Neoliberal Dis/Investments at a Charter School Teaching the Whole Child

by

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ABSTRACT

There has been a robust and ongoing investment in demystifying the discursive and material conditions of neoliberalism. Scholars in communication have done much work to explore the various rhetorical effects and processes of neoliberal discourses and practices. Many of these case studies have tethered their concerns of neoliberalism to the conceptualization of the public sphere. However, most of this research rests on the absence of those that try to "make do." By privileging rhetoric after the fact, such studies tend to provide more agency to ideology than everyday bodies that engage in their own rhetorical judgments and discernments. In addition, scholarship across the board tends to treat neoliberalism as something dangerously and uniquely new. This framing effectively serves to ignore the longer history of liberalism and liberal thought that paved the path of neoliberalism the United States is now on.

With these two broad concerns in mind, this study centers a case study of a charter school in South Phoenix to focus on the vernacular rhetorics of those on the ground. Guided by public sphere theory, critical race theory, and intersectionality, I take up rhetorical field methods to explore how those involved with this charter school navigate and make sense of school choice and charter schools in the age of neoliberalism. Within this context, field methods permit me to locate the various discourses, practices, and material constraints that shape running, being educated at, and selecting a charter school. These various rhetorical practices brought to the forefront an interest and concern with the school's whole child approach as it is rooted within Stephen Covey's (1989) seven habits. Additional qualitative data analysis brings about two new concepts of neoliberal scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity. Finally, I discuss the

implications of these findings as they speak to how rhetorical field methods, supported by

intersectionality and critical race theory, invites critics to center more agency on people

rather than ideas, and how that makes for a more complicated and nuanced neoliberal

reality and modes of resistance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"The better the breed, the bigger and better the returns in every aspect."

It is 1921, and the above words are spoken by Richard B. Haydock in Oxnard, California in a speech to the local rotary club. With these words, Haydock is not speaking about the pedigree of the town's cattle, but of its school-aged children. During this time, Oxnard is attempting to shape its identity and future. As more Mexicans and Mexican Americans move into the east side of town, the White, west side of town is concerned about the negative impact this increasing population is going to have on the community. This White anxiety is felt most strongly in its local elementary school (García, 2018). As the principal of the school, Haydock is seeking to convince business leaders that Mexican American children are not of "good stock" and are a threat to the breed of future American citizens and citizenry. Comparing these children to cattle, he advances that "some of these kids are going to become valuable assets, and some are going to become mighty expensive liabilities" (Haydock, 1921, p. 3). The conclusion is simple: if we care about the future of Oxnard, we should be cautious of educating Mexican and Mexican American children. Why? Because they are not worth the investment. Haydock's influence in his community led to a history of residential segregation in Oxnard so that the "expensive liabilities" would have their own school and the White students could thrive in their own (García, 2018).

This one historical moment begins to establish a number of important national threads. First, this moment acknowledges that our history of K-12 education in this country is one continually re-defined on racism, because if a society and its people are racist, so is education (Asante, 2005). Haydock's concern about cultivating a future

American citizenry is one that is racially exclusive and can be traced to the values inherent in liberal thought and practice. As expanded below, the rise of liberalism is heavily tied to the rise of capitalism. This means that education in the U.S. must be understood through a racialized and classed lens because the history of education is one of residential segregation, compounded with racism. Second, our history of K-12 education is fraught with what we would call neoliberalism. The logic in Haydock's argument of assets, investments, and a public "profit" are an early manifestation of a neoliberal belief that our daily decisions should be guided by economic metaphors and systems. Much work has already been done to connect the dots between neoliberal logic and how it has played out in K-12 schools and higher education through critiques of standardized testing, charter schools, and recent forms of school choice, like vouchers (e.g., Apple, 2004; Convertino, 2017; Hermansen, 2014; Ravitch, 2016).

The entry point I take acknowledges and builds off this work. The project is also invested in taking a stronger historical-contemporary dialectical approach to how we understand the relationship between (neo)liberalism,[1] education, and what it means to be active within the public sphere. To do so, I begin with the premise that, in the U.S., education became a powerful and pivotal space for cultivating, circulating, and upholding neoliberal logics. It is not enough to point to current K-12 conditions as a *symptom* of neoliberalism but a *producer* of its logic as well. Support for this argument begins in the following pages with a historical tracing of (neo)liberalism and its relationship to

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[1] Throughout this project you will see me use (neo)liberalism. This is a short-hand argument that acknowledges the historical and ideological connections between liberalism and neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is not radically different from liberalism, but the product of its long-term growth and expansion with some nips and tucks there. When I am specifically referring to what makes liberalism culturally and materially distinct from neoliberalism, I will use the terms separately.

capitalism and education within the context of the U.S. The subsequent chapters will provide theoretical insight and analysis to make sense of these histories via a case study of a local charter school in Phoenix, Arizona.

Shifts from Liberalism to Neoliberalism

The idyllic rise of the public sphere rests on the emergence of liberalism as a social framework and capitalism as its economic partner. Unlike England, limited by its long history of monarchy, the colonization of the U.S. was the fresh breeding ground for a liberal democracy (Russell, 1945). This historical fact forces us to recognize how liberalism itself has different manifestations depending on where you are in time and context. Within the U.S., liberalism can be understood as a philosophical, political, and social theory that rejects the divine right of kings to rule, is rooted in Protestant values (and sometimes stands for religious toleration), places a value on commerce and industry, favors the middle class over that of the aristocracy, and has a tendency toward democracy (see Locke, 1689/2015). The subject of liberalism, the "liberal," is seen as a "consumer of freedom" (Foucault, 2008, p. 63). In practice, this means that the liberal has the freedom to buy and sell the market, property rights, discussion, and expression. The ability to own and keep private property was also central to early liberal thought and practice. Thus, the liberal subject, or liberal White male specifically, was one with private property and the ability to actively participate within capitalism.

Early U.S. liberal thought assumed that men are born equal but then become unequal through their circumstances. This has historically required governing, scientific, and legislative bodies to legitimize the "inferiority" of specific identities and backgrounds, much like Haydock's comments above. The Constitutional, legal, social,

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and political history of the U.S. is densely soaked with John Stuart Mill's (1859) discernment that, when it comes to liberty and freedom, we desperately want it for ourselves but are not inclined to want it for others – the paradox of the liberal (individualism) in a democracy (governance by and of the collective). Additionally, liberalism "claims neutrality about the choices people make" and "encourages loose connections" (Deneen, 2018, p. 34).

Liberalism, in how I understand it, is not something to be idealized. In *Liberalism & Social Action*, John Dewey (1935) argues that early liberals lacked a historic interest and sense. Their specific understandings of individuality and liberty were historical conditions, relevant only to their time. He specifically articulates, "But they [liberal theorists] had no glimpse of the fact that private control of the new forces of production, forces which affect the life of everyone, would operate in the same way as private unchecked control of political power" (p. 36). In light of this, as a coherent system of thought, liberalism, can "no longer be considered progressive or emancipatory" (Ginits, 1980, p. 218). In general, U.S. liberal discourse is not something to be considered neutral. Its class demands alone rest on racial and gender bias and exclusion, valuing certain bodies and ways of living over others. In the end, liberalism began building the winding road that would ultimately lead us to neoliberalism.

Some key thinkers have argued that narrating the history of neoliberalism is simple: its origin story is not too complicated and fractured to trace (Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2003). On the one hand, this may be very true. The coining of the term "neoliberalism" can be traced to German sociologist and economist, Alexander Rüstow (Hartwich, 2008; Lazzarato, 2015; Reinhoudt, 2018). In 1938, during the Colloquium of

Walter Lippmann, social theorists and economists gathered in Paris, France from August 23rd to the 26th to debate and reimagine liberalism in the age of growing fascism, communism, and socialism. The conference was put together in response to Walter Lippmann's (1937) *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society* as a rupturing point in how academics and economists talked about the relationship between society, the state, and the economy (Ebeling, 2017). When Rüstow defined neoliberalism, he did so to establish a "Third Way" between the failure of classical liberalism and the economic uncertainty of socialism. Rüstow tended to agree with the Marxists that capitalism is faulty and needs to be tossed but did not trust socialism to function on its own. Accordingly, like Dewey (1935), he argues that capitalism recreates the reappearance of the old powers of aristocracy and monarchy but through economic capital (Hartwich, 2008).

According to Daniel Stedman Jones (2012), Rüstow's noting of an ideological and social shift is just one phase of neoliberalism. The second phase of neoliberalism brings American economic and social theorists more overtly into the mix by generating political and intellectual coherence to the point that it "grew into a recognizable group of ideas, and also in a movement" (p. 7). The work of economist Milton Friedman (1962) summarizes this theorizing phase when he argues that the market itself, its practices and logic, can deliver social goods and the very idea of "the good life" itself. The third phase of neoliberalism comes during and after the 1980s. It is this narrative and version of neoliberalism that many are most familiar with and is centered within critical studies of the public sphere and neoliberalism more generally (see Asen, 2017; Asen, 2018; Dingo, 2018; Harvey, 2005). These three shifts and changes within political, social, and

economic life did not begin overtly. Within the U.S. specifically, "neoliberal ideas usually crept in under the radar, subsumed under the banner of rugged individualism or libertarianism, a movement distinct from, though overlapping with, conservatism" (Jones, 2012, p. 9). Mid-twentieth century American economic theorists, building off the foundation constructed by their liberal predecessors, slowly and, at first, covertly made the neoliberal bed that we all now are having to lie in.

On the other hand, I find that the contemporary tracing of neoliberalism is increasingly messy requiring scholars to "recognize the manifestation of multiple neoliberalisms" (Asen, 2018, p. 2). Regardless of such claims, scholars tend to settle on an agreed diagnosis of neoliberalism. For communication scholars specifically, neoliberalism, in the context of the U.S., threatens, undermines, and seeks to erase or capitalize on democratic values and practices (e.g., Asen, 2017; Enck-Wanzer, 2011, Hermansen, 2014). This claim is found in a growing consensus that neoliberalism and its hyper focus on individualism, selfishness, and privileging competition over equity and equality is shifting authority from governmentality through the democratic state to one of capitalism and economic values (Brown, 2015). Perhaps put most succinctly, neoliberalism espouses that politics, the economy, and social issues can all be approached and solved through market theory (Davies, 2017). It has been subsequently concluded that neoliberalism is "the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity" taking democratic values down with each greedy gulp (Brown, 2015, p. 44). Unlike such claims, I do not assume a singular nature of neoliberalism. I do, however, believe that it continues to reshape public life in different ways across contexts and spaces of everyday life.

For the purposes of this project, I understand neoliberalism as a re-investment and re-imaging of subjectivity. As I will unpack in more detail in the following dissertation, as "access" to the "democratic" public sphere is increasingly granted to diverse bodies, the liberal and capitalist structure rooted in U.S. history has hegemonically responded by demanding a performance of the historical liberal subject: a White, masculine, and heterosexual individual who functions within the Protestant work ethic (for work that connects neoliberalism to whiteness, see Asante, 2016; Rennels, 2015). In short, the neoliberal public sphere is more inclusive than the liberal one, in terms of symbolic representation, but limiting in relation to subjectivity. Whiteness, within a neoliberal framework, allows for "diversity" to be created but solely defined in economic terms, making publicity an economically determined concept. Finally, since it does not appear the same across contexts and time, I limit my exploration to the more recent movements of neoliberalism within public K-12 education in the state of Arizona. Within the field of education, neoliberalism is tethered to the growth, emergence, and expansion of charter schools.

The Role of Education and Charter Schools

As liberalism and capitalism were on the rise in the U.S., White, land owning politicians at the time spoke to the imperative role education would play in cultivating a patriotic, engaged citizenry. For example, John Adams articulated, "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expense of it." The U.S. saw its first public school emerge in 1635 and following the Land Ordinance of 1785, which granted public school financing for new territories, there was a concertive effort to attach a thriving democracy to a public education system

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(Tyack, 2001). For John Dewey (1916), democracy is more than a systematic approach and implementation of a government. Instead, it is a way of being within a society that seeks to create an associated living that is cultivated through communicated experience.

Yet, given the brief history provided on liberalism, John Dewey's concept of democracy and education are opposed to the values and practices of liberalism. Dewey does note in 1916 that there is a dialectic between the individual and community. In terms of education, fights for school choice starting in the 1920s pulled that dialectic to the side of the individual, at the expense of the communal. By the 2000s, one of these forms of school choice that are widely debated are charter schools. Beginning in the 1960s and early 1970s, charter schools were a response to a historic education system that was seen as anti-progress and risk taking. In today's world, many see them as a fix to a broken, dusty, and failing public-school system (see Nathan, 1999). Critics of charter school point to their existence as a neoliberal tool to further teeter us towards the liberal roots of individual-based achievement and freedoms rather than communal thriving (e.g., Ravitch, 2016; Spring, 2011).

The first charter school policy was created in Minnesota in 1991. Based on the premise that conventional public schools[2] have their limitations (funding, bureaucracy, banking-models of education that focus solely on testing, racism, homophobia, classism, etc.), charter schools were created to be public schools that would expand school choice opportunities for parents and their children. As charter schools have since expanded and continue to grow across the U.S., understanding their proliferation and impact requires a

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[2] I follow Jeanne Powers's (2009) in using "conventional" over "traditional" as a label for public schools, since traditional implies that charter schools are something different than conventional public schools.

case-by-case analysis since charter schools are only coherent in name only: they vary by policy, practice, and state oversight (Powers, 2009). In the context of Arizona, charter schools have quite a bit of freedom when it comes to oversight and accountability. In recent years, this lack of oversight has become an interest to journalists, community members, and politicians, and political/research organizations (Chingos & West, 2014; Hall, 2017; Knopp, 2008; Rofes & Stuhlberg, 2004; Schneider, 2019). Behind California and Florida, Arizona ranks third in the number of charter schools, but first in the number of students who attend such institutions (Hall, 2017). Arizona's charter schools currently educate about seventeen percent of all public-school students, roughly 200,000 individuals (Price, Ryman, Harris, & Woods, 2018).

Broadly speaking, charter schools have slowly taken on several characteristics that point to their role as a mechanism in a neoliberal world. While some scholars argue that they are a slippery slope to outright privatization of all public schooling (Mead, 2003), others couple them with other forms of school choice (i.e., vouchers) as a similar indicator for their harmful effects (Asen, 2017). Additional criticisms of charter schools bemoan how they have been given more freedom than conventional public schools which makes it easier for politicians to ignore their negative outcomes (e.g., low test scores, continued racial segregation, and the like) (Chapman & Donnor, 2015). Specific to concerns of racial segregation, Ansely Erickson (2011) advances that as a medium of school choice, charter schools worsen the reality of highly segregated schools. More to the point, Erickson argues that charter school choice muffles segregation or treats it as a natural cause of people wanting to be around others like them, weakening democratic connections across experiences and social identities.

Finally, other scholarship addresses the arguments made by politicians which advanced a neoliberal shift in public education: treating students as capital to make them good workers, a hyper focus on personal preference, limiting bureaucratic control and regulation, and claims to innovation that help make education a money-making enterprise (Apple, 2004; Lubienski, 2006; Mora & Christianakis, 2011; Ravitch, 2016; Spring, 2011). Chapter three will unpack the history of school choice, define its various forms, and settle on a richer review of charter schools in Arizona. For now, the groundwork has been laid to mark neoliberalism's continued presence in the world and how charter schools are one context in which the conversation seems to be ongoing.

However, this project rests on the claim that neoliberalism alone cannot fully account for the growth and proliferation of charter schools. First and foremost, because of the history of liberalism in general, school choice is not new within the ideology of neoliberalism (see Mill, 1859/1956). The difference exists when the rationale for having more choice is less about collective concerns and more about creating a competitive choice market for the few to get ahead (Labaree, 1997). However, neoliberalism within the sphere of education is not and currently cannot be fully defined through marketization. At most, education within neoliberalism is a quasi-market: the state still pays for education while parents make choices (Lubienski, 2006). Consequently, more than neoliberal values are at work or some watered-down version of it is being employed.

Second, given that neoliberalism across time has internal inconsistencies, this paradoxical potentiality of neoliberalism requires that we also acknowledge additional ideological investments. For the specific case of charter schools, we may couple the

logics of neoliberalism with the values of neoconservatism (Apple, 2004). Broadly

speaking, neoconservative values seek to establish a certain value system within the

education system that rhetorically hails for us to return to some idealized former past

when American (and its schools) were successful. Moreover, other political value

systems all have different perspectives on charter schools within a neoliberal culture. For

example, progressives who support charter schools see them as a means to maintain a

democratic society by using them to decrease inequality through innovative pedagogies

and integration (Raymond, 2014; Rofes & Stuhlberg, 2004). This results in neoliberalism

not currently being privy to just one political party, which will create variations in what is

meant by neoliberal in both theory and practice (Scott, 2011). Consequently,

neoliberalism and its discourses become rhetorical play-doh for various bodies and

subjectivities to utilize, embody, and disavow.

Third, building on this paradoxical nature of the various forms of neoliberalism, a

certain level of identification must occur for someone to embody its values and logic. In

two separate case studies in different states, previous scholars find that in Arizona

neoliberalism has been successful in allowing parents to frame their individual schools

and teachers as the issue, not the massive state disinvestment of education (an indicator

of neoliberalism at work) (Convertino, 2017). On the flip side, authors Cucchiara and

Horvat (2014) interviewed parents to unearth how they make educational decisions in a

northeastern state in the U.S. What they find is that parents saw school choice not for the

"selfish" modes of neoliberal competition but to illustrate their liberal (or progressive)

values of integrated, diverse public schools. In the end, these two separate studies add

nuance to the *how* and *why* parents make the choices and rationales that they do when it

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comes to navigating a neoliberal culture – further illustrating that neoliberalism needs to be supplemented with additional political and ideological worldviews.

In effect, when scholarship claims that neoliberalism is evil because it is stripping the collective mentality of a democratic society, such claims ignore the actual choices and agency of everyday people. Such broad brushes assume that all individuals within a given neoliberal state employ and value logics of competition, individuality, and metaphors of "the market" within their everyday lives and do so for the same reasons. Through such work, we are constantly letting the complexity of power leak through our fingers to make more deterministic and dichotomous conclusions of conventional public schools are good for democracy, charter schools are a threat. As critical race scholars would remind us, conventional public schools, built on the values of liberalism, for decades systematically excluded the bodies, knowledge, and histories of people of color in the classroom (see Gillborn, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2016). Subsequently, one must be wary of also creating a false dichotomy or tension between liberalism ("good") and neoliberalism ("bad"), especially within the context of public education (see Deneen, 2018; Winslow, 2015).

Therefore, I focus on one charter school in Arizona: Humanitas Academy.[3] Humanitas espouses a civic and holistic approach to educating the whole child – making it a mission-based rather than for-profit charter school. Instead of promising good test scores, this school, relying on the work of Stephen Covey's (1989/2004) seven habits of successful people, seeks to make their scholars active, thoughtful, and agentic leaders within their lives and communities. In framing alone, this one charter school offers an interesting case study on the relationship between (neo)liberalism and these schools of

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[3] This is a pseudonym of the school.

choice – especially since those involved with the school value it greatly (see chapters 4 and 5). The study also centers the everyday utterances, responses, and rhetorical judgments made by the students, parents, and staff within this school. By localizing power, I wish to prioritize the complexity of rhetorical invention and effect by the bodies that do within educational contexts and neoliberalism more broadly (Kiewe & Houck, 2015). Most of the texts gathered and created for this study were done through rhetorical field methods. Following others (e.g., Lozano, 2019), my work further discovers how rhetorical inquiry can continue to explore how the "combination of material and discursive constraints that imbue delimited places with meaning and power" influence and shape communities and spaces of K-12 education (Senda-Cook, Middleton, & Endres, 2016, p. 24). Furthermore, given the multiplicity of neoliberalism, how it can have internal inconsistencies, and is employed by people across political and social investments, specific theories are needed to meet symbolic and material power as utilized on the ground. Thus, my understanding of rhetoric, (neo)liberalism, education, and the public sphere are read through the lenses of critical race theory and intersectionality. This same approach is used for subsequent analysis chapters. Before beginning to deliver on this promise, I conclude this portion with an overview of the coming chapters.

Chapter Overview

Chapter two addresses literature specific to critical racial and intersectional approaches to rhetoric, vernacular rhetorics, and rhetorical field methods in relation to (neo)liberalism, public sphere theory, and education. Based on this literature review, chapter three offers a historical tracing of legal precedents from the federal level, to the state level, and to the specific, local context of the case study charter school. In general,

this chapter explores how school choice has been defined over time and what it looks like in the specific context of charter schools in Arizona.

Next, chapter four explores Covey's (1989/2004) work on the seven habits in general and within education specifically and the day-to-day of schooling at Humanitas. Although a charter school, which was established by neoliberal logics, this project assumes that charter schools can and do hold the promise for liberating, anti-neoliberal practices and beliefs. Since Covey's work plays an integral part of the school's broader curriculum, it became evident how significant the seven habits are to this site and thus this study. In general, I argue in this chapter how many of Covey's foundational claims to the habits are rooted within a liberal logic that has helped support and bolster racial and class-based inequality. However, when the seven habits are engaged within the school and reflected on by parents, they show promise through providing racially marginalized kids with voice, agency, and choice. Moreover, the chapter also considers additional pedagogical moments that are not directly tied to the seven habits to illustrate potential anti-neoliberal practices and beliefs.

Chapter five pulls the scope of analysis out to offer a wider view of the larger structures and discourses relevant to the school. Specifically, I offer a summary of how the (grand)parents in this study make sense of school choice generally and how this landscape has important implications for teachers. It is also in this chapter that I offer two new concepts that were derived during data analysis: neoliberal scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity. In brief, I argue that neoliberal scapegoating relies on symbolic rhetorics to construct who is "the bad guy" within this study's larger context. By exploring who gets blamed for what, I can speak to the silences that exist and how

this may illuminate the hegemony still at work within neoliberal discourses. Dialectical vernacular complicity is a materially inspired concept that acknowledges the limits of anti-neoliberal choices not only for the school itself, but those who depend on it to help secure a better future for their children and grandchildren.

In the conclusion, I propose theoretical and practical implications and then remarks on further research. First, the theoretical implications speak the importance of intersectional work in relation to neoliberalism and neoliberal contexts. As will be expanded further, one of the accomplishments of neoliberalism is to effectively erase the inherent intersectionality in our cultural fabric to craft a singular sense of self, identity, and subjectivity. In this section, I specifically propose what I term a post-liberal critique. This orientation to engaging with neoliberalism invites scholars to historize their understanding of neoliberalism to account for the continuing influence of liberal thought. Second, given the charter school's mission and the goals of its founders, my fieldwork notes space for practical change in relation to broader pedagogical orientations. Following the work of Casey (2016), I unpack how the school would benefit from a pedagogy of anticapitalism antiracism – which would speak to the school's existence as a neoliberal phenomenon and the material conditions of its student body and greater community. Based on these reflections, the study ends with a call for continued inquiry to address the spaces and ellipses that exist within this project.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF RACIAL AND INTERSECTIONAL ORIENTATIONS TO PUBLICS, NEOLIBERALISM, RHETORIC, AND METHODOLOGY

There is a bit of a long pause. A pause for a breath, a moment to collect one's thoughts or to second-guess them. Breathing out slowly, she tells me that she chose a charter school because her children were bullied at their local conventional school. That *she* was bullied as a child because of her accent and nothing was done. Her parents did not have a choice then, she does now. "I don't want them to be like Mommy," she says firmly. A choice needed to be made to help keep her kids safe at school so that they could learn and create a better life for themselves. A life better than what she feels she is giving them now. As a mother, she wants her children to be empowered, to live their best life. For her, this means a trajectory from K-12 education to college, and a steady, well-paying job – a slice of American pie wrapped in the mythos of the American Dream.

In Evelyn's[4] life right now, in this moment, choice is liberating, agentic, and filled with promises. Through individualized choices, people like Evelyn continue to navigate K-12 school choice in Arizona so that their children may have better options than they did, even when their choices may be limited. "Choice" does not seem to discriminate in Evelyn's story. Regardless of her social identities, as a working class, Mexican American woman, she has the agency and privilege to have a say in where her kids receive an education. Guided by the path provided by (neo)liberalism, Evelyn and her family can foresee a better future for their children.

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[4] This is a pseudonym. All interlocutors' names throughout the dissertation have been given different names.

Yet, to help make sense of Evelyn's experiences and others situated in this study, we must begin from the assumption that (neo)liberalism (and its seduction of choice), education, and the concept of the democratic public sphere rest and continue to exist on acts of exclusion. These moments of exclusion have come from the racist, sexist, ableist, ethnocentric, and classist structures above, around, and below and are reinforced within daily interactions. The power at work within these spaces and concepts is complex. The bodies doing, speaking, and coexisting within these structures of power are as equally complex. From a communicative standpoint, language is central to how power functions in these contexts: creating, negotiating, and entrenching meaning.

Historically, within the field of rhetorical criticism, the persuasive language utilized to shape, alter, and negotiate reality were studied from prominent speeches that often came from politicians and other important public figures (Wichelns, 1972; Wrage, 1947). Over time, rhetorical scholars began arguing and demonstrating that persuasive utterances (and their larger, encompassing speeches) were not neutral spaces of rhetorical effects and judgements. Often hidden within speeches were ideological investments that sought to persuade audiences of a particular agenda or worldview (Wander, 1983). Culminating into the critical turn within rhetorical criticism, this stance on the power inherent in many communicative acts illuminates how certain bodies and their ways of thinking, behaving, and believing became dominant and how rhetoric is used to mask and perpetuate power, inequality, and hegemony (McKerrow, 1989). For my purposes, taking up critical rhetoric as a commitment means exploring both the symbolic and material functions of rhetorical invention, judgment, and effect.

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Specifically, I proceed with the commitment that critical rhetorical scholars need to focus on the stable and the economic (Cloud, 1994). By acknowledging that discourse is not the only thing that matters, critical rhetorical scholars can seek to locate how structures themselves become (co)producers and agents within ideological and hegemonic dominance. From this point of view, language alone does not impart power, politics, and inequality but also becomes sustained and normalized through stabilizing structures like the economy, law, and education. Bringing the material and symbolic into conversation with each other allows the critic to uncover discourses of power that are dually productive and oppressive (McKerrow, 2001; Wood & Cox, 1993). Within this line of thought, there is a direct challenge to what kinds of rhetorical discourses "count" and matter within academic inquiry. This critical rhetorical approach is thusly supported in the following chapter with perspectives on public sphere theory and neoliberalism. To best theoretically understand these concepts, critical race theory and intersectionality offer imperative insights into the complexity of power, agency, and the relationality between structures and individuals. Based on these insights, a rationale to situate vernacular rhetorics is offered to privilege the mundanity of everyday rhetorical interactions by people navigating systems of neoliberalism and education, much like Evelyn. The chapter concludes by accounting for the imperative of rhetorical field methods and a review of methods.

(Hi)stories of Exclusion: Public Sphere Theory, Neoliberalism, and Education

Due to the racial project of the U.S. itself, neoliberalism, and education, I follow recent calls for rhetorical scholars to interrogate rhetorics of race and rhetorical practices of racializing, while understanding that race does not operate in isolation from other

material and symbolic factors (Flores, 2016). This centering of an intersectional racial criticism requires addressing the complexity of power across contexts and spaces. For example, although some may argue that it is only privileged (White) bodies that get to employ school choice, others have noted the liberating possibility and agency still provided to bodies we may read as oppressed (Stuhlberg, 2015; Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999). Evelyn's story above is just one example of this nuance. Consequently, a simple comparison of privilege across race does a disservice to the actual material, rhetorical practices of everyday people. Therefore, to make sense of the idea of the public sphere, neoliberalism, and education, I situate critical race theory and intersectionality as my primary guiding theories.

Critical race theory (CRT) is a line of theorizing that grew out of critical legal studies (CLS) due to an increased call for a specific look at the relationship between race and the law (Taylor, 2016). Over the decades, CRT has grown outside its original text of inquiry, legal precedent, to account for how race and racist logics appear in other facets of material and symbolic life. One specific undertaking has been within communication studies and rhetorical criticism specifically. While rhetoric may be the methodological basis for CRT, it also becomes a vital tool in the (re)production of racial ideologies and racist values, especially within the context of neoliberalism and education (Griffin, 2010; Olmstead, 1998). This connection between race, communication, and rhetoric, permits us to explore how communication can function to inform attitudes and beliefs about race, *through* rhetoric (Rossing, 2010).

Connecting these facets together leads to a reimagining of CRT to locate how everyday people make sense of legal discourse while acknowledging that the law is not

the only symbolic and material phenomenon that seeks to (re)define race, racism, and inequality (Hasian, Jr. & Delgado, 1998). In the context of the current project, this opens the space for structures of education, everyday utterances, and actions of people involved with public education to be racial, racializing, and racist (Gilborn, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2016). CRT in relation to public sphere theory is crucial as we continue to acknowledge how the public sphere has been (and continues to be) exclusionary and emerged in relation to ideologies of liberalism that did not grant freedom and liberty to specific racialized bodies. This also means locating how people find the agency to move through racist structures, like education, to evoke change while simultaneously reifying those same hegemonic constraints (e.g., Apple, 2012). Education scholars taking up CRT have made similar claims to ensure that all studies of education do not focus solely on larger social and political trends but how individuals and communities (particularly disenfranchised ones) navigate and move within a system that (re)produces social and political inequality, if not engaging in outright erasure (for example, Smith, 2004). Yet, we must be cautious about essentializing race and treating it as the only pertinent identity marker at work within (neo)liberal and educational structures and discourses.

Intersecting identities of privilege and oppression shape the decisions people make and how their actions may be read (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Taking up intersectionality as a critical lens means acknowledging that people's identities do not work in isolation of each other but build upon each other. This becomes salient within a neoliberal context when we acknowledge how this ideology has organized political and material life by obscuring the inherent connections across religion, ethnicity, economic class, nationality, race, gender, and sexuality (Duggan, 2003). It also means engaging

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with tensions of acknowledging how most of us are dually oppressed and privileged (Jones & Calafell, 2012). As an orientation to scholarship, intersectionality must be more than a "pop-bead" analysis: the listing of identities to illuminate an experience (Griffin & Chávez, 2012). For this project, I understand intersectionality explicitly as an epistemology, ontology, and ethic (Nash, 2019). Intersectional analysis implores an ethic of care that can be traced to these three critical characteristics. First, from an epistemological perspective, intersectional analysis must go beyond status quo stories or the "worldviews that normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and standards so entirely that they prevent us from imagining the possibility of change" (Keating, 2013, p. 35). This argument pinpoints the struggle intersectional projects have with evoking structural change. In short, moving beyond status-quo stories challenges us to move from critique and reflection to praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Second, intersectionality as an ontological reality requires that we locate and account for what has been termed "thicker intersectionalities" (Yep, 2015). Articulated by Gust Yep, thicker intersectionalities ask us to focus on contradictions, ask about cultural practices, acknowledge emotional modalities, and never solely individualize an act, experience, or utterance. For these first three expectations, intersectionality does not exist solely as a thing, a framework to be taken up. It acknowledges the lived circumstances of intersectional experiences across identities and the duality of oppressed/privileged. Understanding intersectionality as something that is established through discourse also brings to the body to the forefront (Otis, 2019). Specifically, centering the body as a onto-epistemological site of knowledge production and rhetorical invention locates how "oppression comes to bear materially upon marginalized bodies"

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(p. 16). Such a focus means focusing on what intersectionality *does* rather than what

intersectionality *is* (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). This third expectation brings me to

the final argument that is central to my framing of intersectionality for this project: an

intersectional approach must account for the "isms" in connection to the individualized

reality and/or experience. With the tempting hyper-focus on the individual experience,

intersectionality can be taken up to explore personal lived experiences without tying it

back into the structures that (re)enforce power dynamics.

