


Spring 5-18-2017

Neighborhood Strategizing: Understanding Community Collaborations within California Bay Area Public Schools

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University of San Francisco

**Neighborhood Strategizing:
Understanding Community Collaborations within
California Bay Area Public Schools**

A Field Project Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

by

Windi Hazzard

May 2017

**Neighborhood Strategizing:
Understanding Community Collaborations within
California Bay Area Public Schools**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by Windi Hazzard
May 2017

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Instructor/Chairperson

Date

Susan Katz PhD.

May 11, 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank the four participants for taking time to share their experiences for this project. The work they do directly impacts communities and serves as a testament to the power of collaboration at the local level. In addition to these contributors, I have been fortunate to have a community of educators, academics, critical thinkers support me through this project. Tim Marsolias's expertise with the English language aided me in my application to IME as well as contributing to the final edits of this field project. Fellow educator and friend, Karah Parks, served as a sounding board for processing the theoretical aspects of this project. Though I have been fortunate to study under numerous talented educators, Dr. Susan Katz is the one who has aided me the most in my pursuit to become an academic. The first and last classes of my Master's program have been under her guidance. Her approach to education and manner in which she has offered constructive feedback on this project serves as the model for the type of educator I strive to be.

In addition to those mentioned above, I have been blessed with three other people who have supported me throughout the process of completing my degree. In classes, Terri Lewis-King was my comment comrade, always ready with insightful comments and a critical perspective. During the writing process of this paper, she motivated me daily as well as grounded me so that I was able to complete this project. Finally, I would not be who I am if it weren't for my mother, Tracy Donaldson, and sister, Andrea Hadjouti. Their love and encouragement supported me from start to finish. For everyone's support, I will be eternally grateful.

ABSTRACT

For the better half of a century, education policy has been guided by economics and profit. One after another, every U.S. president since the 1960s has championed legislation that reflects neoliberal ideals of competition and profitable skills. Through the standardization of the public school system, education has become a marketplace rather than an environment for cultivating empowered learners and critical thinkers. The purpose of this field project is to show how communities are challenging the current education system in order to influence education policy in San Francisco, California. I interviewed four participants from two organizations that advocate parents' rights as well as promoting transparency and accountability at the local level. Based on the experiences of the participants, I created a website intended to serve as a space for community collaboration around education. RedefiningEd.com specifically highlights the tactics and lessons learned around laying a foundation at both the community and organization level, creating holistic relationships, and navigating social institutions. The hope is that the website will serve as a resource for parents and community organizers to challenge the status quo of education in the United States in order to better include the voices and needs of each community.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When reflecting on my own experiences with education, I have come to recognize my love/hate relationship with learning. I have always enjoyed engaging with new topics, trying to understand or solve a problem. For me, assessment was the one aspect that turned my passion for academia into a deep-seeded fear of failure. Despite multiple attempts through primary and secondary school to memorize spelling words, historical dates or chemical reactions, I rarely produced a grade that reflected the amount of work I invested in studying. The best learning environments for me, then and now, have been those where I have been encouraged to ask questions and explain my thinking. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory speaks directly how learning does not occur in a box; that,

understanding is far more likely to be achieved if the student encounters the material in a variety of guises and contexts. And the best way to bring this about is to draw on all of the intelligences that are relevant to that topic in as many legitimate ways as possible. (Gardner, 2008, p. 60)

Gardner's (2008) argument directly challenges the standardized approach to education currently prevalent in the United States by asserting that students learn differently and should be taught and assessed accordingly. Rather than focusing on banking knowledge from a prescribed standard of academic competency, teachers are encouraged to engage with the students' own experiences and ways of learning (Freire, 2014; Gardner, 2008).

This conflict between standardizing education and ensuring students are learning to their fullest capability has been a battle in the United States spanning more than seven decades. One of the central arguments for standardizing education has been to address the educational need for equality in low-performing communities. The silver bullet to

eliminating the achievement gap between low and high-income communities has been to create a standard ensuring all students graduate with knowledge and skills to compete in the world's economy. With proper education, students would be able to break the cycle of poverty and become productive members of society. This has been the utopic platform by which standardized testing, specifically, has been fortified. Continual shifts in political power at state and federal levels have created confusion and uncertainty around the purpose and value of this form of blanket assessment.

Proponents of quantitatively measuring academic success through standardized testing “argue that test scores are valid indicators of student learning in a particular academic subject” as well as “an effective system in ensuring the attainment of minimum academic competences by all students” (Aydeniz & Southerland, 2012, p. 235).

Opponents reason that “despite its potential benefits for bringing about improvements at the system level,” standardized testing limits the micro level of education, restricting goals, “decision-making, [and] the influence they [educators] have on the breadth and depth of curriculum” (Aydeniz & Southerland, 2012, p. 235). Moreover, Leonardo and Grubb (2014) argue that “by their very nature, tests measure the differences among individuals and therefore are designed to reflect inequity among students” (p. 121).

This over-emphasis on standardized competence comes in conflict with Gardner's theory around multiple intelligence as well as reinforces existing disparities in the education system. Measuring the academic competency of all students with one instrument limits the accuracy of the intended result. If advocates argue that standardized test scores reflect aptitude, how do the tests account for students, like myself, who are

poor test takers -- not mention the social, political and economic issues that may influence the testing outcomes.

