When the Elite Control Public Education: A Critical Inquiry on Charter Schools

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WHEN THE ELITE CONTROL PUBLIC EDUCATION: A

CRITICAL INQUIRY ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

When the Elite Control Public Education: A Critical Inquiry on Charter

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This thesis takes a critical look into charter schools in New York City. Through this thesis, I want to answer questions regarding who benefits from the current charter school model in NYC and why this current state of schooling is detrimental to marginalized children. As a former NYC public school student, I know first-hand that good intentions by white educators (and thus white systems) do not always result in beneficial outcomes for the most vulnerable.

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Introduction
"What does it look like to re-imagine urban classrooms as sites of love?"

(Johnson et al., 2019).

I started working at Success Academy (SA) in the summer of 2019, a year after my college graduation. SA was no stranger to me due to their popularity with college seniors and recent graduates. They targeted college campuses as a source of new talent. SA is NYC's biggest charter network operated by Eva Moskozwitz, CEO of SA. Moskowitz spent many years working in the Upper East Side City Council before hedge fund managers Joel Greenblatt and John Petry recruited her to operate SA (Querolo 2022). Not surprising is that the Upper East Side is predominantly white (NYU Furman Center, n.d.).

I joined the network as a Special Education Associate, a brand-new position established that summer. Before working there, I knew very little about what the differences were between the Department of Education public schools and charter schools. I also had very little experience working with an Individualized Education Plan (a written document that's developed for each school child who is eligible for special education) and teaching (The New York Institute for Special Education, n.d.). After a month-long onboarding, hosted at New York Law School, I was able to see the school site I was placed at, SA Hell's Kitchen (SAHK). SAHK shared the building with four high schools and one SA middle school. I attended a co-located middle school and high school, therefore I was not uncomfortable with the fact that I would be working in an elementary school housed with older students. Still, I had yet to form my opinions of whether SAHK was truly a good school like it boasted. I knew that there was strong opposition to charter schools but I had no prior knowledge of all the controversy that surrounded this network of schools. I observed everything and anything and took mental notes of things I liked and disliked. After connecting lessons learned in my graduate classes with my job, I was able to put into words why certain things

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pissed me off about my work environment.

As a young professional I thought my concerns were caused due to my inexperience working. But as time passed by, I knew it was more than that. The structure of the school and the structures of governmental policy that allowed for schools to function this way, was the cause of my frustration and anger. Both the children and the teachers were under a lot of scrutiny to perform well in assessments by school and network leadership. This stress to exceed benchmarks was the priority rather than prioritizing the community they serve, children and their families: "Research shows that our nation's school children have significant unidentified mental health needs, and many receive no treatment for the mental health challenges they face" (Freeman & Kendziora, 2017, p. 2). Children of color living in poverty are very vulnerable to stress in a violent learning environment. Poverty is a key contributor to the mental health issues children face. Freeman & Kendzioara (2017) found that, "Children living in persistent poverty experience long-term effects on their ability to learn in schools as well as increased exposure to stressors and trauma that can permanently affect their brain development and emotional functioning" (2). Yet, children are expected to exceed benchmarks in this environment that lacks the inability to see their lived reality.

Positionality (Reflection of own schooling)

I, like many low-income Black and Latino kids, attended New York City DOE public schools from pre-K to high school. I was born a year after my parents arrived in the city in 1995. They like many undocumented immigrants hailing from rural villages spoke no English and had very limited exposure to city life. We moved a lot throughout my childhood and for the first 9 years of my life, my family and I lived with other relatives in order to make ends meet.

My schooling experience started in Harlem at P.S. 161. I attended this school from pre-K and stayed for the beginning of fourth grade. After heated discussions between my parents, I was switched from a bilingual classroom to an all-English classroom in the second grade. My father

wanted me to learn how to speak English, like a gringa, without an accent. He wanted me to avoid obstacles caused by a language barrier.

After moving to the Bronx, I attended C.S. 102. A school surrounded by small businesses and near multiple transportations options. This was the last time I would go to school near my neighborhood. After I graduated, C.S.102 was closed and was divided into smaller schools. The demographics of C.S.102 were predominantly Black and Puerto Rican. The blackness of the school made my parents worry that I would develop "bad habits". Difference and diversity sounded nice on paper, but the reality of it scared parents (Makris, 2015, p. 122). At C.S. 102, I received English as a Second Language (ESL), math intervention and was enrolled in an after-school program aimed to help my English pronunciation. My English did improve as many friends would point out that I spoke like a "white girl".