I specifically advance that having CRT in the picture reminds intersectional

scholars of how structures matter. The "coining" of the term through Kimberlé

Crenshaw's work is demonstrative of this. In her 1989 piece, Crenshaw's central thesis is

that Black women's experiences are unique because of the both/and of their race in

relation to their gender. She locates this claim within a prominent structure in the U.S.:

the legal system. From this perspective, identity has an interconnected relationship with

structures and as such, individuals with their multifaceted identities are a structural

phenomenon. For example, in the context of conversations around race, speaking to the

individual actions of a racist must always be brought back to how that individual is a

product of structures – a conversation about a racist must also be centered on racism. If

the dialogues focus on the racist, it is easy to slip into assumptions about identity, leaving

the structural unchallenged. In effect, an ethic of care is needed to ensure this does not

happen. I use these ethics and perspectives brought by CRT and intersectionality to frame

my reading of public sphere theory and neoliberalism.

Critiques of the Public Sphere and (Neo)Liberalism

Emerging from the work of Jürgen Habermas (1962/1996), the study of the early

public sphere rested on how power shifted from the aristocracy of monarchy to how

capitalism permitted the growth of a merchant class. The public sphere came into

existence through the conversation of private individuals as they gathered in coffee shops

to deliberate and cultivate public opinion (Habermas, 1974). In Habermas's (1962/1996)

historical accounting of the growth of the public sphere in Europe, he prioritizes and

gives name specifically to a bourgeois public sphere. The bourgeois public sphere

> may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a
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> public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the
>
> public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules
>
> governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of
>
> commodity exchange and social labor. (p. 27)

In this formulation, the public is something different from private individuals and

the state: the public is meant to function as a mediator between these two entities

(Warner, 2002b). Rooted within liberal values of freedom and liberty, this public sphere

sought to grant freedom to individuals so that they can be autonomous and free of public

authority, oversight, and control (Habermas, 1974; Locke, 1689/2015). The public

sphere, as imagined by Habermas, privileges the private person as they gather with others

in community with an independent existence outside of the state to employ rational

modes of deliberation on matters of significance to them (Warner, 2002a). However, this

over-idealized public sphere has since been heavily critiqued by other scholars. These

critics note that the public sphere has never been open to everyone as particular groups

and experiences have been routinely denied access to the public sphere and that deliberative practices of rationality can be used to silence or delegitimize particular ways of living and speaking (Fraser, 1992; Jasinski, 2001; Phillips, 1996). Specifically, we can be critical of the liberal and capitalist roots of Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere as liberalism in general overlooked the nature of communication – conditions never matched or permitted the actual practice of the ideal, liberal public sphere (Hauser & Blair, 1982).

Although the emergence of the public sphere is intertwined with theories of liberalism, recent rhetorical scholarship on the public sphere has invested energy in critiquing the rise, growth, and the hegemony of neoliberalism. What some scholars may paint as a neoliberal public sphere, Habermas (1974) called the refeudalization of the public sphere (Asen, 2017). For both groups, this shift in the relationality of people occurred when the public and private become interwoven through the exchange of economy and social labor. In practice, refeudalization exists when "organizations strive for political compromise with the state and with each other, excluding the public sphere whenever possible" (Habermas, 1974, p. 54). This shift has resulted in the public body of private people who relate to each other becoming "a public body of organized private individuals" (p. 55). A shift to no longer valuing "public people" to prioritizing the "private individual" is just one indicator of the rise and ideological investments of neoliberalism.

Much work has already been done to clarify distinct themes on the challenges that neoliberalism brings to the public sphere. First, subjectivity has been historically defined by public sphere scholars as something that is diverse, relational, and transformative,

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while neoliberalism underscores a subjectivity that is motivated by selfish interests (Asen, 2017). Michel Foucault (2008) and later Wendy Brown (2015) unpack the role of subjectivity by noting how neoliberalism has made everyday people a *homo oeconomicus*, a selfish human consumer, instead of a *homo politicus*, a self-governing, democratic citizen concerned about the welfare of others. Hence, the public sphere, with its liberal values, theoretically prioritized the *homo politicus*. However, it is vital to note that the growth of liberalism in the U.S. rested on representation based on property and capital rather than personhood, making it antagonistic to democratic forms (Deneen, 2018). In many ways, *homo politicus* has never actually existed in true form in the U.S. because of our attachment to private property. Because of this history, our politics have been heavily entwined with the politics of the economy which values selfish competition to make winners and losers. Meaning, it is safe to claim that "[d]emocracy [in the U.S.] was never a liberal project" and that liberalism was never a democratic project as well (Gintis, 1980, p. 222).

Consequently, the clear distinction or shift noted by Wendy Brown (2015) of neoliberalism to favor the *homo oeconomicus* subject over that of the *homo politicus* seems to miss the historical roots established by liberalism, which granted "publicness" to a person based on their ability to be *homo oeconomicus*: a White, Protestant, landowning male. Some scholars recently have also sought to explore and clarify this historical precedent. For example, building off Negt and Kluge's (1993) call to stop idealizing any form of counterpublicity that still focuses on a democratic publicity that aligns with capitalism and its value systems, Cloud (2018) advances for a working-class public. According to Cloud, in theory (and in practice), a working-class public sphere

functions within a publicness that is tied to a "socialist, anti-capitalist political project" (p. 52). I agree with Cloud's assessment and wish to follow suit by accounting for how we might need a form of the public sphere that gets us beyond capitalism *and* liberalism. Such a claim rests on the observation that liberalism (and capitalism) created the tools and conditions to create a hegemonic, power-hungry nightmare of whiteness and capitalism (Deneen, 2018).

Second, pre-refeudalization public engagement rested on the aims of working towards a public good through cultivating relationships to address common concerns (Dewey, 1954). In an opposing view, a neoliberal model of publics asserts a "limited view of knowledge as direct experience as the basis for public engagement…[B]ecause they ask people to make decisions outside of their direct experiences" (Asen, 2018, p. 3). This is an approach that values Western, White, and masculine ways of thinking. For example, the employment of the mind-body dualism that values detached "rationality" and devalues more experiential ways of knowing. Finally, public sphere scholars have historically noted a relationship between agency and structure (Winslow, 2015). For them, a public is something both individually and collectively worked towards through a myriad of opportunities and constraints (Asen, 2018). Neoliberalism has effectively altered the structures of daily life and what agency looks like (e.g., Asen, 2015; Dingo, 2018; Gent, 2018; Mack, 2016). With the false promise of more agency, neoliberalism entices people to employ its logic at the expense of reaffirming hegemonically racist, sexist, and classed structures, like education. Because of this, some level of skepticism seems plausible when we hear stories like Evelyn's.

In the end, since the permeation of neoliberal thought was at one time covert and is now deemed a "political swearword," we must acknowledge how neoliberalism is inherently rhetorical (Duggan, 2003; Hartwich, 2008, p. 28). Rhetorical concepts and constructs like property, liberty, freedom, capitalism, individualism, and privatization not only describe the world around us but also aim to cultivate just one way of approaching and organizing social, collective life. Their persuasive nature convinces us how we should or ought to live our "best" lives. Overtime such concepts become naturalized and normalized in such a manner that they become difficult to challenge (due to their "reasonableness") and, therefore, incredibly important to analyze. It is because of this rhetorical nature of neoliberalism that it has been deemed "doxa": the application of "practical" concepts that people utilize in their everyday lives without much thought or questioning (Bourdieu, 1998, 2003). Although Evelyn never uses the term, she speaks to its existence as a framework for decision making. Moreover, commitments to CRT and intersectionality call for a focus on the embodied, material rhetorical responses and acts of invention within neoliberal K-12 spaces of education. A turn towards situating and centering vernacular rhetorics is how we can get to locating the complex nuances of power, identity, and agency of everyday people within these contexts.

Vernacular Rhetorics

From a critical rhetorical orientation, Ono and Sloop (1995) argue that vernacular speech is (re)produced or resonates with local communities who are marginalized or oppressed. From this perspective, rhetoric is used to not only oppose dominant logics but to affirm and support local and marginalized forms of thinking, knowing, and living. A couple of years later, another approach to vernacular rhetorics came to fruition, but did so

without a nod to Ono and Sloop. In 1999, Gerald Hauser advanced for his own call to vernacular rhetorics through the framework of publics and public sphere theory. Here, the vernacular can help rhetorical scholars locate how people's everyday actions (re)define a given public. Coined a vernacular model, Hauser (1999) advocates that rhetorical scholars should be locating the ongoing debates about issues that bear on people's lives. However grand this second call may sound, it can become oversimplified as a "common resource" for non-official rhetorics and subjectivities (Howard, 2008). Consequently, a dialectical-vernacular can be discerned as the tension that exists between the institutional and the vernacular. The line connecting these two subjectivities acknowledges how the two categories are not always clear-cut (Howard, 2008). More importantly, such a lens demonstrates a relationality between the official and vernacular or the intersectionally dominant and dominated.

Based on this review of vernacular rhetorics, I posit that Hauser's (1999) work serves as a rationale for finding how people audience, interpret, and use rhetoric within their everyday lives, while Ono and Sloop (1995) provide the critical framework needed to do such work. More specifically, through Hauser (1999) a vernacular rhetoric model looks for active members and how they frame their public experience, yet this engagement must be conscious of power, marginality, and inequality in what kinds of bodies and utterances get to count, even within the vernacular (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Locating vernacular rhetorics illuminates agency on behalf of those not widely seen within the larger public. With CRT and intersectionality in mind, within the broader conversations of the public sphere and neoliberalism, vernacular rhetorics that are centered in this project are not only widely unseen/unheard but move and breathe in

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bodies that live in an area built on exclusion and are complexly packaged privileged/oppressed people. The next sections contribute to this understanding of vernacular rhetorics by making a call for rhetorical field methods as the means to locate such rhetorical bodies and practices

Rhetorical (Field) Methods: An Ecological Approach

Provided my understanding of neoliberalism in relation to the above theories, I believe that methods equipped to account for discourses across the macro- and micro-level (and how these rely on logics of persuasion and judgment) are needed. In this sense, I utilize methodological tools that allow me to focus on how truth is rhetorically presented both objectively and subjectively across official and vernacular discourses (McGee, 1990). Thus, I center the methods of rhetorical criticism broadly with those of rhetorical field methods.

First, I employ the traditional rhetorical method of gathering various fragments of texts to craft one of my own (McGee, 1990). By inventing my own rhetorical text for inquiry, I create a broader picture of education reforms to link macro utterances about economic and social changes to the local and their responses, actions, and interpretations (Pezzullo & Hauser, 2018). Informed by the critical approach to rhetorical criticism, this method helps me explore how ideology and power are presented and reproduced within rhetorical strategies and utterances (McKerrow, 1989). More directly, my method relies on the gathering of various texts about education policy that speak to public education, charter schools, and (neo)liberalism. By relying on the internet and other archival sources, I actively sought texts that speak to each of these areas of interest. Doing so allows me to garner a sense of how politicians, public advocates, and other leaders of

educational reform speak about public education and charter schools. By privileging

rhetoric-after-the-fact and of official discourses, I can elicit a larger framing mechanism

for current beliefs about school choice in the age of charter school reform and

neoliberalism. Such data is drawn from publicly available discourse about charter schools

broadly (legislation, news sources, and the like) and the case study school centered in this

project.

Second, I also utilize the methodological and theoretical assumptions of rhetoric

in situ (Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2011). Broadly, the placing of the critic's

body in the field expands, alters, and challenges traditional approaches to text, judgment,

audience, and the critic. In general, a sense of immediacy is added to the text, audience,

and acts of judgment (Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook, 2015). With such a tool,

I can gather a sense of rhetorical effects and judgments as they occur in the moment, are

audienced, circulated, affirmed, and negotiated. This becomes more salient as studies

about the public sphere require a focus on the communicative act or rhetoric-in-action

instead of a focus on it after-the-fact (Hauser & Blair, 1982). This approach of both/and

towards rhetoric after-the-fact and rhetoric in the moment understands rhetorical action

(both material and symbolic) as an ecology: what happens from "above" impacts and

shapes the doing "below" and vice-versa (Pezzullo & Hauser, 2018). Thus, I draw upon

methods of fieldwork, observations, and interviews to gather in-the-moment rhetorical

inventions and responses.

Rhetorical field methods and qualitative inquiry can hold much in common, when

bridged with a critical orientation, that brings a focus on everyday encounters, the

constructing of experience from a myriad of utterances and embodiments, and how

communication and rhetoric are performances – brining a material perspective to how

rhetoric is more than just discourse but contexts, bodies, space, and acts of

(dis)engagement (Endres, Hess, Senda-Cook, & Middleton, 2016; Ria & Druschke,

2018). Reflecting back to the work on and about vernacular rhetorics, engaged rhetorical

work enables me to see rhetorical texts in process, as they are being (co)created, making

texts in the field even more fluid and immediate (Hauser, 2011). Subsequently, what

becomes a text ripe for rhetorical inquiry is expanded while also making audience

members active (co)creators of texts (Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook, 2015).

Finally, this method asks us to rethink the role of the critic. Once displaced and

seemingly "objective" in approach, field methods challenge rhetorical scholars to be

more reflexive, especially when moving between field and text (McKinnon, Johnson,

Asen, Chavez, & Howard, 2016; Zdenek, 2009).

From such a position, locating intersectionally vernacular ways of creating,

processes, affirming, and negating rhetorics requires me to get into the field. Rhetorical

field methods may be employed by a scholar interested in gathering texts and/or one

wishing to locate and observe embodied acts (Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook,

2015). While engaged scholarship encourages rhetorical critics locate vernacular and/or

outlaw discourses, or how vernacular subjectivities engage with modes of judgment

specific to concerns over justice, its methodological and metatheoretical assumptions

force us to become reflexive about "outing" certain discourses, judgments, and logics

(Phillips, 1999; Sloop & Ono, 1997). A primary concern here rests on the fact that

"outing" certain discourses may be damaging to a given community, especially if they

may be oppressed and marginalized (Phillips, 1999).

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In summary, commitments to CRT and intersectionality, both in theory and as reflected in the context and bodies of this study, necessitate a specific approach and engagement with the public sphere, neoliberalism, and education. Evelyn's opening vignette only briefly illustrates the complexity of how power and agency are at work within this local charter school. Given these historical, theoretical, and methodological approaches, I now pivot to situating the context in which this study takes place and then conclude with my methods.

Exploring and Studying in South Phoenix

South Phoenix has a history of racial conflict and tensions, if not just outright acts of White supremacy. First, by the 1890s, environmental racism in the area, following the building of a railroad, effectively split the greater Phoenix city from the "White part" and what is now known as South Phoenix (Bolin, Grineski, & Collins, 2005). Specifically, those deemed not White by early Phoenix laws were regulated to the southern part of the city (below Van Buren Street); meaning, that up until the 1970s, this part of Phoenix was the only place in which racially marginalized people were able to purchase homes as they were victims of harassment from Klu Klux Klan members and other White supremacists (Whitaker, 2005). Consequently, South Phoenix is an area with high numbers of racially underserved people (with the highest currently being Latinx and/or Hispanic) and, subsequently, higher numbers of households under the poverty line due to systematic racism (e.g., lack of access to rights, property, jobs, education, and so on) (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

Since the 1990s, the area has undergone quick development along the Baseline Corridor with the construction of new commercial properties and housing developments.

As expansion has continued, more recent conflicts and concerns have arisen with the expansion of a light rail system. Two community members have specifically noted how the light rail would reduce Central Avenue from four lanes to two. It would also take four years to complete, "a timeline that will force many of us [in South Phoenix] into bankruptcy or to relocate," because construction would limit access to the businesses that line Central Avenue (Contreras & Waldrep, 2018, para. 3). More specifically, small, local businesses have articulated frustration at the light rail company, Valley Metro, since they had no idea the change would result in traffic directions to be rerouted (Boehm, 2018). In 2019, the expansion of the light rail was overwhelmingly supported in a public vote (Short, 2019). The material consequences are yet to be seen. To summarize, South Phoenix is the product of years of racial discrimination, resulting in higher poverty rates, and more contemporarily, continuing tension between local community members and outside forces. These historical influences have also left an impact on education in the area.

Within the larger South Phoenix area, the Roosevelt Elementary School district, founded in 1912, currently educates 9,000 students (Altavena, 2019). For the 220 square miles of the Phoenix Union High School District (which includes Phoenix and South Phoenix), most students are minorities and increasingly Latinx. Over the past years, the school district has been subject to news coverage due to poor spending and budgeting by the district school board, which has led to job cuts (Carranzer, 2016). Things have begun to bubble over to the point that in early 2019, Dino Corando, the superintendent for the school district since 2017, was placed on administrative leave (possibly due to teacher complaints) (Altavena, 2019). This is just the cherry on top of a school district that

reports higher spending costs than similarly sized school districts, while producing lower test scores. Indeed, many of the schools in the district consistently receive "D" and "C" letter grades from the state with a few "Fs" (Davenport, 2018).

These tensions are surfacing only a couple of years into a push in 2014, by legislators and local community members to re-energize public education in the district. The goal is to have the state help create 25 high performing schools in the next five years (Santos, 2014). These organizers are seeking to grow the number of charter schools in the area to help increase testing scores and school rankings in the area. Specifically, charter schools are encouraged to "choose their instructional models with an emphasis on arts-infused lessons, science and math, or a mix of virtual and brick-and-mortar classrooms" (para. 6). State legislators were hoping that within three years, these new schools will boast an "A" letter grade. By the 2019-2020 school year, this plan has not been met. On the one hand, this lofty goal is difficult to imagine within the context of a state that cut more educational spending than any other state in the U.S. following the Great Recession (Russakoff, 2018). While, on the other hand, such broad claims ignore how other factors outside the physical space of a school building impacts students' ability to learn and perform well on exams.

Established before this specific call for charter schools to redeem the Roosevelt Elementary School District, Humanitas Academy opened its doors in 2012. As a charter school, the founders sought to create a school to center a liberal, humanist pedagogy within a climate of high-stakes testing. Much of this goal within the school manifests through Stephen R. Covey's (1989/2004) work on the seven habits of highly effective individuals. These seven habits consist of: be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put

first things first, think win-win, seek first to understand then to be understood, synergize, and sharpen the saw. In classrooms, I saw manufactured cutouts with cute animals on them representing each of the seven habits along with each hallway being named after one of the habits as well. Given the presence of these texts across materials in the school and within discursive interactions (including email correspondence between myself and the school's founder), I do situate Covey's book as a vital text within this study – especially since Covey's work has become its own capitalist enterprise rooted within liberal thought. Moreover, after one school in North Carolina saw promise in the seven habits turning around their school, an additional book, *The Leader in Me: How Schools Around the World are Inspiring Greatness One Child at a Time,* inspired other educators to bring the habits into K-12 education. Subsequently, an entire new enterprise was born out of Covey's original work, but with a focus on transforming educational spaces. I will speak more to Covey's work in chapter four.

Given this context surrounding the case study being offered and that I openly engaged with and shared spaces with others, qualitative tools of reflexivity came to the forefront. I embrace this concept not as a methodological assumption but engaged praxis (McIntosh & Hobson, 2013). Self-reflexivity has been rooted within this project from the beginning because one of my early key informants about this school is one of my committee members. We had met one afternoon to discuss another project I was working on and I started talking about my interest in charter schools when he mentioned that his children attend one. By the next month, I attended my first school board meeting at this school and was intrigued and hooked on what I was witnessing in those meetings. From this first introduction, I was fortunate enough to meet one-on-one with, Dr. Wyatt, the

founder of the charter school for an interview. By the time the interview was over, I had

his full support to continue my research interests at the school. Provided this background

information, I proposed two guiding research questions:

RQ1: How do everyday people (parents, teachers, students, and staff) navigate

and sense-make public education in an age of charter schools and

(neo)liberalism?

RQ2: Can something created through and by neoliberal logics exist and function

outside of it?

Methods

To help work towards this goal, a myriad of data has been collected to generate a

"chain of rhetorical exchanges" across (con)texts (Kiewe & Houck, 2015, p. 15). The

project began with the first school board meeting I attended in January 2018. Between

January 2018 and January 2020, I went to eight school board meetings. Each meeting

ranged from about an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes. Fieldnotes from the meetings

focused not just on the content of the meeting but interactions and responses from the

board members. Although open to the public, I was often (if not most of the time) the

only member of "the public" present for the meetings that I was in attendance for. In

general, each meeting began with a roll call, review of the last meeting minutes, a

discussion of the school's test scores and financial standing, and by the fall of 2018 a

sustained conversation about the new high school that they started creating. With one

exception,[5] I would drive home and type full notes from the meeting (based on my

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[5] My meeting notes from April 2018 were typed the morning after the meeting.

handwritten notes). Transcribed fieldnotes from school board meetings resulted in 82 double-spaced pages.

On April 23, 2019, after the vision for this dissertation was created with the guidance of my committee, I met with Dr. Wyatt again to discuss access in relation to the expanded nature of the research project. He was enthusiastic about my study and offered full support. In that meeting, he agreed to offer me additional access to the morning assemblies, the weekly teacher leadership meetings, and classrooms. After my meeting in April with Dr. Wyatt, I started observing the daily morning assemblies from May 6 until May 17, 2019. These daily morning assemblies typically began around eight in the morning. I would normally arrive around 7:30 to take fieldnotes about student, teacher, and staff interactions. This also gave me access to meeting and chatting with parents which sometimes led to "interaction invention," or moments when I was able to inquire into people's interpretations of communicative behaviors to account for rhetorical judgement as it happens in the moment (Hess, 2018, p. 232). The actual assemblies begin once a small group of students would walk onto the stage in the cafenasium. One student on the stage either holding a microphone or standing behind one on a stand announces, "Humanitas scholars, what do we do?" The room explodes with students from kindergarten to eighth grade reciting the student pledge statement: "I am a Humanitas Scholar. I am proactive by taking responsibility for my life and making good choices. I begin with the end in mind by defining my mission and goals in life…"[6] Next, the

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[6] "…I put first things first by spending my time on things that matter most. I have a win/win attitude by seeking solutions where everyone can win. I seek first to understand, then to be understood by listening to other people's ideas and feelings. I synergize by working together to achieve more. I sharpen the saw by

students offer some type of performance: a song, skit, or reading of a poem or quote. Each performance is based on one of the core habits created by Covey (1989/2004).[7] Most of the time the skits were relatively short (less than five minutes). The assembly continues either with the "Star Spangled Banner," "You're a Grand Ol' Flag," or "America the Beautiful" as led by a trio of students singing along with the track through their microphones. Those present are invited (if we so please) to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. After taking twenty seconds to reflect on our day, the students are led out in single file lines headed by their teachers. Beginning again in August 2019 through January 2020, I attended 20 morning assemblies. I was able to transcribe my handwritten fieldnotes the same day of each morning assembly. In total, my typed fieldnotes yielded 100 double-spaced pages.

Eight parents or grandparents were interviewed for this project. I obtained most of the interviews through network sampling after Dr. Wyatt recorded a video message of me talking about the study and sending it out on an app called ClassDojo. From the video, I received four of the interviews, one of them sent me an additional interviewee. Another was interviewed after meeting during a morning assembly and two interviews came after one of my committee members introduced us at a separate morning assembly. Following a semi-structured list of questions, I interviewed most of these individuals over the phone

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regularly renewing my mind, heart, body, and spirit. As a Humanitas scholar I am here to live, to love, to learn, and to leave a legacy. I am a Humanitas scholar!"

[7] During my time at Humanitas, these morning assemblies changed slightly over time. As the student population continued to grow, the cafenasium could not hold all K-8 students. Thus, starting during the fall of 2019, on Mondays and Fridays it was K, 1st, and 3rd. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, it was K, 2nd, 4th grades. They also changed in terms of what was chanted. Also beginning in August of 2019, the assembly would begin with a scholar asking, "Humanitas scholars who are we?" The rest would respond, "We are wise, we are intelligent, we are noble, we are generous, we are strong. We are the wings of Humanitas!" They would then pivot to the scholar mission stated noted above. I keep the above as is to focus more on effects and the general flow of a morning assembly.

with one occurring face-to-face. Parents and grandparents were asked questions like, "Imagine someone completely unfamiliar with K-12 education comes up to you and asks you what it is. What would you tell them?" and "How is it that you came to enroll your kid at Humanitas?" (See Appendix A). Interviews ranged from 21 to 52 minutes with an average time of 35 minutes.

The majority of the parents and grandparents identified as lower-middle class with some noting a working-class background (e.g., having a single income). Six of the eight identified as female. The following breaks down the racial and ethnic identifications of the interview participants: White (n = 2), Black (n = 3), Asian (n = 1), White and Jewish (n = 1), and Hispanic (n = 1). Interview transcripts yielded 166 pages of double-spaced content. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by me with one exception. One of my interviewees spoke with a naturally low and deep voice that the recording equipment could not pick it up. That interview relies on my handwritten notes. When it came to interviewing parents, there is a rather important missing piece. The majority of the school's student body is Hispanic and/or Mexican American. During the morning assemblies, I heard a number of parents speaking Spanish to each other. I was even introduced to three parents with a young scholar translating for myself, Dr. Wyatt, and the parent. Due to poor planning on my part, I was never able to interview a Spanish-speaking parent. This is more than a limitation of the study, but a painful gap in the daily life and rich fabric of the school.

Next, I partook in seven days of classroom observations between November and December 2019. Most of my observations focused within one classroom, but also gave me access to observe four specialty classrooms as well: physical education, music, art,

and a computer lab. My time in the classrooms ranged from observations to participatory involvement. I was at times invited by the teacher to help with assignments and various classroom activities. This allowed me a chance to interact some with the scholars at the school all while seeing the day-to-day practices of the school. In total, I spent 26 hours conducting classroom observations which resulted in 129 pages of double-spaced, transcribed fieldnotes.

During the course of this project, there were three public events I attended that became relevant to the study. The first was a community meeting at a local church led by a group of parents wanting to inform people about the increasing privatization of education in the state. While at this meeting in the summer of 2018, I was able to hear some personal narratives from former charter school students and a current charter school teacher. The second public event occurred September 2019. This was the state-wide charter school board meeting where Humanitas made its first pitch for expanding into a high school. Finally, Humanitas held a fall festival in November 2019. I was invited by one of the interview participants to attend. These observations have been included in analysis since they offer nuance and layers to the other data and texts involved. These public events took over four hours combined and resulted in 29 pages of double-spaced transcribed notes. Overall, I spent almost 130 hours over two years gathering data.

Data analysis of fieldwork began with me doing line-by-line process coding of almost 500 pages of double-spaced content. Process coding invites the research to ask, "What is going on here?" during each line of coding (Saldaña, 2016). Subsequent codes (often with the first word ending in "ing") are thus agentic, centering the ideas and actions of those on the page. These codes were written onto blank 3x5 notecards that I cut

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in half. These were used to create themes and categories driven by the data but informed by the theories and research questions. Once this process of establishing commonalities and themes across codes was complete, I ended up with 31 unique categories. I then created a codebook in Google Drive to organize my categories and specify their definitions and any specific properties, if the category was broad and/or layered. I chose this data analysis process for all qualitative data to ensure that it was the data that told the story in relation to the context and theories at work. The qualitatively driven chapters (four and five) are the product of this data analysis process that generated unique experiences and concepts specific to the thoughts, arguments, and behaviors of all of those I encountered during the last two years. The theories discussed in this chapter were then used as the compass to navigate the rich terrain located in the data.

Therefore, the following chapters start exploring the variety of data and texts gathered. Before getting into the qualitative and field work data, analysis begins by attending to the legal and historical nature of charter schools by situating them in larger rhetorics of "school choice." Much like the public sphere in Europe, the early groundwork for school choice begins with liberalism and continues today, in a different form, in the age of neoliberalism.

CHAPTER 3: MAPPING AND SITUATING SCHOOL CHOICE AND CHARTER

SCHOOLS IN U.S. HISTORY AND ARIZONA

As a politic and practice, I assume for this project that public education is an inherent good that is federally protected, and state mandated. Following the Civil War, seceded states were required by the federal government to meet several demands in their new state constitutions. One of the stipulations for these Southern states was to include explicit clauses about how education was to be offered by the state and accessible to all state citizens (Black, 2018). Over the time, both previous Union states and more recent state additions to the country have included such clauses. In light of this expectation established during reconstruction, all states in the United States have constitutionally granted public education to all their citizens (Black, 2016). This means that, since the post-Civil War era, education is a state right, protected by the federal government: to be a state in the U.S. requires granting constitutional rights between citizens and educational opportunities. Of course, our history makes access to "citizenship" convoluted, if not overtly violent, and the same can be said of how education is defined and supported. Charter schools have become a recent attempt to redefine what education should look like and do. To help make sense of the role of charter schools within the larger K-12 education system, the following chapter unpacks the history of school choice within the U.S. and the rise and role of charter schools. In this case, the narrative will begin within the context of liberal thought.

School choice, or the concept of one having a few school options to select from, is not a recent concept. As far back as liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill (1859), there have been claims that if state funded and/or supported public schooling were to be

offered, it must be just one option among others. According to Mill, he believes having one form or system of education will stifle individuality. Thus, any

> education established and controlled by the state [or government] should only exist, if it exists at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence. (p. 129)

Clearly Mill does not discuss school choice in the way many talk and think about it today, but that is largely due to how different public schooling systems look. School choice has been redefined over the years to match the material reality of schooling in the U.S.

Emerging at the same time as Mill's thoughts about schooling was Horace Mann and his vision of the "common school." Hailed as one of the best school movements in U.S. history, Mann's goals were to teach White students personal values and good character based on Christian biblical teachings (Kaestle, 2001). From about the early 1700s until the turn of the 19th century, this was the broad approach to public education in the country. With the influx of immigrants during the second industrial revolution, public education began to change to fit the needs of a new social, political, and economic reality. Public education systems were concerned with rapidly creating an Americanized curriculum to quickly assimilate new immigrants into democratic values and the capitalist economy (Ravitch, 2001). This approach to public education desired educational spaces that strived toward homogeneity, simplicity, and values rooted in whiteness and Protestantism (Anderson, 2001). Additionally, this time period began to demonstrate some of the harms of a hyper-localized approach to public education. Since the federal

government did not have much of a say in public schooling until the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), it was left up to the state and local communities to establish laws and norms. This led to segregation in both the North and South and massive redistribution practices that funneled funds to specific schools, taking the best teachers, and creating divides between communities and individuals. In short, our early history of imaging public schooling in the U.S. reflected very little choice in terms of access, ways of teaching, and what content and values were being taught.

From a legislative perspective, "choice" has relatively recent roots within United States discourse. In a significant Supreme Court case, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), the court established a precedent for how the public talks about women's right to terminate pregnancies, religious freedoms, privacy, and parental rights. One key tenet of this ruling specifically "produced a system in which only public schools receive public funding, leaving parental choice of private schooling to private philanthropy and families with economic resources" (Minow, 2001, p. 819). According to Martha Minow (2011), the United States has experienced five large shifts in how rhetorics of school choice specifically are cultivated and disseminated. First, beginning in the 1920s, there was a push to educate all school-aged children through the lens of "Americanization" (i.e. White Protestantism). The second phase arose during the 1950s-1960s, as Whites began funneling their children into private schools to bypass court-ordered desegregation. Next, the 1970s saw a rise in magnet schools proposing progressive values and to assist with working towards desegregation. In response to these magnet schools and desegregation efforts, voucher programs were created to expand school choice – which ultimately led to more students and funding going into private religious schools. Finally, shaped by

legislation, like the Clinton Administration's Improving America's School Act (1994), No Child Left Behind (2001), and Obama's Race to the Top (2009), we have the rise of charter schools at the turn of the century. These new forms of school choice center competition as a marker of success and have ultimately sought to put different students into different schools (see also Lupu, 2008; Natelson, 2018).