I argue that the focus of education should not be upon meeting universal standards but guaranteeing the right to an equitable education. In a time where policy is dominated by standardized metrics for quantifying academic success, education research is obligated to critically analyze what is being done to further public schooling. Opponents of state-mandated, standardized testing predominately focus on how parents and educators boycott, or opt-out of state testing. Aside from coalitions and support groups, little data has been presented to show how communities specifically are working together to ensure students within their communities are reaching their full, academic potential.

In response to this gap in research, I have focused this field project on creating the website RedefiningEd.com to offer a collaborative space for community building around redefining academic success. Through interviews with local community organizers, the website reflects how communities are going beyond standardized metrics to engage with school districts in order to improve academic accountability.

Before we can redefine academic success, we must move from the local to global level -- specifically analyzing how globalization has shifted the focus in our education system away from knowledge-based learning towards a profit-based model. In drawing from theories surrounding international development, the literature review in Chapter 2 offers a historical outline as to why and how standardized testing has become a cornerstone to the United States public school systems. I have focused on neoliberalism and human capital theory to shed light on how education focuses upon producing contributors to economic growth rather than education as a human right. Through

accentuating the link between economic growth and academic success, education has become a commodity not only in the United States but also across the globe (Apple, 2001).

A second component of the literature review presents Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) paradigm as a critique of neoliberal ideas in education. Rather than continuing to support neoliberal education reform, CCW is presented as an alternative foundation to defining knowledge and capital. In order to better understand how communities are able to use their own knowledge in challenging current education policy, three of the six forms of capital defined by Yosso will be highlighted: *navigational, familial, and resistant*. By critically examining neoliberalism and human capital in the context of education, I have outlined the cause and effect globalization has had on the United States school system. As a means of challenging the status quo, CCW is offered as a framework to serve as a hopeful solution for future education reform.

Communities working together for change is far from a new concept. However, we are now in a political era where policy is changed and manipulated in ways that create confusion for the people the policies were created to support. It is everyone's responsibility to come together not only to understand the changes, but also to unite against inequitable systems. The significance of research goes beyond the immediate audience of parents and community members in the Bay Area, where the data is being collected. By creating a website based upon the experience and advice from organizations, other communities will be able to access the information and apply it in their own districts. Moreover, this resource has a relevance to the times in which we are living. As more policies are passed, parents, educators and community members have a

right to comprehensive and accurate information regarding issues that affect them.

RedefiningEd.com was created as a means to share the work already being done on a micro level in order to have a macro impact.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Despite attempts to level the playing field for low-income communities, disparities continue to plague the public school system. As early as the 1960's, a political shift began to emerge to offset a deficit perspective imparted on minority students performing below their predominately white, middle and upper-class peers (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014; Nieto, 2005; Yosso, 2005). By increasing the accountability of school standards specific to marginalized communities, the federal government sought to improve the quality of education across the board and, in effect, increase economic growth in the United States. For the remainder of the 20th century and continuing well into the 21st, state and federal governments have sought to implement standardized assessment as the dominant accountability metric within the public school system.

Through this literature review, I provide a historical context based on critiques of neoliberalism and human capital theory as a way to approach the topic of standardized testing (Apple, 2001; Aslam & Rawal, 2015; Becker, 1994; McCowan, 2015; Nieto, 2005; Russell & Baja, 2015). These two aspects of globalization are presented as an explanation for the formation of the Standards Based Accountability Movement. In response to decades of standardized education policy, I demonstrate through the theoretical framework of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) how a counter-movement of boycotting state testing has challenged the political establishment by drawing from community knowledge rather than emphasizing universal standards of knowledge.

Neoliberalism in Education

In order to understand how the current state of standardized education is embedded in policy, we must recognize the historical relevance globalization has had on education reform. We could argue that education has been used as a means to manipulate economies and control international markets dating back to colonialism (Unterhalter, 2015). However, it was not until 1960 that the international community identified education as an integral instrument for globalization. From a policy standpoint, organizations within the United Nations emphasized that “investment in education was crucial to economic growth” (Unterhalter, 2015, pp. 19-20). From the financial sector, the World Bank began to invest in education research, in an effort to open the door for developed countries with the highest capital to influence education policy (Aslam & Rawal, 2015; Unterhalter, 2015). The United States was not only a major investor in the World Bank, but also laid the foundation for education policy to mirror the capitalist ideals of the United States.

In addition to gaining support from the international community, the melding of education to globalization was further justified through neoliberal politics (Russell & Baja, 2015; McCowan, 2015; Nieto, 2005; Nygreen, 2016). Neoliberalism on the global stage emphasizes competition and places a high value upon productivity. While competition encourages the continuous battle among international communities for the title of leader of the Free World, productivity measures the amount of income generated for the respective economy. When this neoliberal paradigm is applied to education, the global market is represented by the education system and the workers become the students. As success in neoliberalism is defined through profit and leadership, so is it

“assumed to be transferrable from the corporation to the school” (Nygren, 2016, p. 211). Schools ranked in the top percentile are considered superior and more valuable compared to lower-performing schools. While economists can argue that this metric of success functions in the world of international development, the same argument should not be made within education.

