our lives, our society would need to embrace change. (p. 87)

By highlighting a case study of a CEO of a charter school, I argue that while neoliberal restructuring of the global capitalist economy has certainly presented an open assault on public education and teachers, the resistance to such policies can occur from within the neoliberal project, not just by its outright rejection. While charter schools are a vehicle to commodify and corporatize education through public funding and private operation, I offer the possibility that even within such enterprises, education activists can enact agency within the charter school project as a complement to those who choose to enact agency outside of its confines. Because the neoliberal restructuring of education is deeply racialized, where public schools are consistently shut down in communities of color and charter schools open in these predominantly Latino and African American communities, it is not enough to vilify neoliberal educational reform while our students continue to be educated under these reforms. In other words, we need to work within and outside of the neoliberalization of educational reform to effectively serve all students.

#### *Researcher's Positionality*

Love, in bell hooks' terms, is increasingly challenging to practice in the context of my positionality as a Chicana, Multiracial, once-undocumented immigrant scholar-activist. As an educator spanning almost two decades in almost every geographic region of the US, my epistemological lens is filtered through my years as a public high school teacher and early academic outreach coordinator in California, an educational manager at the College Board, a student affairs professional at a major research university and as a university professor in education. To bring a love ethic

to my scholarship and to this work requires a strict adherence to the possibility of hope. In a society where women of color are multiply oppressed and where the academy, in particular, diminishes our very existence (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores, González & Harris, 2012), hope becomes the only viable option lest we fall into a spiral of despair. I come to this work with the full knowledge that love is an act of resistance pushing back against the neoliberalization of educational reform. However, I approach this resistance in a non-traditional and perhaps unpopular way.

### *The “C” Words*

When we think of Freire’s notion of humanizing education (1970), Common Core Standards and Charter Schools are probably not the first things that come to mind. In fact, they might be the last. After all, what could be less humanizing than reducing learning to a set of micro objectives and instituting corporatized schools in the seeming interest of capitalism? Scholars, educators and politicians (Apple, 2011; Giroux, 2004; Ravitch, 2013) profess their adamant condemnation of Common Core Standards and Charter Schools and for good substantiated reasons. Overall, the “C” words are seen as far from democratic and a turn toward an “increasingly technocratic and market-driven reforms that have had a disastrous impact on indigenous populations, people of color, immigrants and impoverished communities” (Buras, Ferrare & Apple, 2013, pp. 3–4). Common Core Standards’ critics primarily assert, among other things, that the standards are either too vague or too narrow for what our children will face in the future, display a mistrust of teachers’ abilities stunting creativity, rigor and inquisitiveness and lead to an increased value on standardized test performance. Regarding Charter Schools, opponents focus on public funding being governed by the private sector. This argument contends, among other claims, that these schools are failing to serve students with the greatest needs, disrupting communities, increasing racial segregation of schools, and introducing new kinds of corruption into education, all while producing similar or worse educational outcomes than public schools (Ravitch, 2013).

Common Core Standards and Charter Schools have been and continue to be the subject of ongoing national debate and contention within educational circles. Combined, the implementation of Common Core Standards within Charter Schools is a perfect storm of educational standardization, school “choice” and privatization, two issues that strike at the core of today’s raging frustration over school quality. In addition to the aforementioned arguments against the “C” words, increasing debate over Common Core Standards includes teachers’ resentment over and constant pressure to abide by Common Core Standards as early as Pre-K. To exacerbate this tension, teachers not only are required to teach in fulfillment of these standards but are oftentimes evaluated on their effectiveness in meeting these goals. Among its other critiques are: whether these standards meet the academic needs for English Language Learners, lack of field testing and teacher involvement in its development and rollout and the focus on non-fiction reading (vs. fiction). Charter Schools, the

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widest reaching school reform initiative in the United States (about 6,000 schools nationwide), are largely revered or vilified, rarely meeting a middle ground (CREDO, 2013). Depending on your ideological differences, the relaxed regulatory provisions for Charter Schools represent both creativity, freedom and innovation in schooling practices as well as lack of accountability, experimental designs that use low-performing students as guinea pigs and an affront to the purposes of public education.

*Pedagogy is Political, Pedagogy is Love*

The way in which educational leaders participate in, respond to and react against the two “C”s is certainly political or at least politicized. I would argue that just as there is no such thing as an apolitical education there is neither such a thing as a pedagogy without love. The only question is whether a school’s political agenda is implicit or explicit in its articulation. Similarly, a school’s love of children, profit, domination and/or power can be implicit or explicit but always revealed. Every facet of a school’s composition from its location, policies, size, demographics, architecture, academic focus, curricular standards and choice of faculty and staff contribute to a school’s political understandings, beliefs and speaks to the school leadership’s priorities (or what/who they love) because the very processes of learning not only constitute the political mechanisms through which identity is shaped but also speak to the school’s principles.

All schools are armed with love—they are fighting fiercely for the love of their mission, stated and unstated, open and hidden, and are convinced of their righteousness (echoing Freire’s earlier words). As Giroux astutely notes:

Central to any viable notion of cultural studies is the primacy of culture and power, which is organized through an understanding of how the political becomes pedagogical, particularly in terms of how private issues are connected to larger social conditions and collective forces; i.e. how the very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities are shaped, desires are mobilized, and experiences take on form and meaning within those collective conditions and larger forces that constitute the realm of the social. (p. 499)

Flatlands Charter constitutes a particularly poignant example of Giroux’s statement, “the very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities are shaped, desires are mobilized and experiences take on form and meaning.” In many ways, Flatlands Charter navigates its existing and ever present political realities to mobilize the desires, expectations and hopes of its students, and, in that path, creating rich student experiences that lay the foundation for a political conscientiousness among the school community at large.

Certainly, Flatlands is not flawless or without its needs for improvement—its own recognition of this speaks to its larger approach to self-edification. However, its



ability to engender such an empowering learning environment while simultaneously managing pressures of curricular standardization, Board demands, community worries and the everyday realities of families living in a dangerous, high stress and unpredictable urban environment, is made possible by a pedagogy of love, “a concept articulated by bell hooks (2003) which calls teachers to nurture an emotional connection with their students alongside best academic practice and which calls teachers to respond to student weakness with compassion” (Johnson, 2008, p. 129).

*Acting on a Call to Love*

Giroux (2004) echoes this notion of and charge to love by insisting that educators must be relevant, meaningful but also political and intentional. Likewise, he calls on cultural studies theorists and culturally relevant pedagogues to equip students with the tools to deconstruct knowledge, question the why of everyday struggles and embrace a political stance.

This suggests the necessity on the part of cultural theorists to be particularly attentive to the connections between pedagogy and political agency. More specifically, it means that cultural studies advocates address seriously the meaning of making the political more pedagogical by addressing where and how the psyche locates itself in public discourse, and what pedagogical conditions provide the groundwork for agents to enunciate, act, and reflect on themselves, their relations to others, and the wider social order. (p. 499). What I want to point out is that the connections between pedagogy and political agency are not always straightforward. Helping students come to terms with their own power as individual and social agents requires educators to do the same within a context of high-stakes testing, curricular standardization, questionable teaching evaluation methods and an ever increasing tension in school environments that forces educational leaders’ hands and leaves them with little space to control. This task often requires educational leaders to be more savvy, increasingly adept and inventive in making the political more pedagogical. It is also a necessary call that pushes all of us in educator roles to not only re-embrace the seemingly unworthy notions of caring, community, trust, conviction and courage but to centralize them in our pedagogical practices.

So often, we, as researchers/scholars/educators grapple with the disconnect we experience between our theoretical writing and the everyday happenings of the schools and classrooms that surround us. In writing this chapter, I hope to act on Giroux’s call to strive to go beyond relevancy and connection by presenting analysis on data from a case study of Flatlands Elementary Charter School. I hope to problematize the oftentimes-narrow notion that educational leaders who accept Common Core Standards and/or work within a Charter School are culprits to corporatized and neoliberal attempts to take over educational spaces. I discuss the ways in which one educational leader uses strategic improvisation to forward democratic principles in her school through practice precisely within the larger counter-democratic policies that bind her. By simply taking one example to allow us to think about the diverse

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possibilities that exist, even within the most dire of circumstances and complexities of education today, I describe the ways in which the CEO of Flatlands Charter fostered a culture of love to fuse student-centered practices with high-stakes testing to foster a culture of high academic achievement and genuine student engagement in the context of a historically low performing environment. To understand the politics of Flatlands' pedagogical approach, it is important to locate it in a socioeconomic context because that context is mired in political loss and gain.

#### FLATLANDS CHARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL—DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

This qualitative research was conducted in the city of Flatlands in the US with a city population of approximately 100,000. The racial composition of Flatlands, according to the 2010 Census, was approximately 18% White, 27% African American, 1% Native American, 14% Asian American, 40% Latino/a. Flatlands has suffered from high crime rates and tend to be concentrated in one location, Central Square, the epicenter of severe urban neighborhood challenges, such as having one of the highest joblessness rates in the nation, massive school drop-out rates, pervasive crime and poverty, and housing that is aging, substandard yet unaffordable. Central Square has an African American population nearing 70% with Latinos/as comprising the majority of the remaining population.

Flatlands Charter Elementary School originated from a place of literal fire. A civil rights lawyer started a foundation that funds Flatlands Charter with proceeds from a multi-million dollar settlement following a chemical disaster in 1993. With those funds, the school's goal was to transform the neighborhood through its youngest, most vulnerable residents. The accident spewed tons of sulfuric acid into the air and sent 24,000 people to hospitals with irritated eyes and lungs. In 1995, the company agreed to settle injury claims with a huge settlement, of which a portion was used to establish the Flatlands Foundation for Children. The Foundation won school district approval for Flatlands Charter in 2005, following controversy over whether the Foundation's funds should be spent on a charter school or on more kids in public school.

Flatlands Charter is in a part of town where residents, frustrated by street violence, erected a series of "tent cities" to prevent shootings. The city had 42 homicides in 2006, a 12-year high, and seven more than in 2004, when it was named the most violent city in the state. The neighborhood is a mix of single-family homes and apartments. It has the highest poverty rate of any area in the district. Most children in the neighborhood qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, and almost 40 percent are English learners, according to data compiled by the Foundation. The school received a federal charter school startup grant. The foundation pledged \$2 million for the school's first three years.

Flatlands Charter's student population is comprised of approximately 50% Black and 50% Latino children from one of the most challenged and underserved districts in the state. To help combat these issues, the founders of Flatlands Charter

strived to provide their students with all the educational opportunities, resources and experiences usually afforded to children of wealthy communities, including but not limited to the academic, social and cultural capital that was once lacking. The school's vision expresses that exposure to a high-intensity, high-quality educational environment beginning at preschool age, will equip children to master the learning standards typical of higher-income communities. Parents/guardians enter their child into a lottery system after learning about the charter school through neighborhood word of mouth, friends, family members or through official announcements made through the school district's communiqués. Flatlands Charter's mission is to nurture the community through education, by providing preschool and elementary school academic services, resulting in grade appropriate achievement, cultural enrichment, and positive character.

Flatlands Charter is based on the premise that students are whole beings when they arrive at whatever age and that the job of the school community is to nurture the whole child as dynamic, caring and lifelong learners. Flatlands Charter aims for its students to become self-motivated, competent, lifelong learners and develop strong foundations for going onto and succeeding in college. For instance, as Flatlands Charter's CEO, Mrs. Jones explained, the school "gives children the opportunity to explore and experiment, to cultivate roots and grow wings with a varied and rich array of materials and media at their own developmental level." More importantly, perhaps, is that intangible feeling when you walk into the school and observe the different classrooms at Flatlands Charter—aside from the diversity of classroom setups and the multiplicity of activity from room to room—is the joy that emanates the school culture. A certain calm weaves its way through the school as a result of what I understand as a shared vision and clear expectations. The campus climate alone is impressive and contagious but what sets this school apart is the climate coupled with the academic success it has achieved.

In 2012, Flatland Charter's students surpassed the 800 API mark—the benchmark for achieving the NCLB standard. Flatlands Charter began with an API score of 645 in 2008, increasing its API to 830 in four years, the highest API in the city of Flatlands. Among its attributes, Flatlands identifies the following assets as key to their extraordinary success: dedicated, well paid, highly educated teachers, a strong mentorship program for new teachers including professional development to prepare them to become effective administrators, a highly networked school campus, cultural activities that engage students, voluntary Saturday school for students and an edible community garden.

In recognition of the school's success, Flatlands recently received the National Academic Achievement Award. This award is given to schools that meet the educational needs of students living at or below the poverty line. To receive this distinction, the school must demonstrate that all students are making significant progress toward proficiency on all academic content standards. Additionally, the school's socioeconomically disadvantaged students must have doubled the achievement targets set for them for two consecutive years. This award is given to

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the school that has demonstrated exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years and to one that made the most progress in closing the achievement gap between student groups.

## METHODS

This research represents a facet of a larger ethnographic study, focusing specifically on my observational data and interview data with the school's CEO. I rely on Mrs. Jones, the school's CEO, as a case study, to explore the ins and outs of the charter school through an educational leader's perspective. A case study, according to Yin (2003), is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.13). To clarify, Yin goes on to state that "you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (p.13). He views case studies as a "research strategy" which is comprehensive, not solely a data collection tactic or merely a design feature. This study drew on Yin's definition of a case study as well as Kincheloe and McLaren's (1994) assumptions about criticalist work, mainly that criticalists "use their work as a form of social or cultural criticism" (p.157).

Some of the ethnographic activities have included classroom observations, performing clerical work in the office, attending school-wide events (such as dance performances, the spelling bee, the opening of the organic garden, end of the year awards ceremony), participating in fundraising activities (jewelry bazaar, bake sales, letter campaigning) and community get-togethers. This intermittent yet recurrent involvement took place over the course of the past four years (2010-2014) when I had the opportunity to experience the culture of Flatlands Charter School and witness the complexities of the school's daily ins and outs. Specifically, I was able to build a strong relationship with the school's CEO, Mrs. Jones through regular meetings, debriefing sessions and the opportunity to shadow her. This relationship proved very valuable in understanding Flatlands Charter through her perspective. While the larger ethnographic research involved interviewing other community stakeholders such as teachers, parents, support staff and the like, I limit the scope of this chapter to the data I gathered from Mrs. Jones, on my own observations of Flatlands and Mrs. Jones, in order to focus on the leadership aspect of Flatlands and to hone in on those issues. The aim of this case study is to learn from the ways in which a school leader negotiates the demands of Common Core Standards within a Charter School setting and in this process, focuses on the ultimate pedagogical tool—love.

This study employs testimonio as both methodological and pedagogical tool that "brings the mind, body, spirit, and political urgency to the fore" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 367). Through the case study, the participant was able to incorporate her own theoretical understandings in developing meaning about her experiences as a CEO of a charter school in an underserved community. When I say theoretical

understandings, I am not referring to the typical academic style of theorizing where we draw on other scholars' theories to analyze data, but rather theory in its basic meaning—to come up with an idea as to the why of a certain phenomenon except, in the case of this study, the ideas come from the case study's lived experiences, her knowledge as a mother, her immigrant customs and the everyday nuances that comprise a life of intimate understandings as a parent, educator, leader and activist.

Testimonios represent what Moraga (1983) calls theory in the flesh. That is, testimonio is a tool for inscribing struggles and understandings, creating new knowledge, and affirming our epistemologies—testimonio is about writing what we know best: familia, barrio, life experiences' (Rendón, 2009, p. 3). Through testimonio pedagogy we are able to hear and read each other's stories through voices, silences, bodies, and emotions and with the goal of achieving new conocimientos, or understandings. (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 367)

#### FINDINGS

This case study revealed a love ethic embraced by the Flatlands' administration, faculty and staff that served as the foundation for their pedagogical practices. It also highlighted the ways in which the term "politics" and everything that is associated with it can have a sour taste in the mouths of educational leaders and teachers. This observation speaks to the importance of language in the context of discussing educational reforms—academicians and practitioners are often speaking different dialects. In these educational discourses, it is easy to critique the common core standards without considering the fact that amidst this banter, students are subjected to neoliberal educational reforms in very real ways. Therefore, educational activists that work in schools on a daily basis understand that they must fight the good fight from within—they don't have the luxury to think, write and give speeches about the evils of charter schools. This case study also points to the reality of standardized testing. As much as educational leaders may not completely agree with certain assessments, they also recognize that such assessments exist and will persist. This case study serves as an example of one educational leader that does her best to balance the insidious presence of neoliberal educational reforms with meeting the needs of students within the given parameters.