In today's world, we have several attempts to achieve Mill's concept of multiple school options through vouchers, education scholarship accounts (ESA), tax-credit scholarships, and charter schools. I will briefly denote the role of vouchers and ESAs before turning towards tax-credit scholarships and charter schools in the following section.

Educational vouchers as a concept come from Milton Friedman in his 1955 essay, "The Role of Government in Education" as well as in his book *Capitalism & Freedom* (1962). According to Friedman, vouchers provide students with the same amount of money it would cost for them to attend their local public school. The child (and their parents/guardians) would use that money, via a voucher, to cover the cost of tuition at a private school of choice. Following the implementation of voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland, Florida, and Arizona, we have many voucher programs that are targeted to specific groups of students: those with disabilities or who are victims of bullying, students living in low-income areas, and those who may be in a failing public school or district.

ESAs, like the first one ever created in Arizona, set aside state-determined, per-pupil funding for individual students. Unlike vouchers, which often limit state funding to be spent only on tuition, ESAs permit money to be spent on other educational expenses:

online courses, transportation, tutoring, therapy, and homeschooling (Prothero, 2015). To be clear, vouchers and ESAs do take public funding to support individual school choice (often to private, religious schools), and studies show that those who benefit from them are relatively well-off individuals (O'Dell & Sanchez, 2016; Whitaker, 2015). ESA expansion is only picking up steam across the nation. The proposed yet voted down Proposition 305 in Arizona was just one of the more open attempts to expand ESA vouchers in the state. This proposition would have increased over a four-year period the number of K-12 students that would receive this public funding. Ultimately, studies show that the outcomes of vouchers and ESAs have little to no significant impact on increasing test scores, overall school grades, and higher education attainment (Lubienski, 2019; Urquiola, 2016).

This data encourages some level of suspicion or skepticism when claims are made about the benefits of school choice. Explicitly, a brief look at the history of school choice in the U.S. allows us to see

> that it has migrated from describing an obstructionist power held by White, middle-class families to a supposedly curative one increasingly offered to poor families of color. Rarely in American history have public goods moved from doing service for the elite and powerful to become tools for disadvantaged communities. When the rhetoric suggests that choice has become such a tool, we should pay close and skeptical attention. (Erickson, 2011, p. 41)

The rest of this chapter will dig into this skepticism with a deeper look at charter schools in Arizona.

The Landscape of Charter Schools in Arizona

As already noted, the first charter school policy was signed into law in Minnesota in 1991. Based on the ideas of Ray Budde, charter schools open the possibility for innovative education policy and pedagogy (Hassel, 2001). The "charter" in charter school is a mission statement and guideline created by these institutions or people that illustrate a goal to follow a particular pedagogy or social aim (Powers, 2009). What makes charter policies unique is how they combine accountability, choice, and autonomy into a system of school regulation that has its own logic, embedded in neoliberal values (Hassel, 2001). What makes charter schools distinct from other forms of school choice is that they are still currently required to be public, thus, ostensibly open to all.

On the federal level, there have been two significant legislative moves that have directly shaped the support and growth of charter schools. First, the 2001 Consolidated Appropriations Act (first passed by the Clinton administration) provided tax incentives in a provision titled, Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000 (Strauss, 2014). Established within this act was the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program. This tax provision encouraged businesses to build in economically disadvantaged rural and urban areas and hire employees that reside there – doing so would provide up to seven years' worth of tax breaks. This law continues to be passed in Congress and currently remains on the books. Since the bill was first enacted, equity funds and banks that invested in retail stores, manufacturing, health care, human services, and public schools have received a generous tax credit, with the potential of them doubling their investment within a seven-year period (Strauss, 2014). In general, the tax credit's goal has been to cultivate public-private relationships between communities and businesses (Abravanel et

al., 2013). In practice, the continuation of this tax credit has enabled direct financial support for charter schools. Specifically, the law has permitted

> community development entities (CDEs) to raise private capital to acquire, construct, renovate, or lease academic facilities in partnership with charter school operators, [by] helping [to] alleviate facilities financing difficulties. In particular, the seven-year structure of the NMTC [was] an ideal fit for charter school facilities financing, as it allows charter schools to significantly reduce their debt service in the critical years of early operation. (Charter School Lenders' Association, n.d., para. 2)

From 2003 until 2016, investments in charter schools totaled $1.99 billion, helping roughly 200 charter schools (Charter School Lenders' Association, n.d.). Other sources indicate that between 2004 and 2017, more than $2.2 billion has been spent between private businesses and public charter schools (Seiffert & Seiffert, 2018). Needless to say, NMTC has played a vital and integral role in supporting and financing the growth of charter schools.

Second, in 2009, President Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiative encouraged states to adopt charter school friendly policies by removing the cap on the number of charter schools a state could have (Mora & Christianakis, 2011). The goals of this initiative were to invite competitive states to adopt rigorous college- and career-readiness, recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, build large data systems to measure and track student success, and help bolster low performing schools (Miller & Hanna, 2014). Arizona (having received $25 million) was one of the 21 states to be awarded this federal

funding[8] (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Four years after its implementation,

general analysis across all states finds that many have made good progress towards the

recently mentioned goals while more work in some states need to be done (Miller &

Hanna, 2014). The same report notes that it may take many more years before we can

know the full extent of how the initiative will play out.

By allocating $4.35 billion through this policy, Race to the Top becomes an

example of the state being used as a neoliberal tool to expand these competitive and

innovative schools. Because of this massive federal move to fund charter schools,

scholars have begun arguing that within the context of neoliberalism, "school choice" is a

pseudonym for charter school reform (Erickson, 2011). Given this, it is noteworthy that

school choice within neoliberalism is more about marketization than privatization.

Education becomes a private commodity when parents see themselves as consumers:

individual decision makers acting in their own self-interest through the analogy of the

market (Lubienski, 2006). Additionally, as both practice and metaphor, "the market" is

the belief that individual, rational self-interest is a universal quality of human nature

(Ball, 1993). Neoliberalism as theory and practice is essential to understanding charter

schools; at the same time, we must be open to a more nuanced understanding of charter

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[8] In total, there were three phases for Race to the Top. Arizona received their funding from the third phase.
To receive this money, the state needed to follow-up on three stipulations: (1) Create five regional
education centers ($2.5 million), (2) Use STEM as the vehicle to implement a college and career ready
standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts ($3 million), and (3) Establish the Student-Teacher-
Course Connection which would help create a common, statewide course framework ($2.5 million). The
remaining funds were promised to the governor's Office of Education Innovation to provide support ($1.5
million), the allocating of $3 million to eligible local education agencies (LEA), and half of the award
($12.5 million) would be distributed to eligible LEAs to implement this third phase award funding.
According to Race to the Top (2019), eligible LEAS are defined as Title 1 schools that have signed the
Memorandum of Understanding (not legally binding agreements that should still carry serious
consequences and mutual respect between the school and a second party, i.e. the state) and completed a
detailed Scope of Work (reports, goals, milestones, and deliverables within a given time line promised by
the school to students, parents, and communities).

schools, since they do not (and cannot) function in a purely private manner. Indeed, through the provision and requiring of public funds, we can see a strong federal push and support for the growth and expansion of charter schools. Based on these larger U.S. trends, it is important to narrow down the day-to-day reality of charter schools to a case study: the state of Arizona, which established its first charter school laws in 1994.

Centering a case study approach to education is warranted since charter school reform is a coherent policy in name only – each state varies on its guidelines and expectations for their charter schools (Powers, 2009). What Arizona does have in common with other states heavily pushing for charter school policies is that it is historically a Republican party-led movement (Hassel, 2001). Former Arizona superintendent of public instruction from 1995 until 2001, Lisa Graham Keegan (2001) was an early, open advocate for charter school policy adoption. She has argued that few parents have school loyalty and are willing to take their children to the best possible schools. By expanding Arizona educational policy to include the adoption of charter schools, Keegan states that these types of schools *are* freedom: freedom from bureaucracy and limiting choices within an educational market. Based on this early policy and discursive work, charter schools in Arizona, unlike other states like California, sought to decentralize and reduce bureaucracy – ultimately empowering parents as consumers (Convertino, 2017; Powers, 2009). In this way, Arizona's implementation of charter schools appears to reflect the values of neoliberalism. Finally, unlike other states, Arizona created a separate organization for charter school oversight in 1994: the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (Hassel, 2001). Creating this organization was a direct effort to keep district sponsorship from hindering the growth of charter schools (Powers,

2009). Currently, local school districts and the State Board of Education can still grant

charters as well. The originating charter school laws offered three pathways for someone

to propose a charter school: local school district, state Department of Education, or the

Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (Ryman, Woods, Harris, & Price, 2018).

Charter schools in Arizona provide some options for parents and students. Unlike

private schools, they cannot charge tuition, they cannot restrict admission like magnet

schools, and they must accept all who come into their front door or hold a lottery if too

many students apply (Maranto, Milliman, Hess, & Gresham, 2001). As a reminder,

behind California and Florida, Arizona ranks third in the number of charter schools, but

first in the number of students that attend such institutions (Hall, 2017). The most recent

numbers illustrate, Arizona currently has 544 charter schools serving over 200,000

students, roughly seventeen percent of all public-school students (Price, Ryman, Harris,

& Woods, 2018). This is quite a success for something that appeared to be a great gamble

for the state and its education system. Due to the little regulation and lack of templates,

early proposals for charter schools ranged greatly. For example,

> the earliest pitches were schools for the arts, college prep schools and a "career
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> academy" for at-risk high schoolers. Other proposals didn't stand a chance: One
>
> school wanted to hold classes in a strip club – before the nighttime crowds rolled
>
> in – with cocktail tables serving as desks. (Ryman, Woods, Harris, & Price, 2018,
>
> para. 9)

Regardless of this early start, Arizona has an expansive school choice framework,

permitting charter schools to be built focusing on specific communities, learning goals,

and pedagogies. This does not mean that issues and concerns with oversight, abuse of the

system, and negligence have gone away the longer charters schools continue to exist. Thus, it is critical to inquire how charter schools are holding up and performing.

Most of Arizona's charter schools are run by private companies. Yes, the school must have a governing board, but those selected are done so through the discretion of school owners rather than a public vote (Harris, 2019). This is just one facet of a larger issue of little to no independent oversight in the state, which leaves parents and students without recourse to challenge a charter school officials' (in)action. This lack of oversight manifests in how these schools are run and who benefits from their existence. One of the bigger charter school chains, BASIS, operates some of the best public schools in the country. There are 20 of them with more than 900 teachers. The company, BASIS Charter Schools, is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation (Harris, 2019). On average, BASIS gets more per-pupil funding than conventional charter schools, and yet their teachers' pay is thousands of dollars less than conventional public-school teachers. This has led one campus, BASIS Scottsdale, to request parents to donate about $1,500 per child per year to help subsidize teachers' pay. Investigative reporting has found that the "charter chain's pleas last year yielded $5 million in donations, according to its records – even as the private company behind BASIS kept about $10 million in Arizona tax money as a management fee, rather than directing it toward teacher pay" (Harris, 2018a, para. 7).

In another case, Glenn Way, the founder of American Leadership Academy (with his dozen campuses and some 8,000 students), has made about $37 million based on real estate deals with the schools. The Arizona State Board for Charter Schools recently approved his request to transfer his for-profit chain of charter schools to a non-profit

company (Harris, 2018b). This move will greatly benefit Way, since it makes it possible for him to sell his campuses – paid for by state tax dollars – to his new non-profit company. By November 28, 2018, Way followed through on this opportunity and made himself $13.9 million (Harris, 2018d). It is with this case of Way making money off the public education system that it increasingly comes as no surprise that magazines, like Forbes, are beginning to pick up on how easy it might be to make building a public charter school good business. In one post, titled "How to Profit from Your Nonprofit Charter School," the reader is offered some handy advice on how to turn education into cash through real estate (via the Tax Relief Act discussed earlier that offers the chance for one to double their money within seven years) and creating a management company (e.g., creating a charter school and then hiring yourself as a for-profit management organization) (Greene, 2018). Nevertheless, not all seems to be good news when it comes to the profitability of charter schools.

Some charter schools seem to be struggling financially as well. The centrist think-tank, Grand Canyon Institute (2019), recently found that roughly twenty percent of charter schools are fiscally unstable: ten percent are in "significant financial distress" while the other ten percent are on the verge of closure (para. 3). The report pinpoints one huge issue that is leading to this cause: charter school operators are granted loans based on estimated and projected student enrollment growth and those student enrollment estimates never come to fruition and the operators cannot pay their bills. In addition, there is discussion around how charter schools receive and spend their money, compared to conventional public schools. Charter schools spend about twice as much on administration than conventional public schools. An Annual Report of the Arizona

Superintendent of Public Instruction (2014) found charter schools in the state spend roughly $1,420 per pupil on administration while conventional district schools spend about $770 per student. Moreover, conventional public schools in Arizona spend, on average, $560 more per pupil than your average charter school (Mahoney, 2015). In broad terms, when it comes to receiving money, the comparison between conventional and charter schools can be summarized accordingly: conventional schools receive more federal funding because they serve more low-income and special-needs children, they also receive more local tax dollars (due to the previously mentioned per pupil funding), and charter schools cannot receive additional local funding because they cannot ask for bonds to be put up to vote (Harris, 2018c).

Yet, a simple comparison of "who gets more" strictly in terms of bottom line numbers eclipses a larger issue. Since the state legislature has provided charter schools with additional per-student funding, as they continue to grow so does their funding. Specifically, twenty years ago, two percent of students were taught in charters and they received 3.2 percent of state funding. In the 2016-2017 school year, charters taught sixteen percent of Arizona students while getting twenty-seven percent of state-allocated dollars (Harris, 2018c). According to Anabel Aportela, research director for Arizona School Boards Association, after the Great Recession, the state legislature cut funding for buses and textbooks for conventional public schools while giving an annual cost-of-living adjustment to charter operators (quoted in Harris, 2018c). Consequently, on a state level, legislation seeks to benefit charter school operators by taking money away from conventional public schools. In some ways this might be an easier pill to swallow if some of this additional funding went to locally created and overseen charter schools.

Regrettably, this does not seem to be the case. Mom and pop charter schools are being overshadowed by large corporate charter organizations like BASIS. Between 2014 and 2017, seventy-three percent of charter student population growth could be attributed to this increasing presence of nationally run charter school organizations (Harris, Ryman, Woods, & Price, 2018). Regardless of the economic and financial concerns surrounding charter schools inside Arizona and nationally, this is not the only point of contention.

We must also address whether charter schools fulfill their promise (especially post-Race to the Top) that they are academically more proficient than conventional public schools. Most of the time this question boils down to: Are standardized testing scores higher at charter schools and do their students perform better? The answer: it depends. As it has already been maintained, we must begin with the acknowledgement that standardized test scores are better indicators of one's economic status than their intelligence and knowledge attainment (Ravitch, 2016; Spring, 2011). For example, BASIS Scottsdale, the best performing charter school in Arizona, is so successful because of the academic achievement of the students *and* that their parents are affluent enough to fork over an additional $1,500 per year to supplement their school and its teachers. Families with more money often have parents who read to their children at a young age (because they have the time and energy) and can afford private tutors or have a parent that can devote time to help with homework. On a broader scale, a recent study of test scores over the last decade have found that gaps in racial student achievement could be "completely accounted for" by poverty (see Meckler, 2019). Because race and socioeconomic status are so heavily correlated, but most racially marginalized groups perform the same, the study concludes that poverty is increasingly a stronger indicator of

student success than a specific racial or ethnic background. Charter schools have yet to rupture or change this reality and it may be due in part to the expectations of standardized testing.

Regardless of the wishes and calls by public educators, the now (in)famous No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy (2002) instilled the belief that accountability should be directly tied to the teachers, principals, and the schools themselves. For both NCLB and Race to the Top, the primary way through which accountability is implemented and measured is through standardized testing. Since both NCLB and Race to the Top were heavily lobbied by testing businesses, these companies have become "a multibillion-dollar industry" (Ravitch, 2016, p. xxiii). This precedent created a similar standard under Race to the Top in which charter schools, with their accountability being attached more to private interests, would become the cure for poor schools that could not meet NCLB's standards. Ultimately, NCLB and Race to the Top further embedded the assumption that standardized tests are valuable measures that should not be questioned. Through the guise of state autonomy, NCLB ultimately resulted in teachers teaching to the test, schools primarily focusing on math and reading, and in extreme cases cheating or manipulation of test results (Ravitch, 2016). Moreover, these national programs ignored the economic and social circumstances of children's lives, pretending that they would be magically eliminated through a good education because testing is the "equitable" way to measure progress and future success. However, some charter schools still advocate that their schools are the only chance students have to become empowered onto a path of college and career readiness; while others, like the one centered in this study, seek to challenge

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the assumption that student (and school) success should be tethered to standardized testing alone.

To conclude, the numbers continue to tell an interesting story. In Arizona, here is what we know about the comparative differences between conventional and charter schools and their learning outcomes. First, roughly half of charter schools outperform neighboring district schools, based on the state's letter-grade ranking system. Second, while conventional schools show an eighty-eight percent graduation rate (within four years), charter school students graduate at a rate of seventy-seven percent. Third, conventional schools are outperformed by charter schools at their primary, K-8 levels. Finally, charter school high schools perform academically better than their nearby district schools about half of the time (Price, Ryman, Harris, & Woods, 2018). To conclude, economically and/or fiscally speaking, charter schools present a troubling and unsettling reality. When it comes to actual performance, the outcomes do not point to a strong case that charter schools provide better educational outcomes. Despite these facts, there is still more to the story.

The Ideological Dissonance of Charter Schools

As I have advanced from the beginning, we must adopt a nuanced approach to these schools of choice. Up to this point, I have illustrated how charter schools can be incredibly problematic. Most of these examples have rested on the financial and capitalism-based issues embedded within the very structuring and arguments surrounding charter schools. I also want to note that negatives and positives may also arise when we situate charter schools as an ideological investment, rather than just a purely economic one. Neoliberal inquiries must account for more than the economic materialities and

concerns of a given context, time, or policy but also the ideological investments that underpin such neoliberal desires. To conclude this chapter, I will touch on some of the ongoing ideological debates about who is/should be pro-school choice and pro-charter school.

Early proponents of school choice were from racially marginalized and oppressed communities. For example, the first ever voucher program in Milwaukee was created by three self-identified Democrats (a Black woman, Black man, and White man) to support low-income students (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Now, most contemporary progressive or left-leaning positions argue that vouchers in general are incredibly harmful and increasingly non-democratic (for example, Kirsch & Hanna, 2019). Unlike vouchers, the first decade of charter schools points to the potential of democratic participation within public education (Rofes & Stulberg, 2004). Especially when we understand that some charter schools are created by community members seeking to create a better educational experience for under-served populations, ethnic groups, and/or marginalized identities (see Buchanan & Fox, 2004). Although the evidence notes that charter schools serve a different and unique role within today's K-12 education landscape, they increasingly get lumped together with the more sinister forms of school choice, like vouchers. By doing so, charter schools become just another threat to conventional public schools, which stifles nuanced conversations about their potential democratic and public good (Rofes & Stulhberg, 2004). In my view, charter schools have the threat of privatization, unlike other school choice options, like vouchers, that are outright acts of privatizing education. More recent reports advocate that it is still public charter schools that low-income parents see as the "means through which their children [will] have equal access to quality

education" (Osborne & Langhorne, 2017, p. 1). If this is the case, then why is it that many on the left are stuck to a critique-only position when it comes to public conversations surrounding charter schools (e.g. Ravitch, 2016; Russo, 2013; Spring, 2011)? For me, this question can boil down to a debate over the concept and practice of "choice" within a democratic polity.

In my case, I understand choice as a core mechanism by which symbolic violence can occur as it functions to become the building block of social reproduction: the privileged creating systems that continue to privilege themselves. I derive such an understanding based on the previous inquiry of communication scholars and the rhetorical nature of "choice" (Gent, 2018; McCarver, 2011; O'Brien, 2007; Wood & Litherland, 2017; Woods, 2013). When choice is being offered, it often comes with caveats or false promises that permit structures to remain the same while changing discourse around how people are to be blamed for their lack of agency in making "appropriate" choices (de Onís, 2015). Here, we are dealing strictly with the ideological assumptions around school choice.

The privatization of school choice via business models (e.g., standardized testing and "local" public schools run and overseen by outside organizations) are rooted in ideological terms (Saltman, 2012). When Milton Friedman (1962) argues for school choice through capitalism because it is more "neutral" and less complicated than democracy, he does so because he believes freedom comes from free-reign capitalism. In this instance, freedom means being able to satisfy your market-based desires as a smart, proactive consumer (Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). This also means that the right choices within school choice, bolstered by neoliberalism, focus on making economic or

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market-based choices: selecting schools for their economic progress potential, making cost-benefit analysis, and centering decision-making as an individual concern rather than a community-based one (Kirshner & Jefferson, 2015). Because charter schools are a by-product and potential reproducer of neoliberal logics, they ultimately bring their own hegemony with them: situating conventional public schools as the enemy because of their non-responsive, bureaucratic structuring (Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002).

However, conventional public schools come with their own messy and complicated history of hegemonic (in)action. This is why different schooling options were heavily supported by oppressed groups. As briefly addressed earlier, Horace Mann's common school ideal rested solely on the promise of educating White children. If this is just one facet of K-12 education's legacy, then it seems feasible that certain groups would want alternatives. Turning back towards public sphere theory may help support a progressive notion of choice (that still comes with hegemonic and ideological consequences).

There have been several pieces within education that have utilized public sphere theory to help explain the potential (democratic) good of charter schools. Kathleen Knight Abowitz (2001), relying on Nancy Fraser's work (1992, 1997), argues that charter schools – being more democratically aligned than other forms of school choice – offer the space for a creation of multiple publics, the advancement of the general polity, and a powerful way to work towards John Dewey's sense of democracy as an ethical principle. From this line of thinking, if created by historically oppressed and underserved groups, charter schools offer the opportunity for regrouping and withdraw to foster identity formation and obtain group recognition, on their own terms (Waks, 2011). Based on

counterpublic theory, Eric Rofes (2004) argues that charter schools may offer an emancipatory potential: a particular form of education that inculcates students into "multiple forms of cultural capital, a new understanding of the social capital of their home community, and a critical pedagogy of resistance" (p. 260). Such claims complicate the ongoing conversations surrounding the logic of choice within charter schools and neoliberalism more broadly. Indeed, it may be argued that school choice is often trivialized due to the heavy political stakes involved across Democrat and Republic lines (Yancey, 2004).

Therefore, this project advances that the left (or those who are more progressive) should be concerned about how power functions within localized communities and practices. Erring to focus on the larger discursive trends tends to place critiques within a false either/or situation in which something is either purely democratic or non-democratic. This does not mean that we let things continue the way they are with no concern or action. Instead, it means that we employ critique with a splash of "suspicion of the totalizing effects of discourse to our own actions and regimes of truth" (Smith, 2004, p. 238). I believe that for charter schools to be progressive they have to offer strong academic skills while making sure that such skills do not reflect and reproduce the dominant culture (Rofes, 2004). Perhaps such an approach can continue to lead us away from whether or not we see charter schools as progressive or not (given their larger history) to really focusing on how some charter schools are problematically run. In light of this, a rhetorical perspective on charter schools can be so crucial since it asks us to consider how we frame the "truths" and realities surrounding charter schools and neoliberalism (Medler, 2004).

In summation, I aspire to follow John Dewey's (1954) request that we not idealize democracy as a utopian idea – making anything not inherently "democratic" less than ideal. By centering the current case study of a charter school in Arizona, I aim to further explore this possibility. To be open to the idea that, if we value the democratic values attached to public schooling and the open exchange of ideas, people and communities can employ these values within the larger ideological and political worldview of neoliberalism. If getting beyond neoliberalism relies on returning or rekindling a desire for community over the individual, then we need to rearticulate people as democratic subjects with a renewed hope in democratic practices and values (Robbins, 2009). Perhaps the following analysis chapters of a charter school – one that is mission-based rather than for-profit – in South Phoenix area can provide some of the answers to such a large goal.

CHAPTER FOUR: HIGHLY EFFECTIVE SCHOLARS AND THE EMERGENCE OF

A LIBERAL WHOLE CHILD APPROACH

It can take me between twenty to forty-five minutes to drive from my apartment in Tempe, Arizona to Humanitas Academy. Driving time varies due to the time of day and the amount of traffic I encounter. The drive always takes me on an interesting journey on which I have two options: the interstate or backroads. I prefer the latter. These roads offer insight into material spaces and differences between Tempe and South Phoenix, where the charter school is located. The further Tempe is in my rear-view mirror the more prominent disparities in living become. A left turn off Southern Avenue onto 24th Street places my car between two drastically different housing communities. To my left is a large, recently built housing community with bright green grass splashed across front and side yards. The houses are two stories and are painted a variety of hues of blues, greys, and beiges. To my right, there are older, ranch-style houses that look like they were built in the 60s and 70s (if not earlier) with an occasional mobile home. These houses do not boast bright green grass patches, and many of their once light-beige exteriors are worn with age and collected dust.

The school is physically located in an area that is surrounded by a gas station, a liquor store, and a dual dry cleaners and laundromat. Humanitas itself consists of two buildings that sit on either side of a road that leads to additional housing communities. Both buildings catch the eye. They are tall, coated with a medium adobe-like color on top, with large, light beige slabs of stone on bottom, and bold, thick white pillars that flank both sides of the entrance doors, three on each side.

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The school's backdrop is a looming mountain range that, at a distance, teases lush, full greenery during the winter and spring seasons. As you pull into the parking lot on the left, you realize you have been fooled by an illusion of tightly clustered cacti and desert bushes. Since the school is located off a busy street, it is always noisy outside. However, there almost always seems to be a breeze, perhaps a friendly greeting offered by the mountains that loom above and in front of you. The first time I stepped foot into one of the school buildings, I was taken aback as to how "normal" the school looked: neutral wall colors, greyish tiles, and dark grey covered stairs. The murals painted on the walls make the inside of the school almost as grand as the outside. Most of the murals offer various inspirational quotes or offer illustrations of the seven habits. Moving throughout the school invites one to consider the history of the school and how it came it be.

Creating a Charter School

With any story, we must locate a beginning, an origin story or at least some version of one. The story of Humanitas begins with Dr. Wyatt, the founder and current principal of the school. Currently a middle-aged White man, Dr. Wyatt is tall and lean, with greying and thinning brown hair, and blue eyes set behind black framed glasses. After an injury forced him to leave the military at the age of twenty-seven, he turned to college and his interest in history.

> I thought I was going to be a high school teacher of military history and then go
> on and teach military history at the college level, because I really loved it. And,
> um, at the university, they...they told me that there was no career path there,
> because so many people are in that lane, and I think they had a shortage of special

ed teachers, so they said, "Hey! We can get you a job like right now as a special

ed teacher." And so, I didn't know what that meant, but I went into special

education. Um, and then…I have a little brother, uh Cameron. I keep his picture

right there [as he gestures to a bookshelf to his right], who had struggled all

through school…We found out later that he had bipolar disorder…

Thus, Dr. Wyatt turned his attention to learning more about special education and then

was compelled to become a principal, but felt that was not working for him either.

And I...I started this idea there's more to a child...child than academics, and

especially with special education, and I...and then so I became a consultant around

the country to try to help other schools to figure this idea that was sprouting about

whole child, and that wasn't working; and so, um, seven years ago, I decided to

build this [gesturing his hands wide above and around his head, slowly lowering

to his side, and then back to rest on the table between us]...build this, uh, school

and the idea of whole child education, and there we are.

This same narrative gets retold by parents as they describe their decision-making process

for why they wished to send their children to Humanitas. For example, Caroline, a White

female, who is a stay-at-home mom of mixed raced Mexican American children, with a

single income, reflects,

And then we found Humanitas. And we met with Dr. Wyatt. He told me that he

had his uh, I can't completely remember here, but that he would go to schools that

were failing and then turn the whole school around and make it a successful

school. And then he realized, like, why don't I just start my own school? And um

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just a lot of the way they hold themselves, the standards that they hold the kids to

is, I, uh I thought it was excellent.

I will return to Caroline's story and her perspective later as it provides some interesting

insight into why she ultimately made the choice to send her son to Humanitas. For now,

we can trace the continuation of this story onto the school's website:

> We started with the idea – whole child education – that we could make a
>
> difference in a few children's lives. We implemented to the best of our ability the
>
> tenets of a whole-child education striving to learn how to address the whole child
>
> – body, mind, heart and spirit. We watched as the principles we taught and the
>
> techniques we used made a difference in the education and daily lives of not only
>
> the children and families we were working with but also the teachers,
>
> administrators, staff…Can we actually function in a broken US educational
>
> system hyper-focused on testing our children to death and focus on developing the
>
> whole child – body, mind- heart and spirit? (Humanitas website, 2019)

Much like many of the other national and state-based discourses around what is framed as

a crumbling K-12 education, Humanitas publicly rationalizes its existence as a fix or

corrective to conventional approaches to public education. Specifically, the founders and

operators of the school openly express a skepticism and criticism to the over testing of

our students, which tends to focus only on their minds. What about the rest of them: their

body, heart, and spirit?

It is from this story, the narrative told about the "why" of Humanitas and how it

came to be, that the following two chapters seek to explore the nuances, nooks, and

crannies of the day-to-day practices and consequences of school choice, rhetoric, and

neoliberalism within this school. Specifically, in this chapter, I center the practices surrounding a school focusing on the "whole child" through Covey's (1989/2004) seven habits. The following chapter will continue to unpack lived, rhetorical engagements by addressing the neoliberal dis/investments that occur when a charter school takes up the seven habits as a framing device for the school's existence. To do so, I will first summarize Covey's work and The Leader in Me organization and then review previous scholarship that has studied schools implementing the seven habits. Next, I put text and data into conversation as I take the written work of Covey and layer it with the day-to-day learning that occurs at Humanitas.

The Leader in Me: Empowering Students through the Seven Habits

Generally speaking, within neoliberalism, education is understood as a commodity, making schools and how they teach a business. When this approach comes to the forefront, we threaten the removal of democracy as a pivotal facet of education (Labaree, 1997). As I argued in the previous chapter, some critical educators created charter schools with the aim of liberation and justice, but we still have to acknowledge that charter schools "remain as a product of neoliberal policy" (Casey, 2016, p. 134). Is bringing the seven habits into the classroom one possible liberating approach that can challenge the grip of neoliberalism within everyday life and the reality of charter school existence?

In 1989, Stephen Covey released his now best seller, *The 7 Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Based on anecdotes and his personal experiences as a father, business consultant, and the experiences of others, Covey argues that he has found seven universal habits. Concerned that people were not being taught character development

anymore in self-help books (but instead, quick personality fixes) Covey wanted to bring to the world the successes he has seen in his own life and those of others. According to Covey, a character ethic believes that certain principles guide all human effectiveness. Seen as natural laws, these principles are "unchanging and arguably 'there'" in the same manner that one cannot escape gravity (p. 40). From these natural laws, via character ethics, people should focus on creating change first within themselves, working from the inside out because private victories are more important than public ones. If we want to change our lives, we must start with the core of who we are: character, motives, and paradigms. Hence, private victories, these internal changes, become vital to creating public ones.