Human Capital Theory and Competition

When neoliberalism is applied to schooling, human capital and competition become the driving forces behind policy. Human capital explains how academic success is measured by the financial return students are able to contribute to their economy (Aslam & Rawal, 2015; Becker, 1994; McCowan, 2015). To increase economic growth, students need to be productive. In order to be productive, students are required to possess knowledge that translates into skills that contribute to economic prosperity. Becker (1994) argues that education is used as an instrument to “produce human, not physical capital because you cannot separate a person from his or her knowledge, skills, health, or values the way it is possible to move financial and physical assets while the owner stays put” (p. 16). Because human capital is connected to skills, education becomes the tool by which the economy is able to directly influence what knowledge is deemed valuable. Moreover, supporters of high standards education policy are the same people who profit through the commodification of education. Investment without profit is a waste. In order to prevent education from being a wasteful investment, investors need to see some sort of return; hence, human capital is viewed as a necessity.

This necessity is defended by the National Governors Association (NGA) in a 2009 guide outlining recommendations for closing the achievement gap. Research

offered in the guide highlights the importance of “adopting a comprehensive human capital approach to build a high-quality education workforce” through “the redistribution of funds from ineffective human capital” along with an emphasis on “investing money in a manner that will produce the most economically productive citizens” (Grossman, 2009, p.1). The guide continually focuses upon the United States education system to be internationally competitive while capitalizing upon investments in education. The arguments presented for education reform at the state level overemphasize education as a commodity. The ideal scenario for academic achievement focuses upon market conditions and creating a productive and competitive environment based upon high-yield in the economy and “shapes not only education policies and reforms, but also the language used to talk about educational goals and values” (Nygreen, 2016, p. 204). Though no direct distinction is made between productivity and achievement, we can infer that students who earn low incomes are considered academic failures.

The second driving force of neoliberalism in education assumes that competition and regulation are key for school improvement (Kumashiro, 1994; Nygreen, 2016). In the discussion of human capital, I assert that being a leader of the global market is mirrored in education through competition among states, districts, teachers and students. Within competition, regulation is needed in order to delineate success from failure. The question then becomes: how is regulation manifested within the competitive market of education? The most prevalent contributor is standardizing the system with the catalyst being President Lyndon Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The intention of this policy was to ensure education equality across socio-economic classes (Sanders, 2016). Inasmuch as the ESEA began a conversation around failures

within the education system, disparities continued to perpetuate socio-economic gaps and academic short-comings among the lower-class, specifically minority communities. A 1983 report by the Department of Education “condemned the U.S. public education system for inadequately preparing all students for the workforce, particularly low-income students and students of color” (Boser & Brown, 2016, p. 4). By the end of the 1980s, President George H.W. Bush organized a summit to identify ways in which standards could be raised -- pivoting education reform towards global competition and away from equitability.

President George H. W. Bush’s emphasis upon economic growth completely disregarded issues of equitability in order to fully embrace competition. Moreover, the infusion of neoliberalism “shapes not only education policies and reforms, but also the language used to talk about educational goals and values” (Nygreen, 2016, p. 204). Carlson-Paige (2014) contends that “when politicians and policy makers talk about education today, they no longer use words like equity, poverty, and equal educational opportunity. What we hear instead are these words: accountability, evaluation, data, measurement, competition, choice, ‘race to the top’” (p. 85-86). Knowledge becomes regulated on standards set by policy makers rather than reflecting the needs of the community.

In the process of neoliberal education reform, competition becomes quantified through annual assessments ranking student aptitude and success (Hagopian, 2014). The results are then interpreted in a way that the testing is not about competition but accountability. Schools that do not pass the tests are seen as failures, and the accountability tag is used to identify failing institutions and justify the use of label

“underachieving.” Rather than establishing reform on a community level, all education systems began to compete against one another to produce the most skilled workers (Madeloni, 2014). The intention behind President Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act was to bring attention to the inequality at the community level. In fewer than 20 years, equality and community have been pushed aside in support of competition in a neoliberal paradigm.

Standards Based Accountability Movement

The emphasis upon human capital and competition in education fostered what would become the Standards Based Accountability (SBA) movement. The first official federal legislation came in 1994 from President Clinton’s Goals 2000: Educate America Act requiring student assessment in elementary, middle and high school as well as establishing the first link between testing outcome and federal funding (Boser & Brown, 2016). Defending the need for standardized tests, President Clinton emphasized the importance of change from within the system via transparent laws creating accountability on various scholastic levels.

Following a similar path, President George W. Bush reauthorized the Elementary Secondary Education Act under the title of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) seven years later in 2001. Despite credit being given to the Bush administration, “much of the framework for NCLB was developed in the final years of the Clinton administration” (Kumashiro, 1994, p. xxxiii). One of the main purposes was to shift control to the state level while still enforcing academic accountability (Arce, Luna, Borjian, & Conrad, 2005; Hagopian, 2014; Kumashiro, 1994; Mitra, Mann, & Hlavacik, 2016). As testing increased, the companies producing the materials were able to capitalize on the “supply

and demand cycle in which school districts find themselves purchasing more tests and test aids to meet NCLB requirements” (Arce, et al., 2005, p. 58). While capitalism and neoliberal ideas were being cultivated within the education system, the market place was able to monetarily capitalize from standardizing public schools.

A second effect of NCLB was implementing Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) assessments requiring schools to report test scores aggregated by race, gender, income-level, and disability in order to continue to receive federal funding (Boser & Brown, 2016; Hagopian, 2014; Taylor, 2016). As much as NCLB enforced the yearly progress reports, this concept has origins in President Regan’s administration (Kumashiro, 1994). Despite decades of attempts by presidential administrations to close the achievement gap across socioeconomic lines, NCLB solidified “a widening inequality among different kinds of schools, with a harsh impact on low-income and racial minority students” (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014, 139). Whether intentional or not, the results of the Standards Based Accountability Movement labeled communities of color as “underachieving” and “low performing” as compared to their predominantly white, affluent neighbors.