#### *A Love Ethic*

Flatlands' administration, faculty, staff and students strive to live by what bell hooks (2000) phrases as a "love ethic," which involves: "choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give our all to relationships; by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet" (p. 88), "a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions" (p. 88) and

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“concern for the collective good of our nation, city, or neighbor” (p. 98). Mrs. Jones puts it this way:

We have one goal: the well-being of our students. It’s not about my feelings or the feelings of the teachers, we’re not concerned about the personal philosophy of teachers but how they conform to our mission. And we are very upfront when we come to school, it’s about the students, it’s not about you, it’s not about me, it’s not even about the community, it’s about the students. So when that is understood, we can do many things... We want teachers that have rigor but a lot of love for them.

The central focus of Flatlands is the students’ well-being. Often, this rather obvious tenet is overlooked amidst conversations surrounding free markets, testing options, privatization, deregulation and economic liberalization. What of students’ and teachers’ liberation in a democratic context? How does that fit into our talks of neoliberalism? The point is that it doesn’t factor in at all. A love ethic or ethics of any kind are missing when we talk about privatization of education—when the interest is profit, all else is disposable. However, a love ethic can exist in the everyday operations that are imposed upon educational leaders within a school context. At the heart of our conversations, Mrs. Jones struck at the core of this love ethic when she explained the role of a teacher:

You are dealing with the treasures of the families. You know when a family goes to the school and gives us the pre-schooler, who’s three and a half and four years old, here I bring to you the most precious thing in my life and I want to leave him here with you for eight hours—that’s precious. And if you don’t love the students then you should be doing something else. Many times I have seen myself, saying this to some teachers “think about it, if you’re not going to be able to deal with this you should work at Wal-Mart, just simple like that. It requires love. It requires the giving of yourself ... giving of your time, the putting up with a lot of confrontations, students saying “I hate you” then bursting into tears and saying “I’m sorry.” More than any other profession ... it is a call of love and education is kind of a religion like a religious order and the children are your little gods. You serve them.

Serving students is the main priority at Flatlands. This approach is quite antithetical to neoliberal educational reformers that place profit at the center of their efforts. Caring for profit margins doesn’t translate to caring for students therefore, precise efforts must be made to counteract the detrimental effects of educational privatization. This can only be accomplished through a genuine climate of human care. Mrs. Jones can’t quite put her finger on how or why the students feel cared for at Flatlands so she relies on her storytelling to try to explain:

I know that students feel cared for. I don’t know exactly how but I think they feel it because sometimes when they are sending referrals if you give them

space to talk they realize they are important and then sometimes they even choose who to talk with. For me, what makes my job so meaningful is that so many times they have wanted to talk to me because students know that the teacher is the first authority in the classroom but then if that doesn't work, I always tell them that they can "appeal to Caesar" and I'm Caesar! They come and give me letters all the time and I listen to them. I know they feel it. How? I don't know how they know, but I know they feel it and I can say that because I receive letters from them, from third graders to sixth graders and they want to talk.

So for example, and I'll be very, very quick here. On Friday, we were having a nacho sale and there was a student in the sixth grade that is extremely poor and she is always hungry and even if it's not time for breakfast, she asks, "Can I have a muffin?" "Yes, have a muffin." Or "can I go get this," all the time eating. So she came to me and said, "Ms. Jones, would you like some nachos?" And I said, "ooohh, I don't think so ... and then it occurred to me that the nachos had been sold kind of a block away, so if I gave her two dollars to buy the nachos ... she would eat half of the nachos on the way back to my office because I know she's hungry. So I said, "You know what? No ... here are two dollars, go and buy the nachos." So those are the things that you do and why did she come to me to offer me nachos? She knew I was going to buy the nachos for her. So how did that happen? I don't know but she knew. And it was such a, such a simple thing. That's it—"Here are the two dollars, go and eat the nachos." So that's the care that they know they have.

While Mrs. Jones modestly claims that she is not aware of the exact formula for creating a caring environment, I observed a variety of ways in which Flatlands demonstrated this care. I mention a few examples here. The actual building where Flatlands is located is pristine—clean with sparkling floors and filled with student art, academic awards, charts illustrating the school's progress on standardized tests and community photographs of parents, students and school staff working together. Everyone in the front office, from the secretaries to the parent liaison, is active but always present, making eye contact, greeting and engaging all people that pass through the school's doors. When you walk into a class, an official student greeter approaches you, shakes your hand and greets you with an introduction to the class and an explanation of what students are learning that day. Visitors are also encouraged and welcome in the school. One of my favorite activities, which takes place on a daily basis, is observing the gospel choir and ballet folklorico practice. This incorporation of both Black and Latino cultures not only affirms the students' backgrounds but also adds an element of joy and motion that permeates the walls of the campus. Finally, while there are many experiences I could point to, I observed that Mrs. Jones truly has an open-door policy. Unless she is in the midst of a private meeting, students, teachers, teacher aides, administrators, service staff and parents are free to visit her. Her door is literally always open and there is hardly a moment

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when she is there by herself. In short, Flatlands is a dynamic site of praise, joy and collaboration with a strong sense of student-centeredness.

So, from the outset, giving a child two dollars to buy nachos (as Mrs. Jones explains in her earlier example) may seem like a simple thing, as Mrs. Jones phrases it. However, I challenge that notion of simplicity in that it only seems simple because of this kind of habitual practice which involves knowledge of a student's circumstances (at home and at school); an understanding of the student's needs and nuanced comprehension of how those needs are expressed, sometimes masked, behind other behaviors or requests; and a willingness to believe one's intuition and make a judgment call. What might be considered simple would be to respond, "No, thanks, I not a big fan of nachos, but I appreciate you asking." That is certainly an acceptable, even nice response but it lacks a love ethic. Mrs. Jones' reaction, on the other hand, embraced a love ethic. As hooks (2000) so beautifully notes:

To live our lives based on the principles of a love ethic (showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity and the will to cooperate), we have to be courageous. Learning how to face our fears is one way we embrace love. Our fear may not go away, but it will not stand in the way. (p. 101)

Indeed, challenging neoliberal reforms through daily acts of love toward children can produce fear—fear that not enough time is being spent on accountability measures, curricular implementations, data-driven results and the like. Yet, the daily responses to interactions that incorporate a deep connection with individual students, based on a principle of a love ethic, are our most powerful tools in resisting a corporatized model of schooling. And, I think, Mrs. Jones would agree that it takes a certain leap of faith and a nurtured courage to embrace those interactions with sensitivity and awareness. Sometimes these interactions with students are benign, almost playful. At other times, however, incidents can be increasingly severe:

One of them, a Latina, started crying and said, "My dad is in jail because of me. Because when we went to court the social worker made me say things against my father that I didn't want to say." I interjected, "but I know that those marks on your face were because he hit you." She responded, "Yeah he hit me and my mom but he means well and he loves us." She carries a horrible guilt. She was a victim, she spoke in court, and now she's cutting herself because her father is in jail. The other one said that she doesn't have a father or a mother and that grandma said, "Don't ask for help at the school because what happens at the house, stays in the house." I said to the girls, "you're going to go back to the class and pretending that this never happened. We're not going to call the parents now, we're going to talk with Ms. Joanna, who is the psychologist and then I'm going to visit you daily if you need anything. Are you okay now? Yeah. So they went to the classroom, then every time I saw them, I hugged them in front of everybody because the boys are bothering them saying, "you



are bisexual” and you are this and that and they make a big deal. I didn’t ask anybody; I didn’t go to the classroom to ask the students who was bothering who. I just approached the situation with as much love as I could.

Mrs. Jones’ love ethic permeates all of her interactions with students, faculty and staff. This ethic requires an indescribable presence of mind and sixth sense for the unspoken in a given moment. Enacting a love ethic in our current educational environment of standardization and data points takes time, attention and an underlying ethos that children are whole beings whose life experiences and daily emotional health impact their learning. It is no wonder then, upon raising the topic of politics, Mrs. Jones reacted strongly. Indeed, politics seemed so far, almost irrelevant, from the pressing moments of children’s every day struggles.

### *Untangling Politics*

This realization was made clear to me when Mrs. Jones and I talked “politics.” I asked her about the political nature of her work, if it existed and if so how, and this was her response:

How political is it, when I observe the playground and realize that a child needs a pair of shoes and I send someone to Payless to buy a pair of shoes? Or if I go to a classroom and I see the student who is falling asleep and I get him out of the classroom and throw a cot in the nurse’s office and put him to sleep, how political is that? That’s part of pedagogy, not politics. Or if I go to a classroom and see a teacher teaching geometry and say, “we find the area by multiplying base times height,” and then the answer is square and then I say, “Hold on, hold on, hold on, sorry can I say something and get involved? Let’s talk about perimeter. Peri means around and meter means measure. Can we get the perimeter? Okay very good. So the answer is a simple number, why do you need to write your answer in the area here times, here in the square . . . so I notice the teachers are missing something there, how political is that? And the school is all about that. About the needs of the students—that’s it. And when we have to go to places or represent the school I always send someone else. So I don’t understand why politics matters.

I was reminded of the mistake I repeat over and over again as a researcher—assuming that the participant and I share the same meanings of certain terms. Words like diversity and democracy are the ones I tend to make assumptions about. In this case, pedagogy and politics would fall victim to my conclusion jumping. Mrs. Jones repeatedly asked, how political is it when x, y and/or z happens? While she adamantly asserted that politics didn’t matter, I, in turn, interpreted all of her examples as politically related. What I soon learned was that the notion of politics triggered a negative connotation for Mrs. Jones. She associated politics with politicians and politicians with certain traits such as being dishonest, corrupt, self-serving and

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entitled. She qualified her narrative by saying that she wanted to protect her students from any outside force that could disrupt their academic trajectory:

What happens is I always think about [what is best for students] ... and no doubt in my effort to keep the school strictly [in the interest of] students I probably put up some kind of walls. I don't want anything to mess up what we have. So it [keeping politics out] is in the effort to keep the purity of the school. The integrity of the mission.

When Mrs. Jones uses words such as purity and integrity, she refers to the importance of the Flatlands mission and inherently in protecting her students from outside forces such as neoliberal reform efforts. She doesn't want to "mess up what we have" implying that such efforts have the potential to do so.

Giroux's explanation helps interpret this:

Refusing to decouple politics from pedagogy means, in part, that teaching in classrooms or in any other public sphere should not only simply honor the experiences students bring to such sites, but should also connect their experiences to specific problems that emanate from the material contexts of their everyday lives. (2004, p. 500)

Interestingly enough, while Mrs. Jones explicitly stated that she felt politics had nothing to do with pedagogy, it was clear that her interactions with students, faculty and staff were carefully weighed directly in response to those seemingly removed politics. Teaching and leading educational institutions are definitively political acts, whether or not we label them as such. She illustrates this with the following example:

Look, the best lessons always emerge from questions from the students. For example, from today's lesson plans, I'm going to teach multiplication and all of a sudden one of the students asks me, "why is it that, how, how, rains happen?" And I say, "Oh, I should teach the cycle of water today." So I'm going to put aside the multiplication and I'm going to talk about the cycle of water and then I'm going to use that that subject matter to bring multiplication into the lesson, because the student asked me something that is relevant to him; that is important and everybody benefits so did I eventually teach multiplication? Yeah. Was that the goal of the day? No. The goal of the day was what the student brought forth an example, I addressed it, incorporated it into the class. So, when they experience that they feel like, "oh I can ask questions."

So you correlate the question that is very, very meaningful to the student and then you incorporate the subject matter. For example why should we talk about ... um, Ski Week [this is how the district refers to spring semester break in early February] in Flatlands? They, they really don't have an idea as to what that means; that is so foreign to them. For example when school starts in September some people ask, "what did you do for summer?" Well you know what our kids did in summer, they played in the street or they went to the park. They didn't

go to Disneyland or Europe. So what do you do; how do you remedy that, do you send them to Disneyland? You can't. So what you do is you open summer school and you can show them videos of Europe and then you can teach them things that will empower them to actually go to Europe in the future.

So, in many ways, Mrs. Jones brings to life what Giroux (2004) states—that “pedagogy must address the relationship between politics and agency, knowledge and power, subject positions and values, and learning and social change while always being open to debate, resistance, and a culture of questioning. (p. 501). By centering children’s questions as the impetus for a lesson and by changing up the plan for the day to accommodate to the immediate albeit divergent interests and concerns of the students, she honors the children’s agency by allowing them to initiate the production and delivery of knowledge as well as value their inquisitiveness in real time. By raising the issue of dissonance between the children’s realities (playing in the street) while on break with the district’s labeling of that break as “Ski Week,” Mrs. Jones inadvertently hones in on a highly political issue that highlights the socioeconomic and racial disparities embedded within two seemingly benign words. For while some students and families would invariably hear “Ski Week” and logically assume that during that week they would head to the mountains for snow sports, the children of Flatlands were puzzled by the clear inapplicability of such a term. Living in the Flatlands is in direct opposition to taking a week to go skiing. Although Mrs. Jones would state it differently, perhaps even disagree with the conceptual notion of this relationship, she nonetheless lives it in her pedagogical practices.

### *Beyond the Critique of Common Core Standards*

The implementation of Common Core Standards can be attributed to pressure from the federal government, which required states to adopt internationally vetted standards to qualify for eligibility for Race to the Top funds. And while Common Core Standards do not dictate curricula per se, its grade-level goals will inevitably result in the changing if not modification of school curricula. The idea behind the Common Core is that it will aim for depth rather than breadth by forcing students to meta-analyze their own thought processes and problem-solving approaches. At first, Common Core will affect math and English, but new science standards are in the pipeline, as well. Forty-six states, three territories, and Washington, D.C., are poised to adopt and implement the Common Core Standards. State education standards have been around since the early 1990’s. By the early 2000s, every state had developed and adopted its own learning standards for grades 3-8 and high school. The lack of proficiency-based standardization (because every state had its own definition of proficiency) partially inspired the development of the Common Core State Standards in 2009. The college- and career-readiness standards were developed first and then incorporated into the K-12 standards in the final version of the Common Core we have today. Once the development process concluded, states

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began voluntarily adopting the Common Core State Standards. Currently, 44 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) are implementing the standards.

Mrs. Jones, although not entirely enthusiastic about the Common Core Standards, welcomed what she perceived as a rigorous set of standards. She also welcomed the opportunity for change, a quality that seems to work strategically for her when faced with challenges.

It is a dangerous move because when you go into the Common Core, you have to change the curriculum. And when you change the curriculum you have to change the data analysis and then you have to change the assessments so... Flatlands Charter is going through major change and we're changing the structure of the administration, because if we're going to change, we're going to change everything.

Although she remains uncertain about the outcomes of the Common Core, she was quick to initiate programs that would prepare students to do well on the forthcoming assessments. Mrs. Jones, perhaps unknowingly, also points to the politics involved in the Common Core implementation. She points to the unfair nature of the standards when it comes to ELD and Special Education students and the privileging of students who come from higher socioeconomic classes; she is also quick to point out that the Common Core Standards will lead to greater profits for private companies such as publishers, a fact that is supported by a 2006 study conducted by Harrell and Jackson that analyzed science teacher testing in Texas which indicated that "the greatest beneficiary of this system appeared to be test companies" (Sleeter, 2008).

In reality, nobody knows exactly how the Common Core is going to increase the levels of education or actually is going to be a failure. I'm just concerned but we're going to do our best. Secondly, teachers especially those close to retirement are thinking that the Common Core is unfair for ELD students and Special Ed. Why? Because especially in the assessments, in the past the assessments were basically multiple choice.

Special Ed students need to be read to. ELD students don't have the vocabulary, so they get lost in the question. And if you give them clues, at least you help them in the elementary school and then they get off and then they succeed. It's controversial and it's definitely going to favor the students who are gifted, and parents who are professionals. They read to them and they go to the library. They are going to score very high. The ELD and the Special Ed students are going to score lower than ever.

With that in mind, I've created Saturday School and Summer School in preparation and all we do is ELA, English Language Arts. Because in mathematics we are doing fine ...72% of students are proficient but only

50% are proficient in ELA, so we are having our massive computerized prep program so students can be ready for the common core. It is a little bit risky, but we're ready, we're ready to change everything.

What stands out about Mrs. Jones' approach is that it is a mix of enthusiasm and opportunism. In other words, while she recognizes Common Core as a neoliberal reform (my words, not hers) by identifying several aspects that point to enhancing the role of the private sector in education at the possible disadvantage of vulnerable population, she attempts to seize such an opportunity, be it less than ideal, to forward both students' academic success and the reputation of the school. Is this selling out to the system? Is it making lemonade out of lemons? Or is it something in between?

*So Far, It's Not There*

It is precisely this in-between space where students' daily educational realities meet neoliberal reforms in which educational leaders must make a decision. There are certainly those who would reject such reforms and the often unreasonable, even unethical, demands they bring, but there is also another alternative. Mrs. Jones could reject the standards altogether and resist their implementation but this wouldn't meet her current students' needs. Rather, she accepts the current measurement and poses a series of questions that address how to effectively negotiate Common Core Standards within real-time, current school contexts. She understands that tests are an inadequate measure of student or teacher performance, however she also recognizes that her hands are tied.