Of the seven habits, the first three focus on self-mastery – to ensure the necessary private victories occur before the public ones. Be *proactive*, the first habit, underscores how "we are responsible for our own lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions" (Covey, 1989/2004, p. 78). The second habit, *begin with the end* in mind, asks us to have a clear understanding of where we are going in terms of life or other goals. Finally, *put first things first* teaches us that we should hone the skills to act rather than being acted upon, having the agency to make sure our steps toward our goals are in the right order.

The public victories ask us to learn the habits of think win/win, seek first to understand, then to be understood, and synergize. With *think win/win* we can make agreements and solutions that are mutually beneficial and satisfying to all people involved. It is the only habit that explicitly explores tensions between cooperation and competition and independence and interdependence (more will be said about this later).

Looking to understand requires we practice emphatic listening to ensure that we diagnosis the issue or concern before prescribing the solution. The sixth habit, *synergize*, asks us to approach life from a Gestalt: focusing the whole rather than the part of our goals and path. Finally, the seventh habit, *sharpen the saw*, focuses on renewing our daily motivations of physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing to ensure we stay focused on life and the other six habits. In the end, Covey (1989/2004) argues that the seven habits are

> habits of *effectiveness*. Because they are based on principles, they bring the
> maximum long-term beneficial results possible. They become the basis of
> person's character, creating an empowering center of correct maps from which an
> individual can effectively solve problems, maximize opportunities, and
> continually learn and integrate other principles in an upward spiral of growth. (p.
> 61, emphasis original)

In 1999, the principal of A. B. Combs Elementary, a magnet school in Raleigh, North Carolina, attended one of Covey's seminars. At the time, the school was facing some hurdles in terms of an aging community, decreasing enrollment, and low staff morale. Moreover, their test scores were declining, and disciplinary issues were on the rise. After leaving the seminar, the principal, Muriel, decided to bring the seven habits into her school to see if it would effect change. Long story short, it did. Since then, others have seen the promise of bringing the habits into K-12 spaces and as of 2014, there are about 2,000 schools across the world using this pedagogical approach (Covey, Covey, Summers, & Hatch, 2014). Seeing the marketing potential in teaching the seven habits at

a young age, The Leader in Me model and company was created by Stephen Covey and his son, Sean.

In general, most of the research on the effects of using the seven habits in K-12 settings has been conducted and circulated by the organization that oversees schools taking up the seven habits as a curriculum: The Leader in Me (Cummins, 2015). These previous studies by the organization center on learning outcomes in relation to testing and student empowerment and leadership. Beyond these studies, other academics have started looking into the possible effects of The Leader in Me. Much like the organization's own research, these studies, conducted mostly by education scholars, focus on learning outcomes specific to leadership, student empowerment, student conduct, and learning outcomes (e.g., Cummins, 2015; Humphries, Cobia, & Ennis, 2015; Shibley, Kolodziej, & Fusaro, 2004). The habits have also been applied to explore physical education (Martin, 2004), offering critiques of how men who teach young kids are perceived negatively (McGowan, 2016), and how to implement curriculum changes (Cuellar, 2001).

Although the idea of teaching young children the seven habits appears good-willed on the surface, we must keep in mind that in today's world, K-12 curriculum is an expensive commodity that does not always have the best interests of students in mind (Casey, 2016). In the rest of this chapter, I take a pivot from the above areas of focus to approach the seven habits within K-12 spaces from a place of skepticism about the underlying ideologies and outcomes of centering this approach to a whole child pedagogy. Yet, knowing that charter schools may offer more room for inclusion within curriculum choices than conventional K-12 schools, we must also seek to understand the various ways these schools of choice seek to bolster historically marginalized

communities and people. Thus, a turn towards the day-to-day practices of the seven habits at Humanitas is warranted to explore how it is enacted at the school.

Understanding the Seven Habits

Discussions about and moments utilizing the seven habits were documented across interviews and observations. The moments where the seven habits were most evident were the morning assemblies and classrooms. Beyond this, most of the parents and grandparents frequently brought up and reflected on the habits during interviews, while I never heard them mentioned during the school board meetings I attended. Consequently, the rest of this chapter is going to center moments within the interviews, classroom observations, and morning assemblies. In brief, I found that the seven habits are supported and utilized throughout the school. However, since many of Covey's arguments for the effectiveness and attractiveness of the seven habits are echoes of early liberal thought, the seven habits are not an ideal anti-neoliberal pedagogical approach. Classroom observations brought about more nuance to this claim as additional pedagogical moments, not clearly rooted within the seven habits, pointed to moments of liberal and neoliberal rupture, especially keeping in mind the focus on the intersections of race and class in this study. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the complicated reality of the seven habits in perpetuating a (neo)liberal world all while still offering a semi-radical approach to education in the age of charter schools and neoliberalism. We will begin by reflecting on how parents and grandparents talk about Humanitas's approach to whole child education via the seven habits and how the habits are "taught" within the school itself.

Rationalizing the Seven Habits

With the exception of one parent and one grandparent, the rest spoke at some length about the seven habits. One grandparent did not speak to it at all, while one mother had other interests in the school – we will get to her in a moment. Otherwise, the rest of the (grand)parents spoke positively about the seven habits. During his interview, Dr. Wyatt reflected on how Humanitas has "incorporated the seven habits and how they affect people, and we incorporate them into all of our discussions because that…we find that helps kids want to help solve problems and think for themselves." Thus, the school is committed to helping students learn the habits, but not just for learning's sake. In addition to understanding the concepts, the school wants them to become something scholars can use in their daily lives to help instill additional skills like critical thinking. For example, Andrea, a White and Jewish mother of three adopted Black children reflects that she likes the habits, "believing in yourself to, you know, succeed and sharpen, you know, sharpen your mind and, like, I love that they enforce those kinds of principles or habits to the kids." Andrea perceives that one of her older children lacks self-confidence and discerns that the seven habits could help cultivate the confidence she believes he should have.

Tom, a Black, middle-class father with bi-racial children, echoes Dr. Wyatt's perspective on the applicability of the habits,

> I think this [the habit of think win/win] is a very good thing for especially my six-year-old because he could be a little selfish…uh if you have a two-year-old and a six-year-old together you know, those kind of things like that, you know. Always thinking, like, trying to understand before being understood, yeah. Think about the other person first. You know, those type of things. I just think it just goes a long way.

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For Tom, he appreciates that the habits are so obtainable that he can see them helping his younger children as they develop and grow. Caroline, a White, working class mother of bi-racial children, has also seen the habits brought home,

> I thought that it was interesting [the whole child approach with the seven habits]. I thought it was a different, definitely a different...I had never heard anything about that. And even now, we go to the park with the family on the weekend and uh kicking the ball around and my son will be like, "We're all synergizing," you know, and I'm like, "What? How weird!" Yeah, I mean it does turn out good, but it wasn't one of the reasons why I picked it because of the "whole child" thing, I just thought that was their motto.

Much like Tom, Caroline's experiences point to the practical applicability of the seven habits outside of the school. Unlike Tom and the rest of the parents and grandparents, Caroline's investment in Humanitas is not rooted in either the whole child approach or the seven habits specifically. While reflecting on the seven habits, Miranda, an Asian, middle-class mother to bi-racial children, articulated that they teach her child "to be focused and provide…and how to be an individual…how to focus on school and develop as a person."

Thus far, the (grand)parents interviewed seemed mostly pleased with the seven habits and the promise they hold for their (grand)children's future. Such comments from Caroline and Miranda begin to point to how the application of the seven habits can be very individualized. Although there is some promise in terms of helping to cultivate teamwork, in general, the seven habits ignore how larger structures of ideologies and material conditions still influence the choices one can ultimately make. This is both a

product of the guiding force of neoliberalism and its supporters who argue that

entrepreneurs must advocate for themselves, and a direct product of the liberal beliefs

inherent within Covey's (1989/2004) conceptualization of his seven habits. To support

this claim, I will zoom out and explore some of the larger implications in Covey's work

and then offer examples from my data gathered in the school as evidence of the both/and

of the material harms and potentials of employing the seven habits.

The Habits and Liberal Thought

Covey (1989/2004) argues that "we are responsible for our own lives. Our

behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions" (p. 78). Later on he adds that

we are "free to choose our actions" but the consequences of our actions will be governed

by natural law: "We can decide to step in front of a fast-moving train, but we cannot

decide what happens when the train hits us" (p. 98). Using the experiences of Victor

Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who has imprisoned during WWII, Covey contends that

Frankl chose his own positive response following the end of the war instead of letting the

environment dictate his actions – he chose to act through this independent will.[9] Covey

uses this argument to structure his first habit, be proactive, which serves as the foundation

for the rest. The idea of being proactive leads one to believe they can become a leader

within their own life. Covey (2011) does make clear in a later writing that practicing

leadership through a habit like being proactive does not guarantee that one will become a

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[9] Josh Gunn and Dana Cloud (2010) labeled such utterances and linguistic framings: "magical voluntarism." For them, magical voluntarism "fosters a deliberate misrecognition of material recalcitrance, an inability to recognize the structural, political, economic, cultural, and psychical limits of an individual's ability to act in her own interests" (p. 51). Covey's work here seems to echo their discernment of how manipulating one's thoughts and use of symbols cannot acknowledge the limitations inherent with such "efficacious" symbolic action: the belief that thought and persuasion on their own can change current social conditions.

CEO. At the very least, you will have the ability to lead your own life. A neoliberal outlook would rhetorically frame this as becoming an "entrepreneur of oneself" (Rose, 1999, p. 144). Within this one argument about free will and the liberty to choose, there is much to address in relation to the historical consequences of liberalism. At the forefront, Covey appears to be repurposing a historically liberal discernment about liberty.

Much like the work of early liberal philosophers like John Locke (1690), Covey argues that his habits are universal and akin to natural laws of nature. When it comes to natural law and liberty, Locke (1690) argues that the "natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule" (p. 109). The goal of a liberal-based education then is to teach children to submit their emotions to rational control, to be intellectually independent of dominant ideas, and care for others while also caring for one's own advantage (Grant & Tarcov, 1996). Provided with the brief summary of Covey's habits earlier in the chapter and some of the data we have seen at this point, the seven habits both in theory and in practice speak to this liberal notion of education. Parents like Andrea and Miranda spoke to learning self-control and the individualized approach the seven habits bring. Moreover, Locke (1693/1996) calls for an education that produces personal freedom: a liberal education which "aims to produce adults who are independent and self-governing as far as is possible" (p. ix). Education in this perspective is not for self-expression but self-mastery and independence. In short, there is a heavy emphasis on the role of the individual, their liberties, their agency often regardless of material constraints and the influence of others. The assumption seems to be that the individual within a liberal society, or with Covey's habits, is capable of doing what they

need to do because they have the liberty to be proactive: to act instead of being acted upon. In theory, Covey's general rationalizations for the habits along with the driving habit of being proactive stake their claim to effectiveness through rhetorics of liberalism.

Nevertheless, Covey (1989/2004) does note the importance of independence *and* interdependence within the various relationships in our lives. With the habit of think win/win, Covey argues that competition does have a place when "there is no particular interdependence, no need to cooperate" making cooperation just as important as competition (p. 242). Beyond the comment from Tom, (grand)parent interviews did not illuminate much on the interdependent potential of the seven habits. From my reading of Covey's texts and the data gathered at the school, the habit of think win/win has the potential for rupturing a neoliberal structure like charter schools and the larger cultural reality as well. I will speak a bit more to this habit, based on Covey's original conceptualization.

Think Win/Win

Covey contends that that think win/win is rooted in the belief that there is enough for everyone (i.e., an abundance mentality) and that one's success is not obtained at the exclusion or expense of others. However, for Covey, win/win is just one option out of six paradigms of interaction. There is also win/lose ("If I win, you lose."), lose/win ("Everyone takes advantage of me, you may as well."), lose/lose ("We might as well all be losers."), and win ("I know what I want. You need to figure out what you need on your own."). With this last paradigm of just "win," Covey argues that this approach is the most common when there is no sense of competition. However, unlike win/win, just "win" has us focusing on our own needs and leaving it up to others to secure their own.

When posed with his own question of, what paradigm is the best, Covey says that the best choice "depends on reality" and thus does not make win/win the only viable option in the context of an interdependent mindset (p. 222). However, a few pages later he claims, "Anything less than win/win in an interdependent reality is a poor second best that will have an impact on the long-term relationship" (p. 225).

To help us make sense of win/win more, Covey offers five dimensions of this habit: character, relationship, agreements, supportive systems, and processes. For character, a win/win situation requires that all involved have integrity, maturity, and an abundance mentality or the notion that "there is plenty out there for everybody" (p. 230). Second, relationships in a win/win situation must be seen as an investment, something we care for and wish to see thrive. When these relationships thrive, agreements provide the directions needed for a win/win situation. A win/win agreement has specific elements: desired *results* (what is to be done and when), *guidelines* that specify how things are to be accomplished, having *resources* that provide support to achieve the desired results, *accountability* to establish standards of excellence, and then *consequences*, taking stock of what are good/bad outcomes. Third, a supportive system has you think about how to align reward systems with the goals and values you created in the previous dimensions. In short, for this habit to work, "the systems have to support it" (p. 242). These systems may be communication systems to budgeting, to compensation, and training. Finally, processes remind you that a win/win outcome requires win/win processes, systems, and procedures.

Ultimately, there are several other habits to consider, but since think win/win got some of the most circulation during field work and offers some compelling reflections

and comments on neoliberalism more generally, I have decided to focus on it (with a nod to some of the others). So, let us turn to some of the other data in relation to this habit to complicate the reality of seven habits at Humanitas. Before offering an example, some contextual information is needed to situate the day-to-day employment of the seven habits within classroom spaces.

Think Win/Win and Possibilities of Resistance in the Classroom

Following the guidance of Covey, Covey, Summers, and Hatch (2014), Humanitas does not overtly teach the scholars the habits, because they do not need to be taught developmentally (e.g., mastering be proactive before learning begin with the end in mind). Thus, the habits are not taught in the sense of a lesson that leads to some type of test or observable/tangible outcome. Instead, the language of the habits is infused into the daily curriculum and interactions. For example, a school that is not using the habits may have a teacher say, "Work hard on this assignment," while the language of the seven habits would transform the sentiment into, "Be proactive and put first things first on this assignment." In short, one will not observe a teacher giving a lesson on the habits. Let us take a look at a specific example to illustrate this practice and employment of the habits.

During a classroom observation in the early afternoon of a cool, December morning, Ms. Bennett is having her second-grade class work in groups on a poster activity. The classroom is tucked in a corner at the end of a long hallway in the school building. A hard tug on the heavy wood door invites you into an unassuming classroom. Immediately to the right you will find the white board and below your feet a colorful rug with squares of purple, blue, green, and red. Ms. Bennett often keeps the fluorescent lights off as the large windows that fill up the two walls that face the outside of the

building provide more than enough soft, natural light. There are six, long and narrow light grey tables at which anywhere from four to five scholars sit. On top of each table are two storage caddies of matching colors. Each table has a designated color to group the scholars: "blue team," "red team," "purple team," and so on. The tables are located towards the back of the classroom and Ms. Bennett's modest desk sits perpendicularly to the right of the scholars' tables. Ms. Bennett has designed her classroom around the theme of cacti with a handful of small paintings and a large, sheet-like wall decoration of a cactus hanging over her desk.

Over the last couple of weeks, these second graders have been learning about various life cycles: trees, chickens, water, butterflies, and frogs. With the class seated on their "carpet" (the rectangular rug) and herself in a wood rocking chair, Ms. Bennett begins describing the activity. Based on their color teams via their seating arrangement, they will be randomly assigned a cycle. As a team, they are to find some way to represent this cycle: they could draw, write sentences, a combination of these things, or something else. "You can do it however you want," she summarizes. Ms. Bennett clarifies that the posters she is going to give to each group must be in a win/win situation so that all can have an equal opportunity to work on it. If it is scrunched up on one side, that it will make it very hard for someone to help. With these instructions, she begins handing out the posters to each group with their assigned life cycle.

This is how the seven habits are typically applied within the various classroom spaces at Humanitas: they learn about the habits by doing them. However, the application of the habits by the scholars themselves in these moments is not always smooth sailing. The yellow team, assigned the life cycle of the chicken, struggles once the activity gets

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underway. One male scholar[10] has decided to start drawing a chick on his own. Very

impressed with his drawing, the scholar wants the rest of his group to glue three

individual papers on the poster (egg, chick, and chicken) because he really likes how his

chick looks. A fellow group member does not want to, and they begin to bicker. They ask

Ms. Bennett to solve the problem for them, but she tells them that they must figure it out

on their own. She makes clear to the first scholar, "It's not what you want. It's what your

team wants." Ignoring these remarks, he gets up and grabs a glue stick from a drawer

across the room and prepares to glue his paper on the poster. Ms. Bennett is able to stop

him and clarifies that he needs to ask the rest of his group what they want. In the end, the

group agrees to the scholar's original idea, allowing them to complete the project. This

one example not only illustrates how the habits are part of the everyday language of the

teachers, but how the habits can rub against the typical tendencies of young children.

Much like Tom's above reflections about the selfishness of his own kids, we see another

scholar struggling with this predisposition as well. Ms. Bennett's use of the language

from the seven habits encourages the scholar to think about the wants of others while

completing the group project.

Seeing the habits employed in this manner points to the ability for them to exist

solely outside of a false dualism of individual versus collective, competition versus

cooperation. Indeed, Ms. Bennett was quite firm in returning to the language of the seven

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[10] A common practice at Humanitas is lining up scholars in two separate lines based on gender. When I
evoke gender pronouns for scholars I observed in classroom spaces, I use gender terminology based on
which gender line the scholar placed themselves. In other instances, like morning assemblies, I use the
gendered pronoun that the scholar seems to present (e.g., scholar who presents as male). Indeed, given this
information (and some direct observations of the amount of gender disciplining I witnessed), a whole
chapter could be devoted to the gendered dynamics at the school, but that is beyond the current scope of
this project.

habits for this entire activity as other scholars had disagreements, particularly "be proactive" and "think win/win." Perhaps completely writing off the seven habits as problematic on paper oversimplifies all the possibilities they offer when put into action. Yet, I still have some reservations about Covey's arguments and assumptions about the world and his habits. Even with this example from Ms. Bennett's class, cooperation (focusing on a collective desire and outcome) coming to the forefront over competition (centering the desire and goals of the individual over the rest, at any cost) does not assuage a critical skepticism about the role of power within larger ideological and physical structures. Liberalism and a subsequent liberal education still privilege the individual, their liberties and agency, and neoliberalism can take these assumptions to their extremes.

Within a neoliberal society, the role of the collective or community has altered enough that it is no longer seen as a protector of individuality but a means to an end that values the individual over the communal (Rose, 1999). What Covey does with think win/win is at least ask us to consider the relationships we do have and how to work together: the individual can function and thrive within a collective. The example from Ms. Bennett's class does not point to the larger, structural possibilities of a think win/win mentality. It does instill the importance of interdependence, cooperation, and embracing the collective, while falling short of a critical engagement with the (neo)liberal tendency of individualism, competition, whiteness, and classism. If we desire educational spaces that can challenge and rupture the hegemonic nature of (neo)liberalism, it appears that the seven habits may not provide the strongest possibility for this to come to fruition beyond interpersonal exchanges. But let me be clear: I am not claiming that this moment is

actively involved in reproducing neoliberalism, but it is not necessarily discouraging (neo)liberal thinking or systems either. This may be due to Covey's own assessment that all systems must support a win/win situation and with competition and a general disinterest in creating interdependence at its core, neoliberalism seems at odds with such a mindset. At this point, the seven habits, specifically think win/win, offer neither overt, hegemonic commitments to neoliberalism nor the space to radically reimagine (neo)liberalism.

During my time in this classroom setting, I had some time to sit and chat with Ms. Bennett about her background and experience with teaching. In the middle of December, as she eats the school lunch of pizza and a salad on a white, foam tray and I eat some homemade soup, we start talking about the students she is teaching this year. The above instance occurred not with Ms. Bennett's homeroom group, but the students that she switches with another teacher twice a day. This second group is the higher performing collection of second graders.[11] It important to note that, in general, all classrooms were diverse, yet this second group contained more White students than her homeroom. While taking a bite of the greasy pepperoni pizza, Ms. Bennett says that her homeroom can be a hard group to teach, because she just does not know all the things these scholars deal with at home. At this point, I have learned that one of her homeroom students, Dylan, a young Mexican American boy (her term), is repeating the second grade because he missed too

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[11] During this conversation, Ms. Bennett also informed me that this class switch was new to the 2019-2020 school year. The splitting of scholars up by skills or ability had been going on for the last two years. The previous year she taught the higher performing class and had some lower performing students in it because the parents really wanted her to teach them. Ms. Bennett reflects that the lower-performing scholars ended up falling behind the rest of the class. So, she thinks that splitting by ability may be a good idea, but it may also help to have a variety so they can help each other, but there is just never enough time for that peer-on-peer help to happen.

many days of school the year before due to familial instability. Another student, Marie, a young Black girl, also has a difficult homelife and consequently struggles with behavioral issues at school. I regularly saw Marie disciplined by Ms. Bennett and some of the specials teachers. Some of Ms. Bennett's other homeroom students perform well enough academically to be in the higher-performing class but are placed in the lower-performing one because their parents speak mostly (if not exclusively) Spanish at home. Before leaving to retrieve the scholars from lunch, Ms. Bennett concludes that it should come as no shock that the lower-performing scholars come from unstable or unpredictable homes.

Comparing these two groups of students demonstrates that they are taught quite differently. In fact, Ms. Bennett did not do the poster activity with her homeroom. Although both groups were essentially taught the same things, *how* they were taught varied greatly. From what I observed, Ms. Bennett's homeroom scholars were not afforded the same opportunities for independent group or individual work. For example, I witnessed a lot of engagement with workbooks across both classes. With the homeroom class, all workbook assignments were done as a class. Ms. Bennett would sit at her desk and use a small camera to project her workbook onto the pull-down screen at the front of the classroom. She would call on individual scholars to complete each prompt or question.

In one instance, the worksheet asks the scholars to find and then fix grammatical errors in a short story typed on the page. Ms. Bennett makes the activity a bit fun by stating that a mouse had written the story and the scholars are helping him improve his grammar. She does clarify that the class wants to correct the mistakes, but do not need to make the mouse feel bad. Ms. Bennett asks if the scholars would want someone to make

fun of them if they make a mistake and the class responds with a resounding "No!" "It is okay to make mistakes because it helps us learn," Ms. Bennett concludes. During this one workbook session, the language of the seven habits was never used. Let us compare this homeroom approach to doing workbook assignments to the second group of scholars Ms. Bennett instructs.

It is my first day of classroom observations and I arrive a little before one o'clock in the afternoon. As I enter the room, scholars are currently working independently in their workbooks at their assigned tables. I am briefly introduced to the class and the scholars are asked to go back to work. One precocious White male scholar, sitting at the front, middle table stands up, puts out his right hand, and says, "Hi. I'm Tommy. It's a pleasure to meet you." Holding back a laugh, I met his right hand with my own and shake his hand, "Hi Tommy. It's nice to meet you too." After this introduction, Ms. Bennett tells me that I am welcome to help the scholars as they are working. So, I take off my backpack and jacket and set them behind the rocking chair and spend the next fifteen minutes walking around the room, helping scholars who have raised their hands.

After the fifteen minutes pass, Mrs. Bennett tells the scholars to bring their workbooks to the carpet, but to leave their pencils behind on their tables. In a mad rush, 30 seven- and eight-year-olds rush from their chairs onto the "carpet" with their workbooks in hand. Sitting in the rocking chair, Mrs. Bennett begins giving instructions for this next activity. They have a list of words with various "a" sounds (e.g., "ai," "ay," and just "a"). The page on the left has another set of questions with blanks for the scholars to insert the proper answer from the list on the other page. After walking through the expectations for the worksheet, Ms. Bennett lets the scholars know that they can work

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in pairs or work alone. She specifically states that they are welcome to find a "buddy pair," but to be respectful to those who may want to work alone. "You get to choose," she clarifies, whether you want to work with someone or alone.

Continuing, Ms. Bennett states, "You also need to be kind. If someone comes up to you asking to work together, you can say 'No, thank you' and both of you are to respect the request and response." She reiterates that it is totally fine to work alone, because you need to "choose what your body wants." The homeroom group of scholars were not granted this same level of independence and freedom when it came to workbook-based learning and activities. Instead, they learn through strict guidelines in which Ms. Bennett can keep an eye on all scholars and guide them through the various prompts. The second group is encouraged to think and learn independently, if not collaboratively, whereas the homeroom scholars are asked to learn through stricter directions and Ms. Bennett's firmer guiding hand.

With these examples in mind, I advance that the seven habits cannot provide the nuance and variance needed for them to be applied equitably across both groups of scholars. For the habits to be effectively "sold," they are marketed as a one-size fits all and they are applied in the same manner at Humanitas and this is a universal framework that is not equipped to speak to the variant needs of two different groups of second graders. I believe that this has implications in relation to both the conditions of capitalism and (neo)liberalism as well. What we see happening between these classroom comparisons is how more privileged (and more academically successful) students are taught to collaborate while others are taught how to follow rules and directions (Bowles & Ginits, 1976/2011). When such behavior occurs within educational contexts, it means

we see a specific system rationalizing and hiding "the exploitative nature of the U.S. economy" in which various groups of scholars are trained for specific kinds of work (p. 14). In effect, Ms. Bennett's instruction is constrained by capitalist structures and the seven habits, as I saw employed, do not offer a set of tools to encourage her to operate outside these conditions.

Moreover, I believe the habit's ability to be circulated as "universal" also rests on old arguments we can trace back to liberal thought and have been repackaged within neoliberal beliefs. Yes, something like think win/win is wonderful for instilling teamwork skills and taking others into consideration. However, for something created through neoliberalism to have a chance of existing outside of it, perhaps more is needed beyond the seven habits. Before unpacking this claim, let us consider other possibilities of the seven habits in a different context: morning assemblies.

Think Win/Win and Possibilities of Resistance at Morning Assemblies

As first addressed in chapter two, the morning assemblies pick one of the seven habits to emphasize on a given day and has a group of scholars reflect on it through skits, songs, and offering quotes. The purpose of these moments is for the scholars themselves to be active in demonstrating how one can apply the seven habits in their daily lives. For one morning assembly, one 2nd grade male scholar shares a story to reflect on the habit of beginning with the end in mind:

> I struggle with this habit, but we know the basic meaning: plan something before you do it. I did not fully understand its true meaning until I came across this quote: 'Do something today that your future self will thank you for.' This quote is meaningful to me, because the things that I do now will help my future…

Through a quick reflection, this scholar speaks to how practicing the habits can be difficult all while offering some advice on how the others in the room could learn from his struggles. The morning assemblies encourage the scholars to reemphasize to each other the importance of the habits not only in theory, but through their practices in their daily lives. Unlike classroom spaces in which teaching the habits is woven throughout directions and the daily curriculum, the morning assemblies serve a very specific rhetorical and pedagogical moment for teaching or reinforcing the habits for students. It is not only a time to remind the school the meaning of the habits. Instead, it is more importantly a moment to rhetorically establish the significance and applicability of these concepts to even the youngest of scholars.

On a beautiful May morning, one group of scholars (who look to be about 5th or 6th grade) performed a skit inspired by the habit think win/win. There are five of them standing behind a long, wooden table on the stage located in the cafeteria. Behind the scholars is a large printed canvas of the façade of Humanitas and in front of them are two standing microphones, slightly off to each side. One of the young boys approaches the microphone to get his fellow scholar's attention. I can hear him ask, "What do we do?" What responses are offered are quiet and muddled, making the response back difficult to discern. They repeat this call and response until the room becomes filled with scholars and they have settled. It is now 7:59am, show time.

As three of the students walk slightly off stage to the right, two students walk behind the table. Taking turns with the microphone they introduce the theme for the week: "This week," states the young girl, "We are going to have skits that focus on the seven habits. Today, we are doing number four: think win/win." She hands the

microphone to her partner who states that each of them will be playing themselves and that he is also the narrator. The skit involves the two of them having a debate over which Xbox game to play: Fortnite or Minecraft. They go back and forth providing reasons for why their game should be played. At one point the boy jokes, "Who even plays Minecraft anymore?" This is met with a small bubbling up of laughter. What gets a good laugh is his SpongeBob SquarePants-like stating of "3 minutes later" showing the passage of time but no progress on the debate. Finally, an agreement is made when the girl proposes that they play a different game, a zombie one. They decide this is a good compromise and begin to play the makeshift white cardboard box "Xbox" they have created. Using a real-life scenario that many in their audience have experienced or are likely to, these performers demonstrate the benefits of think win/win. Instead of getting caught up in what two individuals want, they come together to agree and on a third option that works best for them. This skit echoes what occurred in Ms. Bennett's classroom several months later in December. Both examples underscore the important lesson of cooperation as a means to complete a task (Ms. Bennett's class) and maintain a relationship (the skit). The limitation of the morning assemblies is a lack of organic engagement among scholars. The assemblies tend to be more pedagogical rather than a space to them into immediate practice: a space for reflection rather than doing.

Across interviews, classrooms, and morning assemblies, the seven habits are supported by school staff and (grandparents) and their reflections demonstrate their practical applicability to the lives of young children and teens. These past sections gave us some sense of how the habits are utilized within the school itself, but these occurrences are not neutral spaces of discursive engagement. I do believe that they have

some serious material consequences especially within the larger context of public education itself and the age of neoliberalism. Although Covey's habits consider both independence and interdependence and making win/win situations, the permeation of neoliberalism and the high stakes of running a charter school in Phoenix, Arizona bring independence, individuality, and competition to the forefront at Humanitas: an independence that serves to uphold historical structures of liberalism that have landed us in our age of neoliberalism. Classroom observations had brought to light arguments and concerns regarding capitalism and its practices within educational spaces. The next section continues those threads by considering the implications of the habits in relation to (neo)liberal thought and practice specifically.

The (Neo)Liberalization of Whole Child Education

In the most general sense, the seven habits make reproducing historical inequalities in relation to race and class possible all while offering some agentic potential for scholars and a community that are historically marginalized and underserved. As demonstrated, this is due to the liberal roots of Covey's arguments and how these materially manifest in the lives of the scholars. Yet, they also offer a language and series of practices that seek to empower, in this context, bodies that historical and contemporary structures tend to ignore or erase all together. Empowerment is not enough though. If neoliberalism supports a multicultural, watered down "equality" that is non-redistributive, resources, including actual liberty and agency, only continue to be reallocated in an upward manner (Duggan, 2003).

Put another way, the seven habits may empower these scholars and their historically overlooked and underfunded community, but this sense of empowerment

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ultimately serves to benefit long standing hegemonies of (neo)liberalism (whiteness and classism). As educational scholar Lisa Delpit (1988) discerns, classrooms engage with their own forms of power in which what is taught and how it is taught reflect the rules of those who have power in a given culture. If you do not have immediate access to such power, the classroom can become one space in which you are taught ways to make acquiring that culture of power easier. In effect, we become empowered to feel like we have agency over our choices in life as we are taught these rules or scripts. However, these discourses and practices of empowerment (whether communicative or how we present and comport ourselves) do not challenge how the habits essentially ask us to empower our way through networked systems of racism, sexism, classism, and the like – a concern certainly brought to light during classroom observations.