In addition to policy supporting the ranking of student achievement through standardized assessment scores, NCLB minimized the parental participation specifically in terms of having a choice to opt-out of state required testing (Mitra et al., 2016). Based upon fears of repercussion, local and state level agencies initially did little to support parents;

limit[ing] parental agency by frustrating the ability of parents to opt their children out. Most states had little incentive to provide information to parents about opt-out procedures under NCLB. Indeed, showing parents how to opt-out would presumably have encouraged the behavior, and states risked losing federal funds if they emboldened dissent toward SBA. Some states may have actually supported parental opt-out, but were not able to do so formally for the sake of their funding.

(Mitra et al., 2016, p. 4)

One purpose of President Johnson's Elementary Secondary Education Act was not only to provide funding for resources and adequate curriculum but also to increase parent participation within the school system (Mitra et al., 2016). Opting out of state-mandated tests empowered parents to reject mandated assessment, thus, developing their own agency. NCLB severely limited parental agency and placed academic outcomes under full control of state and federal agencies. Though not perfect, the ESEA focused on reforming education from a local level, whereas NCLB stripped the agency away from communities drastically influencing how and what students would learn.

By the turn of the 20th century, there was a political push towards a national education standard. By 2009, the United States began to implement various aspects of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) under President Obama. The objective was to “seek to ensure all students are prepared for all entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses” (Common Core State Standards, 2017). Despite the rhetoric around student achievement, CCSS “has very little to do with helping students develop their capacities and much more to do with empowering US businesses to dominate global markets” (Hagopian, 2014, p. 19).

With this trend, organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation heavily invested in Common Core State Standards research and development. In a speech at the National Conference of State Legislators, Bill Gates reasoned that standardized curriculum and assessment would “unleash powerful market forces in the service of better teaching. For the first time, there will be a large base of customers eager to buy products that can help every kid learn and every teacher get better” (Gates, 2009, para.

50). Though language arts and mathematics were the initial focus of CCSS, market place stimulation was the impetus behind standardizing education and solidifying neoliberalism's hold on education.

By the end of 2015, all but eight states had adopted some form of CCSS into their education policy (Common Core State Standards, 2016). The majority of school districts were administering tests based on the NCLB until President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December of 2015. Despite attempts to minimize oversight by the Department of Education, testing would still be required at the state level. The most disturbing aspect of President's Obama's education reform platform was the celebration of competition through *Race to the Top*, a "\$4.35 billion ... contest created to pit states and school districts against one another in a desperate struggle for scarce funds" (Hagopian, 2014, p. 9). States and local districts were encouraged to adapt standardized education to their needs; however, the nation was encouraged to compete with each other more than ever.

The historical implications of these policies directly relate to the impact neoliberalism has had on education. Parents who challenge the neoliberal aspects of education undermine the competitive nature of education. By rejecting the testing policy, opt-out advocates are able to tap into a capital specific to their community creating an opportunity for equitable education reform that serves the students rather than the market.

Community Cultural Wealth

Multiple critiques exist labeling education as a market place rather than a human right. Levinson (2012) points out that "some educational processes aim to obscure and ratify existing power arrangements" (p. 15). This argument materializes through the over-

emphasis on human capital. Due to the structural domination that exists within our education system and society as a whole, groups of people are prevented from advancing on the basis of merit alone. Simply stated, learning the skills deemed valuable by society does not guarantee success (Levinson, 2012). Moreover, these “skills are not objective phenomena that can be measured and accounted for, which individuals either do or do not possess. They are social constructs variable through time and space, and perceptions of skills are mediated by racial/ethnic and gender identity” (Allais, 2015, p. 249). Class inequities and worker exploitation are perpetuated through the overemphasis of marketable skills.

When society allows skills to exist in a hierarchical framework, power and equity shift at the will of those who seek to exploit the imbalance. Becker (1994) questions that “if capital exploits labor, does human capital exploit labor too- in other words, do some workers exploit other workers? And are skilled workers and unskilled workers pitted against each other in the alleged class conflict between labor and capital?” (p. 16). Approaching education with a human capital emphasis does not take into account the individual. When education is justified through a human capital perspective, knowledge and success (both academic and financial) become pre-determined by the market, utterly disregarding issues around access to the marketable skills, especially among minority communities.

Long before President Johnson ratified the Elementary Secondary Education Act, the deficit model guided education policy. The assumption from this model is that if underachieving students work harder, then they will succeed. To understand the underlining ideology behind the deficient model, Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of cultural

reproduction states that appropriation of the dominant culture through schooling and family leads to increased success within disadvantaged communities. Yosso (2005) argues that,

the assumption follows that People of Color ‘lack’ the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. As a result, schools most often work from this assumption in structuring ways to help ‘disadvantaged’ students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital. (p. 70)

Countering the deficit model within a cultural capital perspective changes the narrative to include the knowledge and experiences that come from all cultures. In disregarding cultural capital, deficit models are used to preserve racist systems that justify academic failure among minority communities (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014). This approach to education is problematic considering it promotes the dominant culture while ignoring societal structures and systems of power designed to disparage minority groups. Yosso’s (2005) critique is not limited to Bourdieu’s (1977) cultural reproduction theory, but is integral to the debate of whether or not education should be a market place or if education is a basic right.