First of all, I believe that tests will never represent what the students know or the ability of the teacher. But unfortunately there is no other way to measure. I think testing is necessary. And I'm going to say this, that testing is indispensable but if someone has the brilliant idea of providing a way for children to show what they know without testing I'll be the first one to implement it. And I'm going to sign up for that, but so far, it's not there.

Mrs. Jones is somewhat resigned to the realities of standards and testing, however she keeps a spirit of optimism and searches for ways to affirm students' intelligences in other ways. Until the day that testing is not required, Mrs. Jones will continue to innovate in ways that make her students feel loved.

And one of the ways to ameliorate that stigma of the testing is that you should always compliment the students for what they are good at. That's why when you give awards as an incentive you should give the awards for "most improved citizen," "most cooperative," "great thinker" because there is something good in every student. I mean, what are students looking for in a test? A high score, an award. There is a place for everybody in the world but again if someone invents a way to measure that is different than testing let me know, I'm going to sign up.

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Mrs. Jones is more than willing to “sign up” for the alternative to more standardized testing. To some, this is good reason to resist testing altogether. For Mrs. Jones, this is a reason to prepare her students for what is to inevitably present itself to them as they continue on their educational paths. This approach may not work for all educational leaders but Mrs. Jones demonstrates that it is a viable one.

#### DISCUSSION

When scholars discuss neoliberalism from a conceptual standpoint, it is easy to get caught up in the black and white distinctions of right vs. wrong, public vs. private and common good vs. individual responsibility. While we are reading each other’s articles, commentaries and blogs, K-12 educators in the field are wrestling with neoliberal reforms as a daily practical exercise. What I’ve learned and continue to learn from this study is that we aren’t even speaking the same language. Words such as politics and pedagogy are not uniformly understood. In fact, academics speak these terms in ways that simply do not resonate with teachers and principals, and less so, with parents, students and community members. At times, even though our (academics and folks in the field) goals may seem the same, the language and messages we receive about different reform efforts are in opposition to one another. Sleeter (2008), for example, notes that “many people in poor and historically underserved communities see neoliberal education policies, such as school choice and accountability, as offering potential solutions to long unmet needs” (p. 1948). The propaganda advocating for such policies has succeeded in articulating its message in ways that speak to the communities it targets. Lakes and Carter (2014) illustrate this point:

Faced with choices about educating their children in such a political environment, parents are often uninformed, misinformed, and fearful—fuelled by media speculation about failing schools, incompetent teachers, and school violence. Under pressure, parents are easily attracted to schemes that appear to satisfy multiple objectives, such as discipline, protection, and greater academic achievement. (p. 108)

Teachers are also bombarded with pressures on various levels (from federal mandates pushing standardization, administrator’s focus on measurable outcomes, to the everyday stress that teaching involves). While some teachers are actively engaged in the political ins and outs of the teaching profession, others are either uninvolved or are working toward transformational change within the context of their own work environments. Bartolomé (2003) states that:

Teachers working toward political clarity understand that they can either maintain the status quo, or they can work to transform the sociocultural reality at the classroom and school level so that the culture at this micro-level does not reflect macro-level inequalities, such as asymmetrical power relations that relegate certain cultural groups to a subordinate status. (p. 412)

As succinct and true as Bartolomé's statement is, I doubt that most teachers and educational leaders are intentionally thinking about their own political clarity, at least in those terms. In other words, their classroom environment and curricular choices may reflect a political clarity (that all students deserve a quality education, that racism and homophobia have no place in the classroom, etc.) however it may be implicit and not necessarily articulated as such. In the midst of every day teaching and leading realities, political clarity is messy because students' learning, lessons and lives are at stake. Apple (2011) astutely notes:

Given the complicated politics of identity, there is no guarantee that all teachers will always be progressive, of course. Yet, many teachers do have socially and pedagogically critical intuitions. However, they often do not have ways of putting these intuitions into practice because they cannot picture them in action in daily situations. Due to this, critical theoretical, political and educational insights, then, have nowhere to go in terms of their embodiment in concrete pedagogical situations where the politics of curriculum and teaching must be enacted. (p. 25)

Furthermore, not only do teachers and administrators have trouble putting these intuitions into practice; the same is true for teacher educators, as Sleeter (2008) reminds us:

Teacher educators must become much more aware of what neoliberalism is and how it is impacting on a range of social institutions in order to mount what Weiner (2007) refers to as 'a political defense of teacher education's values as a public good.' Generally teacher educators have only a vague idea (or no idea) of what neoliberalism is, not recognizing it as a project for restoring class power by dismantling public services. There is a connection between erosion of public funding for higher education, for example, and erosion of funding for other public services such as health care and libraries. (p. 1955)

So, while we hope and wait for teacher educators to fully grasp what neoliberalism is and its destructive impacts on students, we must tread carefully in our judgments of those who are mandated to work within these neoliberal parameters and who are in continual interaction with the students who experience the daily impacts of neoliberal education reforms' laws, policies and practices. I offer that we can work as insiders and outsiders and everything in between to do right by students. This is why I am leery of iron-handed statements such as the following:

Choice for choice's sake can be irresponsible, reckless, immoral, and in some cases, undemocratic. Passing laws and policies that have been shown to weaken the democratic fabric of the country by facilitating people's choice to segregate is immoral, and those who knowingly create and support such laws and policies are engaging in education malpractice. (Tienken, 2011, p. 5)

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Is Mrs. Jones engaging in education malpractice by enforcing Common Core Standards or by choosing to run a Charter School? I think not. Yet, Tienken (2011) affirms this oversimplification:

Children have a right to a quality education. School leaders, those who prepare them, and the people who lead our professional organizations have a duty to help provide the quality. If some education leaders choose to drink the snake oil then they should expect to get sick. If some help sell it, they should resign. (p. 14)

Tienken's (2011) accusations emphatically point the blame for the current educational crisis, as represented by Charter Schools and Common Core Standards, on school leaders. So, whether fault is laid on the neoliberal movement and/or the educational leaders who perpetuate the movement by working under such reform efforts, it seems that blaming, regardless of target, misses the central point. Acting from a pedagogy of love where we seize mundane opportunities "to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries" (hooks, 1994, p. 130), may seem like a resignation or surrender to neoliberal reforms, when in fact is quite powerful.

In Keith's (2010) article, *Getting Beyond anaemic love: from pedagogy of cordial relations to a pedagogy for difference*, she uses the following epigraph:

One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites—polar opposites—so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. ...What is needed is the realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. (Martin Luther King, 1990, p. 247)

She goes on to conceptualize the passage as one that moves from a pedagogy of cordial relations, which enacts what Dr. King terms "anaemic love", towards a pedagogy for difference which entails a more profound Self-Other transformation and human connection. I wonder if we can also draw from this passage to understand the ways in which educational leaders like Mrs. Jones use love as a corrective measure and an implementation tool for justice.

## CONCLUSION

Giroux (2005) claims that any notion of critical pedagogy which allows students to be conscious of injustice and engages students in the politics of the day is far from the kind of pedagogical intervention which requires students to answer the larger question 'why' and more importantly, to take a political stand that "address[es] the relationships between politics and agency, knowledge and power, subject positions



and values, and learning and social change while always being open to debate, resistance, and a culture of questioning” (p. 13). This chapter focused on a unique charter elementary school primarily funded by a private foundation established as a result of a class-action lawsuit against a major corporation held responsible for a toxic explosion, negatively impacting the community’s health. I described this school’s history, development and response to “reform” measures as mandated by the national common core state standards and addressed how this school’s narrative represents pedagogical intervention in action. I reported on data based on a case study of Flatlands Elementary Charter School in a state that now ranks in the bottom ten nationwide in school spending, and among the lowest in the ratio of teachers, counselors, nurses and librarians per pupil.

Under the pressures of national policy that demands high-stakes testing and curricular homogeneity in classroom activity, findings revealed how this charter school fostered and nurtured social and cultural capital to fuse student-centered practices with high-stakes testing to foster a culture of high academic achievement and genuine student engagement in the context of a historically low performing environment. While some have argued that private foundations’ influence on public education is fundamentally undemocratic, this school problematizes this notion. While this foundation did demand performance on the basis of quantitative academic measures, it was also, unlike other foundations, beholden to the community and less to a hegemonic business interest. As documented by its mission and funding sources, this foundation is driven by a strong sense of purpose and reinvestment in the community. In this way, its seeming neoliberal bend as illustrated through the school’s privatization, was not so straightforward.

This case study provided an example of how one school used the Common Core standards to further its overall goal of college-readiness for all of their students embracing “a vision of pedagogy that is directive and interventionist on the side of producing a substantive democratic society” (Giroux, 2004, p. 502). In the midst of critiques about the Common Core, this case study illustrates the ways in which creative one school leader utilized an arguably neoliberal construct to not only significantly benefit a low-performing school community but more importantly, to broaden democratic possibilities within it.

I am reminded of Ladson-Billings’ (2004) lecture, *It’s Not the Culture of Poverty, It’s the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education*, where she argues that prospective and novice teachers regularly and loosely use the word “culture” as an explanation for students patterns of behavior they cannot explain, using the word as a proxy for other terms, primarily race. As I have discussed in this chapter, in the debate around Common Core Standards and Charter Schools, the polarity of the arguments on each side is striking. And, while I understand and possess the rage over the capitalistic exploitation of children in the effort to make profits, I also gravitate toward the struggle to negotiate the everyday workings of school within this deplorable system. Ladson-Billings notes that:

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We lack complex understandings of how individual, family, community, school, and societal factors interact to create school failure for some students. It is much easier to explain students' failure by looking at something internal to the students than endemic in this thing we call school culture. (2004, p. 106)

Similarly, it is much easier to vilify school leaders and teachers in this debate by blaming them for acquiescing to corporatization rather than looking at the ways in which, we, as academics, enjoy oversimplifying that which is complex. This is not to say that neoliberal reforms are not responsible for many of the challenges in today's schools but to suggest that teachers and leaders of schools are engaging in an evil enterprise by struggling daily to educate children in this current political environment; that they should drop everything to challenge this neoliberalism ignores the daily lived realities of students. Certainly, there have been teachers and administrators who have flatly and courageously opposed neoliberal efforts that should be applauded, however could we also view the work of Mrs. Jones and other administrators as agentic and courageous as well? Is she not pushing back against neoliberalism by engaging the Flatlands community through love?

If the goal of this nation is to prepare teachers more effectively for diversity, democracy and equity, perhaps we also need to teach teachers how to become critical consumers of propaganda, savvy interlocutors of policy and practice and interpreters/facilitators of theoretical knowledge as it applies to their situational contexts. So long as we continue to focus on leaders with a deep commitment to and knowledge about equity, democracy and teaching, I think we can still hope, no matter what reforms come our way. Giroux notes that "education is already a space of politics, power, and authority" (p. 500)—it is also a place of love.

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LIZA N. PAPPAS

## 12. FROM ALTERNATIVE POLICIES TO ALTERNATIVE IDEOLOGIES

*Parent-led Education Organizing and Resistance  
to the Neoliberal Imaginary*

If a school doesn't get results we got to try something different...let's create some competition so everyone is held to a very high standard. (Former Schools Chancellor, press conference, 09/28/2010)

We realize there's an educational crisis but we believe an educational crisis requires an educational plan. (CEJ Parent leader, press conference, 05/2010)

### INTRODUCTION

In the years 2002-2013, under then Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) closed more than 100 schools, replacing them with traditional public schools or charter schools. This was not NYC's first mass school closings push. In 1980, Mayor Koch proposed to close 40 schools as part of his Program to Eliminate the Budgetary Gap (Dean, 1983). For decades, in major metropolitan areas across the United States, school closures have been the policy of choice in addressing systematic failures. In the late 1930s to the 1950s, and again in the mid-1970s through the 1980s, school closings were introduced to remedy budget shortfalls and declining enrollments (Colton & Frelich, 1979). School closings were also pursued as part of desegregation plans (US Commission on Civil Rights, 1967).

NYC's recent drive is distinct in its support for school closings as a response to "academic failure"—generally defined by test scores and graduation rates—and as a means to improve schools.<sup>1</sup> Currently, many administrators and elected officials herald the closure of academically struggling schools as a bold education reform in spite of the fact that the little empirical research available suggests that in of itself, closure is not an effective intervention (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). As this study illustrates, administrators reason that school closings will be "a fresh start," paving the way to open new schools, with new foci, new staff and staff cultures.

In the past five years, school districts nationally have been articulating their support of school closings, many boosted significantly by the federal government's 4.35 billion dollar Race to the Top Initiative (RTTT), which provided competitive

grants to states for satisfying a number of education policies including turning around low-performing schools.<sup>2</sup> The recent resurgence of mass school closures is changing the landscape of public education—what many consider a deleterious effect of a ‘neoliberal’ trend in public education within a larger context of neighborhood gentrification and racial re-segregation (Lipman, 2011a; Buras, 2011). School closings continue to have a disproportionate impact on low-income communities and communities of color that have been historically under-resourced and simultaneously forced to bear the burden of educational disinvestment and racism (Valencia, 1984; Journey for Justice Alliance, 2014).

The controversy over school closings is largely depicted as a two-sided conflict. On one side are school district administrators committed to raising test scores. On the other side are union officials devoted to protecting their membership. If families or school communities are represented in the debates, they are often portrayed as too emotionally attached to the schools in question to be reasonable. Historically, school communities have demonstrated a similar fervor as administrators have with respect to school closings though theirs is in vehement disagreement (Weatherly, Narver, & Elmore, 1983). Much of the literature explains community opposition as a concern for a loss of relationships and identity (Berger, 1983). It largely has not expounded on profound ideological differences that many communities have with school closings, as I will do in this chapter.

Without evidence that closings are a proven strategy to improve schools, and in the face of steady and vibrant opposition, how has school closure policy reform expanded? Ravitch (2013) argues that in addition to the financial backing of RTTT, proponents have been able to tap the staunch narrative of the failure of public education writ large, as well as a burgeoning anti-union sentiment that has helped shift the discourse from failing schools to one of failing teachers—while successfully keeping attention off of the larger political and economic infrastructure responsible for fundamental inequities concerning poverty, and class and racial segregation that impact schools (Anyon, 2005b; Rothstein, 2004). Lipman (2011b), Hursh (2007), Ball (1996) and others however point to a market model that is replacing traditional school systems, and bringing together “a new simplified bottom line, and a new governance approach to managing the district to maximize that bottom line” (Menefee-Libey, 2010, p. 89).

Neoliberalism is currently the dominant theoretical framework for explaining the growth of the market model in public education, although it is not as simple or homogenous as it appears or is often described (Blomgren 1997, p. 224, as cited in Thorsen, 2009). Harvey’s definition is useful in situating market influences in public education within “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills [and] an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2005, p. 2).

This chapter investigates neoliberalism’s manifestation in the form of the Portfolio Management Model (PMM)—a school system rebuilding effort championed by

many school districts, which facilitates market values of choice and competition, and a new management and governance strategy that creates new roles for education contractors and restructures the role of the central office. In this chapter, I explore how school closings in NYC have proliferated via PMM as part of a neoliberal imaginary (Ball, 2012)—the transposability, mobility, and expansion of private solutions in the sector of public schooling—focusing on new roles, relationships, and a re-formation of school governance (pp. 6–16).

As part of my analysis, I discuss how PMM has propelled a market ideology and logic about what constitutes successful and failing schools, and how schools as institutions improve. I also examine how the three school reform levers of PMM (choice, test-based accountability, and a shift in education management and governance—referred to as empowerment) have seeded the ground for mass school closure policy. These reforms together help broaden our understanding of how a neoliberal imaginary has reshaped the role of individuals (particularly parents<sup>3</sup> and communities) and their relationship to and with the education system; as well as reworked the role of the state,<sup>4</sup> its relationship to parents and communities, and its role in education governance. Because we know less about ideological opposition to neoliberalism especially from a grassroots perspective, I largely focus on one community group's critique and resistance to mass school closure policy and its own educational platform as one case of a counter imaginary to neoliberalism.