Not only will this mean that neoliberalism is present within Humanitas, but that concerns of privilege, race, and class arise as well. As noted in the introduction and chapter two, we must consider (neo)liberalism's commitments to whiteness, classed distinctions, and an individualized orientation. Especially when we remind ourselves that "whiteness has always carried with it a kind of economic mobility" (Casey, 2016, p. 113). From a historical view, liberalism was about defining whiteness within the age of U.S. colonization and with whiteness came capitalism, which promised economic mobility for Whites. John Locke's (1690) early work was so influential to the spirit of capitalism that we cannot untangle liberalism from capitalism (Grant & Tarcov, 1996). Since capitalism "never functions for the needs of all," one way that its access has been limited has been along racialized lines (Casey, 2016, p. 117). Therefore, liberalism, capitalism, and whiteness are all heavy entangled with each other – leading to the pulling of one thread to

the unraveling of the rest. An engagement with (neo)liberal practices is ultimately an investment in performances of whiteness and classism and this is something chapter two put into conversation with notions of the public sphere and practices of publicity.

This then begs the question of who or what gets to be public? This larger theoretical question of who gets to "practice publicness" is both a question of the emergence of the public sphere (via Habermas) and the identities of those granted access and the more recent neoliberal concerns of subjectivity rather than *just* identity (how we are to behave and believe instead of just who we "are"). For example, liberal conceptions of the "public person" point to historical constructs of what it means to be a White man (landowning, capitalist, proponent of liberty) while contemporary conversations and research about neoliberalism demonstrates how it is more about a performance of whiteness that rhetorically erases our complex, intersecting identities (Duggan, 2003). This subtle yet vital pivot from identity to subjectivity is how the neoliberal public sphere is paradoxically diverse and conservative. Bodies of color are given access to "practicing publicness" but such practices (or performances) must uphold whiteness and therefore these practices are brought into K-12 classroom.

Granted, one cannot change their race, but performances of whiteness may permit some limited economic mobility. The seven habits, rooted within liberal logic, is doing just that: giving to all who come into contact with Covey's work, seven ways to perform whiteness and/or seven practices that uphold whiteness. Although the subject of liberalism, the liberal, was to be "be progressive, forward-looking, free from prejudice, characterized by all admirable qualities" this notion has only ever been just that, a thought, an idea, never a complete practice (Dewey, 1935, p. 2). As some social progress

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has forced the structures of capitalism and liberalism to open "the public" to historically underrepresented bodies, access has demanded those bodies to perform in ways that still embrace the structures for what they are. Essentially, neoliberalism has been effective in rhetorically convincing people that success is an economically determined construct that supports historic values of whiteness. Since the neoliberal subject has never been clearly "raced," we can assume that rhetoric has been effectively used to ensure that the "neutrality" of the "non-raced" neoliberal subject upholds whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Given these critiques and concerns, perhaps is there is more to consider in relation to the possibilities of Covey's work in a neoliberal age.

What Covey's (1989/2004) concepts and the data force us to acknowledge is how neoliberalism rejects two core notions of classical liberal thought: we must acknowledge another's right to exist and must take this value into consideration when making decisions and taking action. Neoliberalism at its worst is selfish and hyper individualized – we are to value success of the individual over that of a cooperative effort (Amadae, 2016). Within the age of neoliberalism, Covey's concept of think win/win is a hail back to a time when we theoretically cared about others when making decisions (much like Ms. Bennett was attempting to do during the poster activity). Instead of thinking of choice as "defined by each particular individual's preferences only constrained by available opportunities," some of Covey's beliefs and practices remind us of the value of working together and there are certain liberties and choices within a community (p. 13). More importantly, we must remind ourselves that Covey claimed with win/win that all systems must support that form of relational interaction. The various systems within a neoliberal world do not support or inspire think win/win. Thus, we cannot completely

write-off Covey's work as purely problematic as it is limited by our symbolic and material cultures of power. Granted, much of it rests on repacking liberal beliefs in contemporary language and practices, but because it is a hail back in many ways, it reminds of us some of the disjunctures between liberalism and neoliberalism.

In the end, seven habits are prevalent in the school along with general discourses about its whole child approach. Nonetheless, it is not the only driving pedagogical force at Humanitas. My time at the school did locate moments of potential (neo)liberal rupture that, for the most part do not seem to stem from the seven habits directly. Instead, they are pedagogical moments that still speak to the "whole child" all while offering some resistance to the neoliberalism of people, relationships, and educational contexts.

Pedagogical Resistance to (Neo)Liberalism

As much as educational policy and curriculum has manage to reproduce liberalism, leading us to neoliberalism and the continuation of whiteness and classism, John Dewey (1935) once believed that education could be a pivotal space for changing the problematic tune of liberalism. Specifically, he articulates that

> the first object of a renascent liberalism is education [and by this] I mean that its task is to aid in producing the habits of mind and character, the intellectual and moral patterns, that are somewhere near even with the actual movements of events…The educational task cannot be accomplished merely by working upon men's [sic] minds, *without action that effects actual change in institutions*. (Dewey, 1935, p. 61, emphasis added)

Within the specific context of public education, Covey's seven habits assume that the locus of change is within a person and this is an old habit (no pun intended, Covey) that

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must change so that action and agency are acknowledged in current conditions. Consequently, I wanted to also account for additional pedagogical and educational moments that spoke to Dewey's claims from decades past. Specifically, I located moments where structures are implicated within Humanitas and possibilities exist within and throughout these moments.

Once a day, the scholars at Humanitas get about thirty minutes of a specialty class: physical education (PE), art, music, and computer lab. Later one morning, Ms. Bennett's second grade class is getting to head to their PE class. We exit the classroom (the boys in one line and the girls in another) and take a left down the hallway. Ms. Bennett asks the scholars to wait patiently since we have arrived early. Pulling out her phone to look at the time, she sees that there is enough time for a bathroom break. Ms. Bennett then counts off the scholars by three allowing them to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom. As the last group make their way back, the kindergarten class that was in PE begins their slow exit. The PE room is in a classroom that looks much like Ms. Bennett's but has no windows. There are four white walls, a white board and overhead projector at the "front" of the classroom, and eight black mats spaced out across the floor. PE class begins once the scholars have randomly seated themselves together in groups of three to four on the long, narrow black mats. A YouTube video walks them through about ten minutes of mediation, then they shift to another YouTube video of yoga stretches, and then a brief cardio workout led by an all-White family wearing various superhero costumes.

After the cardio video concludes, Coach, a middle-aged Black man, asks the scholars to sit down and be quiet, because they are going to watch another video. As he

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pulls up this video on YouTube, I can see that the title is "Moral Stories." The story

begins as the mom and kids go to the supermarket. When they come back, the mom

carries the bags in by herself as her children goof around and play. Exhausted by this

task, she says that she is going to lay down for a bit and takes a seat on the couch, leaning

her head back. The kids then dig into the grocery bags and pull out smaller, snack-sized

bags of popcorn. Once done, they throw the bags on the floor by their mom and ask to go

outside. Once outside, they run into an old man putting bags into the truck of his car. We

learn after a brief exchange that he is the kids' grandfather. He says that he is heading to

a charity and asks if the kids want to come with and they somewhat hesitantly get into the

car. While driving to the location, Grandpa tells his grandchildren that we have two hands

so that we have one to help ourselves and the other to help others.

The trio head to the building where the charity organization is located and hand

out food. On the way back, they stop and get ice cream. They eat it in the car for a bit

until Grandpa gets out of the car and helps a blind woman across the street. As he gets

settled back into the car, the kids ask why he did that. He says that "we should help others

even when they can't help us." By this point in the video, some of scholars have become

restless: shifting around, chatting with one another. The video ends with the children

being dropped off at home and them apologizing to their mother for their poor behavior

earlier. Coach pauses the video before it completely ends with the credits and says that he

wants to discuss what they just watched.

He begins by summarizing the general plot of the story and asks what the grandpa

means about having two hands. After some scholars begin immediately speaking over

each other, Coach states, "I will wait" and leans back on his desk, hands clasped in this

lap. Slowly the scholars settle down and become quiet. Coach continues, "Not every kid gets to eat every day...that's what they was doing when they went to the charity."[12] He has to wait again as the scholars start offering comments and personal anecdotes of their own about helping at church and so on. Before continuing, Coach emphasizes to the scholars that what they just watched "is an important lesson." Getting up from the desk and walking to the middle of the projection screen so that his face is covered in the light, he clarifies this important lesson, "With it being Christmas time, it is a time of giving. I want to ask you to go home and look at your toys. If there are any that you no longer play with, you should think about donating them to kids that don't have any toys." Coach also notes that they should be helping their parents. In the video, the mom had to carry the grocery bags by herself and "we cannot do that" in our own homes. Since their parents are working really hard right now, some working other jobs and overtime to get ready for Christmas, the scholars should be helping out around the house. "There isn't a law about getting gifts," so they need to keep this in mind. He says that if they behave well, he could imagine their parents getting them the gifts they really want like a PS4 (which gets a lot of "oooos" from the scholars) or an Elsa doll or ice castle, "or whatever."

Overall, the scholars seemed quite captivated with the video and Coach's discussion afterwards. Many were nodding their heads and even had serious looks on their faces. There is no clear indication overtly or subtly within the video itself that today's brief moral lesson in PE is directly tied to the seven habits. Yet, the scholars are being taught a valuable lesson about kindness, generosity, and helping others. In so many ways this ten-minute moment in a PE class can seem so insignificant. But given the

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[12] To honor vernacular ways of speaking I have chosen not to "[sic]" such utterances.

above comments about the seven habits, it becomes an interesting piece of how the "whole" part of the child is educated at Humanitas. No, the video and discussion does not speak to the chances that most of the scholars in the room are not from wealthy families themselves. It does serve to remind them of the importance of helping others and supporting people who may be different than them (in terms of age and wealth). When tied back to the landscape of neoliberalism, this moment is powerful. Since one of the primary strategies of neoliberalism in recent years has been increased calls for privatization, the last two decades have seen shifts in personal responsibility for most aspects of life: education, family, social support, and the like. Today's lesson in PE challenges this privatization effort by reminding scholars the importance of community. Of course, privatization in general is why it has become the burden of a community people and not the state to support its poorest and most vulnerable groups – a fact we cannot sweep under the rug. At the very least, this moment keeps an overt desire of neoliberalism for privatization to be taken to its extreme at bay.

Within educational spaces, other acts of privatization have led to an increased reliance on standardized testing. Not only do these tests help support a massive private business enterprise, but they inherently value additional neoliberal logics about individuality, merit, and market-based approaches to determining one's ability and/or worth. Humanitas Academy, like all public schools, is not immune to the reality of standardized testing. Chapter five will address this tension in more detail. In relation to this chapter's focus on pedagogy, there was one instance in which a small moment of rupture pointed to a critique of the wider effects of standardized testing at Humanitas.

The weather has begun to cool in the desert as we head deeper into December. Humanitas is about a week and a half away from winter break and you cannot help but note a large tonal and emotional shift within the school. A walk down the hall between classroom transitions illuminates the stressed faces of teachers and how the scholars (especially the younger ones) have become unhinged, restless, and even just goofy. That is how this particular morning started. So, you can imagine by the time the scholars returned from their lunch, they have become almost unmanageable. Ms. Bennett is doing her best to get through the day's lesson plans as best she can. As the minutes go by, her ability to do so becomes more strained as the scholars slowly become cartoonish versions of themselves. Getting towards the end of her lesson on clouds, Ms. Bennett tells the class that they are going to head outside to see what kinds of clouds they can see. Getting up and opening the door on the back wall of the classroom that leads outside to a small jungle gym, Ms. Bennett tells the scholars they can follow her. Unfortunately, mother nature was unaware of the day's lesson as the Phoenix sky boasted a beautifully clear, crisp afternoon sky with no cloud in sight.

Instead of heading right back inside, Ms. Bennett announces to the class that they have a couple of minutes to run and play. Before the words are completely out of her mouth, the scholars scatter about like ants whose dirt mound has been compromised. Carefully navigating our way through the bodies, Ms. Bennett and I make our way to the small jungle gym and rest our forearms on the cold, green metal railing that surroundings the play area. After some jokes about the lack of clouds, I ask her about the rising tension in the hallways and at the school in general. Sighing and tilting her head up ever so slightly, she tucks a loose strand of light brown hair that has fallen from her ponytail

behind her ear, "It always seems to get this way at this time of year." The scholars seem to know a break is coming, but it never comes soon enough. Pausing, Ms. Bennett shifts her body weight from one foot to another and discloses that she wishes she could play with the scholars more. Over the last week, she has been imagining getting to do more arts and crafts with them, but Dr. Wyatt wants them to "work…work…*work*!" until the break. Not knowing how to remotely sympathize in the moment, I let the space between us fall silent.

Never would I have imagined that a quick, five-minute play break could become a salient, potential radical moment of pause within the literal and figurate space of this school. It is certainly clear that Ms. Bennett's decision to let the scholars play for a while (instead of heading back in to do more work that they clearly were not going to absorb) points to a general whole child pedagogical moment. Their bodies and minds needed a mental break and as a teacher she recognized it and accommodated her plans accordingly. Even though this is a group of second graders, and they do not yet take mandated standardized tests, they are still subject to its pressure and the school's general anxiety about doing well on them.

This anxiety it certainly made clear during the vast majority of school board meetings I attended in which the board members would pour over test results and discuss curriculum changes to increase scores. Board members would ask the woman in charge of curriculum, Ms. Eyre, about using new approaches and she would frequently remind them that changes in curriculum take time to reflect on test scores (an issue I will cover in more detail in the following chapter). Needless to say, the larger decision-making force at Humanitas does have a huge investment and concern with standardized test scores. Ms.

Bennett's reflection on the expectation of Dr. Wyatt that "work, work, work!" must be

the norm underscores the historical and sustained concerned about the effects and

consequences of standardized testing (see Spring, 2011 and chapter three). In addition,

neoliberalism is also all about maximizing a student's achievement, a fetishization of

productivity within classrooms. Consequently, teachers who can do more in less time are

seen as more valuable (Casey, 2016). Ms. Bennett is a valuable teacher and one who

recognizes the importance of taking the time to do "nothing" by giving the scholars

exactly what they needed to get through the rest of the day. Hence, a small moment of

play can have interesting consequences not only for a whole child approach but the

demands of standardized testing in our neoliberal world.

Finally, what is also noteworthy is the small way in which one could argue that

this moment of play for Ms. Bennett's scholars does connect to Covey's (1989/2004)

seven habits. His seventh habit, sharpen the saw, emphasizes that we cannot be effective

people unless we take care of our entire self: spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational.

Certainly, this play time could be seen as a "sharpening" moment of the scholar's

physical needs. However, I argue that Ms. Bennett's later reflection on the expectations

from Dr. Wyatt extends beyond the scope of the school employing the seven habits.

Instead, the larger educational expectation for standardized testing is so that five minutes

of playtime does more than "do" the seventh habit, because I see it as a larger structural

rupture that Covey's work is not equipped to speak to. These are moments inspired by

Covey's habits, but also the pedagogical choices of two teachers seeking to help shape

well-rounded scholars through some habits of their own.

Reflections and Implications

As demonstrated in this chapter, Covey's seven habits are far from the whole child approach that Humanitas and its scholars and community needs, at least according to scholars referenced in the previous chapter. In general, the argument for the habits' effectiveness is highly individualized, allowing us to ignore or over-simplify larger structural constraints. I have argued thus far that, since Covey's work echoes the sentiments of early liberal thinking in the U.S., the seven habits ultimately offer the grounds to reproduce whiteness and class-based distinctions. Intersectionally oppressed bodies of color are inculcated in the habits, but the final product is one of whiteness and class-based performance expectations that are (neo)liberal. Yet, in some small way the habits do offer a small critical rupture in attempting to challenge the hyper-individualism of neoliberalism by keeping others in mind with some of our decision making. The final pages offer a few pedagogical moments that are not directly tied to the seven habits (although the argument could be made). I have offered them as whole child moments beyond the scope of the habits because they offer structural critiques that Covey's habits are not naturally informed to do.

In a more general sense, I also want to keep in mind that Humanitas does not have to infuse the seven habits within their day-to-day schooling. Within the context of the larger charter school system in the state, the premise of wanting to educate the whole child in general is not the norm; instead, it is a rationalization and framework that stems from Dr. Wyatt's specific educational and work-based experiences. If we broaden the context beyond the physical boundaries of Humanitas, the very existence of the school is important. As summarized in chapter two, South Phoenix has historically been politically

and economically neglected and still struggles as a result. For example, as a Black grandfather to two grandchildren, Phil reflected on the "bad rap" this area has while struggling to understand why it has been so readily written off. According to his perception, there are good schools everywhere, there are bad schools everywhere and the same goes for teachers. He personally "loves living in the area" yet knows neighbors who send their children off to schools farther away. Phil acknowledges the schools that do struggle in the area but is concerned with how school choice allows people to essentially stop trying to improve their community's school when they send their children away. From his point of view, and I have to agree, there is not much the seven habits can do to change this fact.

Andrea, who had just recently moved from a different state, came to Phoenix having certain expectations about the area and its schools.

I feel like we're kind of told that in Phoenix, "Oh, your kids are going to do so well in Phoenix because they're not the um, the education is lower…the educational standards are lower." And so, people told us that they were going to do so well because they are more advanced. That was what I was told and that is the totally wrong information.

Andrea does point to the higher standards at Humanitas for why schooling for her children has not been as easy as she was told. This notion of Humanitas being an exception in the area was echoed by another parent I spoke to briefly during a school meeting about designing their new playground area. She very passionately spoke to how she sees Humanitas as a "shiny gem in the South Phoenix area." Perhaps Humanitas's ability to be unique and "shiny" is due to the larger issues with the South Phoenix school

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district. Another parent, Tammy, admitted that she is uneasy about sending her children to one of the area's conventional public schools while Tom also argued that he and his wife never had an interest in sending their kids to those same low-performing schools (keeping in mind performance is almost solely determined by test scores).

Consequently, Humanitas's existence is important. Whether people think it is a threat to the area's conventional schools or they see it as an opportunity for the community to have an academically successful school, its existence is real and does have real consequences. The desire to do more than create good standardized test scores, to instill a whole child approach through the seven habits, makes it a charter school with a complex existence. In the end, this chapter established the narrative of the school's founding and goals for its students and community. Its promise of educating people's (grand)child holistically is shaped by Stephen Covey's (1989/2004) seven habits whose practices are questionable but not easily written off because of where they are being employed and for/by whom: scholars from predominately underrepresented communities. In the concluding chapter, I will offer some practical implications on other pedagogical assumptions that could help bolster the seven habits to a space of anti-neoliberal practice. To get a fuller picture of the implications of Humanitas, its existence, and its day-to-day operations, more information is needed beyond conversations around pedagogical choices and practices to locate the possibilities of moving discussions surrounding charter schools beyond a critique-only position.

CHAPTER FIVE: NAVIGATING SCHOOL CHOICE THROUGH NEOLIBERAL

SCAPEGOATING AND DIALECTICAL VERNACULAR COMPLICITY

It is a blistering hot afternoon in the summer of 2018. The sun pricks my skin with its heat as I make my way to a public discussion about school choice held at a local church. The non-partisan, grassroots group has been traveling around the greater Phoenix area to educate people on the history and impact of school choice and privatization efforts more specifically. The two dozen or so of us (mostly young adults) have gathered in a small lounge area at the church. I take an awkward seat between two people in a light brown leather couch that swallows me whole as I lower myself down. Getting adjusted the best I can, I prepare to take notes while many of the other adults are eating food. The talk is given by Allie, a short, blonde White woman in priest robes and an unexpected but delightfully cheerful bubble-gum pink cardigan and, Terry, a middle-aged White man in an unassuming blue button up and casual black pants. Their presentation walks through the history of privatization efforts within education policy in Arizona. Although most of the talk focuses on vouchers and tax credits, the presenters do speak for a moment about charter schools.

Terry specifically discusses how charter schools are not accountable to the community like conventional public schools. Recently, there has been some talk in the state to find ways to privatize charter schools and this idea has received support from various lobbying groups, some backed by Betsy DeVos and her family. Before Terry can unpack some additional claims, a young White adult male who is sitting in back left corner of the room begins talking as he raises his hand in the air, "I am more libertarian in my beliefs. So, I don't get why making a school private would be bad." Allie responds

that doing so would only further limit free education, leaving those privileged more so. Wanting to provide some anecdotal evidence on the issues with charter schools, one young woman with dark brown hair sitting immediately to my right says, "I went to a BASIS school and there is an annual teaching fund in which parents are expected, they would get letters form the school, asking for parents to give additional money to the school." As it turned out, that money was not going to the teachers. Instead, various student organizations would raise money for their collective groups for various things like travel. All these raised funds were put into a single account. When students went to request money that they had raised from the school, they were informed that they did not have any. The school was using the money the students raised to help supplement the teachers' salaries while keeping the additional state and parent money for themselves.

After letting various responses of shock and horror to have their affective moment, Terry speaks up to make clear to the libertarian that he is not anti-corporation or business. What he is against is "starting a school with public funds to create a private business" and then not being transparent. Another young woman sitting across the room with a snack-sized bag of plain potato chips raises her hand and discloses that she teaches at one of the other big charter schools in the greater Phoenix area, Great Hearts. She informs the group that when she signed her teaching contract, she agreed to a tax exemption in which the school – not the state – can take additional money from her paycheck to help fund the school. Pausing to let this sink in, Terry nods his head and sighs, "Schools shouldn't be funded through loopholes." The woman who attended a BASIS school agrees very strongly and admits that schools, like BASIS, rely far too much on loopholes rather than the general trust to get funding. The libertarian in the room

speaks up again, "I was homeschooled. And the more I hear about public schools being bad, I don't think I would send my kid to a public school. I am torn about things like charters. They could make an old, inefficient system better or just leave it behind all together."

At this point, I speak up. I state that such an argument is exactly the framing used for the support of charter schools and the privatization of public education. "Since the system is so broken, instead of trying to fix it, people argue that a new, capitalist system is the best solution." Affirming my argument, an older woman sitting on the floor adds on, "And at the end of the day, that is just a message: 'All public schools are bad.' My daughter told me when she was young that she didn't want to become a teenager because everyone says that teenagers are bad." The room bursts with laughter and quickly settles down. The woman says that she told her daughter, "That is just a message." She could become a bad teenager or not become a bad teenager. "You can choose to continue that narrative or not." The young libertarian seems to take this comment to heart, nodding his head while offering a sincere contemplative look. Wanting to wrap up the gathering, Allie steps forward and passionately remarks,

> We need to make explicit what has been implicit for decades. The state and the country once valued a public education that was for the common good. It is still law. We currently have not seen fit to change this law, at least in Arizona. I still believe in choice, but I am gravely concerned that this state is on the verge of losing public education. I really think it closer to happening than we think.

With these closing words, the meeting comes to and end and people start chatting based on various threads discussed by the presenters.

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While others are chatting amongst themselves, I approach Allie to start a conversation since I was both intrigued and inspired by her closing remarks. While talking, she discloses that her two kids attend a private school. I offer a neutral head nod in response and this puzzles Allie. "I'm used to getting shocked faces when I say that." I am not shocked because this is not the first time I have met someone in the last two years who is critical of privatization but sends their children to private schools or schools of choice. Before parting, Allie does clarify that her children can go to a private school because she is "White and privileged." Before I could follow up on the remark, we were interrupted by others wanting to chat with her.

In general, what I have learned during the last two years is that the imaginings we have about school choice generally (both discursive and material) inform some of the larger implications of (neo)liberalism and school choice specific to race and class. Yet, these imaginings tend to never be merely fictitious. They manifest in real ways with tangible effects. The older woman in this meeting offers an interesting comparison to help a listener understand the power of language and decision-making. However clever and interesting a take, I disagree with her statement. It is more than "just a message." It is a consequential one that has and will continue to reshape the K-12 landscape.

This public meeting, which speaks to both the imagined and the real, establishes many of the imperative themes this chapter addresses. First, I will offer an overview of how school choice is navigated by the (grand)parents involved in this study. Second, I also want to briskly consider some of the many discourses about teachers that I witnessed. While there are multiple discourses about teachers and teaching, one prominent discourse deals with standardized testing and that will be where I center the

discussion. Next, from this broader landscape that is crafted, I have derived two key concepts that summarize the experiences of neoliberalism and school choice in this context. First, neoliberal scapegoating works at the discursive level to we see how various people rhetorically construct "the bad guy" or who or what should be blamed for the state of education. In neoliberalism, scapegoats for "failing" public education include various forms of government (state and federal) and even specific politicians or key educational agents. These moments of scapegoating can help locate what hegemony is at work and what additional political or ideological commitments one has in relation to neoliberalism.

Second, dialectical vernacular complicity invites us to consider how material constraints and options force individuals to make certain choices. This term invites us to seriously consider, perhaps with some empathy, why people engage with structures that are harmful in order to get "ahead." Finally, provided these concepts, the end of the chapter offers reflections on the role of relationality and the provisional possibilities of vernacular rhetorics. Specifically, by the end of this analysis, I situate the importance of how meaning is neither passive nor stagnant as various actors and agents constantly reimage new connections between (neo)liberal discourses, structures, and practices within the context of Humanitas and school choice in Phoenix.

General Reflections on Navigating School Choice

Chapter three gave us a wide view of education in Arizona and the role and impact of school choice. As demonstrated thus far, the data gathered in the study expands and complicates this macro-level narrative. School choice in Phoenix is not what it once used to be, at least according to Olivia, a White, working class woman who is helping

raise her son's two Mexican American children. She grew up in Phoenix, moved out of state for several years, and has recently returned.

> And it was a whole new ballgame. Uh, trying to find them a new school, we moved in a neighborhood, well we were trying to figure out which neighborhood to move into because a huge consideration was for the kids and where they would go to school. Being away from Phoenix for quite some time, like 11 years, I was unfamiliar with some of the changes that have happened in Phoenix and Maricopa County regarding education, schooling and charter schools and that sort of thing. So, it was stressful! Very stressful to figure out where we should send these boys to school…Diversity was important as well. So that's pretty much my thing. I got involved with, when I moved out here, finally, we picked a home here in the South Phoenix area, and the South Phoenix area had really improved very much for housing so we thought we can look for a school for the boys here.

Searching for a school was not as easily done. Olivia spent time looking at various conventional public schools, their ratings, and various charter schools as well. One charter they investigated was full, and she was not comfortable sending her grandsons to a local conventional public school. Sending them to another conventional public-school district in a wealthier part of the greater Phoenix area was also not ideal because she, much like Evelyn who we met in chapter two, was concerned about bullying.

> Um, being that the state of politics right now and diversity, I had read where some schools have singled out minority children there or the students did, not the school itself. And so, it made it a difficult learning environment. So, bringing them into this particular area of the valley [South Phoenix], they're not the minority.

They've been able to really be who they are, and not really have to deal with that

kind of bullying.

For her, it was fate that Humanitas had just opened and someone she knew was sending

their kids there. In the absence of a long or good track record, she appreciated being able

to speak to the school's leadership to learn about the learning curve for new schools.

Tammy's thoughts and experience echo Olivia's in a lot of ways. At the forefront

of her reflections is the acknowledgement of how much schooling has changed over the

years:

That [school choice] is new for me, too. I mean, when I was growing up, you

went to whatever school you lived near. That's what we did. And thankfully, I

came across some pretty good educators...a couple, you know, that I still talk to

now. But, um, this whole thing was new. I mean, I appreciated it because, and see

as much as I say, I don't gotta stay where I'm, you know, stay in the community,

even if people don't believe the kids should have the resources.

The end of the reflection from Tammy denotes, yet again, the perception and reality of

schooling in South Phoenix. Here, she seems to offer a quick thought on the belief that

the students of the South Phoenix area are not offered the same resources as others.

Olivia seems to agree with this sentiment:

But you go to the Roosevelt School District, which we're in, and you don't get

that [good resources and support]. It makes me angry. I feel it's by design many

times, by, by the state, you know? It's like, then how we talk about charter

schools. You read in the paper how these charter presidents or administrators are

making so much money off these charter schools. It's just, how do you know?!

It's very frustrating, you know, even if a charter school is that great, because you

don't know how they're allocating or spending those funds.

Even though these (grand)parents send their (grand)children to a charter school they are

not unaware of the complex landscape of charters in the state. Whereas Olivia is evoking

a structural critique of a divestment by the state for the South Phoenix area and its

residents, Tammy had a slightly different opinion about what ultimately makes for a

thriving, successful school:

I think it's all about leadership and leadership of the school. Because when you

have a specific type of leader, whether it's a public school or charter school, the...

most of the time, the rest of the body follows, you know, what's going on for

leader. So, I know that there are some public schools where they have a fantastic

leader, and you wouldn't even think it was a public school…And so, the school

operates almost like a charter school. But I think it's all about the leader of the

school and I've heard of some charter schools that are just horrific. It's just a

nightmare, but it is just a charter school wanting to try and get money. Yeah, so I

think it just depends.

Just like Olivia, Tammy is not unaware of the corruption that does exist with charters and

that they can fail. But both Tammy and Olivia take the good with the bad ultimately

because, as articulated by Evelyn, "The school should fit the child and what they need,

uh, and like to learn."

Overall, almost all the (grand)parents in this study came to enroll their

(grand)children at Humanitas due to recommendations by friends and family. In Olivia's

case, it was convenient that Humanitas was close to where they lived, but some parents

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made farther commutes in order to get their children to school every day. Evelyn sent her son to Humanitas because they had cousins attending even though the family lives walking distance to another charter school. The travel is worth it because she appreciates that there is constant communication between parents, teachers, and the principal. In relation to Dr. Wyatt alone, she marveled at how "He has, like, memorized my child's face. He knows him." Caroline also makes a longer drive to drop her children off at Humanitas, but her recruitment experiences were a little different.

> First of all, you just get overloaded with garbage in the mail…So, in this the charter schools, especially by our house, we don't live near the school, we live in Laveen and so, we drive. That's uh that's how much we like that school; we drive every day. I see a few ones opening up around here [in Laveen] and there's a mom that left Humanitas, she was in our kindergarten class. She left for Heritage [another charter school], and she's desperately trying to get us to go there. Now I'm getting things in the mail from them too.

So, with choice of school requires additional considerations that parents and grandparents must make. In very practical terms this means having to navigate transportation or wading through the stress that making the choice can create. Yet, choice means that new ones are almost always going to come around – adding another option to the buffet of school choice. To be clear though, access and decision making has not been easy for all the parents and grandparents I interviewed.

From the moment I asked Olivia my first interview question about her experiences with education, she jumped into a five-minute reflection on the stress and process of searching for the best school for her grandsons. She and her son did enroll his

sons into Humanitas, but the eldest was performing so well that they ended up enrolling him into a more competitive baccalaureate school in a different city. Although things seem to be settling down, I asked Olivia how her stress level was now, in this moment. She offered an exasperated huff and said,

> I am not as stressed as I used to be…Although they have to go to two different schools, which is a challenge because I take one to the other school and the dad takes the other to the other one and it's a lot of chaos...uh organizing, you know? I am just grateful that I can do it. How many parents can't do that? They just have to trust that wherever they send their kids to school.

Olivia is aware of the strange privilege this additional stress of having the ability to engage fully with school choice creates. Beyond Olivia's experiences, there were some other stressors for those interviewed about their experiences with navigating school choice.

Tom knew he wanted his children to attend a Montessori school. When it came time to start this process, when his oldest was in pre-K, he and his wife began their search. Much like shopping for a car, they visited a number of different schools and sought to interview and talk with school principals and additional staff. The day arrived when they were ready to visit their ideal Montessori school in the area.

> And the school we were really wanting to go to, we uh kind of popped up for a visit. And the principal…we just got treated pretty…for us, pretty, pretty badly I would say because the person wouldn't even come out and introduce herself to us. You know, there's no one there [no staff were out and about waiting to greet anyone]…It was just the attitude of the place that we just didn't like.