From a theoretical perspective, Yosso (2005) offers Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as a framework for reevaluating the idea of knowledge as a form of capital. From a societal understanding, CCW is “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). When applied as a critique of the current competitive education system, community collaboration becomes an instrument of resistance against neoliberal ideas.

Yosso (2005) defines six tenets to CCW. The three most relevant redefining

academic success are *navigational*, *familial*, and *resistant* forms of capital. Navigational capital “refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Familial capital recognizes the importance of communal ties and the knowledge that comes from them. Lastly, resistant capital speaks to the knowledge communities have in order to challenge injustice. Though each of the three serve as a distinct form of knowledge, “these various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Rather than accepting accountability through competition and human capital benchmarks, organizations around the country have been accessing these three forms of cultural capital as a way to challenge policy in the pursuit of a more progressive approach to education reform.

Counter-movement

Due to decades of standardized neoliberal education policy, testing remains the dominant metric of accountability in the United States education system. In the search for an alternative to standardized education, parental push-back led to a form of resistance based upon boycotting annual state-mandated assessment. The first media coverage of protesting occurred in 2001, the same year NCLB codified high-stakes testing. An affluent community in New York state decided to opt 100 of their eighth grade students out of participating in national tests (Hefling, 2016). As a means for gaining a voice, parents in this community utilized both resistance and familial capital. While drawing on each other for knowledge and support, these parents rallied together as a community to challenge the system.

Over the next 15 years, parents and activists created contested spaces and accessed their navigational capital to organize across the country. These spaces were used to traverse unclear policy regarding test-taking requirements (Chambers, 2014; Deutermann, 2014; Hagopian, 2014; Mitra et al., 2016). By the spring of 2014, communities across the country were protesting on such a scale that the testing season was dubbed “Education Spring,” co-opting the 2011 Arab Spring movement (Hagopian, 2014). Naison (2014) argues that “never before in the state, or perhaps anywhere else in the nation, had a movement this diverse arisen to defend local control of public schools and fight back against uncontrolled testing” (p. 67).

In Chicago’s Garfield High School, for example, the movement gained momentum during this time. Initially, teachers were organizing amongst themselves to challenge policy that increased testing. Boycotts were further fueled by the high school parent teacher association engaging in a letter writing campaign to inform parents of their right to opt-out (Hagopian, 2014). Organizations, such as More Than a Score, reached out to 30 different schools across Chicago as a means of informing and empowering parents to challenge state mandated assessment. Examples like Garfield High School illustrate how a counter-movement to the Standards Based Accountability Movement has grown in national awareness. Stakeholders at various levels collaborated to change policy and empower parents to insert themselves back into the debate on education reform.

Despite research showing the the disadvantages of extensive testing, some argue that refusing to participate in state testing causes a ripple that undermines strides towards equitability in the public school system (Harris, 2015; Hefling, 2016; Leadership Conference, 2015; Russel et al., 2015; Taylor, 2016). Middle and upper-class

communities are able to use their financial and social capital as their own form of accountability. On account of the New York parent protests in 2001, some argued that the reason behind the national media coverage was due to the race and affluence of the community; so much so that social media responded with the label #Optoutsowhite (Taylor, 2016). Leading up to the opt-out movement, Apple (2001) anticipated this push-back by arguing that,

more affluent parents are more likely to have the informal knowledge and skills ... to be able to decode and use marketized forms to their own benefit. This sense of what might be called “confidence”- which is itself the result of past choices that tacitly but no less powerfully depend on the economic choices- is the unseen capital that underpins their ability to negotiate marketized forms and “work the system.” (p. 73)

Affluent parents have more flexibility in access to resources such as reliable transportations and afterschool activities as well as experience moving within education environments (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Leonardo & Grubb, 2014). This access translates into valuable capital for their children. With greater level of access, it is much easier to challenge standardized testing without fear of lowering the quality of education. By opting out, students from this demographic lose little in terms of education.

In contrast, low-incomed communities suffer from disparities perpetuated from a dependence on standardized testing scores. Stewart (2016) argues that students of color will suffer more if they choose to opt-out saying that “the gates to the middle class are full of tests that they will need to pass to be successful in life. Pretending we can wave away the obvious barriers to family economic security will hurt more people than help” (para. 30). The justification for boycotting standardized testing may have been rooted in challenging excess testing; however, it did not address how to fix a broken system.

Despite stakeholders from both sides agreeing that standardized testing is far from ideal, the discussion continues over whether ensuring standards is more important than supporting community involvement in education reform. According to Mitra et al. (2016),

tensions [that] include balancing the values of uniform expectations for testing across all students as compared to an individual student's educational needs along with parental rights to seek these individual needs. While accountability emphasizes the value of making sure all children meet a set educational standard, parental rights in education highlight the long standing value in U.S. education policies of allowing families and local communities to have a strong say in how to educate young people. (p. 4)

With current federal legislation allowing states to determine opting out policy, this debate is far from over. In some states, refusal to participate in yearly testing could result in legal and financial ramification (Mitra et al., 2016). In New Jersey, with or without parental approval, student refusal is reported as truancy. In Virginia, lack of test scores prevents high school seniors from graduating. And in Michigan, college scholarships are incentivized through state testing participation. Despite states such as California and Wisconsin supporting parental choice and state exemptions, opting out does not address the disparity still present across numerous school districts. Though creating a space for opting out "can promote parental agency, [...] by doing so, often preserve[s] systemic inequities" (Mitra et al., 2016, p. 4). There is no simple answer to whether or not opting out is a productive tactic for education reform as a whole. However, it does bring to the surface the need for increase parental agency and brings to light inequities in the public school system.