For fifteen months, between January 2010 and May 2011, I observed the critical work of a citywide parent-led organizing coalition, the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ). This chapter highlights CEJ's efforts to contest school closing proposals in the nation's largest school district and introduce an alternative framework to a neoliberal imaginary for school improvement. In contrast to the ideals of neoliberalism that have captivated many school districts, it gives an on-the-ground account of several strategies that CEJ enacted—both articulating a different theory of what makes schools good and how schools transform themselves, and promoting that vision and platform via a broad-based organizing coalition. It concentrates on CEJ's School Transformation Zone (STZ) proposal and how it constituted a counter-imaginary to neoliberalism in public education by asserting schooling as a public good, parents as public actors, and the state as a central public actor that facilitates collective and public school decision-making.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE NEOLIBERAL IMAGINARY

Ball (2012) treats neoliberalism as a complex and contradictory set of practices that imagine the market as a basis for material and social solutions in schools and the public education system. Ball's framework draws upon a range of methodologies and epistemologies that look beyond what many think of as privatizing movements in public education, such as choice and vouchers, to new governance re-arrangements which are blurring boundaries between state, economy, and civil society (p. 9). In this most recent work, Ball investigates how policy is operating in this landscape,

moving through and adapting to these new assemblages. I utilize the notion of a neoliberal imaginary—an ideology which promotes market authority over the state and individual goods and goals over collective ones (Lingard, 2009, as cited in Ball)—to make sense of the Portfolio Management Model and its reform levers (choice, accountability, empowerment) that have taken shape over the past decade in NYC, and that served the implementation of school closure policy. Like Ball, I am interested in how neoliberalism works: not just what it values, what it imagines, and what it produces, but how it connects a set of practices to values. I utilize the term imaginary not just to refer to a set of ideas, but to that which makes possible or enables (Habermas, 1962; Taylor, 2007).

I extend Ball's reference to a 'neoliberal imaginary' to introduce and theorize CEJ's platform as a counter imaginary—"a set of specific, local, and embodied practices" (p. 66) that re-imagine schools as centers of their communities, parents and school communities as partners in decisions about schools, and the state as a facilitator of collective decision-making. First, I offer a brief history of the market's entry into and reshaping of public education. In doing so, I give particular emphasis to the reformation of the state's role. What is particularly important to discuss is that CEJ's School Transformation Zone offers not just an alternative to school closure policy and to PMM, but to the role of the state in school governance. I argue that CEJ both challenges market priorities and the state to do more than facilitate market interests.

### *Schoolplace Market Beginnings*

Beginning in the 1980s, the merging of discussions of public schools with talk of a global economy revealed an ideology that advocated for a diminished state role in public life, and in its place a role for privatization and market mechanisms to regulate education thought and practice. Timar and Tyack (1999) noted that the conceptualization of education as a private and individual good constituted the antithesis of democratic ideology of schooling as a public and collective good. In contrast, market advocates in public education have generally insisted that the problems facing schools are inherent in its monopolistic structure (Moe, 2008). In 1990, Chubb & Moe argued that markets had an incentive to be responsive to a clientele of parents and students who also had an ability to exit at any time, certifying a "natural selection" where "schools that fail to satisfy a sufficiently large clientele will go out of business" (p. 33). While these authors agreed that the market system was imperfect, they advocated that it would serve as a better alternative to the democratic system which had led to the governing of public schools by a diverse interested constituency, in which parents and students had no particular standing.

While many education historians have noted an early alliance between business and education (Callahan, 1962; Cuban, 2004; Kleibard, 1995), Harvey (2005) explained that the turn to market authority in all realms of public life occurred after World War II when the consensus was that both capitalism and communism had

failed and the only way ahead was to construct “the right blend of state, market, and democratic institutions to guarantee peace, inclusion, well-being, and stability” (p. 10). Harvey notes that neoliberalism in its first wave privileged a market constructed by strong private property rights, free trade, and less regulation. The role of the state was relegated to create the conditions for the market to flourish and democracy was never given a genuine role as it was seen as a threat to individual rights (p. 66).

While Harvey pointed out that neoliberal thinkers early on argued state interventions ought to be minimal (so to not to interfere with the market flows, and not to allow other interest groups to interfere) he recognized the contradiction—the need for the state to assert its role to ensure non-interference (p. 67). Other writers too have stipulated that in comparison to the 19th century, current neoliberalism makes no excuses for a strong state to promote market interests (Kumar & Hill, 2009).

Apple (2004) complicated how we understand the market took force in public education—acknowledging a power bloc of multiple and combined fractions including but not limited to neo-conservative intellectuals favoring higher standards as a means to improve schools and technically oriented professionals committed to measurement and accountability (p. 15). Apple (2006) also foreshadowed that an expansion of the neoliberal education model would shift the state’s function to be evaluative and in that capacity, it would appear Janus-faced: devolving authority and retaining it. It is important to note that on the eve of the twenty-first century, market reforms such as charter schools, vouchers, and the use of privatized school management organizations were understood as “random specks in the fabric of school governance” (Timar & Tyack, 1999, p. 17), not the blanket itself that they are thought of presently (Fabricant & Fine, 2012).

#### *The Market in the Form of the Portfolio Management Model*

The governance strategy of the market model in education is the Portfolio Management Model (PMM). Increasingly, urban education scholars are writing about the Portfolio Management Model as operationalized by school districts to move from “bureaucratic compliance” (Stone, Henig, Jones & Pierannunzi, 2001) to a “contracting regime” designed to enhance efficiency and innovation (Henig, 2010). This has meant states and districts creating greater flexibility and autonomy for school decision-making, redesigning human capital systems (Odden & Kelly, 2008), and taking new approaches to school district management, drawing directly from thinking and successes in the private sector.

Hill (1997) developed the PMM concept for school systems, allowing schools more flexibility to meet increasing demands to demonstrate academic performance, and importantly, allowing school districts to shed their traditional relationship with schools in favor of contract arrangements that increase the autonomy of principals. Lake and Hill (2009) point out that PMM requires school districts to take on a new role, namely, as a manager of a diverse provider strategy—appraising the performance



of individual schools, as well as assessing an entire portfolio to determine “whether a different mix of schools might serve the community better” (p. 8).

Saltman (2010) observes that decentralization as part of PMM is radically different from the two major decentralization reforms as part of the 1980s: school-based management and community control, which advocated for local decision making on behalf of school administrators and parents and community members (recall CCC). Saltman argues that PMM decentralization combines a highly centralized control at the top levels of the district with a control downward to education contractors. For purposes of this chapter, it is important to mention that in this formation the state’s role accentuates its management and evaluation functions. It is equally important to underscore that these roles underemphasize its direct relationship with schools and with school communities. Moreover, while Henig (2010) argues that in the portfolio model, the state is not bypassed by a traditional supply and demand configuration and instead plays a key role in decision-making, I explore how in the school closing process in NYC, the neoliberal imaginary has reoriented the state’s decision-making in the specific realms of evaluation. Ultimately, I argue this is what serves the implementation of mass school closure policy—key decision-makers are removed from schools and the public, neither in partnership with, nor accountable to them.

#### LOCAL CONTEXT: THE STATE’S ROLE: MAYORAL CONTROL AND THE PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT MODEL IN NYC

For most of New York City’s history, school governance has consisted of an independent central board appointed by the mayor and local school boards appointed by the central board. For a thirty-five year period, however (from 1968 to 2003) New York City elementary and middle schools were governed by locally elected community school boards that had the power to appoint and remove superintendents, as well as veto or accept the superintendent’s choice of principals (Gitell et al., 1972). The 1969 legislature called this reorganization of the school system decentralization as it limited the power of the mayor, eventually replacing the central school authority with a seven member board—five seats appointed by each of the borough presidents, and only two appointed by the mayor—and provided for the election of 32 community-based (neighborhood designated) school boards with parent and community representatives. To this date, New Yorkers vigorously debate the efficacy of this arrangement (Lewis, 2013), as they have in other cities that also invested in community control (see for example, Grosskopf & Moutray, 2001).

In 2002, the New York State legislature abolished the community school boards, and turned New York City public school governance back over to the control of the Mayor.<sup>5</sup> The legislature agreed with then recently elected Michael Bloomberg who expressed the school system lacked accountability, and that its entrenched bureaucracy could not possibly serve the needs of students because it was too focused on serving the needs of its employees. Bloomberg and his first selected Chancellor Joel Klein termed the launch of their education plan “Children First,”

to distinguish interest on behalf of children from interest on behalf of adults. In its introductory brochure, NYCDoe explicated that Children First meant “putting children ahead of the special interest politics and bureaucratic inertia that too often drove decisions and got in the way of quality learning in the past” (2008, p. 3). NYCDoe administrators also specified that the three core principles underlying the Children First Reform Initiative were choice, accountability, and empowerment—a plan they argued was both bold and commonsense.

The school choice process in NYC has engaged parents and students as individual consumers, facilitating their selection of schools across the city, and then allowing monies to travel with students to schools. Funding is a key lever in this equation; the underlying belief of the market model in education is that if funding is tied to students, schools will have to compete for students and funds. The market model imagines that giving parents the choice of where to send their kids for school, as well as allowing schools to compete for students and funds, would create “performance pressures that raise the quality of schools available to everyone” (Hill, 2010, p. 2).

NYCDoe administrators reasoned that granting school principals empowerment<sup>6</sup> over their budgets, staff, and supports would help them best meet the particular needs of each school (rather than offering them centralized support services.) As such, in 2007, NYCDoe required that all individual schools choose among a list of external contractors or school support organizations<sup>7</sup> from which to receive customized instructional and operational assistance. NYCDoe administrators also supposed this new arrangement would help the central office shift from a top-down bureaucracy to a more limber organization that could be more focused on school performance. When schools had both resources and authority to make decisions, administrators presumed they could be held accountable fairly for results.

The NYCDoe’s Children’s First Initiative was well aligned to the Portfolio Management Model (PMM)—an increasingly utilized school district model that offer students and their families a diverse portfolio of school types to choose from, and that also refocuses the district’s role to manage this portfolio through strategic investment in schools identified as successful and a divestment in low performing programs (Hill et al., 2009). The three core principles of Children’s First (choice, accountability, and empowerment) were exactly parallel to the three objectives of the Portfolio Management Model:

- To offer a diverse array of schools (choice and competition)
- To grant schools autonomy over budgeting and hiring (empowerment)
- To hold schools accountable for common performance standards (accountability)

I examine these three levers of the PMM strategy from the vantage point of the school closing process— and from the critique of CEJ who did not see its common sense. I pay particular close attention to the empowerment lever and specifically the district or central office’s role in the PMM governance arrangement as its new way of operating significantly accentuates its purpose as an evaluative rather than a support structure. Given that community leaders early on expressed concern that

then Mayor Bloomberg's leadership and reforms had "eclipsed student, parent, and citizen participation" in school system policy (see Fruchter & McAlister, 2008; Ravitch et al., 2009), one tension an examination of CEJ campaign uncovers is whether the state is accountable to schools, students and their families when it has removed itself as a provider of supports.

## METHODS

This research was part of a multi-sited case study investigating how the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) explained and pursued school closure policy as a school improvement strategy, and how the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), a parent-led education coalition of citywide community-based organizations, challenged the rationale of mass school closings, and proposed an alternative vision and set of actions for schools to improve. I took a maximum variation sampling approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994), in order to capture multiple and conflicting perspectives between and notably, within each. While the larger study also involved me interviewing, surveying, and observing the actions and interactions of a multitude of public actors (including parents, district and school administrators, educators, union officials, advocates, etc.) I focused on NYCDoE and CEJ because they represented traditional school district and community organizing perspectives on school improvement.

Data collected from three sources between January, 2010-December, 2010 inform this chapter:

- Interviews of NYCDoE administrators and CEJ parent leaders (27 and 17 respectfully)
- Observations of CEJ press conferences and organizational meetings<sup>8</sup> as well as school closing public hearings<sup>9</sup>
- NYCDoE school closing proposals and documents pertaining to CEJ's *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign, and particularly their proposed *School Transformation Zone*

Using interpretive policy analysis (Yanow, 1996, 2000), I analyzed data collected answering the following questions: How does school closure policy proliferate as part of a neoliberal imaginary? How does CEJ's School Transformation Zone constitute a counter imaginary for school improvement?

### *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity, or the researcher's social, political, and value positions in light of how these affect the research design, implementation, and interpretation is important not just for understanding and carrying out critical research but in supposing that there is no objectivity in research (Harding, 2005). However, as Behar (1993) and others have maintained, researchers tend to hide behind a cloak of neutrality. I aspire to

neutrality defined as trustworthiness with participants and confirmability of the data (Guba, 1981).

I have spent time working in and with community organizing groups in the urban school reform field since early 2000 and in the same time period, conducting educational research in collaboration with school district administrators. From 2001-2005, I worked for a national school reform intermediary organization, now defunct, the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (CCC). In the process of bringing multiple stakeholders in public education to the same table to discuss common struggles and solutions concerning urban schools—most especially voices of parents, community, and students themselves—I realized that conversations about schools and school improvement in school districts and in community organizing circles were profoundly different and disconnected from each other.

The design of this research project was to be in both district and community organizing spaces to further probe these differences, and to assess whether there were any points of connection (Anyon, 2005a). Furthermore, contemporary battles over school closings offer a window into these differing conversations and into fundamental discrepancies in ideas and values for what makes schools good, how schools improve, and who should make decisions about students' schooling.

Conflicts over school closings in NYC and in other parts of the country are profoundly racialized, reflecting ongoing tension and mistrust over inadequate and inequitable funding, opportunities, and outcomes, not to mention representation in decision-making—in this instance, a majority of white administrators advocating for school closings impacting majority communities of color. As a white woman, I reap the undisclosed benefits of a dominant status group in urban education and in educational research. Through this study, I found that I was advantaged as an invisible actor. Much that has been written about invisibility has acknowledged that racially marginalized people of color have been rendered invisible—not afforded recognition or recourse. I experienced invisibility with the opposite effect: a blanket acceptance.

Furthermore, being in two organizations with conflicting goals meant that as a researcher I had to make a concerted effort not to privilege one component of the research over the other—including the time, quality, and quantity of data collection. Overall CEJ granted me more access to their meetings and I sought to balance this by requesting more interviews in the Department of Education and because of the size of its organization at more levels. As a researcher I also sought to complicate both organizations' platforms by seeking out the minority dissenting voices within each.

#### SCHOOL CLOSINGS PROLIFERATION IN NYC AS PART OF THE PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT MODEL

School closings are a core function of PMM as its thrust is “for continuous improvement via expansion and imitation of the highest performing schools, closure and replacement of the lowest performing schools, and constant search for new

ideas” (Hill et al., 2009, p. 1). Competition theoretically facilitates a natural selection by which the best schools attract the most customers and the weakest schools go out of business.

Over the past decade, NYCDoe has worked on both the “demand” and “supply” side to offer more quality choices (Corcoran & Levin, 2010). Demand reforms have focused on increasing the number and kinds of schooling choices (including magnet, charter, and alternative schools) available to families based on the rationale that parents will have authority over their children’s education if they are effective consumers (Stewart, Wolf, & Cornman, 2007).

It is also important to note that in this model, choice is meant to extend students’ options beyond their immediate locale. PMM is envisioned as making this choice available to families regardless of their economic status—a provision that families with monetary wealth have by virtue of their financial ability to live in and move to neighborhoods with schools that they desire. As stated by one Deputy Chancellor,

Parents ought to be able to select from among a variety of different high performing schools to send their kids to, and historically we’ve diluted the parents in the poorest communities...the most rational choice for their kid is the school closest to where they live and that’s a problem...that strips parents of the opportunity to exercise a lot of their decision making power around the kind of education they’d like to see for their kid, and its incumbent on us to restore that kind of empowerment to parents. (Interview, 07/07/2010)

To NYCDoe administrators, choice was an equity reform, relieving parents of the constraints of neighborhood schooling and affording them an opportunity to exercise their consumer prowess in a broader educational marketplace.

NYCDoe administrators linked school closure policy to their choice reform overall, based on the premise that closing schools would ensure better schooling options for families. Each Education Impact Statement (EIS)<sup>10</sup> the NYCDoe issued in 2009-2010 stated that closing the school would address the school’s longstanding performance struggles and “allow for new school options.” To the NYCDoe a school closing meant a new school opening, and by this reasoning, school closings would automatically grant parents another choice. As one administrator put it, “we’re opening new schools, not closing schools. For parents, the distinction should be I have more choices” (interview, June 3, 2010). The NYCDoe linked school closings and school openings administratively—attaching new school proposals to closing school proposals (Pappas, 2012).

Decentralization may be considered a supply strategy as it eases the rules and regulations of schooling structures to allow for more flexibility and autonomy (Ladd, 2002). The empowerment reform sought to move decision-making to the school level; principals were given expanded control over personnel, curriculum, budgets, and support services in exchange for meeting performance targets. In the Children’s First contracts, principals agreed that students would benefit when they (principals) “have clear performance goals to which they are held accountable,

greater authority over the key decisions affecting their school communities, financial resources to support the specific needs of their students, and greater discretion over these resources.”<sup>11</sup> The principal was recognized not only as the lynchpin for school success, but also as an accessory to mediocre school performance. As summarized by one administrator in the Office of Portfolio Development, “we have a system of accountability...we’ve given principals autonomy over their schools and, in exchange, we’re holding them accountable” (interview, December, 7, 2010). In the school closing process, the empowerment reform became a way to justify school closing decisions.