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A friend of theirs had a child enrolled in pre-K at Humanitas and suggested they check the school out. Their experience visiting Humanitas was much different. They felt like the staff showed enthusiasm and Tom specifically enjoyed the "kind of customer service type feel" that was projected by the school's staff. In the end, Tom says he and his wife chose Humanitas because

> we just feel like they, they believe in what they're doing. Um, even though it may not be, you know, Great Hearts, or the Kyrene school district or something like that. Um the people, they are really moving in a forward trajectory for the kids and we are…and we can grow with that because we're going to do the things that we need to do outside of school for homework and things like that. It's all about quality of life, right? You know, and that's, I think that's the premise of our decision making and where we chose to put in them in this school…And they seem to be great people with what they are doing and it just an impact on us.

Across these experiences from Olivia, Tammy, Evelyn, Caroline, and Tom, we can see that, although they are all involved with Humanitas, their process and experiences of coming to the school varied. What they were looking for in the school was unique to their expectations and standards for what makes a good educational learning space. For some, diversity and inclusion mattered, while others were more concerned about passion and interpersonal treatment. The experiences of these (grand)parents shed a light on how multifaceted engaging in school choice is. Moreover, given most of these (grand)parents are working class and from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups, they are not the typical face we attribute to school choice. Their privilege does not necessarily come from their social identities but from their ability to have options and the means to explore

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and select what they want. In other words, they have the privilege of options and mobility. Nonetheless, as Tom's, Olivia's, and Evelyn's experiences and perspectives show, not all of them have full access to all their choices.

One of the most effective social influences neoliberalism has imparted is the erasure of the complexities of identity. As chapter four argued, practices of a "good" liberal, and thus neoliberal, assume a "neutral" performance of whiteness that is heavily intertwine with class. Therefore, larger conversations about who benefits from the neoliberalization of public schooling, via school choice, tend to echo these same sentiments (e.g., O'Dell & Sanchez, 2016; O'Dell & Sanchez, 2017; Ravitch, 2012). There seems to be a hyper focus on those who are already privileged rigging the system to accumulate more and I am not interested in contesting those claims. What I am contesting is the erasure of people who we would deem underserved and historically underrepresented from being active, agentic individuals within the various practices of school choice. The erasure of these bodies and experiences does a disservice to their presence and perspectives. What I hope we discern from this brief summary of the parents and grandparents in this study is that not all who engage with school choice are inherently privileged (via race and class).

Furthermore, my interviews and conversations with (grand)parents point to an important distinction between school choice and vernacular, parental choice. The former is what we typically focus on or hear the most about: how the larger structuring systems of education permits certain types of movement and choice. For example, Arizona being a per-pupil funding state, with various forms of schooling options, creates a unique and specific school choice landscape. Consequently, these larger, macro-level discussions are

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vital. They ask us to focus on policy and the implicit biases and reinforcing hegemonies they can perpetuate or attempt to alleviate (see chapter three). What we begin to see here, in these few examples, is how "doing" school choice looks and sounds different than the larger, sweeping discourses we may receive from policy and the news. Vernacular, parental choice exists within the framework of education in the state, but it does not always clearly and neatly reflect it. The parents and grandparents of Humanitas are in a difficult and complex position due to the education system that currently exists coupled with their social identities and concerns about equity, diversity, and safety. By accounting for these handful of experiences, we can begin to start piecing together the slippages that exist between school choice and vernacular, parental choice. In the end, it does matter that these vernacular modes of "choice" are still limited by structures of racism, classism, and access. In the following section, I want to bring discussions about teachers and standardized testing into the picture to further develop the story of school choice at Humanitas. This next section paired with the previous helps establish the larger context in which neoliberal scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity derive and exist.

Discourses About and Material Constraints of Teachers

During the beginning of the public meeting at the local church, Terry introduced himself and articulated his deep concern about Arizona "pushing good teachers out" of public education jobs. There is "data" to support these claims, but circumstances at Humanitas also reflect Terry's concern and the instability of teachers at public schools (see Fischer, 2019). How frequently teachers were mentioned during data collection meant that I should offer some space to reflect on these comments and arguments. Since the neoliberalization of education rests heavily on standardized testing and teachers are

seen as the direct influencer of outcomes, these must be understood in relation to one another.

It is close to the beginning of the new school year and this is the first time the school board is meeting. There is much to discuss as they look forward to the upcoming year and the goals and obstacles that the school is facing. One important topic of conversation is scholar success – specific to standardized test performance. Dr. Wyatt pivots the conversation to discuss how teacher turnover at Humanitas is harming the scholars' ability to score well. He reports that they had a 50% turnover rate during the last school year (from August 2017 until July 2018). Not only does this frustrate him but it makes running the school "so tiring and ineffective." His goal is to reduce this number to 10% this year. "How many teachers is 50%?" asks Kenneth, one of the board members calling into the meeting due to illness. Responding, Dr. Wyatt says that they lost 17 teachers last year. "Is this rate of teacher turnover high everywhere in the state? Or the issue unique to us?" continues Kenneth. Dr. Wyatt begins to say that it may be unique just to us or well the surrounding area. He does not think higher class areas have such a high turnover rate. Ms. Eyre, the young Black woman who helps oversee curriculum, disagrees. She thinks it is a problem that is not unique to poorer areas.

This same concern of Dr. Wyatt's came up a year later as he, Ms. Eyre, and another prominent staff member, Ms. Haraway stood in front of the Arizona Charter School Board to make their case for why the board should grant Humanitas's request to expand into high school grades (from a K-8 school to K-12). The room is packed with mostly White presenting bodies in professional and business casual attire. While discussing the school's standardized test scores, a board member, looking down at a

packet of papers, asks about Humanitas's science scores. Dr. Wyatt admits that they are low as well, but they have struggled to get a trained and licensed science teacher. He argues that this is not a unique problem to their school but a symptom of teaching in Arizona in general. And Dr. Wyatt is not wrong. In 2017, in an attempt to fill teaching vacancies, Governor Doug Ducey signed a law that permits teachers to be hired with zero formal training (Strauss, 2017). They are required to have at least five years of relevant experience, but "relevant" is not clearly defined. Flashing back to the Humanitas school board meeting the year before, Dr. Wyatt revealed that one of their most recent teacher hires was someone who had just left working in the corrections systems for a couple of decades. The man ended up becoming a decent teacher because he was "very trainable."

It is no exaggeration to claim that teaching and teachers in Arizona are at a precarious moment. Teacher salary is ranked 50th for elementary teachers and 49th for high school teachers, over 900 certified teachers in the state have left the field at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, and the ability to teach without a degree or experience does not instill confidence in how invested the state is in public education (Bice & Rau, 2018; Marsh, 2019). Andrea, one of the parents interviewed, voiced her anxiety about poorer schools, like Humanitas, losing good teachers due to long commutes and more desirable schools opening in surrounding areas. Tammy also briefly reflected on the teacher turnover rate at Humanitas, while still articulating that she feels like those that get behind the Humanitas mission of whole child stay "for the long haul."

However, compared to some other studies on charter schools in Arizona, the parents and grandparents in this study do not blame teachers for the state of education and scholars' overall success. Whereas Convertino (2017) found parents at a charter

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school in Tucson, Arizona blaming the teachers for issues surrounding student success, the (grand)parents in this study spoke more directly to the disinvestment of the state and how that has also implicated the teacher themselves. For example, Caroline spoke to the struggle teachers have when "trying to figure out how to buy supplies for the classroom." Olivia and Tammy both reflected on concerns over teacher pay and support. Thus, the interview data adds some nuance and variance to the broader arguments being made about teaching and teachers in Arizona.

As already noted, talking about teachers also leads us to discussing standardized testing and student performance. The young woman (from the church-based community meeting, who shared her experiences as a student at a BASIS school) also noted how intense testing was at the school. She said that in advanced placement classes, every time a student scored a four (the second highest score one can get), the teacher would receive a bonus. Thus, she was aware – as a student – that teachers with a lower salary would push their students to score higher on the exams. Allie, one of the speakers, folds her arms across her chest and shaking her head remarks, "So, basically teachers would be working for commission." I saw nothing like this during my time at Humanitas. Instead, I heard a lot more reflection on the general antagonism many at the school feel towards standardized testing. For example, during his interview, Dr. Wyatt remarked, "And in America you live and die by your grade. That's America. And it ticks me off." The school board meetings, although spending hours poring over test scores and how to improve them, would also voice their frustration with the pressure of standardized testing. One parent and school board member, John, after one of these discussions admitted to the group, "Despite our best efforts, we are still teaching to the test." All that additional

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commitment to the seven habits (as discussed in the previous chapter) seems to take a backseat to the looming presence of testing.

Teachers at Humanitas also feel the pressure. During a lunch time conversation over salad, Ms. Bennett, one of the second-grade teachers, stated that she would never want to teach beyond second grade. This is in part due to the maturing and natural changes children go through, but also the increased stress and pressure of standardized testing starting. Parents and grandparents also had their own thoughts and reflections about testing. Here is Olivia speaking to the role of test scores:

> So, it was very stressful [trying to pick a school]. I made a lot of phone calls. I looked on websites to see where schools are rated. I don't think there's necessarily a good indicator...uh test scores. Which, I uh have been learning aren't a good indicator... And some of the challenges, particularly with diversity, a lot of parents don't have computers, they don't have access to the internet. Um so those things and holding kids more accountable, of course, their test scores are going to be lower. Which brings down the whole school.

And it was made clear during my data collection that larger decision makers, like the Arizona Charter School Board, do not take into consideration poverty, lack of resources, and the additional stressors that students bring when they are from economically disenfranchised families. Dr. Wyatt, Ms. Eyre, and Ms. Haraway, along with the rest of Humanitas, were denied their charter school expansion on that September morning. The reason ultimately boiled down to the school's test scores. The board did invite Humanitas back for another pitch once the newest scores were released in a couple of months. Humanitas did return (with increased test scores) and that following January it was

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announced during a Humanitas school board meeting that they were granted their expansion request.

This short section on teachers and standardized testing concludes the general overview of the landscape of school choice and charter schools in Arizona, Phoenix, and South Phoenix. The qualitative data offers some interesting insight and nuance into how larger forces are at play across spaces and Humanitas specifically. The school is not immune to expectations of standardized testing or the reality of teaching precarity and lack of support in the state. In chapter four, I argued that Humanitas does not overtly offer structural resistance or critiques to neoliberalism. By taking these discourses about teachers and testing into account, we can begin to see a more complicated picture in which Humanitas is trapped within the talons of neoliberal thought and policy. No matter how much the seven habits may offer to individual students, Covey's ideals are not enough to bring (neo)liberalism to its knees and Humanitas, as one school, cannot do such revolutionary work on its own either. It is from this broader contextualizing work that the rest of the chapter pivots and presents two theoretical concepts that may help us expand and further understand charter schools and neoliberalism. Some of what we have read to this point will inform these two concepts and I will bring additional data to support the salience of the terms, as derived from the various qualitative data gathered.

Neoliberal Scapegoating and Dialectical Vernacular Complicity

We are about halfway through the meeting on a cool January evening and the school board is discussing the current plans to alter the school's playground. While Dr. Wyatt asks about finding someone to sample the dirt, a Black man with patterned brown pants, a black shirt, and brown vest enters the conference room. "Can I help you?"

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inquires Dr. Wyatt. "This is the public board meeting, right?" the man asks back. Dr. Wyatt affirms that it is, and the guest pulls out a seat and settles down near me at the back of the room. While the meeting continues, the man pulls out his phone and starts scrolling through the school's website, landing on the list of the school board members. He quietly takes notes for the rest of the meeting.

Dr. Wyatt approaches the man once the meeting has concluded, "I knew I recognized you!" he booms leading with a handshake. "I was going to joke about whose kid you are, but I figured you out," he says playfully. It turns out the visitor is the newly hired principal for a charter school not far down the road. After some basic pleasantries, the principal begins making a small speech about the two schools respecting each other. Dr. Wyatt jumps in to clarify that he believes there are plenty of students in the area – that is not his concern. He is concerned about other charter schools poaching teachers. The principal agrees and asks if they can make a promise to not poach each other's teachers. The two principals agree to let natural job flow and changes to dictate which teachers they hire. The visiting principal turns to the rest of the board members that have lingered and continues,

> School choice is like buying a car. Do you see everyone driving around in the
> same car? Same make and model? Color? Wheel style? No. People can buy the
> car that they want and will suit their needs. Picking a school should be like buying
> your car of choice. It is all about fit and we [gesturing to everyone in the room]
> offer different fits.

He clarifies that he is in the business of choice, not competition.

The dominant, god, or keywords of (neo)liberalism are rhetorical (Duggan, 2003). Concepts like property, liberty, freedom, capitalism, individualism, and privatization both describe the world around us and aim to cultivate just one way of approaching and organizing social, collective life. Their inherently persuasive nature convinces us how we should or ought to live our "best" lives. Overtime such concepts become naturalized and normalized in such a manner that they become difficult yet incredibly important to critique. Within the context of K-12 education, one god or keyword is school choice. As the principal above denotes, school choice is much like any other consumer choice one may make in their daily life. What it offers is the same consumerist ideals of buying a car ("I am the car I buy") but in relation to where and how one's (grand)children are educated ("My (grand)children are where they go to school"). Moreover, choice in this manner repurposes old capitalistic notions of rugged individualism in which we blindly believe that the choices we make are of our own doing, unhindered by others or structures. It also matters that this one explicit echo of such wider circulating rhetorics came from someone not affiliated with Humanitas. Thus, this one principal may rely on such rhetoric, but it does not mean all engaging with charter schools recycle the same sentiments.

Whereas discourses of competition may circulate across other contexts and avenues of life, choice is seen as the more rhetorically appropriate word for public education. Although generally neutral, the visiting principal pits competition against choice. The former is dangerous, too cut-throat and thus not good for the business of running a school, making "choice" the more liberating, friendlier word. It is for just this one simple reason that we must remember that neoliberalism is not universal and one-

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note. Because of this simple yet very important distinction, the next sections will analyze (neo)liberalism in relation to school choice, charter schools, and the role everyday rhetoric has in (re)constructing material and symbolic effects with the concepts of neoliberal scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity.

Hegemony, Additional Ideological Investments, and Neoliberal Scapegoating

It is early May and it is the third morning assembly I am attending. After about ten minutes of observation, one parent whom I got to know well during my fieldwork, Mary, arrives with her daughter in tow. She walks directly up to me and we greet each other. She is a White woman with short blonde hair, with small oval shaped glasses, wearing a light purple blouse and black skinny jeans, and black sandals. Her daughter, a ball of energy, keeps rushing back and forth in circles between her mom and the space in front of her, saying a thousand words I do not comprehend. What I do catch is her informing her mom that she is performing her song today for the assembly. Stroking the top of her dirty blonde hair, Mary seems concerned, "What? You mean you're performing in the assembly today?" Affirming this, Mary goes straight to her phone and starts going through her emails, "They *never* tell us about this stuff," she huffs. She keeps scrolling through her phone, excavating for any evidence of an email she may have missed that would have included her daughter's recent information. Giving up for a second, as her daughter rushes back to lean on her, Mary tells her that she will have to record the performance since the rest of the family did not know about it.

During this exchange, another parent, Kenneth, comes into the room. He is a White man with light brown hair and dark eyes and is wearing a dark red polo shirt, grey pants, and a lighter grey pair of fashion tennis shoes. After getting his sons settled in with

their backpacks, he approaches us and greets me by name, "Hi Kat." "Kenneth," Mary begins, "Did you know that our children would be performing today?" Kenneth indicates that he had no idea and that, "I guess I'll have to stay a little bit later then." After a brief pause, he shifts the conversation, "Have you figured out what you are going to do this summer?" Although a vague question to me, Mary understands completely, "No, I haven't found anything yet." Kenneth states that he has found a community center in South Phoenix that will take in the kids for $70 a week. Impressed with the price, Mary asks for the name and begins to Google it on her phone.

"It's not my ideal place," Kenneth clarifies, "I mean it is in *South* Phoenix." Mary nods her head in a gesture of understanding the implied meaning behind Kenneth's statement as she clicks and scrolls on her phone. He continues, "I keep holding out that ASU will have some huge grant or something that will hire qualified people to watch the kids at some really nice place so that my boys can go there, but that is a wild dream I guess at this point." "Oh! They have all kinds of activities. They have Zumba," Mary proclaims, zooming on a table on her phone that lists all of the provided activities. Of additional interest are basketball and ballet. She then goes on to tease Kenneth about doing Zumba. He seems a little less than enthusiastic to engage with the joke.

I speak up to note how I cannot imagine having to do this work, "I grew up in a really small town. My parents could just leave us alone at home during the summer and we would climb trees, or my brother and I would walk down to the library." Kenneth shares that he also grew up "a latch-key kid" as far back as he could remember. Continuing to scroll, the screen reflecting off her glasses, Mary notes how she grew up with a stay-at-home mom, so they did not have to worry about it either.

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"Well, there still are 52 spots still open, Ken. So, we can still sign-up the kids. Do you think you're going to do it?"

"Probably," Kenneth responds, "Like I said, I haven't found anything else so far that is as reasonable."

"Hmm...they offer scholarships," Mary notes. With the word scholarships, she raises her right hand to add air quotes around the verbally articulated word. "So, there are going to be *tons* of kids there on 'scholarship' while I am going to be one of the few parents actually having to pay to send my daughter there."

After a long sigh, Kenneth throws his left arm around her shoulders, a sign of familiarity, and states, "Well, that's socialism for ya!"

They both laugh at the joke and then simultaneously look at me, perhaps to see if I am in on the joke. Feeling implicated in a way that I am not comfortable with, I simply offer a very faint "chuckle" and am rescued with the announcement that the assembly is getting started.

This project has argued from the beginning that how one approaches and navigates within neoliberalism and its products, like charter schools, is likely to be supplemented with additional ideological experiences and commitments. Not all parents and grandparents who send their children to Humanitas do so for the same reasons and sharing a common school does not necessitate shared beliefs and values. Therefore, their engagements with a neoliberal product is not univocal. I found this moment with Mary and Kenneth to be incredibly profound. As a reminder, the majority of Mary and Kenneth's kids' schoolmates are from historically underserved racial communities whose experiences are compounded with classism. For me, as I walked away from this moment

at the end of the assembly, Mary and Kenneth's remarks point to an interesting tension. They are willing to send their White children to Humanitas, but there is a line they are hesitant to cross when it comes to summer programs. Their exchange is coded with racist and classist innuendo from their inflections with *South* Phoenix and "scholarships." To help make sense of this unassuming conversation between two parents and a researcher/student, I will offer, define, and demonstrate the concept of neoliberal scapegoating.

As the data below will illuminate, neoliberal scapegoating is the outcome of who is rhetorically constructed as "the bad guy." In some ways the concept asks us to pay close attention to the "blame game" in relation to the struggle over equality and agency. Much like Kenneth Burke's (1945) theorizing about scapegoating more generally, neoliberal scapegoating is interested in addressing how guilt or, in this instance, complicity is purged and onto whom or what. The next concept, dialectical vernacular complicity, will illuminate the shift from guilt to complicity as the latter centers agency more directly. In general, neoliberal scapegoating is the discursive hegemony I found in relation to school choice, charter schools, and Humanitas specifically. It is with discourses of neoliberal scapegoating that we should inquire: Who or what continues to be ignored as complicit within the hegemonic conditions of neoliberalism? To be clear, neoliberal scapegoating is a rhetorically symbolic phenomenon with material effects. Moreover, the term must embrace and/or seek to understand how race and class are "bundled together in a chain of meaning" within neoliberal discourses and practices (Collins, 2019, p. 257). In short, I frame neoliberal scapegoating as an intersectional interrogation of neoliberalism and its contradictory discourses and practices.

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To begin understanding neoliberal scapegoating, let us consider a moment at the beginning of the Arizona Charter School Board. One of the board members, a middle-aged White man in a dark navy suit, has approached the podium to offer a summary on standardized testing in the state. After reviewing some general numbers and percentages, he makes an interesting pivot to help the audience rationalize the large number of underperforming schools. He argues that many (we are to assume he is speaking about parents and perhaps teachers)[13] are concerned with the increase of testing and its wear and tear on students – people want to cease testing. Thus, he proposes that we should be working towards "assessment choice." However, the state is considered at high risk with the federal government's expectations. Long story short, although "we [the state] may want assessment choice, we are limited by federal expectations and their threat to pull funding."

In this case, we see a state employee pointing to the federal government as a snake that has coiled itself around Arizona, constricting its ability to make the testing choices it wants. This is simple and clear-cut example of neoliberal discourse (a distrust and thus call for limiting governmental oversight) and neoliberal scapegoating, blaming the federal government for the state's issues with standardized testing. In relation to more

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[13] There is this moment during a Humanitas school board meeting (about eight months prior) to help support this assumption: Dr. Wyatt cuts in to add that the reliability of the AZMerit test is "incredibly low." Indeed, he continues, there has been some community outrage and even some teachers who have openly complained about the new answer submission format, which is not good because teachers aren't supposed to know how the test looks. Adam, clearly shocked by this information, declares, "What?! The teachers can't see the test? How do they know what to teach if they can't see the test?" "We were completely blind-sided by the new test format," replied Ms. Eyre. It was so bad that the kids were crying, and the teachers were stuck just repeating their instructions from their manual, unable to assist their students. "The grid," she continues was just awful, but since they know about it, they are now taking the time to teach students how to properly submit their answers in the grid format. John asks, "Who has a say in how those tests get created? This seems really messed up."

general neoliberal discourse, the speech reproduces the neoliberal belief of keeping federal government oversight in-check or at bay and how neoliberalism's disinvestment from governmental oversight causes people to rely more on capitalistic ways to find support, guidance, or avenue for existence (Casey, 2016). However, such an utterance ignores consistent findings that standardized testing ultimately tests one's class background than actual skill (see Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessmann, 2019). Obviously, race is then also part of this benchmark of testing success since a number of "mechanisms link socioeconomic status to achievement" as well as things like traumatic stress and less parental engagement (p. 10). Regardless, neoliberalism seems so infused in this setting that the man does not need to rationalize or unpack his argument. The enthymematic work of the utterance is rhetorically powerful for an audience of folks who are likely pro-school choice and thus interested in additional freedoms and options. This meeting was not the only context in which the federal government or any governmental entity was metaphorically thrown under the bus all while ignoring racial and class-based distinctions and inequalities.

My time at Humanitas brought about similar moments as well. The "blame game" (often from genuine frustration) is metaphorically passed around like a baton in school board meetings from the federal government, to the state, to the Arizona state board to charter schools, and even to specific people. One moment arose from Dr. Wyatt in relation to sentiments about the state government. At the time, the fight over poor teacher pay and decreasing educational funding had reached a climax as teachers began planning a walk-out that ended up lasting, at some schools, for six days (The Republic staff, 2019). The following moment occurred at the end of the meeting in early 2019:

The meeting then turns to the discussion about the Red for Ed protests. In a mass

email, Dr. Wyatt announced that he supports the strike but that the school still has

a commitment to parents and that he does not want to add additional school days

into June. Turning to Ms. Eyre, she reports that she "doesn't think many will

miss." Regardless, Dr. Wyatt wants it made clear that teachers have to notify

school staff if they plan on walking out. At this time, the walkout has been

scheduled for that Thursday [three days away] and Dr. Wyatt encourages all to

wear red in support. To close the meeting, Dr. Wyatt does reflect that "our state

legislature does not value education. That has been made clear." And schools

have been forced to survive in such a climate that is anti-education in general.

We hear Dr. Wyatt point, with much assurance, a figurative finger at the anti-educational

climate the state government has helped cultivate over the past years. He also had some

additional fish to fry in other contexts as well.

During his interview, Dr. Wyatt told me that it is the federal government's fault

(because of their programs) that Humanitas has to take money out of classrooms (which

also means less pay for teachers). Specifically, he argued

It's a difficult thing to navigate, because your money depends on all that [federal

support], and because of all the programs, to manage the programs, we have to

hire more people to manage the programs from the federal state government,

which then takes money away from the classroom because we have that middle

layer just to manage the...the grants and the programs that we're required to do.

Dr. Wyatt was also just as critical of standardized testing as well. He posited,

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You do away with the...the high stakes standardized tests for everybody and

find...I don't know what the answer is but find another way to...to rate a school.

Maybe it's from parent surveys. Maybe it's from scholar projects, and, um, maybe

even its outcomes, which...which students from that system went onto the higher

levels and...and were successful. Um, that...that's what I would do. Get...get rid of

those standardized tests, because that's what got us off track in the first place.

Thus, we can see that there is much skepticism about the overreach and limiting forces of

a state and federal government making Dr. Wyatt's job of running a school more

difficult. Yet, all of Dr. Wyatt's various discernments effectively ignore the nuance of

these issues and how they impact his scholars – the issue comes down to how they make

running a school difficult. In effect, nothing is ever noted as potentially racist or classist;

it just does not work in far more general terms and that, I argue, is neoliberal

scapegoating.

One key moment during my time in the field was the couple of months in late

2019 when Humanitas was working diligently to get approval of their high school. We

have already seen glimpses of the pitch by Dr. Wyatt, Ms. Eyre, and Ms. Haraway to the

state charter board. What we had not yet witnessed was a minute of tension that occurred

between Dr. Wyatt and one of the board members after it became clear the school was

not going to get their expansion request. The following are my notes from this moment:

Dr. Wyatt states that investors won't wait...the male board member cuts him off,

seemingly offended, "That's not true." One of the women sitting behind me

states, "Uh, yeah, that is true." The conversation between Dr. Wyatt and the board

member gets a little more heated as the latter thinks that Dr. Wyatt is offering the

board an improper ultimatum: if I don't get approval today, I will lose the chance to build this school. Dr. Wyatt apologizes and states that the school board member is correct. He concludes, "We will outgrow next year. I don't know where I am going to put people."

All possible dramatic inflection aside, this was a tense moment. The two men were clearly flustered with each other. Here is a reflection of this interaction about four months after the fact at a Humanitas board meeting:

Dr. Wyatt turns back to reflect on the state charter board meeting I witnessed back in September. "That Smith...I think his name is Smith, grey haired dude, guy...person. He doesn't care about finances." He turns to Adam to back him up. Adam clarifies that he got upset with Dr. Wyatt's comments about the investors because it wasn't relevant to the boards concerns with the test scores. Callie asks if the board only cares about "just the data." Is there nothing else they really take into consideration? Ms. Eyre says that they tend to focus on just the facts and so that is what they will do. Dr. Wyatt jokes, "And leave the *me* out of it." The board members laugh and all start joking with one another.

Dr. Wyatt then turns to talk about the January state board meeting he just attended. He mentions how he saw in a previous meeting three other schools "get beat up like we did." These schools also went back and all three were approved for expansions. What Dr. Wyatt wants to note are two differences between these cases and Humanitas's experiences. First, these other schools got to use AZEDs (academic standards for the state) to demonstrate school testing growth in a way that would have helped Humanitas if they could have used it as well. Ms. Eyre says that in terms of math scores specifically,

being able to use this data would have helped them make their case. Second, the board

shrunk the comparative radius from other schools down from five miles to two. Kenneth

asks if this is going to establish a precedent, because given a two-mile radius, Humanitas

looks pretty good. Dr. Wyatt affirms this question and point.

All these previous moments from Dr. Wyatt, across his interview and various

utterances, begin to construct a narrative about the structural and even interpersonal

constraints and speed bumps Humanitas faces. There is just not one thing that points to

who or what makes operating Humanitas difficult. In general, these instances begin to

thread together the many networked organizations and people that ultimately frame the

reality of running a charter school within a neoliberal context. They discursively weave

together a series of arguments that help frame Humanitas as a school struggling against a

series of foes, from the federal government to state charter school board, who never

consider larger racial and class-based concerns or circumstances. What never occurred

while I was present in the field was any reflection on how some of the school's decision

making is itself potentially problematic. The next section will have more to say about

this. For now, neoliberal scapegoating has rhetorically constructed the villains and

victims within the walls and existence of Humanitas. Before moving on, I also want us to

consider how some of the parents interviewed engaged in neoliberal scapegoating as their

insights permit a level of complexity we do not necessarily get from the organizational

level.

Much like Dr. Wyatt, (grand)parents also seemed to lay blame the most at the feet

of the government. Yet, their critiques were a bit different in that they tended to focus

more on the state government and politicians more specifically. For example, when I

asked Tammy who she thought should have less of a say in education, she reflected on the negative impact of politicians who have no experience with education.

> I don't think their perception is as relevant as people who are actually in the class every day I mean, you can say this is a good school because it looks good on paper but if you don't go to that school and teach every day, how do you know if it is going to really work? It's like a coach trying to make a change from another state and they never even been there.

Her comparison of coaching a sports team to that of making decisions in K-12 education points to her perception and concern of having unqualified or uniformed people make decisions. Miranda had her own thoughts about some of these choices the government seems to keep making. She argued, like Tammy, that the government should be limited in how much it participates in overseeing public education.

> I think I know it might be politically incorrect or whatever, but [laughs] the government. Yeah, but I think because, because I think they just think more of the financial aspect instead of the impact on the kids. Like, I know with a lot of like extracurricular activities and stuff have been eliminated, just due to funding and stuff I understand. But then that's a big, significant part for children's growth in education and in the school system and in life, and just having the opportunity to have those options and stuff.

Andrea and Caroline, like Miranda, also spoke to their concerns about extracurricular activities being cut. Whether it be music or art, these additional activities are seen as vital to the education of a well-rounded child, but of disinterest to the state government.

Olivia's response to who we should and should not listen to when it comes to education policy echoed a lot of the same sentiments we have already heard:

> So, we should be listening to the parents, educators uh educators you know, and not some multi-millionaire. If you can't tell, I'm really angry about it [laughs]. I'm angry because we don't have the right people. So, we can't trust the government at this moment the federal government, the federal government to make right decisions for the education of children. I can't trust governor here in the state to make it right, because they [teachers] had a fight tooth and nail to get you know, a raise. And this is an important job. And we... I .... [sighs] don't think that [sighs] I frankly don't get it!

Indeed, Olivia's frustration was felt quite strongly during this moment of our interview. However, she was the only (grand)parent that explicitly spoke forth an economic-based critique of education – one in which she sees unfit millionaires getting their say in what it should look like. She later directly critiques the role Betsy DeVos (someone who dually symbolizes the political and economic) has in all of this when she stated, "Betsy DeVos in that in that particular responsibility area [issues with teacher treatment] is failing us." It is with Olivia's comments that neoliberal scapegoating encourages us to pay attention to more than who is to blame for why things are the way they are.

Specifically, neoliberal scapegoating asks to inquire into the additional political investments of people to locate the particularities and nuances of engaging within neoliberalism and its logic. Olivia's arguments seem to evoke a political sentiment about education and some of its biggest decision makers. To be clear, I never directly asked any interlocuter what their political commitments were. Yet, rhetoric provides just one tool to

help us discern this identification to some degree, if we can tether it to larger circulating discourses. Therefore, we must quickly take into consideration how U.S. public opinion on charter schools has dipped over the last couple of years. In an EdNext Poll, a pro school-choice organization, support for charters dipped in 2017, but raised slightly in 2018 with most support coming from Republicans as Democrat support is down to 36 percent (Cheng, Henderson, Peterson, & West, 2018). Some theorize that this dip with Democrats is due to the overt support schools of choice, like charters, get from Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (Schneider, 2019). Yes, Olivia's grandchildren attend a charter school, but that does not assuage her larger concerns about those behind educational policy.