Summary

Throughout this literature review, I have attempted to draw parallels between

international development and education reform in the United States. The common denominator for both is the concept of success. In both the global market and education policy, success rests upon the assumption that investment without profit is wasteful. In order to ensure a productive, zero-waste investment, education, like the market place, must produce something that translates into profit. Standardized testing is used as quantitative evidence of how education funding is being utilized. Underperforming schools are seen as non-profitable and a drain on the economy. By resisting competition through opting out, issues of funding and equitability become jeopardized. Alternative forms of assessments and community engagement are needed to change the current education system as well as address root obstacles preventing equity in education.

CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT

The purpose of this field project is to highlight parental agency and community engagement in education through qualitative research. As discussed in previous chapters, the dominant metric for accountability has been measured quantitatively by systems embedded in competition. In order to hinder “‘reforms’ and policies that further connect the education system to the project of making our economy more competitive” (Apple, 2001, p. 4), the experiences shared by Bay Area community organizers served as the content for the RedefiningEd.com. This website is a testament to how communities are successfully using different forms of capital as currency for education reform. In creating a resource that shares the experiences of advocates battling inequities at the local level, other communities will hopefully be inspired to engage with the systems educating their children.

Development

The development of the RedefiningEd.com first began with identifying the community I was going to interview. As of 2016, California is one of two states to pass education legislation specifically addressing parental right to opt-out of state tests (Ed Code 60615, 1995). Though the website does not explicitly address opting-out of standardized testing, the state level precedent illustrates an intentionality around parental inclusion as compared to neighboring states that enact policy limiting parent participation. In regards to choosing organizations within the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), I decided to take advantage of my proximity by selecting among groups that serve families near where I live.

After limiting my scope to San Francisco, I sought organizations that serve two aspects of educational engagement: parental and community. I reached out to those that specialize in these areas, requesting interviews relating their experiences in collaboration at the local level. One of the major obstacles I had to overcome was confirming the participants. I began this process with the assumption that I would easily connect with at least one organization from each area of engagement. However, that was far from the case. In the end, four participants from two organizations agreed to be interviewed.

Organizations

The first organization was Mission Promise Neighborhood (MPN). In 2013, it was selected as a recipient of the Department of Education Promise Neighborhood Grant. Through the collaboration of 20 pre-established programs, MPN functions as a collective impact initiative that serves predominately Latino families within San Francisco's Mission District. Going beyond collaboration, Kania and Kramer (2011) argued that "collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants" (p. 38).

At the backbone of this initiative is the Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA), which in addition to working with adults towards financial stability "holds the initiative's progress moving forward" (L. Anderson, personal communication, March, 6, 2017). Though each of the 20 programs follow their own framework, they all collectively work towards the same goal of ensuring families have the tools needed "to build a stable life" through economic stability as well as safeguarding student "access to the quality education ... resources and supports they need to be able to go to college" (L. Anderson,

personal communication, March, 6, 2017). The end goal specific to academic success provides a pipeline for student access to post-secondary options of their choice.

The second organization interviewed was Parents for Public Schools-San Francisco (PPS-SF). Since 1999, they have sought academic success through “sharing knowledge, bridging communities, and informing policy” by offering support to “help families to navigate SFUSD enrollment, understand education policy and decision-making, and to become empowered, engaged members of their school communities” (Parents for Public, n.d.). The partnership established with the school district stems from PPS-SF’s ability to effectively communicate policy and disseminate information relevant to parents. In regards to this field project, I was interested in their social media pilot program, #Boardwatch. One of the program’s goals has been to increase transparency and accountability. The second purpose was to incorporate live tweeting at the meetings for people to follow along and engage in real time. PPS-SF wanted to provide an outlet for parents to increase awareness of the decisions being made that directly affected their children.

Interviews

The basis for the interview questions drew from Yosso’s (2005) *navigational, familial and resistant* forms of capital. With each organization, I structured the questions addressing how each organization navigated the San Francisco Unified School District, built relationships from a familial understanding of community, and lastly, resisted current education policy that was relevant to their communities. Though each organization did not speak in detail about all three forms, the combination of their responses offered tactics and tools I was able to translate into resources for the website.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Analysis

Academic success can be elusive when goals and objectives differ from person to person. In my approach to analyzing the interviews, I chose to focus on the three forms of Cultural Capital Wealth examined in Chapter 3: *familial*, *navigational* and *resistant* (Yosso, 2005). Many interpretations can be drawn from the knowledge and experiences of the participants. However, I am applying this theoretical framework to the participants' responses as a way of guiding my understanding of how they specifically utilize various forms of capital while engaging with education policy in their communities.

Familial Capital

When we look at public education, national and state policies tend to be the driving force behind reform with minimal regard for local perspectives. By approaching education from community-lead initiatives, we begin to understand the power of the knowledge that comes from communal ties cultivated at the local level. Familial capital legitimizes these ties as a source of knowledge, which, in turn, is converted into currency in the battle for equitable changes in education. Two stages of strengthening familial capital are, first, laying a foundation at both organization and community levels, and, secondly, creating collaborative spaces for holistic relationship building.