Prevailing arguments for decentralization tend to emphasize the importance of distributive authority and local decision-making (Weiler, 1990), but in the neoliberal framework those authorities are often curtailed, as Apple (1996) explained, because the state retains its authority as an evaluator. In the school closing process, the central office established the standards for school performance, developed the metric for measuring schools performance, and ultimately identified a list of schools to be closed. The central office also retained macro control over the enrollment process by which students were assigned to schools (as the choice process only allows families to rank their selections; an algorithm calculates the matches<sup>12</sup>). Independent researchers found that high schools proposed to be closed in 2009-2010 were serving more of a concentration of students needing the most support, those classified as English Language Learners, overage, and living in temporary housing situations (see for example, NYCIBO, 2010). Thus, school closings decisions were made under an evaluative system that presumed student populations and their needs were the same across all schools, and held schools solely responsible for outcomes.

The neoliberal framework imagines the state’s strongest and most important role is as an evaluator of individual schools’ performance and a portfolio of schools. This function however introduced a significant tension into the school closing process. By removing itself as a support provider to schools, and devolving these responsibilities to school support organizations, the central office itself had very little answerability to schools with regards to the support schools had been provided to achieve standards set for them. The central office was in essence combining retaining macro decision-making while transferring responsibility for school outcomes to the school support organizations (Apple, 1996; Saltman, 2010).

THE NEW YORK CITY COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE AND  
“THE FIX OUR SCHOOLS, DON’T JUST CLOSE THEM” CAMPAIGN

The NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) was formed in November of 2006, as the union of the three regional organizing collaboratives<sup>13</sup> to build greater parent power and influence system-wide education policy in New York City, harnessing the power of parents and grassroots communities to create a more equitable education system. CEJ’s architects believed that if it was successful, parent and community leaders would have significant input into school improvement work across New York

City, and in alliance with other key constituencies, would be able to represent the demands of educationally underserved communities (CEJ working papers, 2006).

CEJ builds partnerships between community groups across the city in a wide variety of formations: local development corporations, multi-service organizations, networks of union and community groups, and organizing organizations embedded in public education work.<sup>14</sup> Collectively, CEJ member groups serve and organize thousands of New York City residents on education issues, but many also organize around issues of housing, employment, and the environment. At the time of this study, CEJ was comprised of eight member groups. A ninth group, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University serves as the primary support provider. In its eight years to date, CEJ counts the following among its bigger wins: securing 34 million dollars to improve struggling middle schools (2007); 10 million dollars to provide tutoring to struggling students in over 500 schools (2010); and most recently 5 million dollars to implement parent-teacher conferences affecting more than 200,000 students (2013). When the NYCDoe announced 20 school closing proposals in December 2009, none of CEJ member groups were dealing directly with school closings. Still to CEJ, school closings immediately signaled a short-sighted and destructive policy that would harm students, especially students most struggling in school, and as an organization they decided to take it on (field notes, February 23, 2010).

#### *Case Study: Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them*

On January 26, 2010, there wasn't an empty seat in the Brooklyn Technical High School auditorium. The Panel for Education Policy, the Mayor's advisory board, was set to approve closing proposals for 19 schools<sup>15</sup>—the greatest number proposed at any one time during then Mayor Bloomberg's tenure (up to that point<sup>16</sup>). Thousands of people were already standing, chanting, and booing when then Chancellor Klein read prepared comments introducing the proposals to close schools he said were “not meeting the standards necessary for our kids” (field notes, January 26, 2010).

Oppositional testimonies by members of the public continued that night for more than eight hours until 3:30 a.m. More than 250 speakers (including elected officials, union representatives, community leaders, teachers, parents, students and alumni) upbraided NYCDoe officials, questioning the data school closing decisions were based on and the motives of school closure policy. While they issued different assertions, a diverse public overall vehemently disputed that closing schools would help students who were struggling academically, and that the hearing process itself was a genuine opportunity for them to make comments (Pappas, forthcoming).

*Demanding a moratorium on school closings.* In early March 2010, on the steps of the NYCDoe central office, most commonly referred to as “Tweed,<sup>17</sup>” CEJ leaders along with a broad coalition of allies held a press conference calling for a temporary moratorium on school closings<sup>18</sup> until an independent analysis of the policy's impact on school communities could be provided. CEJ challenged the NYCDoe's premises

that closings would remedy schools struggling to graduate students and ensure better education opportunities for students. One parent leader began her opening remarks by outlining the stark distinction in the diagnosis and remedy for struggling schools put forth by the DOE and by CEJ:

We're here today to tell the DOE to fix our schools and don't close them, and to say that the schools that have been persistently failing have been under their watch for the last nine years. The DOE is responsible and should be providing [schools] with supports and resources...we are here today to turn around Tweed so they can begin to do the right thing on behalf of our children. (Field notes, 03/05/2010)

“School turnaround” was the phrase that the US Department of Education introduced to indicate and incentivize efforts to restructure failing schools. “Turnaround Tweed” was the answering motto intended to represent CEJ’s attribution of academic failure to the NYCDoe rather than to the schools themselves. To embolden this point, CEJ marked up the EIS NYCDoe had issued to all schools proposed for closure. In each, NYCDoe had cited the school for “lacking the capacity to significantly improve school performance,” and called for closure. In CEJ’s version, the EIS cited NYCDoe for its “continued failure to provide a college and career preparatory education to tens of thousands of Black and Latino students,” and also called upon them to implement “an aggressive educational strategy beyond simply closing schools” (CEJ document, 3/2/2010).

In contrast to NYCDoe’s diagnosis that schools lacked the capacity to improve, CEJ questioned the supports schools had received to educate students. To CEJ, school closings were a direct result of the system’s failure to provide sufficient guidance and assistance. Their analysis was that the NYCDoe was scapegoating schools, shirking their own responsibility to provide sufficient support and resources. CEJ also saw the school closings process representative of Mayor Bloomberg’s failures to lead a transparent decision-making process and to build partnerships with school and community leaders in the difficult work of improving schools. A second CEJ parent leader who testified at this initial press conference expressed outrage there was not clear or sufficient information available for families on closing proposals concerning their children’s schools:

There are far too many questions about how decisions have been made, about the data closings are based on, about what has been done to support and nurture and improve the schools serving our neediest students, and what will happen to students if the schools are closed. We need answers...these are our children; they are not pawns in a chess game. Fix Our Schools, Don't Close Them. (Field notes, 03/05/2010)

As active parent leaders in the education policy arena, CEJ’s parent leaders challenged the NYCDoe’s assertion that it knew what was best for children and therefore could make decisions unilaterally. The refrain “Fix Our Schools, Don’t



Close Them” was not just a positional statement in opposition to school closings; it also signified how CEJ redefined the NYCDoE’s or the state’s accountability to schools and families as providing adequate resources and support not merely through performance evaluation.

Emblematic of their school improvement framework, CEJ did not host the press conference alone. They had reached out to more than 100 elected officials, religious, academic, and civic leaders, and other advocates, who were similarly raising objections with the Department’s school closing proposals. At the conclusion of the press conference, then City Council Education Committee Chairman Robert Jackson announced that he would submit a resolution in the City Council supporting CEJ’s call for a moratorium on school closures until an independent analysis could be conducted. CEJ’s next step was to announce its own remedy for struggling schools.

### *The School Transformation Zone*

As a way to offer an alternative set of school improvement strategies, CEJ turned to the educational platform for college readiness it had been developing.<sup>19</sup> Its five major elements served as the foundation for CEJ’s proposal for a School Transformation Zone (STZ):

- Offer an opportunity for schools to redesign the school day and year, adding more academic time for students;
- Support the implementation of a well-rounded college preparatory curriculum beyond test preparation that engages all students in hands-on learning, problem solving, and arts programming;
- Attract, train, and retain excellent teachers and principals by providing more leadership and professional development opportunities as well as more collaborative planning time;
- Provide comprehensive supports that address students’ social and emotional needs through a strong safety net of relationships and services; and,
- Design a structure for parents and community leaders to make decisions alongside administrators and educators about their children’s schools (CEJ STZ document, 03/2010).

CEJ’s School Transformation Zone was not the same as the model proposed by the federal government with the same name; their Zone was a home-grown model alternative. Akin to the Chancellor’s District,<sup>20</sup> the Zone was conceived as a centrally managed zone of assistance for struggling schools.

The STZ reflected CEJ’s assertion that schools needed ongoing, broader, and deeper classroom supports to improve—comprehensive supports that attend to children’s social and emotional needs outside of the classroom that affect their preparation for learning. Comprehensive supports for teachers are a second, key component. The STZ also reflected CEJ’s conviction that improvement could only be sustained through a larger community investment. CEJ built into the zone a

coordinating committee made of parent, community, and student leaders along with teachers and administrators who would select participating schools from those that chose to apply, and who would serve in an ongoing capacity to advise, implement, monitor, and troubleshoot the initiative.

To CEJ, the STZ identified concrete steps for improvement that schools could take in a reasonable amount of time. Because it was aligned to school improvement models that the federal government outlined, conceivably it was also fundable.<sup>21</sup> Acknowledging the NYCDoe's emphasis on principal autonomy, CEJ stipulated that schools designated as low-performing would not be mandated to join but instead could opt-in.

What made CEJ's contestation of school closure policy different from other vocal stakeholders was that CEJ was offering an alternative proposal. CEJ leaders were confident that many would back the STZ, but also knew they would have to dedicate organizing power to garner that support. A week after the press conference, at their monthly steering committee meeting, CEJ leaders considered how to expand its campaign: including recruiting the support of City Council members to ensure the successful passage of the resolution; meeting with NYCDoe officials to discuss their consideration of STZ; and organizing parents and communities in danger of facing future school closings (such as the 34 NYC schools named to the Persistently Low Achieving Schools (PLAS) list by New York state<sup>22</sup>). This multi-pronged strategy was not new to CEJ, and exemplifies the kind of organizing CEJ and others groups like them believe necessary to win—a combination of inside-out tactics (working with school system administrators) and outside-in tactics (mobilizing constituency pressure).

On March 25th 2010, CEJ hosted a meeting at Trinity Church in lower Manhattan for parents whose children were attending the PLA schools. Most of the 30 parents in attendance had not heard of Race to the Top Initiative nor School Turnaround, but a few recalled receiving a letter from NYCDoe that notified them that their kids could transfer to another school (field notes, 3/25/2010). CEJ parent leader provided an overview of the four intervention models the federal government had stipulated that school districts would have to choose from to receive school improvement grant money. They then introduced the School Transformation Zone, remarking that it was grounded in research-proven school improvement strategies such as robust, embedded, and relevant professional development; comprehensive and coordinated supports for the whole student; and strong and consistent parent engagement. Immediately after the meeting, CEJ leaders took notice that their efforts to organize parents had proved more difficult than they anticipated. After multiple school visits to PLA schools and follow up phone calls, leaders had hoped for a bigger turnout.

The *Mulgrew v. Board of Education* decision (2010)<sup>23</sup> however, served as encouragement for CEJ to continue its efforts. When news of the lawsuit decision reached CEJ, many expressed satisfaction that the court found that the Mayor and the Chancellor were not “above the law” (field notes, April 10, 2010). At the start of the April steering committee meeting, one CEJ parent leader presented a diagram

that crystallized the differences in DoE and CEJ models for school improvement. On one side of the diagram was Bloomberg and Klein's principles for reform—what was labeled the “business sink or swim model”—and on the other, CEJ's model—labeled “sustainable educational supports” (CEJ document 4/10/2010). CEJ's analysis was that the NYCDoE held schools solely responsible for their outcomes, and that in contrast to competition the School Transformation Zone put adequate support at the center of their school improvement plan.

CEJ also discussed that the NYCDoE's primary solution to low performing schools was to close them, and endorse new small school and charter school models in their place. CEJ members discussed that that school closings in some cases were necessary for those that did not respond to any interventions, but that small schools and charter replacements were not a sustainable solution. This discussion led to a slight but important change in the campaign's name. Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them was meant to distinguish between being opposed to mass school closure policy as a school improvement strategy versus being opposed to individual school closings. CEJ was organizing against the former, not the latter. CEJ wanted to focus attention on the criticality of comprehensiveness of supports, and parent and community engagement for sustainable school reform efforts, often missing from discussions about new school models.

The remainder of the April steering committee meeting was dedicated to the STZ resolution to be voted on in the city council at the end of month. CEJ as a whole was inspired with the resolution because it demonstrated that elected officials were endorsing its educational platform, but a few parent leaders noted that the city council did not have the power to enforce its implementation and openly questioned if their organizing power might better be invested elsewhere. Still, the consensus was that passing the resolution would constitute a significant public statement in support of an alternate solution to school closure policy.

*The School Transformation Zone Resolution.* On April 28th on the steps of City Hall, CEJ leaders held a press conference with a number of academics, elected officials, and members from union groups, civic and religious organizations who had signed in support of the STZ resolution, and called for the NYCDoE to take notice of their unified presence. As a broad-based coalition, they agreed that struggling schools needed a bold intervention, but they were opposing mass school closures as a remedy. One CEJ parent leader's remarks honed in on school closure policy as an indolent response from a negligent school system: “Our lowest performing schools where many of our neediest children attend have been left to flounder and fail and are then targeted for closure.” She continued, “Low performing schools need a bold investment to transform learning and improve student achievement” (field notes, 4/28/10). This parent leader used the term bold to refer to an investment in struggling schools that she and others believed had never occurred. She included the term learning to signify that schools were more than just a measurement of achievement by test scores (interview, April, 28, 2010).

Next, another CEJ parent leader read the letter that CEJ had sent to the Chancellor which summoned him to endorse the School Transformation Zone, arguing that more than 70 of the most prominent thinkers and actors in public education had signed on. CEJ continued to highlight its efforts to draw support from varied sectors of education policymaking in NYC—something they pointed out the Department had not pursued in its decision-making. CEJ’s second press conference was as vibrant as the first held almost two months prior. In less than eight weeks, CEJ had helped galvanize a considerable body of actors to articulate not only a critique of school closure policy, but also a feasible alternative to it.

Following the press conference, and starting the month of May, CEJ devoted its organizing power to recruit City Council members to vote in favor of the resolution put forth by Councilmember Jackson. CEJ leaders distributed STZ leaflets to council members on their way into office, made appointments to visit their offices, and held a briefing for council legislative staff inside the City Council chambers on May 20th. More than twenty City Council staff attended the briefing, as CEJ leaders described the importance of more learning time for students, more common planning time for teachers, intensive supports, a rich college preparatory curriculum, and active parent engagement. In the closing remarks, one CEJ leader noted that in addition to representing an alternative vision for improving schools, the School Transformation Zone offered an alternative vision for making school decisions that place parents and communities at the center:

This is a real statement, parents and community coming together around a key issue in education. Where we’re going with our kids especially in neighborhoods of color ... there has to be an alternative vision, there has to be a way to bring back parent and community involvement and engagement, sustainability, [so that] everyone buys into what happens. We’ve been here [before] ... we’ll be here when the Mayor’s gone because we live in our communities. Our children will then take our place. This is a moment to make something different happen in our schools. (Field notes, 05/20/2010)

This parent leader was not just calling for support for the resolution or the STZ in particular, but for a new reality of policymaking where people who live with its legacy have the greatest input.

Five days later on May 25th, the New York City Council unanimously approved resolutions 156 and 157a in support of expanded learning time and the School Transformation Zone. There was much jubilation at CEJ, especially because a unanimous passage of any resolution in the City Council is spasmodic. However, it was immediately tempered by the reality that these resolutions had limited sway. The NYCDoE did not have to adopt the STZ just because local elected officials voted universally in favor of it. In fact, the DOE soon after stated that they would not consider the Zone. Succinctly put by one Deputy Chancellor, “The transformation [zone] isn’t enough to move student achievement. We want to do a much more dramatic intervention, changing structures and programming and also changing

adults” (interview, July 16, 2010). Still at CEJ, it was a brief time to celebrate—a momentary glimpse of an alternative to an onslaught of school closings.

CEJ’S SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION ZONE AS AN “ALTERNATIVE  
IMAGINARY” TO NEOLIBERALISM

In this final section, I give emphasis to how NYCDoe and CEJ organizations imagine school improvement in fundamentally different ways. I also elaborate on how CEJ’s School Transformation Zone constituted an alternative imaginary to neoliberalism. My analysis concerns four areas. While the NYCDoe equated equity to expanding choice in a marketplace of schools, CEJ understood equity as an investment in and access to great schools in all neighborhoods. While the NYCDoe held individual schools accountable for outcomes, CEJ envisioned a shared accountability framework in which entire school communities were responsible for success and failure. While the NYCDoe defined parent authority as their ability to choose a school for their children, CEJ accentuated the need for parents’ input in ongoing decisions about schools. Lastly, while the NYCDoe recognized the state’s role as providing oversight and evaluation, CEJ believed the state’s duty lay in facilitating collective decisions about schools.