Neoliberalism is not just friendly to conservative political leanings but can be taken up for progressive agendas as well. The very idea of individualizing schooling through discourses of choice was used in the 1970s by progressives (Minow, 2011). However, within the context of charter schools, approach and rationale are not singular. In Olivia's case, we see a progressive lens since she seems to advocate for a "democratic society that reduces inequality, poverty, and discrimination, which are viewed as negative byproducts of capitalism" (Raymond, 2014, p. 9). Thus, it matters that who she scapegoats reflects some larger political and social beliefs. The rest of the (grand)parents evoked a more liberal approach since they couple equality with additional personal freedoms (i.e., additional choices of personal value). For mothers like Andrea and Miranda, this means having schools that help instill confidence for their children: the ability for their children to be themselves is its own personal freedom they believe schools should seek to foster. Keeping cultures of power in mind, such liberal approaches

have their limitations. Specifically, an education system that reflects liberal and middle-class values helps maintain the status quo by ensuring that "the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it" (Delpit, 1988, p. 285).

In addition, this neoliberal scapegoating further supports and complicates previous claims that neoliberalism asks us to blame teachers and the schools themselves for the state of education (see Convertino, 2017). In this context, we see arguments about the disinvestments of the government or its politicians for our problems. But we are still missing clear arguments for the issues inherent within a capitalistic framework that increasingly shapes and redefines what education does and looks like. Besides Olivia, this disinvestment by politicians was never addressed by those directly involved with Humanitas. What neoliberalism scapegoating does for almost all those involved with this study is obscure their complicity within this capitalist, neoliberal culture.

As I sat in my car the morning after the exchange between Kenneth, Mary, and myself, I was baffled. What kind of mental gymnastics did they have to jump through to rationalize sending their children to a school that very likely reflected those they were concerned would surround their children during the summer? Neoliberal scapegoating makes these gymnastics possible. Specifically, it provides them the means to rationalize sending their children to a school of choice, a product of neoliberalism, while still considering other options for the summer.

Thus, what made the moment so vital in the data is Ken's and Mary's ability to discursively erase their own complicity within structures of race and class. A joke like, "That's socialism for ya!" demonstrates one's ability to rhetorically assuage any complicity in the larger guiding forces of neoliberalism and its inherent whiteness and

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classism. The joke takes the place of any kind of reflection on the implications and effects of not only their words, but their material consequences and such contradictions make sense within the contradictory nature of neoliberalism. You may choose to send your children to school with poor, historically underserved students of color and then be concerned about making the same choice for summer care. To be clear, this specific type of scapegoating is only possible within the context of neoliberalism and its assumptions about personal freedoms, individuality, all packaged within hegemonies of race and class.

Subsequently, neoliberal scapegoating demonstrates the role language plays in crafting the villains within charter school contexts. Because neoliberalism is internally contradictory, people's rationalizations of who is to blame for the state of education reflect this. However, neoliberal scapegoating is distinct from any other general sense of scapegoating. Neoliberalism, and its values, construct certain constraints that guide or make more readily available who or what is to be blamed. Up to now, various actors related to Humanitas never speak to their own complicity. They, like Ken and Mary, do not universally scapegoat in a manner that situates them as reproducers of neoliberalism and thus issues of whiteness and classism as well. These people are also not completely unaware of their involvement either. The "why" they may rationalize or scapegoat in particular ways is due in part to the surrounding material reality. To help further unpack this discursive act of neoliberal scapegoating, we need to consider its mate, dialectical vernacular complicity.

Agency, Identity, and Dialectical Vernacular Complicity

I argued in chapter four that for Humanitas to be an anti-neoliberal space they would likely be forced to close or would struggle to exist. This section's concept of

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dialectical vernacular complicity is a term derived from the data that may help us make sense of how charter schools, and those involved with them, balance being a product of a system they find harmful or limiting all while doing what they can to make sure their community and children thrive. Therefore, dialectical vernacular complicity is an honest view that to be totally "radical" in this context might be a risk that is too great of a gamble for the school and surrounding community. So, the school and its relevant actors are strategically and tactically complicit in neoliberalism generally and the specific structures of public K-12 education. Humanitas's goals of focusing on the whole child and the practices I see with the morning assemblies, classrooms, and scholar/staff interactions all point to tiny rupturing points. But for the school to survive, they still have to care and invest time, energy, and resources into neoliberal practices, standardized testing, and engaging in the act of school choice itself.

Although this concept was inspired by what I saw and heard during data collection, it is also informed by the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and her interlocuters' engagement with strategic essentialism along with Michel de Certeau's (1984) discernment between strategies and tactics, and Robert Glenn Howard's (2008) theorizing about a dialectical-vernacular model. I will speak to each in brief. First, strategic essentialism is a deconstructive approach to cultural analysis that is heavily interested in the malleability of identity to progress towards social justice and equality. Spivak (1989) defines strategic essentialism as the "strategic use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (p. 126). Essentialism asks us, "What do people of color have in common?" An answer to this question would allow

people to temporarily and through self-reflexivity essentialize culture to achieve political and social goals (Asante & Miike, 2013).

One important critique of strategic essentialism is the issue of temporality and action that is non-systematic:

> Spivak spoke of strategic essentialism as a way to accommodate the system she found in the United States. Since she did not want to obliterate the system, to stand it on its head, to take it down to the point where we start again, she tried to rearrange the gallery by moving pictures around in the hall. (Asante & Miike, 2013, p. 7)

However, this critique assumes a more radical approach is possible without consequence or harm to those already on the margins. In the context of South Phoenix, many of these people are already disenfranchised and systematically underserved as hegemonies of class and racism compound each other. Subsequently, this concept has political and social implications. By assuming one unit of focus, perspectives get neglected or overlooked leaving out people who do not fit into that single category (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Ideally, we would have the means and ability to embrace the complexity of individual's identities within a larger unified front, but due to the hegemony of larger structures, like the law, we may need to strategically essentialize our identities to get changes made.

In the same manner of strategic essentialism, dialectical vernacular complicity shifts to focus more on the daily actions of people (and perhaps organizations themselves) as they seek to survive and potentially thrive under oppressive systems. In addition, while strategic essentialism often rests on cultivating a shared identity, dialectical vernacular complicity is interested in exploring mundane discursive and

material practices. It is an interest in what people do, because of who they are rather than rhetorically constructing who the "we" is. As already expressed, neoliberalism has been effective at inviting people to supersede their social identities in favor of a more neutrally White, classed subjectivity. Strategic essentialism, in a "pure" sense, was not utilized in this neoliberal context of a charter school. A different strategy emerged: one that does not fully reflect the same goals and limitations as strategic essentialism. Thus, de Certeau's (1984) concept of tactics extends this sense of "strategic" beyond the rhetorical construction of a shared identity to account for judgement and agency.

According to de Certeau (1984), tactics are procedures used by those on the margins of culture in which their lack of power allows them temporary and limited incursions or attacks into the spheres under dominant control. In this sense, tactics helps us locate how people "make do." Consequently, as a concept tactics can illuminate the how and why some people are more interested in smoothing their entry into a place or hegemonic structure instead of seeking to interrupt the mainstream. In some ways, tactics can offer an alternative to or help supplement strategic essentialism (Colebrook, 2001). A tactic can present an essentialized ideal, one rooted within a dominant strategy, but does this while short-circuiting or perverting its logics or assumptions. Finally, dialectical vernacular complicity, via tactics, also opens the possibility for larger organizations, like a school itself to be agentic and tactical. To help support this claim, I conclude this portion by bringing vernacular approaches to rhetoric into the conversation.

Rhetorical scholars have their own investments in studying strategic or tactical practices. For this study, I began to frame this commitment through the vernacular turn in rhetorical criticism in chapter two. I specifically claimed that a vernacular rhetoric model

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looks for active members and how they frame their public experience, yet this engagement must be conscious of power and oppression. To help come to this understanding, I mentioned the work of Robert Glenn Howard (2008) and his dialectical approach to understanding the relationship between vernacular and institutional discourses. This dialectical framework recognizes that individuals might function within some vernacular and institutional agencies, discourses, or practices.

In the same spirit that Spivak and de Certeau provide with their own concepts, a dialectical-vernacular approach demonstrates a relationality between the official and vernacular or the intersectionally dominant and dominated. Vernacular discourses and practices are not and cannot be separated from institutionalized (or hegemonic or dominant) discourses/practices because the institutional is structurally prior. In other words, vernacular bodies often rely on the institutional or dominant to create the space for their practices and discourses to take shape – which can lead to the vernacular distinguishing themselves as different from the dominance of the institutional or hegemonically ideological. Ultimately, I take the spirit of strategic essentialism coupled with tactics and bring those in relation to rhetorical scholarship via vernacular rhetorics to offer the concept of dialectical vernacular complicity.

We could generally frame dialectical vernacular complicity as: "I am aware of X, or I know X exists, and I still chose and/or am forced to do X." An example of dialectical vernacular complicity in another context may look something like a White woman being aware of the inherent sexism or misogyny at her workplace but choosing to embody some version of it to get ahead and potentially effect change from a higher position. Accordingly, it should be clear that dialectical vernacular complicity requires at least one

of two thigs: First, a self-awareness of how one's actions are complicit within power, ideology, and daily impact of inequality and/or, second, some general goal of transforming or altering existing systems of inequality, progress, democracy, and so on. When this second tenet is missing, the use of dialectical vernacular complicity can become problematic and subsequently hegemonic. Specifically, when we see this concept in action, it can illuminate issues of when individualized practices and goals are centered rather than the bolstering of a collective and the desire for structural change. The rest of this section will demonstrate the concept, its possibilities, and failures.

Dr. Wyatt voiced during his interview that he has his own personal concerns and critiques of the current K-12 system in the U.S.

> The American K-12 system is really…uh looks to prepare kids for the workplace, to be workers, and, um, it's a political...It's highly politicized through big companies to push the agenda so they could sell the tests, textbooks, buildings, materials. Um, it's supposed to be localized, where the local education agency can make decisions about the education, but it's highly controlled with the federal government with dollars.

The additional comments we received from Dr. Wyatt in chapter four supplement this perception and then rationale for why he wanted to build Humanitas. What we do see in this comment is an argument about the neoliberalization of education and its resources. Dr. Wyatt is not the stereotypical greedy, for-profit charter school founder that we typically hear about (like those in chapter three and during the public event about school choice). Unlike other charters, discussed in chapter three, Dr. Wyatt has helped build a school board that is constructed solely of teachers and parents of the school – one way he

is able to localize educational decision making. Building a charter school in many ways makes him complicit within the structures of neoliberalism, but his critical eye and decision-making focus on ensuring those involved with the school have a say in how the school is run subvert expectations.

That was Dr. Wyatt's argument on the theoretical level, let us consider how he sees this playing out at his own school:

> And I think also...well, actually, I think it is because we are really relationship driven. So, I try to hug...I mean, I try to physically hug every grandma that I see, and I try to...I...we actively say that I love you, and we actively reach out to the parents in a...in a spirit of love and have the doors open…Another thing I do is I reach out to every pastor in this area and make sure that my... I have a great relationship with the different pastors, and so I go to the pastor and say, "Hey, you've got John and Suzy and Jill and Laquitia and Jose, I want you to come and walk my halls, and I want you to walk in classrooms." And when Johnny sees that his religious leaders here, he's gonna realize, "Oh, everyone in our community values education." And so, we'll have the pastors come through, walk around, and if there's a problem with a child, well I…we call the pastor, too. "We're having a meeting for Chance, and we want to discuss some behavior things. Can you come to the meeting?" And so, they come to the table. Mom's there at the table. Community provides behavior experts to the table. So, I try to reach out to the religious...the churches to make sure that they feel welcome to come here as well.

Dr. Wyatt effectively mirrors in this response some of the same commitments to local-based arguments and judgements. What allows Humanitas to be tactically complicit as a

product of neoliberalism are these additional commitments and extra work they put into the success of the scholars. By returning to the roots of public schooling in the U.S. and its focus on localizing education, Dr. Wyatt is tactical in providing these additional supports for scholars all while still playing by the rules expected of him as the founder of a charter school. And all of this is done with an eye towards bettering the community and helping to bolster it to greater heights. Nonetheless, Dr. Wyatt is not alone in engaging with dialectical vernacular complicity.

Let us also consider the following self-reflection from Tammy. After spending some time discussing her experience and history with school choice, she went into a short monologue in which she started asking herself some tough questions. "I didn't send them [her daughters] to the Roosevelt school. And I often think about that, like, why didn't I send them to school in the Roosevelt School District? Why didn't I send them to a public school, you know? I think about those things, but I don't know." But Tammy does know why. She is sending her daughters to a school of choice because she believes it is more likely to help them thrive and succeed. The massive disinvestment in local K-12 public schools has led parents like Tammy (and Olivia and Evelyn) to be tactically complicit in their material engagement with neoliberalism, but discursively critical of its products and beliefs. Consequently, these parents engage in dialectical vernacular complicity when they supplement their engagement with neoliberalism with additional progressive and/or diversity-based commitments. We have seen several comments from (grand)parents, like Olivia, Evelyn, and Tammy, that articulate a concern for difference, racism, and racial equality. Thus, some have seen Humanitas as a space for safety and subsequently individualized success for their (grand)children.

It is with these reflections from Tammy that the above connection between neoliberal scapegoating and its focus on additional political commitments meets with dialectical vernacular complicity. There is some critique of neoliberalism and many speak to their progressive and/or liberal politics (i.e., focusing on racial justice and equity concerns) as a means to rationalize their complicity through some larger structural critiques. Dialectical vernacular complicity does, therefore, move us beyond neoliberal scapegoating to locate material decision making and effects. Just as opinions about school choice and charter schools are not univocal, the same rings true for dialectical vernacular complicity. As Spivak (1993) would remind us, "A strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory" (p. 127). Dialectical vernacular complicity functions in the same manner. Each act or judgmenet is contextual, not a roadmap that all will follow in the same manner. The map may be the same, but how one navigates it, with what tools and abilities they have, will offer variances to the journey. Not all come to the spaces and practices of school choice more generally with the same experiences, perspectives, and tools, we must make do with what we have. Thus, deeming these moments of dialectical vernacular complicity as solely hegemonic, ineffective, and nonsystematic is itself problematic. It ignores the situation, the context, the people at play, and their agency and decision making.

Keeping this in mind, I also want to explore the following argument from Andrea which echoes some of the same local-based perceptions articulated above by Dr. Wyatt:

And, you know, you can't just send your kid to the school and be like, you know, "The teacher can teach them all, I'm done." No, you have to, you know, be involved. You have to help your kids with projects, and I don't, you know, it's the

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community that makes the school. Yeah, um it is the community that makes the school. That's how I feel. I mean, I, you know, Um just for an example, the school that my boys went to had a terrible principal and parents were, you know, pretty unhappy with her and PTO [the parent teacher organization] was low, but then a school, which was not even a mile away, you know, they had a great principal, and had a great PTO turnout, everybody was always at the PTO meeting, they actually had to open up to the cafenasium, because there's so many people. So, you know, and there's only like, you know, not even a mile apart. And they're in the same small community. So, you know, they have the different results. So, it's, it's the community that makes the school, you know, the principal, the parents, the teachers, I mean, that community that makes us a school good. It's not charter schools. It's public schools. No, not…not, none of that. It's the community that makes the school. That's what I feel.

Here we see Andrea rationalizing her engagement with school choice, her complicity within the larger structure, by narrowing her argument down to the local level. This perspective includes not just the schools themselves, but how others, specifically parents, impact the over success of the school. By saying it is the community and undermining the public schools versus charter school debate, Andrea's roadmap to dialectical vernacular complicity is rooted within local logics that make it about the people, not the type of school. She can rationalize her decision by reflecting on previous engagements with other parents and school staff. Therefore, we see that dialectical vernacular complicity engages both at the macro-level with (dis)engagements and ruptures with larger neoliberal assumptions and the micro-level of vernacular experiences with and among others. In

short, Andrea's tactical rationality is one of quality rather than of school type. It was during my interview with Andrea that she mentioned and then invited me to a fall festival that Humanitas holds each year. It was there that she and I got to meet in person and speak a bit more to these thoughts.

It is a beautiful, chilly November night as I get out of my car, put on my jacket and backpack and make my way across the street to the main school building. In the parking lot outside the gates there is a large red truck parked with a trailed hitched all set-up for a hayride. There are already several families here as scholars dash back and forth between games and their parents. Right inside the gates, to the right, are three smaller blow-up games. First, is a sort of jungle-gym obstacle course, next to it a rope ladder challenge with two ladders running parallel with each other, and then a small bouncy "castle" that is square-shaped. Slightly to the left is the entrance table that is being run by both scholars and teachers. There is also a pony ride area roped off in the large patch of grass in the back, left corner. The festival is free but if you want food/drink or to ride horses you have to pay. Tickets are a dollar each, so I buy two and stick them into my left jacket pocket.

I am sitting at a table, jotting down notes when I am approached by a tall White woman with curly, playful brown hair. "Are you the person doing the ASU study?" she asks. After a couple of quick exchanges, I realize that she is Andrea! We shake hands and start up on small talk. I bring up the recent news about Humanitas receiving a "B" letter grade and Andrea launches into a story about how her neighbors, who send their children to the public school down the street are unhappy. According to her, they report feeling unheard by the school as it continues to be unresponsive to their wants/needs. Gesturing

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to the festival around us, Andrea jokes that this is clearly less of a concern here at Humanitas. Therefore, across two different contexts we see Andrea continuing to layer and stick to her discernment about what driving forces moved her to enroll her children into a charter school and to keep them there. Her tactical response is less invested or directly related to larger political and cultural concerns, but more localized reflections on the people that make up and, in her opinion, ultimately determine the good schools from the bad. Andrea, like so many of the other (grand)parents, seem to argue that the choices they do make are based on what they think is going to be best for their kids. Such judgements and practices offer a promise of systemic distribution as these are historically marginalized kids, but do not create a revolution in which (neo)liberalism is dismantled. Along with Dr. Wyatt's comments and those of these two parents, I also want to illuminate this concept with moments witnessed during school board meetings.

Taking a sip of water after a story about a previous teacher, Dr. Wyatt takes back over the meeting. "Now, this is me thinking like a CEO, but I gotta think like one at times." Here, Dr. Wyatt launches into his dream to expand Humanitas into new campuses and buildings within the area. The Humanitas model of whole-child education is unique to Arizona. "A first of its kind." Over the past five years, the school has seen their scholars increase in leadership, character, and academic achievement. As this campus population stabilizes, Dr. Wyatt speculates that Humanitas will become the "model site" for Arizona. Therefore, Dr. Wyatt would like to continue this excellence in education at another site. According to him, several of the younger students have pleaded with him to create a high school for them to attend so they continue their education with Humanitas. This one utterance from Dr. Wyatt does some interesting work. Needing to "think like a

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CEO" evokes neoliberal friendly assumptions, but this mindset is how he can work towards growing a school system that seeks to bolster an underserved area in Phoenix.

Moreover, towards the end of this little speech, he concludes, the "market is friendly...; people want our model." Dr. Wyatt's ability to dually engage with neoliberal discourses for a material gain that uses a charter school to support and encourage long-term success for historically marginalized racialized bodies does much to demonstrate dialectical vernacular complicity. The both/and of directly utilizing hegemonic language, but for a purpose that stems well beyond a greedy, money-grabbing charter school: to encourage and empower scholars to change the narrative and situation they were born into. It is also for this reason that I ultimately see Covey's (1989/2004) habits as a potential framework for dialectical vernacular complicity. Although the habits on page are prone to recycling old liberal beliefs, but repackaged for neoliberal world, their employment in this context appears more tactical. Since they still advocate to focus on the entirety of a person, not just their economic value as workers and consumers, they can offer, within a school setting, subversive moments and practices.

Up to this point, I have argued that concepts like tactics and complicity can function together. However, this moment from Dr. Wyatt sheds light on how being tactical and complicit can become tense, coarse, and problematic. Although the data thus far points to how tactics and complicity can work in tandem, other data demands we draw a clear line between the two. For example, it is early 2019, and the school board meeting is making a shift from discussing current student enrollment to dreaming about the new high school they would like to be open by 2021. Pulling up some data on the overhead projector, Dr. Wyatt notes that there may be up to 4,100 uncommitted high school

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students by the time the high school would be open. Kenneth states that there is a fifty- to sixty-year relationship with elementary school students from the Roosevelt district going into the Phoenix Union district for high school. Thus, "our [test] scores *have* to be better." Dr. Wyatt nods his head and concludes that they could open the new high school with 300 students. John, the newest addition to the school board asks what unique "thing" this high school would offer to the area.

Dr. Wyatt passes the question back to John, "I don't know. Why would *your* kids stay with Humanitas?" Seemingly unmoved by the question, John calmly states, "My kids *are* Humanitas. So, they are different. What about students not from this elementary school?" Smiling, Dr. Wyatt replies that the school would offer dual enrollment, a beautiful campus, an internship during their senior year, and teaching that would focus on liberal, Socratic pedagogy. His vision would include teachers who could teach multiple subjects. For example, a music teacher that could also teach a core subject, like math. He also makes clear that the school's focus would not be on sports, "I don't want football." Dr. Wyatt then pivots to retell a recent interaction when he saw a former student, whose younger sister still attends Humanitas, crying in the back seat of her mom's car. Opening the door, he asks to see what is making the former scholar so upset. The mother says that her daughter is crying because she misses the school. Dr. Wyatt says that he turns to look back at the young woman and seeks to console her, "Regardless of what has happened, remember that we love you." He concludes his response to John with, "I want a high school that is very liberal arts-based with a strong private school feel."

This desire for a private feel is concerning to those that fear the erasure of public schools and the inherent values we think should come with it: creating citizens, offering

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equal learning environments for all, and upholding a democracy through public-based support. The same desire for a private feel was also felt by Caroline. When asked to reflect on why she ultimately chose Humanitas, she stated,

> And um just a lot of the ways they hold themselves. The standards that they hold the kids to is, I, uh I thought it was excellent. And to me it felt kind of like getting a little bit like a private education. You know but it was just the charter school thing, so it's free.

Caroline is the product of a private school education but is unable to currently provide the same opportunity to her kids. Therefore, she has to find the next best thing and that is a charter school with high expectations, school uniforms, and smaller classrooms with more one-on-one engagement between staff and scholars. However, this latter assumption does not seem to be based in reality. I was informed by Ms. Bennett that she wishes she could do more one-on-one and peer-to-peer work, but there are too many scholars in the classroom. During a school board meeting, Kenneth asked Dr. Wyatt what the average teacher to scholar ratio is. Dr. Wyatt reported it is 28:1 for typical classroom teachers and 23:1 when they include specialty teachers. For the 2016-2017 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that the average classroom ratio in Arizona was 23 students per teacher, the nation's highest ratio (Allhands, 2019).

Now, we must keep in mind, as unpacked above, teachers are at a precarious moment. There is a teacher shortage that Humanitas is not immune to. However, I believe what makes Caroline capable of assuming that Humanitas has smaller classroom sizes is due to its status as a charter school and desire to "sell" itself as feeling like a private school. It may be true that compared specifically to the Roosevelt School District

Humanitas has smaller classroom sizes, but they are still larger than classrooms across

the state and there has never been any acknowledgment of this fact during any of my time

in school board meetings. This lack of critical reflection easily leads down the path of

unaware neoliberal complicity, specific to the profession of teaching in the state. In

addition, this reality of bigger classroom sizes is an outcome of the state's per pupil

funding. To help encourage and make easier choice, per pupil funding attaches a certain

amount of money to each student and then that money follows them around from school

to school. Thus, when Humanitas was granted their high school extension, but only

allowed a cap of 250 students, Dr. Wyatt disclosed, "I almost vomited." They ideally

would like to have a cap of 400 students.

What Dr. Wyatt is pointing to is how fiscally smart it is to have higher ratios of

students to teachers to ensure a robust flow of cash from the state. The material effects

are overcrowded classrooms especially in poorer areas like Humanitas and the concerns

voiced by (grand)parents (like those in this study) that their kids would be lost in the mix

and more prone to having issues of race-based bullying left unaddressed. Finally, it is

important to keep in mind that Arizona ranks near the bottom in the U.S. for per pupil

funding (with Utah, Oklahoma, and Idaho behind) (Rice, 2019). Humanitas is impacted

by these structural circumstances, yet there is little to no reflection on how to help ensure

smaller classroom sizes: complicity without the reflexivity. But this judgement is unfair

when we fail to remember that the state, with its policies, seems to force complicity onto

the decision-makers at the school or they would lose their school. To wrap things up, I

also want to quickly explore another conversation that implicated teachers at Humanitas.

Currently, according to Dr. Wyatt, the policy for paid time off (PTO) is "very liberal" and benefits "the teachers more." Ideally, he would like for the policy to be "more beneficial to the employer." He does want to provide the option of teachers being paid out of their PTO if it goes unused by the end of the year. Dr. Wyatt then turns to a narrative about a woman who got pregnant and needed time off. In total, the days she took off exceeded the PTO permitted. Therefore, subsequently missed days became days that she owed them money back. Here, Ms. Haraway quips in about how it is similar in Georgia, in which one teacher she knew had to wait an additional three weeks for a paycheck until her "debt" was paid back to the school. The story about the pregnant teacher is enough to raise eyebrows, but the explicit desire to ensure that PTO benefits the school more than the teachers upholds directly neoliberal values of the precarity of work, that we are our work, and we are easily replaceable (see Moore & Robinson, 2016). The best workplace is one that benefits the employer over the employee. Regardless, potential threats to Humanitas go well beyond concerns about teacher PTO.

John interrupts the board meeting to say that he read somewhere that most charter schools are not financially stable. Getting worked up, James (the school's accountant) expands on what John is mentioning. A report from the Grand Canyon Institute (the one mentioned in chapter three), which James describes as, "a centrist, but clearly not centrist think tank" provided *super* biased claims that used only one criterion to argue that about 40% of all charter schools in the state would be gone in two years, due to poor money management. James argues that is not true and that some may be in danger of closing but not that many. He continues that he has spent "a good amount of time" talking with one of the researchers of the report to "be a voice of reason" to their bad math. Trying to

make sense of what James is saying, Adam offers an example: "So, is the Grand Canyon Institute essentially arguing that if I have a mortgage on my house, I am in debt and close to bankruptcy? Is that the comparison they are making with charter schools and bonds?" James affirms this example. He provides more clearly that the facts and numbers that should have mattered the most in the report were ironically ignored and "The *Republic* [a newspaper] ran with the numbers for their own agenda." James does note that there are some charter schools that "absolutely" misuse tax dollars and have struggled to maintain the necessary enrollment to keep the needed state funding to pay the bills. John offers, "Maybe that is a way we can sell ourselves to students and parents, 'Hey! Your tax dollars are cared for here!'" Affirming that is a good idea, James concludes, "When there's freedom, there's freedom to make mistakes."

Although a persuasive statement, it effectively erases the full extent of some of the mistakes made for the sake of expanding school choice and charter schools in the state. John's joke about using the failure and corruption of other charter schools as a selling point invites us to inquire: Where does doing it for the whole child end and capitalizing on a good PR moment, as means to grow and get more scholars into seats, begin? This ultimately boils down to the inherent issue with the role competition plays not only with charter schools, but school choice more generally. Covey (1989/2004) would argue that interdependence is necessary for support and that competition only works when there is not interconnected between people, organizations, or schools. Competition is not neutral. It does not come without biases or consequences. The logics of school choice seem to undermine Covey's argument. And as much as the competing charter school's principal attempted to claim, school choice cannot be separated from

competition – they are one in the same. Within the perimeters of school choice, competition is natural, it is necessary for it to function, it just *is*. As one final example of this point, while reviewing some of the current numbers for Humanitas in terms of how they performed on standardized tests compared to other schools in the district, Dr. Wyatt says with a sigh, "I just want to be competitive...; I want to beat them all." It is this very type of sentiment that seems contradictory to all the other tactical work Humanitas seems to be up to from the seven habits, to arguments about localizing education, and caring for an underserved community of people. Yet, is it fair to deem the school complicit when they are bound to these structures that exist outside of their immediate control?

Relationality, Neoliberalism, and School Choice: Implications and Reflections

A common refrain we hear and utter within critical-based spaces often sounds something like, "All oppressive forms must be rejected straightaway" (Asante & Miike, 2013, p. 7). As a critical scholar invested in racial justice and equality, I understand this sentiment. I have likely said it myself. My time during this project has forced me to grapple with the practicality of this type of statement. As ideal as the claim seems to be, it is not practical. Navigating the reality of school choice, on the ground, requires far more pragmatism than "just burn it all down." One of my biggest takeaways during the past two years is the realization that critiquing a system and actions from the outside engages in its own hegemony – vernacular erasure – in favor of academic thought. We should ask more from our tools of inquiry and theoretical concepts instead of simply demanding those trying to live their lives to do better (I will say more about this in the concluding chapter). Dialectical vernacular complicity thus points to everyday people being a

vernacular practitioner of structural critiques and engagements on their own terms, based on their own lived experiences.

I want to make clear that, I do not see dialectical vernacular complicity as a long-term political strategy. Just as Spivak (1989) notes of her own concept of strategic essentialism:

> It seems to me that the awareness of strategy – the tactical use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like woman or worker or the name of any nation that you would like – it seems to me that this critique has to be persistent all along the way, even when it seems that to remind oneself of it as counterproductive. (p. 125)

For any hope of any ideas of the original conceptualization of the public sphere and liberalism to be saved, John Dewey (1935) posited that radical changes needed to be brought to institutions. It is not enough to bring *ad hoc* policies or behaviors/choices into play for the sake of "action" within current structures. Something far more transformational needs to happen and it is not fair to completely condemn Humanitas for the ways in which it is both tactically complicit and complicit within neoliberalism, school choice, and the underlying issues across race and class. For me, this means that what critiques I have levied against the school and its various agents and actors should be approached with their own skepticism and caution. How am I, through this project, engaging in additional problematic work? This does not mean, however, we let neoliberalism off the hook.

As a reminder, we ended up with neoliberalism because we let old patterns and ideology permeate and become relevant in a new economic, political, and social world.

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Unfortunately, a vital space like K-12 education has fallen both victim and perpetrator in this culminating buildup of liberalism with its racial and class-based distinctions and hegemons. Deneen (2018) argues that the replacing of one unjust and unequal system (liberalism) with another (neoliberalism) was achieved through acquiescence of a full population across racial and classed lines. I have found throughout this chapter that this is not necessarily the case. People *are* agentic. It may rest on being tactically complicit, sometimes through neoliberal scapegoating, but it matters that we try to best explore and honor how the vernacular seeks to thrive in this system – failure, misgivings, and all.

What is important to note about neoliberal scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity is how frequently they may overlap. Many of the examples you read in one section could easily be used in another. For example, the exchange between Ken and Mary not only illuminates neoliberal scapegoating but also points to the possibilities and limitations of dialectical vernacular complicity. A lack of critical self-reflection implicates their interaction as potentially complicit in relation to the duality of whiteness and classism. In brief, just as difficult as it is to separate the discursive from the material, it can be easy to overlap and keep into conversation neoliberal scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity.

To conclude, these two concepts may be unique to this given context and charter school, yet I do believe they help represent and unpack the symbolic and material practices of navigating the age of neoliberalism and school choice. This chapter ultimately considered several things: how larger conversations around school choice and charter schools offer broader heuristics for rhetorical meaning making, neoliberal scapegoating, and dialectical vernacular complicity. I made sure to include a brief

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summary of how (grand)parents operate and function within school choice and how teachers and standardized testing force us to consider the state-level issues that exist. Therefore, I walk away from this chapter seeing the imperative for relationality. A concept employed within intersectional work, relationality asks us to get outside of focusing on the core of essentialized people, ideas, arguments, and structures (Collins, 2019). In this sense, identities, like race and class, are "constituted and maintained through relational processes, gaining meaning through the nature of these relationships" but they do not exist outside of structures (pp. 45-46). Relationality does not stop at the level of the interpersonal but must also think of the personal in relation to the structural, the person *as* structural.