One of the best pieces of advice I received in my early training as an educator was to try not to reinvent the wheel. The context behind the advice was to remind me that many teachers have worked long and hard hours creating worksheets and lesson plans, and I should not be afraid to tap into those resources. The same is true when laying the

foundation at an organizational level. Laura Anderson, Education Manager for MEDA -- the backbone agency for MPN -- explains how the Promise Neighborhood Grant awarded to MPN continued initiatives started by the School Improvement Grant such as funding school coordinator positions. Rather than attempting to reinvent the wheel in the Mission District neighborhood, the goal of MPN “was to continue some of these things that are already started by a prior grant that normally get interrupted or cut off” (L. Anderson, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

Unfortunately, the Promise Neighborhood Grant only covers the cost for school coordinators in the four schools served in the MPN initiative, leaving six other schools to seek outside funding. In the case of PPS-SF, the idea for #Boardwatch was modeled after a neighboring organization, GO Public Schools. Through the latter organization’s own successful social media initiatives coupled with shared goals of transparency and equity, PPSF-SF was able to co-opt the GO Public School approach in order to better serve their community.

A second key tactic for laying a supportive foundation at the organization level is active collaboration. Laura Olivas, Leadership Program Manager at MEDA, shared how the difficulties she experienced during the recruitment process for the first parent cohort of the Community Advisory Council. She explains that, “I didn't tap into my team. I didn't tap into the staff. I didn't include the parents. Going at it alone didn't work. I lost sight of the concept that we are a network and ... a family” (L. Olivas, personal communication, March 6, 2017). By approaching recruitment alone, Olivas was overlooking information and advice that others could have offered. After personal

reflection, she understood that seeking out personal support would lead to a connection and investment of more people to the goals and overall purpose of the program.

In addition to constructing a solid foundation at the organization level, parent outreach requires the same thoughtful care. Celina Ramos-Castro, Family Support Manager at MPN, explains that “success, as the first layer, is to assure that families have the basics... and then we can build upon those things ... so that they can reach their goals and dreams for themselves and for their children” (C. Ramos-Castro, personal communication, March 6, 2017). She further explains that outreach should not be limited to providing resources, but should also include support in understanding the processes in accessing these services. In the Bay Area, affordable housing is an example of how communal ties play an immense role in how we can redefine success in education. Though housing may seem to be an indirect factor in the quest for academic achievement, homelessness has direct implications on student success in the classroom. Fortifying familial capital through ensuring the basics serves to establish relationships and trust with parents, which opens the door for conversations directly related to academic support for their children.

Once a solid foundation is constructed at both the organization and community levels, organizers are able to transfer into the second stage of strengthening familial capital. By providing spaces where parents are open to asking questions and identifying needs specific to their community, organizations can be more responsive to the needs of their communities as well as provide additional clarity around policy and procedures relevant to their parents. The result is an increase in parental agency and empowerment to

share the tools they have learned with others in their community. This process will help create a cycle of familial capital.

Navigational Capital

In the discussion of human capital in Chapter 2, I outlined how the overemphasis of skills for profit has served as an impetus to fortifying competition within education. In order to redefine academic success beyond fiscal gains, Yosso's (2005) concept of navigational capital serves as a theoretical framework in which we can alter the narrative to include the skills used in "maneuvering through social institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). The tactics the participants use to navigate education spaces illustrate how the theory of navigational capital is successfully being utilized at organization and community levels.

At the organization level, groups such as MPN are designed to collaboratively work alongside multiple organizations. An integral component in establishing and maintaining successful partnerships requires clearly defined roles. Ramos-Castro shares that "if MPN and MPN Schools would have had a prior meeting to discuss roles, it could have provided clarity on roles and responsibilities, also allowing for alignment between the school's FSC (Family Support Coach), Parent Liaison, and Community School Coordinators" (C. Ramos-Castro, personal communication, April 17, 2017). Because these conversations were not held at the beginning, the initial stages of collaboration among MPN Family Support Coaches, school level Parent Liaisons, and district level School Coordinators were clouded by confusion and redundancy.

Looking outside collaboration amongst organizations, traversing parental spaces requires the recognition of grey areas. Engaging with parents is a complex task, so

expectations should be set accordingly. Just because services are available does not mean parents will immediately flood in to access them. Ramos-Castro explains that “there is a lot of grey where families may not be ready. How can I assure that families feel helped so that they make the decision to do something?” (C. Ramos-Castro, personal communication, March 6, 2017). Supporting parent agency is key to not only to relationship building but also and navigating through community spaces.

By acknowledging the complexity of parent outreach, the participants agree that one of the most effective ways to reach communities is to meet the communities where they are -- in their own spaces and on their own terms. Miranda Martin, Director of Policy at PPS-SF, advises that “the best way to reach people... is (not) holding some meeting somewhere and asking people to come because that's adding something new to their routine or their life,” but to meet them where they are (M. Martin, personal communication, April 21, 2017). Aside from scheduling conflicts, additional hurdles among parent groups and the organization are magnified by cultural and linguistic differences. PPS-SF has found multiple electronic platforms to be the most efficient way to reach their diverse parent groups.