Table 1 below contrasts how the NYCDoe and CEJ imagine equity, accountability, parent and community engagement, and the role of the state:

Table 1. *Contrasting NYCDoe and (NYC) CEJ Imaginaries*

	<i>NYC DoE</i>	<i>NYC CEJ</i>
Equity	Choice Competition and Natural Selection School independence from the neighborhood	Access Collaboration and supports School interdependence with the neighborhood
Accountability	Based on test scores Centered on schools	Based on multiple measures Shared across stakeholders
Parent & Community Engagement	Parents shop for schools	Parents invest in schools
The State’s Role	The state manages and evaluates	The state facilitates collective decision-making

*Equity*

In direct contrast to the NYCDoe’s notions of equity as choice and competition, CEJ’s defines equity as democratic access and as comprehensive and ongoing supports to all schools. As illustrated by the two quotes at the start of this chapter, NYCDoe understood competition would ensure “everyone was held to a higher

standard.” CEJ advocated for schools to have “an educational plan” and set of supports to improve. NYCDoe believed a system based on choice would incentivize schools to compete for families, and extend parents an opportunity to have voice in schools. CEJ on the other hand, believed access to schools was parents’ greatest lever for change—both in meeting the needs and interests of their own children and supporting the educational success for all kids. Moreover, while the NYCDoe envisioned equity as expanding parents’ options to send their children to schools outside of their neighborhood of residence, CEJ envisioned equity as ensuring all neighborhoods are equipped with great schools.

Both the NYCDoe and CEJ recognize the role of neighborhoods in shaping school success, albeit in different ways. Administrators perceived the neighborhoods in which many struggling schools reside as a barrier to school and student success. This partially explains why they sought to restructure the school system in a way that operates independently of neighborhood boundary lines. CEJ acknowledged elements outside of the school that impede success; their analysis pointed to historic funding inequities and systematic neglect of schools. But CEJ also recognized the importance of neighborhood connections and relationships for young people. Like other community-based groups, CEJ is dually committed to school and neighborhood regeneration; they see school improvement imperative to neighborhood revitalization as much as they see neighborhood health vital to a school’s functionality. As a result, it is crucial to CEJ that school improvement efforts be linked with larger social and economic equity campaigns and recognize schools’ interdependence with the life and security of the neighborhood. Where the neoliberal imaginary is constructing a marketplace of schools, CEJ counter imaginary reconstructs schools as centers of their communities.

### *Accountability*

In the neoliberal imaginary, school performance is oriented along the axis of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness (Ball, 2012, p. 32). School, administrator and teacher roles and responsibilities are then shaped to ensuring students are meeting performance outcomes. Performance evaluations certainly can put a much-needed focus on how schools, administrators, and teachers are serving students’ educational success however defining performance strictly by academic measures and through testing can result in diminishing and dismissing additional important purposes of schools (facilitating students’ social and emotional development along with their civic attitudes and commitments, for example.)

While CEJ agreed that there should be rigorous academic standards for all children, they disputed how school performance was measured. In the STZ, CEJ envisioned that schools would be encouraged to provide a rich college preparatory curriculum beyond test preparation, and utilize multiple measures to assess student’s development and growth. CEJ also challenged that schools be evaluated solely on how students performed academically.

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NYCDoE centered their evaluation system on schools, assessing that the principal's leadership and the schools' internal structures (principally, the staff composition) determined their capacity to serve students well. As explained by one administrator:

People have not understood and regularly misunderstand that structural reforms lead to instructional change...size is one of the constraints, composition of adults is another...not because adults are bad, but because dysfunctional schools are bad for adults and kids, and a group of adults not working together needs to be jiggled. (Interview, August 27, 2010)

CEJ recognized the importance of structural changes but they specified these as comprehensive supports targeted toward strengthening pedagogical strategies (teacher training and professional development) as well as toward organizational changes such as expanded learning time so that students would have access to both academic and social supports. In this way, the STZ constituted an alternative imaginary to a "sink or swim" strategy.

NYCDoE's accountability framework was one-directional; it only measured how schools performed, not how they were supported to do so. CEJ focused on how schools had been supported to succeed. They also sought to engage a variety of stakeholders (parents, community leaders, union officials, advocates, etc.) who would help guide the school improvement process alongside administrators and teachers. This core component of the STZ reflects CEJ's vision for a shared accountability framework for school failure and success. Whereas the neoliberal imaginary conceives of competition as a motivating force, the counter imaginary conceives that school improvement is facilitated by collaboration.

#### *Parent and Community Engagement*

The neoliberal imaginary constructs parent roles as individual consumers in a marketplace. NYCDoE equated parent authority with school choice, reasoning it a more appropriate and manageable channel for parent engagement. As one Deputy Chancellor explained:

It's very hard for parents to go into an existing school to try to change either the culture, or the curriculum, or the pedagogy...the system of choice ought to be the way parents exercise opportunity by selecting schools with a curriculum and instructional approach that they're most comfortable with. (Interview, 02/11/2010)

Administrators also advocated for choice because in their estimation parents only care about their own children. As one administrator stated, "parents only care about their [own] kids. They don't care about the system. They don't, and why should they" (interview, April 28, 2010). The neoliberal imaginary envisions that a market model would best facilitate the self-interest parents naturally display in regards to their children's education.

Shopping for schools however did not represent full nor ongoing input in school decision-making to CEJ who sees unlimited potential for parent knowledge and expertise in school reform and policy. To CEJ, choice offers a fairly limited lever for parent engagement—it only concerns parents’ selection of school types for their children. It does not afford parents additional control over their child’s schooling experience. CEJ provided a counter imaginary, envisioning parents would be invited to invest in schools and the schooling process for the benefit of all children.

CEJ parent leaders’ very participation in school improvement efforts defied the notion of parents who only care about their own children, and parents who find it difficult to discuss school culture, curriculum, or pedagogy. Throughout their *Fix Our Schools, Don’t Just Close Them* campaign, CEJ leaders repeatedly voiced that parents ought to “have real input” in the decisions that affect their children’s schools. Often in discussions at CEJ, “real input” was juxtaposed to choice and to the processes instituted by NYCDoE and the Mayor, which CEJ argued systematically disregarded parent, community, and student input.

CEJ leaders defined real parent and community engagement as being engaged in an ongoing way in what their children were learning, in what policies were being adopted that would affect their learning, as well as being able to provide ongoing input into these decisions. It also meant that those ultimately responsible for decisions about schools would have to touch parents and kids that their decisions would most impact. In the words of one CEJ parent leader:

The DOE needs to have real parent input in their system. They don’t have it. The DOE departments, they just highlight things, but it’s not touchable... they feel like they can do things without any input...they just discuss how they are going to implement something, but without, you know, the ring, without reaching people from the neighborhood. (Interview, 05/21/2010)

In the STZ, CEJ posed that parents, along with teachers, students, administrators, and community group leaders as part of school-based coordinating committees would make collective decisions about the design, implementation, and monitoring of the school improvement strategies. CEJ also proposed that a citywide coordinating committee of representatives from community and union groups along with top education officials would monitor and troubleshoot the larger initiative. Again, while the neoliberal imaginary limits parents roles to consumers, CEJ offers a counter imaginary of parents as public actors and problem-solvers, who guide schools in concert with educators and administrators.

### *The State’s Role*

Finally, the school closing process revealed dramatic differences in understandings DOE and CEJ leaders have about the ideal role of the state in management and governance. NYCDoE’s portfolio management strategy “empowerment,” highlighted principals’ increased administrative control of their schools, and a new



role for school support organizations in providing customized supports to schools. Significantly, it also involved a shift in role for the central office—from providing direct to schools to evaluating individual schools and the portfolio performance.

As Henig (2010) argued, PMM can be better described as a contracting regime than a market arrangement, as the state (central office) does not step aside to allow but instead retains key decision making roles in managing and evaluating a diverse portfolio of schools. Empowerment held the promise of shifting the central office's role so it could focus on how schools were progressing, but the school closing process raised significant questions about how the kinds of supports schools were provided and whether resources and authorities to schools were sufficient.

The state's amplified role as evaluator took place as the responsibility for providing school supports was delegated to newly formed school support organizations. In this contracting arrangement, the state was less accountable to schools and to families for the quantity and quality of supports that were provided. Because school support organizations were also constructed as ageographic entities, parents lacked local accountability channels to get their questions answered or concerns addressed.

CEJ registered concerns that a focus solely on principal leadership and internal school structures often came at the expense of parent leadership and larger community investment essential to sustainable school transformation. In contrast to PMM and particularly the state's role as a manager and evaluator, CEJ defined the state's strength as enabling school and community partnerships in school decision making. Whereas the neoliberal framework distrusts democracy, CEJ counter imaginary put forward a vision of the state's role as a facilitator of school, family, and community collective decision-making, to reap the benefits of multiple-perspective taking and partnership in school improvement work.

## CONCLUSION

While administrators and parent leaders agree that schools can be much improved, their diagnosis and remedies are quite dissimilar. CEJ's Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them campaign gives insight into the ideological differences many school communities had with respect to school closure policy. CEJ's School Transformation Zone is instructive as it reflects a remarkably different theory of school improvement. In this chapter, I argued it also constituted a counter imaginary to neoliberalism in four key ways: (1) schools as centers of their communities, not autonomous units in a marketplace; (2) school improvement driven by targeted and comprehensive supports not competition; (3) parents empowered as public actors not private consumers; and (4) the state's most powerful role as a central public actor that facilitates partnerships in school decision-making rather than as a removed evaluator. Through the STZ, CEJ was able to reassert schools and schooling as a public good built by all, not a private good distributed throughout a market.

CEJ leaders began their campaign against school closures in early March 2010. Immediately after calling for a moratorium on school closing proposals, CEJ

offered the educational platform it had spent a year devising as an alternative to school closure policy. In addition to calling for an end to school closings (what many advocates, elected officials, union representatives and others who opposed school closure policy had done), CEJ offered an alternate proposal, putting forward a concrete set of steps for schools to improve. In doing so, CEJ raised the visibility of alternatives to school closure policy. The City Council and many other academic, civic, and religious leaders were persuaded.

While NYCDoe under Mayor Bloomberg was not convinced to implement the School Transformation Zone nor interrupt mass school closure policy, CEJ saw its platform represented in 2014, with a newly elected Mayor who recently dedicated 52 million dollars to launch the opening of forty community schools.<sup>24</sup> This initiative aims to keep schools open on nights and weekends; offer onsite medical, dental, mental and social services to students and their families; and intricately involve parent and community leaders in its design, planning, and implementation. A new CEJ parent leader mentioned in the press release was quoted as saying:

CEJ is excited that through this Community Schools Initiative, New York City schools will finally be encouraged to support the whole child and partner closely with communities to raise student achievement. As parents who know what it takes to make our neighborhood schools work, we are excited by the Chancellor and the Mayor's commitment to having parents and communities deeply invested and involved in the planning, design and implementation of Community Schools from the start. We know that Community Schools can build the strong partnerships that transform student achievement, through a positive school climate and a strong academic component, while also strengthening the entire community by drawing from the assets that already exist there. We look forward to working with the administration to ensure that this initiative is a success and that it reaches the districts and schools that need it the most.

It is far too early to tell how this initiative will perform but as this parent leader states, CEJ is encouraged by its stated investment in comprehensive supports and school, family, and community partnerships in the difficult work of school improvement. While not 4.35 billion dollars, it will be important to see what this set of values and practices will produce. One can only imagine.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Many districts continue to pursue school closings to address budget deficits and low enrollment. For example in the past two years, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia proposed 49, 28, and 24 closings respectfully (Ahmed-Ullah, Chase, Sector, 2013; CBS news, 2013; Dowdall, 2011). The urgency expressed by the Recovery School District in New Orleans is exceptional—it is closing the last of its public schools as it transitions to an all charter-school system (Layton, 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> To date, eighteen states have received RTTT grants. See ED Whitehouse report issued March 24, 2014 at: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/settingthepacerttreport\\_3-2414\\_b.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/settingthepacerttreport_3-2414_b.pdf)

- <sup>3</sup> Family is a more inclusive term than parent but parent is widely recognized in the literature and used in both NYCDoe and CEJ organizations. I use these terms interchangeably.
- <sup>4</sup> I use “state” as both a theoretical term (authority of lawmakers) and to refer to the NYCDoe central office as a local educational government agency. As I discuss in the next section, the Mayoral-controlled education system was granted authorities by the NY state legislature; “state” does not refer to the State of New York itself.
- <sup>5</sup> Under the current configuration, the Mayor appoints the Chancellor, as well as 8 seats on a 13 seat-advisory body, the Panel on Education Policy (PEP), which replaced the former Board of Education.
- <sup>6</sup> As I will briefly discuss, the empowerment name signified the school principal’s *empowered* role as the school’s top administrator, but also formulated a revised relationship between schools and the Central Office via a new support structure.
- <sup>7</sup> Also referred to as Children’s First Networks, school support organizations employ up to 15 staff members who provide instructional and operational supports to between 25–30 schools. Their design was also age-ographic so theoretically the same school support organization could be providing supports to schools in all five boroughs in New York City.
- <sup>8</sup> CEJ allowed me to observe their internal strategy meetings, both monthly steering committee meetings that constitute the membership body that votes on all campaign decisions and bi-monthly campaign meetings where decisions are then carried out.
- <sup>9</sup> In accordance with N.Y. EDUC. Law 2590 codified as amended at N.Y. LEGS. Chap. 345 (2009) which pertains to the phase out, grade configuration, re-siting, or co-location of schools of any public schools in the New York City school system, public hearings allow all interested parties an opportunity to present comments regarding the proposed school closing or proposal regarding a significant change in school utilization.
- <sup>10</sup> In accordance with the reauthorization of mayoral control legislation in 2009, the DOE was to issue an education impact statement for every proposed change in school utilization including school closings or phase-outs, estimating the ramifications on any affected students and on personnel needs, the cost of instruction, administration, transportation, and other support services; assessing the ability of other schools in the affected community district to accommodate pupils following the school closure; and providing information regarding each school’s academic performance status.
- <sup>11</sup> [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/732BDC3F-01C8-416F-9414-ABBAE719B591/24798/CHILDRENFIRSTSTATEMENTOFPERFORMANCE\\_TERMS\\_FINAL\\_Jun.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/732BDC3F-01C8-416F-9414-ABBAE719B591/24798/CHILDRENFIRSTSTATEMENTOFPERFORMANCE_TERMS_FINAL_Jun.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> For a more in-depth explanation of the NYC high school matching process and a review of the first year of its operation in 2003-2004, see Abdulkadiroglu, A., P.A.Pathak, & A.E. Roth (2009).
- <sup>13</sup> Community Collaborative to improve Bronx Schools (CCB in Region 1); the Brooklyn Education Collaborative (BEC in Regions 5 & 6); and Brooklyn Queens Education Collaborative (BQ4E in Region 4).
- <sup>14</sup> CEJ’s formation is somewhat unique in that most adult organizing groups are based on congregational models, such as the IAF or PICO or dues-paying models, such as the organization formerly known as ACORN. 100% of CEJ’s funding is provided by foundation money.
- <sup>15</sup> Originally there were 20 schools on the proposed school and grade closure list in 2009-2010. One school was subsequently removed from the list.
- <sup>16</sup> NYCDoe proposed 26 school closings in 2010–2011, 23 in 2011-2012, and 22 in 2012–2013.
- <sup>17</sup> The Old New York County Courthouse named after the colorful and corrupt politician who funded its construction, William M. “Boss” Tweed.
- <sup>18</sup> CEJ also called for a moratorium on co-locations, the practice of placing multiple small schools in one building, until an independent review of co-location proposals could be conducted.
- <sup>19</sup> Over the course of 2009, CEJ member groups had worked with groups in the boroughs where they were located to hone an educational platform for school success for K-12 grades. Months before the school closing proposals were announced, CEJ had scheduled a meeting with then Chancellor Klein to share its platform.
- <sup>20</sup> In 1996, NYC schools Chancellor Rudy Crew removed 10 state-identified low-performing schools from their sub-district authorities, and placed them in a virtual district, imposing a centralized management structure, a uniform curriculum, and intensive professional development. The initiative

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grew to include 58 schools and was disbanded in 2003. The debate on its design and success continues: (see for example, Wall, 2014.)