Collins (2019) takes Stuart Hall's (1986) theorizing of articulation to emphasize the "interconnection of ideas with each other as well as how ideas and society interrelate" (p. 233). Meaning is not stagnant or passive in this sense. It is active and constantly reimaging new linkages that alter connotative meanings between ideas, action, and society. Since meaning is often created through rhetorical language, it is provisional. These moments of neoliberal scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity are conditional: they can be messy, quick, and even contradictory. That, I argue, is what makes them rhetorical and what makes this analysis temporary and incomplete. These relations or ecologies of meanings, identity, and power continue to adapt and change as the material forces around them shift. What is consistent are the actors finding a way to survive and thrive within neoliberalism's world of K-12 school choice.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The structure of U.S. education did not evolve in a vacuum; nor will it be changed, holding other things constant... (Bowles & Ginits, 1976/2011, p. 49)

This project has sought to tackle and explore several conversations at once. The reality of neoliberalism, its role within the theory of the public sphere, how this manifests and functions within educational contexts, and the importance of using CRT and intersectionality to analyze neoliberalism. Moreover, the study sought to continue unearthing what rhetorical practices and possibilities exist when rhetorical critics get into the field – to center the vernacular in tandem with the critic. With these theories and methods in mind, I inquired:

RQ1: How do everyday people (parents, teachers, students, and staff) navigate and sense-make public education in an age of charter schools and (neo)liberalism?

RQ2: Can something created through and by neoliberal logics exist and function outside of it?

It has been my goal for the entirety of this dissertation to tell one situated story about how everyday people navigate charter schools, and to locate the unique educational practices and experiences in Arizona and how those impact one school, Humanitas Academy, and its scholars, (grand)parents, teachers, and community. Chapters four and five offer arguments and evidence as to whether something created through neoliberalism can exist outside of it. An oversimplified answer would be, yes, it is possible, even if those possibilities are fleeting, quick, and not necessarily structural.

By this point int the project, I believe that the notion of the ideal public school, however idealized, has never come to fruition, and we are still striving to achieve this ideal in some ways through education. Dewey once contended that U.S. educational systems are lifeless and antidemocratic even after decades of progressive action and theory (Dewey, 1988; Waks, 2010). As previous chapters illuminated, the early roots of public education were set aside for White, Protestant students. Over time we have "added" diversity to the face of public education without offering inclusive educational practices that sought to teach outside of White, Protestant beliefs and values. Today, it appears that much has not changed. Many have argued that because of the rise of the school choice movement our public schools are increasingly less diverse and more segregated. Access to public education has certainly grown, but access to *where* someone obtains a public education is still heavily determined across class lines (Monarrez, Kisida, & Chingos, 2019). Across the U.S., schools are segregated in part because neighborhoods are. We see that with charter schools specifically they "increase segregation inside school districts but tend to decrease segregation between districts in the same metropolitan area" (p. 70). This same study found that in Arizona, charter schools have no effect on segregation.

In brief, outside data seems to claim that charters are not at the forefront of re-segregating American schools – which would cause concern for cultivating a strong, diverse public. Additionally, we must keep in mind that people of color, particularly Blacks and Hispanics, support school choice and charter schools more than White people do (Henderson, Houston, Peterson, & West, 2020). The data gathered in this study helps bring to light the judgements such racially marginalized people utilize to rationalize their

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engagement with and appreciation for school choice. Some of the (grand)parents interviewed reflected on how important it was for their (grand)children to be surrounded by others like them in school. Thus, desegregation was not at the forefront of their decision making. Instead, they sought out educational spaces that would help bolster and support their racially marginalized loved ones, and for many it was just happenstance that Humanitas Academy is a charter school. Put another way, it was less about the type of school than what the school could offer their (grand)children.

Regardless, who "gets" to be public within public education has certainly expanded over time. Yet, however diverse our public schools are, they still fail to be inclusive spaces for historically underserved and represented identities, cultures, and practices. And this may be in part due to the larger "public" they have long been situated within. For Habermas, the public sphere is supposed to be where differences of opinion can be addressed and resolved by rational arguments. For Asante (2005), this ideal is problematic "since so much of modern European history has been complicated by the irrationality of ethnic and regional conflicts and wars" that has led to various divisions (p. 169). Consequently, we no longer exist within a singular public. Instead, some have argued that our lives are infused through a series of quasi-publics that do not only include rational deliberation, but shopping and working as well – which seek to offer a cohesive identity that erases intersectional differences (Rose, 1999). "Public" has therefore transformed greatly since Habermas's original conceptualization from one's ability to deliberate on important issues to a myriad of discursive, rhetorical, and material practices.

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This sense of "quasi" publics echoes similar claims made about how there is not just one looming public sphere, but the existence of multiple publics because Habermas's bourgeois public sphere was just too monolithic (Jasinski, 2001). For Hauser (1999), there is a reticulate public sphere in which there are networks or webs of discursive and rhetorical arenas. These multiple publics are not isolated but can have permeable boundaries. Inspired by and building off the work of Nancy Fraser (1992), Catherine Squires (2002) imagined three different types of marginal publics: enclave (largely hidden to preserve culture and create resistance), counterpublic (consistent interaction with the state to create alliances and cultivate change), and satellite (independent spaces for group identity maintenance). For Squires's purposes, distinguishing publics that exist at the margins denotes how different resources are available to particular people or groups. Neoliberalism impacts and shapes some of these quasi-publics, reticulate publics, or marginal publics, since it seeks to alter political, social, and economic systems and (everyday) practices. Provided this information, we must keep in mind that neoliberalism has appeared in numerous forms across contexts, time, and spaces because no singular public exists.

A public charter school, like Humanitas Academy, is just one context where one could see different forms of neoliberalism. A different charter school in South Phoenix, perhaps the one ran by the visiting principal we heard from in chapter five, would likely express different forms of neoliberalism that vary from and even contradict what I discerned within and around Humanitas. In effect, one cannot make large sweeping claims about *all* of neoliberalism, even within the same context. For me, this boils down to the significant role people play in doing with neoliberal values, discourses, and

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practices as they wish and/or are capable of. By specifying a unique form of neoliberalism through a local exploration as well as individual and organizational (dis)investments, this study found particular forms of (neo)liberalism via the seven habits, neoliberal scapegoating, and dialectical vernaculr complicity.

Based on this work, I echo the arguments of others who advance that we need to stop framing public schools and charter schools as a problem within themselves but how they are a product of larger social relations (e.g., Apple, 1982/2012; Spring, 2011). At the same time, schools and those involved with them are more than passive mirrors that reflect the desires of the dominant. When we believe that schools are indeed passive, we ignore any possibility of agency towards change by those on the margins and we also ignore how their thoughts and actions offer their own possibilities for change (Apple, 1982/2012). Moreover, Dewey (1988) held that changing our lifeless and antidemocratic schools must come from outside social groups since they offer novel approaches to civil society and life. However, these people's ability to effect large-scale change is limited in part to their reduced number of resources and narrow focuses, which will vary with how they engage as a public. Simply put, such historically oppressed groups hold much promise for transforming education and the public sphere, but centuries of marginalization and a need to focus on specific identity-based issues cannot create substantial change on its own. The next section will speak more to the issues of focusing solely on identity rather than structural issues.

Provided the data I have collected in tandem with more broadly circulating discourses about public education, school choice, and neoliberalism, I find that a neoliberal public sphere does exist, and this cultural structure has implications for public

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schooling. There is still some desire to imagine and question who gets to be part of the public in the U.S. As mentioned in the introduction, this access is more diverse that the liberal public sphere of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The neoliberal public sphere may be more diverse, but it still fails to be substantively inclusive. In terms of race specifically, the neoliberal public sphere gave rise to the first Black president in the U.S., yet, one who was easily "consumable" not only for a White audience, but for whiteness more generally. Therefore, a neoliberal public sphere is racially diverse in terms of representation only. As argued in chapter four, racially marginalized individual may have more agency and choice in a neoliberal public sphere, but they are beholden to preforming the historical liberal subject, one who is White and embraces capitalistic systems (even if they do not own property in the historical liberal sense).

By locating what intersectional bodies *do* in the age of neoliberalism and school choice in Phoenix, Arizona, this project finds that diverse bodies (and often oppressed bodies) are finding agency within a structure that does not ultimately value the entirety of their personhood. Instead, there seems to be a tradeoff. Humanitas offers an educational space for students living in an area that is historically neglected by the larger Phoenix community. Humanitas "demonstrates that charter schools can serve the foundational public purpose of public education – preparation for citizenships" and cultivating well-rounded people (Gill, Tilley, Whitesell, Finucane, Potamites, & Corcoran, 2019, p. 67). Yet, this learning space asks that they at times adhere to a history of liberalism, capitalism, and neoliberalism, due to the larger constraining forces of education in the state, all while finding the moments it can for anti-neoliberal judgements and practices.

To conclude these thoughts, this final chapter will offer some key take-aways in the form of theoretical, methodological, and practical implications.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications: The Imperative of Intersectionality, Post-Liberal Critique, and Immanent Politics

I have found during my time on this project how crucial intersectionality is to rhetorical inquiries into neoliberalism. So far, I discovered over the last two years how important it is to locate intersectionality at the structural level. This commitment to critiquing and transforming structural inequalities is rooted in foundational intersectionality scholarship. For example, the Combahee River Collective (1983) argued how they are "actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as [their] particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the face that the *majority systems of oppression are interlocking*" (p. 272, emphasis added). Regrettably, more recent scholarship has shifted its focus of analysis to understand how identity is intersectionally shaped and experienced: shifting from highlighting and transforming racism compounded with capitalism, for example, to how one lives as a racially and economically marginalized individual (Duggan, 2003). Specifically, my analysis chapters sought to center not just the identities of those involved but also the interwoven, compounding hegemonies of neoliberalism, whiteness and classism as they permeate daily life. As argued by Duggan (2003) such a focus on the structural is imperative within a neoliberal society:

> Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics and
> cannot be undone by a movement without constituencies and analyses that
> respond directly to that fact. Nor will it be possible to build a new social

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movement that might be strong, creative, and diverse enough to engage the work

of reinventing global politics for the new millennium as long as *cultural and*

identity issues are separated, analytically and organizationally, from the political

economy in which they are embedded. (p. 3, emphasis added)

I must echo Duggan's discernment. In this context, neoliberalism is not just about

capitalism and class, but how these are heavily informed with additional identity

commitments to whiteness. Therefore, any sense of change must be rooted in a focus on

social identities and the political and economic context in which they are situated. It was

with this notion in mind that the data collected pointed to dialectical vernacular

complicity as one heuristic as to how this kind of intersectional change could occur as

intersectionally complex bodies move and rationalize their commitments and actions.

Moreover, CRT and its commitments to structures, history, and social justice,

remind us to keep looking back to understand the present. Our past lives through and

amongst us. This is why CRT scholarship has paid attention not just to neoliberalism but

liberalism as well. Neoliberal concepts, like colorblindness, being the key to racial

harmony and equality, persuade us that equal treatment is the fix to racial and economic

inequality. And this belief is seeded in liberal thoughts about "rights." Arguments for

giving people rights, like a right to equal education tend to focus on having a fair process

instead of creating substantive change (e.g., building radically transformative educational

spaces). "Rights" can also be alienating since they tend to create divisions between

people as we bicker over who should have certain rights, as long as they do not infringe

upon mine (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The public discussion that opened chapter five points to how some of these same threads and concerns of "rights" emerge within the context of public education and school choice. The libertarian in the group seemed to espouse this rights-based language the most, but the speakers leading the discussion also made sure to articulate that they were pro-rights. Specifically, Terry stated that he did not wish to get rid of school choice, he just wanted more accountability imposed by the state on some of these forms of choice. Therefore, much of the discussion focused on making sure a fair process was in place instead of advocating or imagining what substantive change would look like for Arizona's education system. This one example shows how liberal thinkers' beliefs and values about "rights" are still present within a neoliberal context and culture. And in a more historical sense, liberalism not only began these discourses about "rights" but also tells people of color in particular that they need to stop complaining about racial inequality and should just roll up their sleeves and work hard like everyone else – a sentiment that was not consistently challenged during my time at Humanitas and across interviews.

This project has found that Humanitas offers an interesting case study in relation to previous work utilizing CRT. The history of public education rationalizes the desire and need for non-conventional approaches to public education to help cultivate educational spaces that do not center whiteness, classism, and the like. While some argue that school choice seems to only benefit those who are already privileged, Humanitas serves a community of people who are dually racially and economically underserved. Humanitas is still limited though by those structures of the past that informed the neoliberal policy of charter schools. However, the school does seem devoted to

transforming the community in which is it located. Humanitas offers additional support to its community through a food panty and having school documents available in several languages and teachers/staff that are bilingual as well. More recently, during the rise of the coronavirus, even though schools were shut down, Humanitas continued its food pantry to offer support to families during a time of economic instability and loss. Consequently, their commitments are more than just educational (high test scores, good school rating). They also seem active in supporting their part of the South Phoenix community in what ways they can.

Thus, I argue that the data and findings of this study both support and extend the theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality and CRT. With recent calls for intersectional work to focus on the structural and bodies that *do* and CRT's long commitment to historicizing concepts and inequality, my two years at Humanitas illustrate the value of these commitments (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Otis, 2019). The project extends intersectional work by offering neoliberalism as an inherently anti-intersectional project, making it something intersectional scholars are well-equipped to study. In relation to CRT, the limitations of Covey's (1989/2004) seven habits and the concept of neoliberal scapegoating offer additional insights into the unique racializations of a neoliberal culture. In addition, with the influence and guidance of intersectionality and CRT, I have settled on some new theoretical insights in relation to public sphere theory specific to conversations about neoliberalism: I wish for us to consider a public sphere that is post-liberal.

Specifically, I inquire: Can we say it is time to be post-liberal? On the one hand, the roots of liberalism, both in theory and practice, are not something to be celebrated. As

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the colonization and establishment of the United States of America became the poster

child for some of the promises of liberal political thought, freedom, equality, deliberation,

and economic mobility, it did so by limiting those promises to a very specific group of

people: White, landowning, heterosexual, Protestant men. The promissory note of

freedom in the "New World" came with real and, at times, violent caveats. On the other

hand, there is a continued investment across disciplines in this thing called neoliberalism.

I find it interesting that it is not *post*liberalism, but a remaking anew of something that

exist(s)(ed), liberalism. This wording politic is incredibly important. By it being "new"

rather against its predecessor, neoliberalism permits some of us to hold onto our liberal

ideals – that tantalizing promise of freedom, equality, and social mobility – because we

are not ditching or rejecting liberalism (something I think Rüstow, discussed in the

introduction, was conscious of). Instead, we are saying something new is happening,

while keeping the "old" in the background, present.

By idealizing a political and social philosophy that has never actually been *fully,*

completely, and *energetically* put into practice, I am afraid that neoliberalism will

continue to be the scapegoat for most current political issues today: racism, social

inequality, environmental concerns, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and so on. In the

context of a liberal democracy, these things can become more complex with the tensions

of the individuality promised in liberalism and the inherent concern for a collective in a

democracy (at least in terms of representation). Yet, most of the attention is paid to

neoliberalism. Little energy is put into connecting how liberalism created the very

groundwork for many of the manifestations of some would deem neoliberalism and how

liberal beliefs continue to be recycled today (Deneen, 2018). Given my findings in this

project, I want to inspire the urge to locate the critical (dis)connections between liberalism and neoliberalism. For me, this results in a post-liberal critique. Here, I am taking "post" in its most literal sense. In the age of neoliberalism, let us treat liberalism as something done, past, former, and even outdated. My current tenets for this post-liberal critique invite critical rhetorical and public sphere theory scholars to consider the following when engaging in their scholarly craft.

First, *be sympathetic to the appeal of liberalism*. This requires individuals to be accountable to their own historical understanding of liberalism (whether specific to the U.S. or Western Europe more generally). What were its philosophical roots, promises, and actual practices? How have these ideals manifested in more contemporary times (e.g., the Civil Rights movements, feminists' movements, marriage equality, etc.)? Although some of this work may not find its way onto the page, it should inform how one understands neoliberalism. Additionally, it also means working through the *why* – why is liberalism so attractive today even when our history is limited to its actual full employment for all people? As I realized through my own work on this project, in the context of the U.S., this may mean locating liberalism in relation to democracy and our K-12 educational spaces.

Second, we should locally *historicize neoliberalism*. Make clear one's own understanding of the emergence of neoliberalism and how it is something distinct from liberalism. Remember, Asen (2018) notes there is no singular version of neoliberalism. These first two tenets should be put into conversation with each other to explicitly make a case for what communicative and ideological phenomenon point to a shift from a logic of liberalism to that of neoliberalism. This is increasingly important considering that both

liberalism and neoliberalism struggle with the state, market, and their (dis)combined roles (Chaput, 2018). Yet, as I argued in chapter four, there are some aspects of liberalism in the U.S. that make it distinct from neoliberalism.

Third, we should ask: *Is it capitalism or neoliberalism? Or both?* Part of the history of both liberalism and neoliberalism are that they have been snug bedfellows with capitalism. For both, some work of economists (e.g., Smith, Hayek, and Friedman) inspired social and political thought. Thus, it is important for research to unpack the nuances between when something is capitalism, when it is neoliberalism, or when it is both. For example, a concept like the bootstrap mentality is not unique to neoliberalism, but to capitalist beliefs about labor, agency, and self-sufficiency. Additionally, as Molefi Kete Asante (2005) notes, the role of the bourgeois public sphere itself, with its liberal roots, has ultimately come to "serve the ends of capitalism" (p. 170). We should do more to address the blind spots these two create for our critical analysis of power. This begs: what new relationships to/with/within capitalism does neoliberalism have? As I have held through this study, it is a hegemonic reimagining of whiteness in late capitalism and an increasingly diverse public.

Finally, a post-liberal critique invites scholars to *center field work and/or qualitative research*. More needs to be done to locate how people experience neoliberalism in their everyday lives. If we treat liberalism as something done and over with, then we need to find out how people are living in the age of neoliberalism: what is their agency, what decision making practices inform the choices they do or do not make, how does it inform voting, political and social action? Even if what we find "on the ground" reflects our theorizing about neoliberalism, it means our theory is being reflected

by practice rather than just the idea of it (see Hunt, 2016). This tenet asks for a shift from diagnosing to advocacy *and* diagnosis. This dissertation project demonstrated what we could gain when we inquire into and reveal the practices of people as they navigate ideology, hegemony, and the material structures from a rhetorical perspective.

This final tenet brings me to the methodological implications of this study. I believe that rhetorical field methods have much to offer in relation to rhetorical criticism more broadly. As Asen (2105) argued in his book on educational practices, "If scholars rely exclusively on already available texts, we necessarily encounter rhetoric after it has occurred, studying its record but not its embodied performance" (p. 14). Ideology and hegemony, which are often rhetorically (re)constructed, do not exist solely in structures, but are constituted and unsettled by everyday practices. The agents in this project are complicated: they are contradictory, hegemonic, resistive, and anxious to do what they can to bolster their community, scholars, and (grand)children. Chapters four and five demonstrate the nuance of living in the age of neoliberalism within K-12 charter school contexts and could only do so through field methods. I believe approaching neoliberalism with rhetorical field methods asks us to consider the applicability and relevance of immanent politics and phronesis in everyday life.

In their call towards a participatory critical rhetoric, Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook (2015) challenge rhetorical critics to focus on immanent politics while in the field. For them, immanent politics ask critics to "privilege their relationship with the members of the communities they research in the locations they research and on an equal plane with their relationship to a community of critics…" (p. 43). In practice, this means "privileging the politics encountered by the critic *in situ*" (p. 47). Concepts like neoliberal

scapegoating and dialectical vernacular complicity aim to do just that: locate an immanent politic and then value those practices within the context of Humanitas and the larger landscape of neoliberalism. These practices, like dialectical vernacular complicity, value vernacular ways of making do with the resources available to them whether material or symbolic. In general, these practices may seem to many as too liberal, not radical enough, or even complacent, if not hegemonic. As I have argued, such claims engage in vernacular erasure that does not meet the pragmatism and/or phronesis being employed by vernacular actors. Immanent politics and phronesis can work in tandem since the latter focuses on speaking to ethics in relation to political and social praxis, or the relationship between you and the politics and society in which you act (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Communication scholar Robert Craig (2018) has recently argued that the field of communication is, or should be, phronetic (based on practical wisdom or common sense). In the same manner that Barry Brummett (1984) argued for rhetorical scholars specifically, Craig (2018) posits that communication (like rhetoric) should be a heuristic: it should be a practical framework to give people the ability to employ practical wisdom to think and do well whether at home, at work, or when engaged with civic life. In other words, Craig's essay is an advance for communication scholars to think about how their research can and should have positive consequence in the world – permitting others to take what we have to offer to do the same in their own lives. Although not mentioned by Craig, it has already been argued that any use or exploration of phronesis must account for power (see Flyvbjerg, 2001). More specifically, I think about the argument provided first by Maurice Charland (1991) and then expanded by Kent Ono and John Sloop

(1992): critical and rhetorical scholarship sometimes fails to provide a roadmap of what the good could be. If power exists, how can it be challenged and transformed?

In his call for phronesis and a need for communication to provide a roadmap, Craig (2018) does not provide his own roadmap to what this may look like. If rhetorical field methods have taught me anything, it is perhaps it is time we turn to the vernacular to show us their roadmaps and we appreciate them for what they are based on their immanent politics and practices of phronesis and pragmatism. Aaron Hess (2011) argues that the answer may lie in the various "places of rhetorical praxis" that are being created and responded to in the field (p. 140). For Hess particularly, phronetic research occurs through the direct encountering of the micropolitics and micropractices of power. The tools of critical theory thus necessitate a skepticism towards power, rhetoric, and action in general, but these commitments may be at odds with the practical, pragmatic things people need to do, to make do. This project certainly struggled with this tension, and it was far easier to fall into the critique mindset of critical rhetorical theory, intersectionality, and CRT. However, I advance that the data from this project, those whose lives I have very briefly accounted for here, offer the nuance and practicality of everyday life within education and neoliberalism through their own practical wisdom – even if that means we do not leave this current stage of the project with a plan to overthrow neoliberalism.

In the end, when I call for a post-liberal critique, I am not claiming that the alternative should be neoliberalism, but liberalism is not cutting it either. I believe that our attachment to liberalism, and its connection to the emergence of the idyllic notion of public schooling, allows us to metaphorically kick the can down the road. If the actual

manifestations of neoliberalism are a threat to any sense of equality, my caution is the habit of relying on liberal notions of democracy and individuality as the fix. Obviously, in some ways, parts of liberalism are more desirable than neoliberalism (i.e., the appreciation of community to better the individual). My point is that we should stop treating the terms as dichotomous of each other and that we should turn to the vernacular to offer roadmaps for change and survival. With these theoretical and methodological implications in mind, let us turn towards the practical.

Practical Implications: Employing Anticapitalist Antiracist Pedagogy

As I argued in chapter three, for charter schools to be liberating and transformative spaces for marginalized and oppressed identities, experiences, and communities, they need to exist without reproducing the harms they claim to be fixing. Although the story at Humanitas is complex, the founders proclaim a desire for social justice and teaching the whole child and the desire for growth and innovation. From my time spent between the field and previous scholarship, I believe that the seven habits can potentially serve as a transformational approach to doing K-12 education. However, they need to be supplemented with additional theories for Humanitas to become social justice oriented. To keep the neoliberal tendencies of the seven habits at bay, the school should adopt the work of Casey (2016) on a pedagogy of anticapitalism and antiracism.

I advance that anticapitalist antiracist pedagogy is the praxis to the concerns articulated in chapter four. Specifically, it

> entails a conception of learning that cannot be reduced to the status of a
> commodity: nothing one learns should derive its primary values based on its
> exchangeability. This means that learning cannot be primarily for job training, or

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preparation for future work. It means, further, that all information to be subjected

to critical scrutiny on the part of the learner based on their lived experiences.

(Casey, 2016, p. 154)

The eerie thing about scholars testing well is that it bodes well for the school: for its potential growth and ability to generate itself as an educational commodity. However, testing well does not alleviate the intersectional oppression of neoliberalism. This is why anticapitalist antiracist pedagogy centers people in the current historical reality, which is intensely dehumanizing and oppressive. Such a pedagogical approach assumes that the history of schooling is oppressive, but classrooms within schools can become radical spaces for change, justice, and transformation (see hooks, 2015).

Thus, we keep in mind that schools will almost always maintain privilege by "taking the forms and content of the culture and knowledge of powerful groups and defining it as legitimate knowledge to be preserved and passed on" (Apple, 1982/2012, p. 38). In chapter four, I argued that Covey's (1989/2004) seven habits within K-12 spaces can do just that. If Humanitas truly wanted to be a social justice-oriented school, anticapitalist antiracist pedagogy's assumptions could be used to supplement the habits. You can tell scholars to be proactive but remind them of structural and ideological limitations of neoliberalism (or class and race specifically). Lisa Delpit (1995) posits that schools can and should teach racially marginalized students the practices and tools that they need to survive within whiteness and White-dominated spaces. The practicality of teaching these behaviors must also come with a structural critique that reminds students of the power at work within all the various places and spaces of their lives. Since Delpit sees the "narrow and essentially Eurocentric curriculum" that is given to teachers as

limiting and dehumanizing, I find that the seven habits contribute to this and thus something else is needed to critique these "norms" (p. 290).

Thus, we keep in mind that schools will almost always maintain privilege by "taking the forms and content of the culture and knowledge of powerful groups and defining it as legitimate knowledge to be preserved and passed on" (Apple, 1982/2012, p. 38). In chapter four, I argued that Covey's (1989/2004) seven habits within K-12 spaces does just that. If Humanitas truly wanted to be a social justice-oriented school, anticapitalist antiracist pedagogy's assumptions could be used to supplement the habits. You can tell scholars to be proactive but remind them of structural and ideological limitations. It is by no means my desire to add to the labor and workload of teachers with such claims. But if Humanitas has been successful in infusing the seven habits within daily conversation the same could be said for this additional pedagogical investment. For example, the pedagogical moment from the PE class stands as one possible example of what this pedagogy could look like in practice since "it is only through the practice of critical consciousness that a more just reality is possible" (Casey, 2016, p. 160). That moment with Coach points to the consciousness raising capabilities of pedagogical moments in K-12 spaces.

Reflections and New Directions

Before concluding, I want to offer some brief thoughts on the limitations of this study while offering some calls for future research. First, as I stated in chapter two, one painful gap in this study is the lack of an interviewing pool that accounts for Spanish-speaking parents. In addition, the study never did directly interview teachers. Although observations across the school provided insight into the daily actions of teachers and

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moments of discussion that allowed for me to hear rhetorical judgements, direct interviewing may have offered some additional nuance to the agency of teachers at Humanitas. Next, my time in the field was temporary. A more thorough, longitudinal study could only offer more insight into the changing landscape of South Phoenix itself and Humanitas as well. Finally, I am also a limitation due to my own experiences and social identities. As a White body invested in racial justice work, my privileges as a White person clouds my ability to do much of this critical work. As articulated beautifully and compellingly by George Yancy (2012), White people who are invested in racial justice can never be antiracists. I am always an antiracist *racist*. My personal feelings about racial inequality cannot erase the structural privileges and benefits (historical and contemporary) I have received. These tensions and realities were evident throughout each previous page as they informed every decision or argument I did or did not make.

Provided these limitations and the study as a whole, I have some thoughts on additional work that could continue the threads I have laid here. To begin, although neoliberalism has various manifestations, I believe it would be compelling for future research to offer a cross-state comparison of charter schools: their practices, beliefs, and daily struggles to see if any neoliberal consistencies exist across state lines. Other work should be done to continue address the critical implications of Covey's (1989/2004) seven habits as a pedagogical framework for a charter schools or any other type of school that can afford to adopt the Leader in Me program. As previously noted, there is plenty of work on other educational outcomes of the seven habits, but I think it is important for researchers to continue approaching the habits from a space of skepticism. Finally, other

rhetorical scholars interested in neoliberalism should locate additional contexts to explore through rhetorical field methods. K-12 education is not the only structure that has been affected by neoliberalism; we should continue to add scholarship in our field that centers vernacular judgements and agency in a multiplicity of neoliberal spaces. Ultimately, rhetorical scholars should continue to invest in tools that allow us to complicate and nuance the material reality of who engages within and can potentially benefit from school choice and other neoliberal practices.

To conclude, from the beginning, I have sought to tell a story. We began in the past, in Oxnard, California, so that I could establish a historical narrative about education, racism, and (neo)liberalism. From there, I made a case for nuancing our academic inquiry into neoliberalism by advocating for a historical tracing of liberalism and its beliefs. To demonstrate this claim, I narrowed down the scope of this story by focusing on one specific neoliberal product, charter schools. Approaches to public sphere theory, intersectionality, and critical race theory served to frame how this story was going to be told and why. Rhetorical methods broadly, coupled with vernacular rhetorical approaches, sought to ensure that my voice was not the only one heard in the narrative: I desired to highlight the agency and rhetorical judgements of those directly experiencing K-12 school choice and neoliberalism.

These larger outlines helped demarcate a larger history of K-12 school in Arizona that was told in chapter three to contextualize Humanitas as a charter school in South Phoenix. The final chapters provided insight into the pedagogical practices of Humanitas and how (grand)parents and those involved with charter schools navigate school choice through neoliberal scapegoating and tactical complicity. This is just one narrative that

sought to contribute to a rich rhetorical and educational investment in ideas of

democracy, education, and publicity. The story of Humanitas does not end at the margins

of these pages – it lingers as I do in my own spaces and reality of (neo)liberalism.

Therefore, the story continues.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUESTIONS (PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS)

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to reflect on your thoughts about public education. As a reminder, you do not have to answer all the questions and you are free to stop the interview or tape-recording at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about your own experiences with education.
   a. The good?
   b. The bad?
2. Imagine that someone unfamiliar with U.S. education comes to you and asks you describe what it is. What would you tell them?
   a. How do you find yourself navigating within this reality?
      i. What enables you?
      ii. What constrains you?
   b. What impact does this have on you? And your child(ren)?
   c. How might your experience in South Phoenix be different from other parts of the city? State? Country?
3. What you are goals for your child(ren) in life?
   a. What are things that might get in the way of your child(ren) reaching this goal?
   b. How does their education factor into this vision?
4. How is it that you came to enroll your child(ren) in this school?
   a. Were you recruited by other schools? Tell me about that experience.
   b. What was it like to make the choice to send your children here?
   c. What are your perceptions of conventional public schools compared to charter schools?
5. Many voices have opinions on education. In your experience, which voices should we listen to the most? Why?
   a. Which voices should have less of a say?
6. Is there anything I've missed? Anything else that you'd like to discuss?

That completes the interview process. Once again, thank you so much for your time! If you are interested in following up on the project or have additional questions or concerns here is my contact email: Katrina.Hanna@asu.edu

APPENDIX B

IRB EXEMPTION FORM

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Aaron Hess

CISA: Language and Cultures
602/496-0652

aaron.hess@asu.edu

Dear Aaron Hess:

On 4/29/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Communicating Educational Values at Charter Schools
Investigator:	Aaron Hess
IRB ID:	STUDY00010115
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• IRB Recruitment Script.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Site Permission.pdf, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • IRB Proposal.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • IRB Consent Form.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Interview Protocol.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings, (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 4/29/2019.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Katrina Hanna
        Katrina Hanna