Websites such as Storify.com and SurveyMonkey.com allow PPS-SF to compile information on a large scale. In order to communicate directly with parents, secondary platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WeChat in addition to traditional printed materials allows for breadth of information dissemination. In terms of creating a space to do this, Ramos-Castro emphasized that “if you learn the process, and ... share that knowledge... it builds more community and we help each other out as a community”

(personal communication, March 6, 2017). The combination of outreach and community building through navigational capital paves the way for community sourced reform.

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital speaks to how communities draw upon their experiences to challenge systems of power in order to bring about change. By using the knowledge and experiences directly from the community, the success achieved will reflect the agency and self-determination from the inside rather than implementing change from outside perspectives. Deliberative democracy offers a theoretical approach to this tactic of resistance by recognizing community members as both stake holders and decision makers. The decision making process becomes a collective effort where “arguments offered *by* and *to* participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality” will be included (Elster, 1998, p. 8).

Though not an explicit example of deliberative democracy, PPS-SF was successful in supporting their parent’s as stakeholders and decision makers in order to change admission requirements at a public school. Lowell High School is one of the most sought after, competitive schools in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). Among the application process, interested students submit annual standardized test scores. Due to a shift in policy in the spring of 2015, California public schools replaced one standardized assessment with the Smarter Balanced Assessments Consortium (SBAC), a computerized approach to yearly testing.

In the first year of field testing, SBAC scores were not reported. As a result, all students applying to Lowell High School submitted scores from the Terra Nova test, a standardized test traditionally administered by private schools. The following year,

SFUSD reported student SBAC scores; however, parents understood that the test was still in the field testing phase. Some parents “were told the scores didn't count, some schools still didn't have adequate technology, ... and families were given no indication that scores would be used to determine Lowell admission” (M. Martin, personal communication, May 8, 2017). Parents assumed that middle schoolers applying to Lowell for the 2016-2017 year would have an opportunity to take the Terra Nova exam.

However, when the SFUSD published the Lowell 2016-2017 admissions packets, SBAC scores were listed as the only test option for SFUSD students. Parents were dismayed at this change in policy, citing their assumption that the 2015-2016 SBAC scores were extraneous. Based on parent response, PPS-SF advocated for students to have the choice of sitting for the Terra Nova exam. In the end, the school board extended the Terra Nova test to public school applicants for one more year, allowing students to submit the higher of the two scores on their applications.

A second example of resistance came the same year when the MPN Community Advisory Council (CAC) campaigned for Proposition N (Prop N), the Immigrant Parent Right to Vote measure. Parents believed that they had a right to vote in district level education policy regardless of their residency status. Through the space provided by MPN, the “parent council petitioned to have parents vote in school board elections, to elect our school board officials” (L. Anderson, personal communication, April 17, 2017). Laura Olivas described how 12 parents from the Mission District comprising the CAC identified the need for more involvement in their own schools to be “decision makers.” Not only was the group successful in the passing of Prop N, but also they now are represented as “part of implementation committee to ensure that they’re at the table

ensuring their safety and designing the process by which they will be voting” (L. Olivas, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

As an alternative to approaching resistance, Martin (personal communication, April, 21, 2017) offers the term *critical friendship* as a means to simultaneously cultivate relationships among stake and power holders while maintaining expectations of accountability. She further explains that,

the critical part comes in when there are decisions made that we don't think are in the interest of parents or we think there is something that hasn't been considered by the district... We are usually respectful in the way we do it but also persistent. (M. Martin, personal communication, April 21, 2017)

Within the context of resisting divisive education policy, community organizers are able to utilize resistant capital to advocate for their communities while sustaining partnerships with those in positions of power that are able to implement the change. Resistance capital is not limited to challenging the system alone, but enacting relevant change that benefits the local level.

Conclusion

From the beginning of this paper, I have argued against standardizing education. Due to the overemphasis on competition and human capital, public schools in the United States have become assembly lines rather than institutions for imparting knowledge. That being said, it is important to be realistic and acknowledge that there is a need for ensuring equitable metrics and standards in the education system. Kumishiro (2004) theorizes that,

schools should use standards in paradoxical ways, namely, by teaching students to reach them but simultaneously supporting students in seeing where and how the standards have gaps, where they include and exclude certain perspectives and experiences, advance certain goals, privilege certain groups, and so on. (p. xxv)

By recognizing this paradox, we as a community continue to hold the complexities needed to simultaneously eliminate and maintain standardization within education. Rather than attempt to reform education from the side of testing and standards, we need to research how and why education inequality has become a social problem. As a society, we need to recognize the disparities that exist at the community level in order to mobilize, form and implement a plan for resisting systems of oppression (Blumer, 1971). Moreover, we must meet the communities where they are if we are going to enact effective change (Alinsky, 2010).

During the process of researching and writing this paper, I have reflected on the idea of checks and balances in our education system (K. Parks, personal communication, March 17, 2017). In creating spaces for communities to resist divisive education policy, we are adding an additional element to accountability. Community-based organizations that cultivate critical friendships with policy makers redistribute the concentration of power from being in the hands of one group.

In the words of Kevin Kumashiro (1994): “progressive change happens not merely when a strong individual assumes a position of leadership, but more importantly, when each one of us assumes the responsibility to lead, to take action, to build a movement” (p. xxxvi). Much more work needs to be done at both the grassroots and academic levels. As illustrated in this paper, communities have been collaborating for decades. To truly redefine academic success, we must begin with the voices of the communities.

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