- <sup>21</sup> In April of 2010, New York State, one of 11 states that was granted funding as part of the RTTT initiative, received 308 million dollars.
- <sup>22</sup> Schools that were named to the state's PLA list were identified based on three criteria: former status as schools under registration review, Regents test scores, and graduation rates lower than 60%.
- <sup>23</sup> In February 2010, a lawsuit was filed in the New York Supreme Court by United Federation of Teachers, the AFL-CIO, Alliance for Quality Education, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, and city council members and activists. In March 2010, the court found that there were significant violations, including that the NYCDoE in issuing boilerplate education impact statements did not provide an adequate assessment of each proposed school closings impact, nor detailed replacement plans. The decision meant that the 19 school closing proposals were null and void.
- <sup>24</sup> <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/292-14/de-blasio-administration-52-million-investment-launch-community-schools>

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### **13. SHAPING AND CHALLENGING NEOLIBERAL SCHOOL REFORM**

*How Youth Impact School Reform Politics from Their Positions  
in Non-Profit Community Organizations*

#### INTRODUCTION

News cameras are poised; ready to capture what could be a contentious community meeting. Roughly eighty community members, mostly Latino, are waiting to hear from the four white men sitting in a line of chairs at the front of the room. The men are leaders in the school district and key players in the city's larger reform movement—an amalgamation of foundations, think tanks, business leaders, political rising stars, former Teach for America Alums, education journalists, and even district representatives—which has spearheaded the rapid re-design of many schools throughout the district over the last decade. Also at the front of the room, to the side of the four men in chairs, are ten Latino and Black high school students, both boys and girls, wearing jeans and black and red t-shirts with graffiti print that reads “Educate, Don’t Discriminate!” They will be leading this meeting. Importantly, the meeting is not being held in one of the drab, stuffy meeting rooms at the district’s central headquarters. The meeting is held on these kids’ turf, in a community room housed inside the non-profit youth organization where these activist kids from area high schools gather during their busy weeks to work on various racial justice issues in the education system.

The youth have gathered their families, friends, and community members—as well as the media—to bear witness and confront these education leaders with their own assessment of how well (or not) these leaders have done to reduce various racial disparities in academic achievement across the district. Although these reform leaders have previously given lip service to reducing racial disparities in school suspension rates, education funding, college AP course offerings, and remediation rates, they have not followed through with their promises to the community that swift reform would deliver equity on all these measures. Despite the tension in the room, and despite the tough stance of these youth who are standing over the seated adults at the front of the room, the fact that the reform leaders are also wearing identical “Educate, Don’t Discriminate!” shirts suggests that reformers and youth activists of color ultimately converge in their

calls for racial justice in education reform. These matching t-shirts powerfully demonstrate elites' symbolic alignment with youth of color and their goals for reforming schools.

Outside of this non-profit context, however, other youth of color across the city have been participating in walk-outs and rallies to protest neighborhood school closures, often in conjunction with parents and teachers left behind in these seismic school and neighborhood transformations. As in other cities, these neighborhood activists advance their critiques of neoliberal education reform as they are experienced in the context of larger gentrification and revitalization projects in historically black neighborhoods, amidst the resulting devastation of African-American community dislocation (Lipman, 2008; Lipman & Haines, 2007). For many of these activists, reform feels less like promising innovation and more like reckless experimentation.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the tenuous relationships that reformers have forged with the non-profit activist youth described above, school reformers (a networked collection of journalists, bloggers, local foundation representatives, business entrepreneurs, former Teach for America alums, leaders of education reform advocacy non-profits, and even representatives of the central school district and members of the city school board) rarely every align with these neighborhood youth in the same ways, and in fact often characterize their community movements as knee-jerk neighborhood reactions that “defend the status quo” instead of working collaboratively with reformers to solve educational failure in low-income communities. Why is it that these education reform leaders, without fail, show up to these highly publicized youth activist accountability meetings, but routinely dismiss these broader community campaigns for racial justice and community claims to neighborhood schools? What does this uneven relationship with communities of color reveal about the neoliberal reform movement's ethic of racial justice in education, and the extent to which youth of color in particular can push reformers towards racial equity?

This chapter investigates the potential for young people to impact neoliberal school reform policies from their positions in funded non-profit social movement organizations. Based on four years of ethnographic research, as well as multiple in-depth interviews with school reform elites and adult and youth community organizers, I explore the following questions: What are young activists' responses to landmark changes in educational policy in their neighborhoods? What are the strategies and successes of their social movement organizations to address school reform? Is there room in the neoliberal imagination for community movements, and if so, what role do youth play in these processes? Can activist youth force a shift in the actual implementation of neoliberal educational policy and bring racial justice issues to the forefront? Importantly, how does the non-profit/reformer relationship facilitate young people's potential to participate in school reform, and which dimensions of this relationship also hinder the realization of their visions for educational and racial justice?



COMMUNITY AND YOUTH POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF  
NEOLIBERAL SCHOOL REFORM

Over the last few decades, neoliberal education reforms have taken hold of public education systems across the world. These reforms include the privatization and deregulation of the public school system (Saltman, 2007), the dismantling of democratically elected school boards in favor of mayoral control over public schooling (Shaker & Heilman, 2004), and the promotion of market-based systems of school choice that tend to advantage middle-class families (Ball, 2003; Robertson & Lauder, 2001). The neoliberal education reform movement champions a vision of individual advancement over public and communal well-being (Harvey, 2005), and is characterized by the use of market and corporate language in discussing educational problems and solutions (Saltman, 2000). Neoliberal reform rhetoric emphasizes saving low-income students of color from substandard education and closing the achievement gap, while consistently deemphasizing the role that systematic racism plays in creating this gap (Noguera & Akom, 2000). On a macro level, this education movement has become a central piece of urban gentrification and corporate-led globalization (Lipman, 2008, 2004; Klein, 2007; Lipman & Haines, 2007).

What has been understudied in this critical literature on education reform is the extent to which low-income community collectives, particularly the Black, Latino, and immigrant youth who become objectified in educational policy discussions, are able to mobilize youth voice in order to bring racial justice issues to the forefront of neoliberal education policy. In Lipman's research on education reform and urban gentrification in Chicago, low-income African-American communities are routinely denigrated, dismissed, and distorted in white elites' remaking of the city school system (Lipman, 2008, 2004; Lipman & Haines, 2007). In this picture, communities of color are virtually shut out of education reform processes.

However, in many places local education reformers do make efforts to form at least token alliances with community collectives. In the city where the research detailed in this chapter takes place, two youth activist organizations have become amongst the most valued and respected community partners in many local reformers' eyes. As Margonis and Parker (1995) note, neoliberal strategies that are often promoted through colorblind, market-based language reproduce racial inequality by leaving larger racial inequalities undisturbed and un-interrogated. Given this context, the interventions of youth of color—with their explicit focus on racial justice—hold the promise of forcing reformers to attend more closely to racial disparities in education, and complicate the reproduction of racial inequity brought about by colorblind neoliberal education reform policymaking.

At the same time, the structure of the institutionalized, funded youth activist non-profit brings with it some limitations to making deep and lasting social change. As Kwon (2013) notes, youth organizations—such as those featured in this chapter—are

embedded in a neoliberal logic that over the last two decades has encouraged “at risk” youth to become empowered, self-directed, “responsible” citizens: what Kwon terms “affirmative governmentality,” in ways that both enable and constrain young people’s ability to make social change while also masking the retreat of state responsibility in providing a measure of human security to these youth. While these organizations give youth of color the political education, tools, and resources to spearhead youth-led social justice campaigns (Gordon, 2010; Gordon, 2007), their efforts are also constrained by the dictates of funders and the demands for quantitative deliverables over the kind of qualitative youth leadership development that is necessary to foster systemic and profound change.

This chapter will focus specifically on the narratives of both youth activists and elite reformers in order to draw out the promises and limitations of the youth activist non-profit to successfully compel a consciousness of racial justice in neoliberal school reform policymaking. This data is drawn from ethnographic research that follows the tactics of four community educational and social justice groups (three of which include at least some youth activist focus) as they attempt to shape school reform in one mid-size city in the United States. Youth activists in this study have organized around issues as diverse as equitable school funding, student voice in school turnarounds and teacher evaluation processes, college preparation, and school discipline policies. In total, these projects include seventy-three in-depth interviews with education reformers, adult organizers, and teen activists ranging from one to three hours each; three focus groups; and participant-observation data over a span of five years (2008–2013).

In a subsection of this chapter titled “Racial Justice vs. Educational Excellence” I will detail the ways in which elite reformers in this city characterize racial justice and racial equity as unwinnable goals, and instead posit a de-racialized and de-politicized ethic of “educational excellence” as a panacea to racial disparities in education. In the next subsection titled “Racial Justice as Educational Excellence” I contrast reformers’ views of colorblind educational excellence with youth activists’ insistence on using explicit racial justice and racial equity frameworks to guide educational policy decision-making. As demonstrated in this chapter’s opening vignette, youth collectives find power in the non-profit community context to hold elite reformers accountable to past promises of reducing racial disparities in educational mobility, to foreground racial equity in school reform discussions, and to become key participants in reshaping educational policy. The next subsection, “Building Youth Power” draws upon student narratives about their shift from objects of neoliberal education policy to active subjects helping to steer this policy-making process, and finally to respected and valuable collaborators in school reform. The final subsection, “Softening the Message” examines the resulting frustration of youth activists to have to tamp down their social justice and racial justice framing as they become valued collaborators embroiled in education reform networks and enter into longer-term partnerships with elite reformers.

## LOCAL RESEARCH CONTEXT

This qualitative research was conducted in a mid-sized city in the US where nearly half of all high school students do not graduate. Nearly two-thirds (72%) of the students in this city's district qualify for free or reduced lunch. White students make up 20% of the city's student population across the 162 schools in the district. Despite the low graduation rate and the concentration of low-income and poor students of color in city, the central school district and local realtors boast that this is one of the fastest growing urban school districts in the nation. City realtors frequently cite a pro-reform think tank's 2010 report that commends this city for its pro-reform policymaking and legislation, its openness to charter schools, and its welcoming climate for "educational entrepreneurs."

Because of this, various self-identified reformers have stepped into the fray to help re-design public education in this city. Several of these reformers have very little experience working directly in the education system. Rather, they have enjoyed success in both for-profit and non-profit sectors of the market, and it is their experience in these sectors (rather than their embeddedness in the public school system) that makes them valuable to the reformer movement. Many of these reformers view this historical moment as an unusually open time of educational democratization, one in which all kinds of expertise (and not just narrowly trained education professionals) are valued in the project of crafting urban education policy. These reformers represent various institutions and wield different types and degrees of power, and many have either temporarily abandoned more lucrative career paths in order to participate in education reform or seek to apply their business acumen to this domain of innovation.

These reformers converge across institutional contexts, and wield different degrees and types of power. Reformers representing foundations distribute monetary resources to local reform efforts, and assemble collectives of reform agents who work together across a given district or state. Journalists who identify with the reform movement harness the media and hold the power to frame school reform battles in particular ways to the public. Individual leaders at specific schools dominate the reform process at the school level. Despite their heterogeneity, skills, and institutional variation, there is surprising consistency in the ways in which these reformers view themselves in relation to the larger reform movement. Most of these reformers are white and middle to upper class and have very little history of direct involvement in racial justice and community movements. They are consistent with where they fall on the big dividing lines in local school reform battles: they see the comprehensive neighborhood model and the centralized school district as relics of the past, and instead favor the proliferation of charters managed by a diverse array of educational management organizations. They advocate for the placement of strong school leaders who are free from district oversight and can operate outside of constrictive teacher union contracts. Although many of them strongly identify as Democrats and critique the legacy of the Bush Administration and No Child Left Behind, these reformers believe in the standardized testing movement as a way to measure school improvement and to hold schools accountable.

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This convergence of educational entrepreneurs has made a dramatic impact on the city school system, namely in the closing and transforming of struggling neighborhood schools in communities of color. Out of these sometimes disastrous experiments have arisen informal networks of mostly Black and Latino community members who have been organizing to oppose neighborhood school closures like these, as well as what they perceive to be other gentrification projects in their own neighborhood and other low-income neighborhoods around the city. In the last decade, housing prices in this area of the city have shot up, and young white families have started to move into the area because of the centrality to the urban core. Meanwhile, many low-income African-American families have moved to adjacent cities in search of more affordable housing. With a deep distrust of both national and local foundations, many of which have been active in funding school reform projects around the city, these networks of neighborhood activists who are struggling to remain in the city have opted to organize loosely and with few resources, rather than become funded non-profits. Black and Latino youth have played a role in opposing neighborhood school closures, and have organized walkouts and protests as a response to school closures.

There are also formalized community non-profit organizations in this city that advocate for racial justice issues. Some of these, including those that house citywide youth activist campaigns, are visible and respected by elite reformers. These organizations periodically align with reformers, and include collectives of low-income Latino parent and youth activists who have their own agendas for racial justice in the school system. These goals include dismantling zero-tolerance discipline policies, increasing student funding, expanding school transportation, promoting college readiness, bringing in youth and community voice in teacher evaluation processes, and fighting for educational justice in tandem with comprehensive immigration reform. Two of these low-income community groups whom reformers see as stable allies explain their own coalition philosophy as “no permanent allies, no permanent enemies,” and consider their own periodic alliances with reformers (among other key allies) as strategic ways to further specific racial justice goals and make significant changes to the school system. These community organizations view this historical moment as an unusually open opportunity to push for reform policies and change long-standing racial injustices in the public school system, and they try to coordinate these efforts with other sweeping school reform initiatives often championed by reformers. Although they periodically align with reformers, they themselves do not identify as “reformers” nor do they identify strongly with the national reform movement. Many of these groups have existed long before the reform movement descended upon this city, and have grown out of previous racial justice struggles emerging in the 1960s.

#### METHODS

This research on school reform, community organizing, and youth activism represent data taken from a participatory action research (PAR) project with a group of low-income parents called the African-American Parent Project, as well as from the

broader ethnographic study which follows the tactics of four community educational and social justice groups (at least three of which have a distinct youth activist component) as they attempt to shape school reform in one mid-size city in the United States. In total, these projects include seventy-three in-depth interviews with reformers and activists ranging from one to three hours each, three focus groups, and participant-observation data over a span of four years.

Ethnographic activities have included attending and participating in rallies, protests, demonstrations, neighborhood association meetings, school reform events, school board meetings, house parties, and community organizing meetings. These lived contexts have provided rich opportunities to witness complex community challenges to, and delicate alliances with, local reform agents. They have also provided insight into the ways that elite reformers publicly reaffirm their alliances with some community groups—such as youth activists housed in community non-profits—while publicly denigrating others, such as predominantly African-American collectives protesting neighborhood school closures and gentrification. These meetings, events, and activities have centered on contentious neighborhood school closures, discipline policies, and school board elections, among multiple other educational and racial justice issues. In addition to the PAR project with African-American community members, this larger research context includes twenty-five additional in-depth interviews with Latino and Anglo community activists from these various groups. The aim of this research was to trace the various ways that different community movements attempt to harness neoliberal reform to their own ends, the various victories and setbacks of these movements, and the ways in which local reform agents value some community constituencies over others.

As a white, middle-class woman, my positionality in this research varied across contexts. The mostly white, middle-class reformers in this study explained to me their views on race, racism, educational excellence, and even the irrelevance of racial justice in their interviews in ways that they might not have in the presence of a person of color, and in ways that often contradicted their public proclamations of racial equity at youth-activist and other community meetings. While my intersecting identities brought me uncomfortably close to these local stakeholders who champion a neoliberal movement of which I am critical, these same identities created a social and cultural distance along lines of age, race, and class between myself and the African-American and Latino community activists with whom I wanted to connect. This distance was especially profound in relation to the mostly African-American anti-gentrification activists who I studied, as initially they were highly critical of white outsiders interested in school reform in their communities. My connection to the other groups was easier to forge, since many of them were already seeking tactical and strategic alliances with white reformers and education “experts” in order to advance racial justice goals. By virtue of being an academic, I was often read as belonging to that realm of people, though I wasn’t necessarily read as a “reformer.”

My connection to so many different players in school reform (African-American anti-gentrification activists, Latino immigration reform activists, youth activists embedded in these various movements, gentrifiers pushing the school district

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to turn failing neighborhood schools into shining examples of excellent public education, as well as white reformers) allowed me to see the friction between them, and underscored the complicated costs and benefits of the uneasy alliances and strange bedfellows that are often forged in the process of overhauling urban schools. My vantage point also helped me to understand the moments when potentially powerful alliances—specifically between Black anti-gentrification youth and parent activists and non-profit Latino and Black youth activists—were thwarted. For example, during an open brainstorming session at a youth activist center about strategies to pressure school officials and policymakers to prevent school push out of Black and Latino youth, two African-American women organizers from an anti-gentrification and educational justice network across town showed up to the meeting and participated, until they discovered that the youth activist group had identified a prominent pro-reform think tank as a potential ally to their campaign. The two women raised an objection to this alliance, doubting that the think tank authentically cared about racial disparities in education given their collusion in disregarding community outcry around the contentious turnaround of several failing neighborhood schools. When the meeting moved on with very little discussion of their critiques, the women then quietly left the meeting. Later, youth organizers from the youth activist center mistakenly surmised that the women were actually representing the teacher’s union and that is why they were critical of the youth alliance with the pro-reform think tank.

Moments like these underscored the ways in which organizational relationships with controversial reform agents can simultaneously advance youth activists’ agendas while unintentionally sabotaging the potential for broader community coalitions to support their campaigns for racial justice. After witnessing reformers’ marginalization of African-American voices in the school reform process, as well as their dismissal of African-American calls for more racially just and inclusive reform, I began to doubt reformers’ authentic commitment to young activists’ larger racial justice goals, and to question how far youth activists of color could successfully push reformers to prioritize racial justice in education reform policy and practice given the absence of this ethic in reformers’ sanitized discussions of the “achievement gap” and “educational failure.” In the next section, I illustrate how reformers frame these issues in de-racialized ways.

#### CHALLENGING THE COLORBLINDNESS OF NEOLIBERAL REFORM: YOUTH VICTORIES AND SETBACKS

##### *Racial Justice vs. Educational Excellence*

While reformers regularly referred to the achievement gap and the deplorable failure of low-income schools in their calls for swift reforms (especially in low-income neighborhoods), there is a marked absence of a racial justice narrative in reformer

visions of educational excellence. For example, one reformer reframes racial injustice (in the civil rights tradition) as *educational opportunity* instead of racial integration:

Well, I don't think segregation is the issue. I think it's opportunity, and kids who have been deprived access to opportunity, or deprived opportunity. And segregation does that. You know, we have pretty segregated schools...but I think for the first time, we're making a good-faith effort to prioritize equity, and to prioritize opportunity for our students.

As a result, even middle-class white reformers who saw themselves as civil rights advocates and as advocates of low-income Black and Latino youth noted that the reformed schools they championed for these youth were not necessarily the same schools that they themselves would send their own kids. When remarking on the "beat-the-odds" schools which are producing increases in test scores and graduation rates among low-income youth (though they still remain profoundly racially segregated) many reformers held these schools up as models, but clarified "I wouldn't send my own kids there:"

I mean some of them are more oriented toward more low income populations, so low income kids will do better in a kept environment because it's highly structured, it's highly disciplined which works for kids that come from structures that are in disarray. But if your kid has full structure in the house then you want a different kind of environment, so charters tend to gear themselves to the population that they are serving. [These schools] will work for some kids but not for other kids.

In these kinds of rationales, reformers espoused a kind of separate-but-equal vision of school reform in which their own children have more opportunities for free and critical thinking and less structure/discipline than should low-income youth of color, who come from family "structures that are in disarray."

Furthermore, many reformers viewed racial justice as a matter of adherence to the standards movement, which has the potential to soften the "soft bigotry of low expectations." If all kids were held to the same performance standards, there would not be a need to engage in the messy work of explicitly addressing racial injustice in the public school system. As one prominent reformer working at a reform-oriented foundation explained:

But to me, until you push to a set of instructional techniques, it really doesn't matter. I mean you can believe all you want that you're gonna achieve, this kid can achieve. Maybe they don't read the wall street journal at home ... but the beauty of the standards movement is if it were enforced strictly, we would expect every kid to achieve at this level and there are sticks and carrots. If the incentives are right, to really teach these kids well, then I believe the rest of the stuff would fall into place.

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This reformer and several others noted that the education system is so broken that there is no time to place cultural competency/sensitivity at the center of education reform designs. This represents a “soft” and impossible goal, while improving test scores represents an achievement within reach. As one reformer housed in a non-profit reform advocacy organization explained, addressing “racism” is like “trying to fix someone’s soul,” a truly un-winnable goal:

Sometimes when I walk through the street late at night and there are a couple of African-American, large boys walking down the street toward me, I cross the street. How do you fix that? And maybe you don’t. Maybe all you can do is insure that there are really high standards and insure that those teachers are held accountable for making sure your kid reaches those standards, and that’s the best you can do. You can’t fix someone’s soul, you just can’t.

#### *Racial Justice as Educational Excellence*

Racial justice, as a key component of education reform policy, looks much different to youth activists of color engaged in reforming discipline policies; fighting for college access, school transportation, and a voice in teacher assessments and evaluations; and changing the ways in which schools are funded. These youth do not believe in the standards movement to address entrenched racism, and they push reformers to “keep it real” and explicitly discuss racism and racial disparities. As one seventeen year old Latina activist explained:

You have to keep it real with them. You have to let them know because obviously you can’t turn a blind eye to racism. ‘Cause it still exists. And you can’t act like you don’t know what’s going on. And so, for us, in our testimonies and everything, it was easy for us to tell them, “Look there’s a huge disparity between whites and minorities.”

These youth, in their accountability tactics, test the boundaries of reformers’ rhetoric of “equality” and “equal opportunity” by pushing reformers to more explicitly recognize racism and racial injustice. As one sixteen-year-old African American woman explained:

They do acknowledge disparities. They do acknowledge a lot of different factors that go into that. But I think that the end of the day they have to respond to all audiences: to white parents, to Latino parents, to Indian parents, to African American parents. They talk about “equality for all” but when we need to call it out, then that’s when we say “you do want equality for all, but let’s be real and let’s be honest and look at the achievement gap. Let’s look at, you know, the quality of education at different schools, and the specifics of everything.” And so instead of avoiding it, instead of pretending that’s not what it is, let’s face it straight on.



Here, youth activists recognize reformers' proclivity to discuss the achievement gap and "equality" in colorblind terms, and see their own mission as "keeping it real" and bringing back racial (in) justice to the forefront of proposals for educational improvement. In this sense, youth activists' bold insistence on speaking truth to power holds enormous potential to interrupt the enforcement of neoliberal colorblind educational policy and frame discussions of educational excellence in racial justice terms. As these youth host elite reformers on their turf, hold them accountable to their commitment to "equity," and speak with support from their communities—their words are powerfully mirrored by the images of civil rights leaders and protest art lining the walls. The physical space, mentorship, and resources that this non-profit structure brings to youth mobilization provide leverage to these young people's challenges to elites.

#### *Building Youth Power*

In doing this, and forcing elite reformers to address racism head-on, youth activists who find themselves in proximity to reformers and listened to by reformers (especially reformer policy makers) experience a marked sense of empowerment. One eighteen-year-old Latino man remembered his victory in the state legislature around a school equity bill:

I was excited. Excited to know that I was finally getting a chance to make a difference in somebody's life. And it was kind of cool to see—to know that potentially, if this bill gets passed, everything that I've worked on and everything that [our organization] has worked on could change the lives of every single student in the state.

Although much of the critical literature on neoliberal education reform notes that this reform is carried out by elites who largely ignore communities of color and their input (Lipman, 2008; Lipman & Haines, 2007), these youth find themselves in an unusual position of authority vis-à-vis white reformers. As the specter of Black and Latino youth figure centrally in reformer narratives about saving schools and saving youth from educational failure, these very youth find their voices and experience respected by elites in power. One youth organizer underscored the necessity of hearing from the very students who have been the most marginalized by substandard schooling practices:

So when we talk about emerging leaders, it's not the honor roll, and it's not student government. Emerging leaders are not the traditional leaders. You can't have a student tell you how to engage them unless those students have experienced being disengaged.

Another eighteen-year-old African American youth activist explained his sense of empowerment and authority, as someone who had actually experienced the injustice

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of being targeted for administrative punishment and expulsion at his school for a relatively minor infraction:

It's better to hear from the students as opposed to talking *about* them. Because then you get a clear perspective from them. Like, "This is what's happening to me and I'm going to tell you about it. I'm going to explain to you why it's a problem for me as a student." So it's cool to be able to speak.

As youth voice becomes more respected and listened to, youth in non-profits find themselves in the position of entering into a mutual relationship with elites, and even partnering with them. One nineteen-year-old Latina explained:

Well for me, since I was able to speak to the committee about it...I was able to personally know some state representatives and state senators, even got one of the senators to write me a letter of recommendation [for college].

And so we developed, like, a deeper intimate relationship between [our organization] and people in power. Because now—not necessarily on a mutual level, but we know each other's perspectives and they understand where we're coming from. And now we have so many people, so many politicians in support of our discipline bill. It's incredible.

Another student marveled:

Just like the first meeting we went to, to where the adults weren't so much interested in what we had to say. Now, to like the last meeting, they asked us "What do you think?" or "How do you feel on this topic?" Like, it was huge change. It felt good to know that like we changed their opinions on student voice. Like [at first] they easily didn't really know much about student voice, they didn't care ... To now, where they are asking us what we think. So that was a huge change. And I think that's what it is. We just don't go away!

One pro-reform school board member described why she has grown to respect these community non-profits who "don't go away," and contrasts these groups with her characterization of undifferentiated "angry community groups" which continually seem to stand in the way of positive change, and which criticize reform from what she views as a faulty logic: "They [community non-profits] have worked to create their own capacity, to make sure they have become knowledgeable themselves, so we're having a conversation *on the same level*." These youth activist groups are seen as valuable collaborators and partners in school reform: they are community players who are willing to speak the same language that reformers speak and value the same goals that reformers value, while at the same time translating these goals and language into explicit calls for racial justice. The school board member juxtaposed these activists to a neighborhood-based African American network who had recently protested another neighborhood school closure, contrasting the first non-profits' knowledge with the second group's reliance on mere "nostalgia":

And there's this other group saying 'The community should decide.' Well, you know, there's a whole group of people who are living in the past, and folks whose own experiences for success in education was so poor that they couldn't even articulate or have a vision of what successful education ought to look like, you know? It's nostalgia. And nostalgia isn't a strategy for reform.

As non-profit youth activists refuse to "go away" and continually show up to reformer meetings, strategy sessions, and policy discussions, they demonstrate that they can "become knowledgeable" and push for their vision of educational and racial justice while being able to "have a conversation on the same level." I argue that the longer these youth are "at the table" with reformers, the more entangled they become in reformer networks which value—and *need*—their continued partnership, and the more pressure they receive to soften their messages for racial justice.

### *Softening the Message*

As these teens move from being objects of saving in reformer narratives to being active agents within struggles to reform public education, they also move from being voices that admonish elites and hold them accountable to becoming *partners* in school reform projects. As they gain respect from elites, they are asked to enter into longer-term partnerships with reform entities, even as their own coalition philosophy is "no permanent enemies, no permanent allies." As one youth organizer explained:

We also sometimes struggle a lot with how aggressive to be. What tactics to use. So it's kind of like, what tone to take. Should we straight up call them out and just say "You haven't done anything! How dare you! You should be ashamed of yourself." Or should we say: "You're doing some good things, but you know, this little progress is not enough. Let's work together to close that gap."

In these partnerships, youth activists' challenges to white elites can become risky as they try to sustain their status within elite education reformer coalitions. Several youth organizers expressed this ongoing dilemma of how to address "targets" who value ongoing change and reform, and are willing to listen to youth of color in the process. For the sake of "working together," youth learn to carefully tame their outrage and charges of racism, and also frame racial injustice as an *educational opportunity* issue rather than a larger social justice issue that extends beyond schooling. As one eighteen-year-old Latino man put it:

You definitely have to let them know, "This is going on in my life right now. And it's keeping me from school." Like, "I want to graduate, I want to go to college. I don't want to have a criminal record when I'm in high school 'cause I care about my future and I want to go and get my diploma and be ready to get my college degree without anybody questioning me about something stupid that happened in high school."

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So you do have to link that because it also gives more of an emotional feeling. Like not just saying, “Oh, kids are being criminalized in school.” You know? Instead you say, “These kids aren’t being able to get to go to school.”

Although framing the problem of zero tolerance, for example, as an issue of educational access and opportunity is one way of maintaining a narrative about racial justice, this young man explains that he has to frame this as an educational access issue rather than a larger racial justice issue. He frames punitive discipline policies as something that keeps *him*, as an individual, from accessing education and future success—rather than something that impacts an entire community and connects to broader social justice issues such as the expansion of the prison industrial complex, deportations, and immigration reform, among other issues. In this way, youth find themselves having to shift their message slightly to resonate with reformers’ emphasis on education as mobility and individual consumption, rather than as a social, communal, and even human right. This messaging also blunts the radical edge of their campaigns, and isolates them from coalescing with other racial justice groups on initiatives beyond education reform. As one seventeen year old Latino woman from another organization noted:

So of course we all want to be like the Malcolm X type or Martin Luther King or Caesar Chavez type people. Like our discussions with each other. But we can’t be like extremely radical with them because then they would take that as, “Oh, you’re totally against our government.”

While youth activists push reformers to recognize racial inequity in existing educational practices, and press these mostly white reformers to value racial equity as a worthy goal in local education reform decisions, their public presentation to these increasingly valuable and powerful partners must walk the fine line of pushing adults in power towards racial justice goals without alienating them. These non-profit youth activists find ways to assimilate racial justice goals into neoliberal rhetoric in ways that also require them to narrow the scope of their racial justice activism in public conversations, to undermine the leverage of their own coalition philosophy of “no permanent allies, no permanent enemies,” and to frame issues according to their increasingly complicated ties to reform elites instead of the integrity of their backstage (Goffman, 1959) political commitments and aims. As one youth organizer sighs “[Our approach] all depends on where we are in that relationship [with elites]. Ah, it’s hard.”

## CONCLUSION

Although underemphasized in the critical literature on neoliberal urban education reform, there is great potential for low-income youth of color to achieve special status and gain an important voice in educational reform and policymaking. As the very objects of reformer efforts, their challenges to and partnerships with reformers

hold the power to bring explicitly politicized social justice issues—namely racial justice—to the forefront of education reform. As the only players in the school reform landscape with first-hand experience of how it really feels to be on the receiving end of unjust educational policies day after day, young people’s experiences translate into a kind of expertise and authority in school reform debates, one which becomes recognized and respected by elite reformers. Just as various market-oriented educational entrepreneurs are welcomed into the fold of the neoliberal reform movement, so are select community activists like these youth of color, who have long been neglected in educational policymaking.

However, youth in non-profit contexts like these (versus the activist youth in the underfunded or unfunded community collectives which protest neighborhood school closures) find themselves having to shift from being respected outside agitators to becoming valuable reformer allies and partners, which can at times compromise the spirit and message of their racial justice critiques. School reform elites begin as targets and soon become partners the longer that youth are “at the table” participating in education reform conversations. As one youth organizer explained “We’re having a challenge because [specific reformer partner] is sometimes our enemy and sometimes they’re our ally at the same time on different campaigns.” This ambiguous relationship with elite reformers makes it increasingly difficult for youth to call them out on what they perceive to be neglect of community (and specifically youth) demands for racial justice.

Importantly, the deeper question is why school reform elites want to enter into these longer-term partnerships with youth of color? What kind of legitimacy and credibility does the specter of partnering with urban youth of color lend to neoliberal school reforms? It is important to note that not all youth voice is valuable in this landscape: reformers regularly delegitimize and render invisible youth walkouts and protests—which are connected to larger community collectives—that try to salvage neighborhood schools in rapidly gentrifying areas. Given the community outrage over contentious neoliberal reforms, reformers often use civil rights rhetoric (Miner, 2004) and seek alliances with community organizations in order to bring a much-needed legitimacy to the implementation of controversial reforms. In some ways, these youth-reformer partnerships may actually allow reformers to project a public image of themselves as connected to racial justice groups, open to community critique, and doing right by the very youth they are claiming to save from underperforming schools. Even as they enter into these partnerships, they pursue larger reforms that exacerbate other racial injustices and exclude other communities of color from school reform processes.

When powerful education reformers wear the same t-shirts that youth activists wear, it is unclear whose victory this really is. Does this empowering display mean that youth of color have successfully forced elites to examine entrenched racial disparities and foreground these in their education reform agendas? Or does it mean that reformers have successfully cloaked neoliberal moves to reshape schools and cities in young activists’ calls for racial and educational justice? I argue that by

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examining the frustrations of youth activists themselves to tamp down their own language and political critique as they become networked into the reform movement, we might gain some insight into the ways that the neoliberal context provides the possibilities for, but also undermines, youth activist efforts to bring racial justice to the forefront of educational policy change.

#### NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> See the 2010 report titled *Framework for Providing All Students an Opportunity to Learn through Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* issued by the NAACP, the National Urban League, and other civil rights groups. This report criticizes elements of the Obama Administration's education reform agenda, specifically school reform experimentation in communities of color and the lack of sufficient community participation in school reform decisions.

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