For middle school, I attended Frederick Douglass Academy V (FDAV) a small, co-located school. Small co-located schools became the norm as accountability measures were rigid and schools had to prove their effectiveness based on quantitative data (NYU Steinhardt, n.d.; "A Schoolhouse Divided," n.d.). FDAV was my second choice because I had applied to De La Salle Academy. My fifth-grade teacher urged my mom to apply, stating that they offered need-based scholarships. I moved along to step two, of the three-step application process, a simulated school day, where the applicant would spend part of the day at De La Salle. Attending a school in Manhattan, my mom believed, meant that I was guaranteed a quality education. The Bronx has been looked down upon due to the demographics of the borough and its criminalization in the media. FDAV was the next best choice she heard, from word of mouth, was good. When it came time to apply to high schools, we still had the desire for me to go to school in Manhattan so I took the specialized high school entrance exam. The entrance exams were important for us because it was our only shot at getting a seat in a Manhattan school since school placement was based on zip

code. I did not succeed this time either and went to Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics (BCSM), a magnet high school.

Edward Tom, the founder and principal at the time, chose to open this small school in Morrisania, one of the poorest Congressional districts in the country because he wanted to provide quality education to a high-needs community. Mr. Tom was known for his motivational speeches about how low-income people of color were expected to fail and were not pushed to perform at high standards. He was known for his "tough love" (Mitchell, 2009). He promised parents that BCSM was the place for their children to succeed and these speeches were effective in gaining parental interest in the school. All the students, specifically the high achieving students, were reminded that they had to work twice as hard in life to be successful because they were expected to fail. The school's motto was "whatever it takes" and it was not only rigorous it was very strict.

BCSM was known for pushing out students that required extra support. These students for various reasons were not performing at the academic levels the school desired and thus these students were hurting their data. Data, in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Era with Mike Bloomberg as mayor, was essential in securing funding for schools. It was essential for new schools to perform well in order to evade scrutiny from above. Bloomberg, like many politicians at the time, was a big fan of accountability measures, making test scores, attendance records, and report cards the ultimate indicator of a school's effectiveness (Love, 2019, p. 122). In order for BCSM to uphold its mission, the school implemented strict measures to ensure order and desired outcomes. Tardies and uniform infractions (such as not wearing dress socks or having missing items such as a tie or a blazer) ended up in detention with students accumulating ridiculous amounts of "time owed to the school". Time owed, if not served by the end of the school year, was expected to be served during summer vacation inside a hot auditorium. Their arguments for the rigidness was that they wanted to prepare us for the real world as low-income people of color.

BCSM, like many other NYC public schools, viewed us as deficient and wanted us to assimilate to the larger society to receive all the advantages that come with whiteness (or your proximity to whiteness).

BCSM offered very few Advanced Placement courses and, like many of my schools, lacked the resources to have a vast array of elective courses and extracurriculars. Tracking kept most students separated, especially the "smart kids". These kids stuck together in all the honor courses, A.Ps courses, had internships, and competed in STEM competitions. After being admitted to the honors track in my junior year of high school I realized that many of my friends were not being exposed to the same opportunities as the honor students. I became an honor student after receiving tutoring support from a non-profit organization called CitySquash (it also helped that BCSM and Citysquash had established a good relationship). Being in the honors track meant you got harder work compared to the other two tracks (general education and lower track/remedial) but it also meant you were provided more attention from the college counselors. There was a social hierarchy in the school where the high achieving kids were given more privileges as they made the school look good (Hallinan, 1994).

All my hard work and long nights of Squash practice, volunteering while also taking care of my familial duties paid off (I believed) once I started receiving college acceptance letters. After going to a liberal arts college, I realized how my lived experiences inside and outside the classroom were direct implications of my identity and social standing in society. I was able to attend a private school with the help of the Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) and CitySquash. My parents were sold into the American dream, that if you worked hard enough you could make something out of your life. But hard work is not enough when you lack cultural capital, a financial safety net, and networking connections. My parents lacked formal education and were not aware of the steps needed to secure college admissions and white-collar jobs. They believed

that if you graduated college you would land a good job. But before you get the job, the first hurdle is surviving high school and successfully navigating the college admissions process.

My schooling experience after elementary school (after NCLB really kicked off) changed once I moved to the Bronx. Small co-located schools were the norm and were meant to give more individual support for students but they still lacked funding and were obsessive about discipline ("A Schoolhouse Divided," n.d.). The school system placed pressure on public schools to perform at the same level that better-funded schools were performing at. This system did not look at schools individually case by case instead it provided standards that had to be met to secure funding. My time at BCSM was not all bad because it did support most students with college application fee waivers, Kaplan SAT prep for every junior, and SAT fee waivers. But it is frustrating to know that while I had moved up in ranking academically a lot of my friends in the other tracks were on their own. Schools gave priority to students that came in performing at high levels by providing them more resources and opportunities while allowing students not performing at their standards to passively go on to the next grade. My accessibility to whiteness aided my completion of high school and college. My grasp of the English language at an early age prevented me from repeating a year and my U.S. citizenship granted me federal financial aid and loans. My parent's school choices were confined by our zip code and like many parents tried their best to provide for me but in the U.S. good things come to those already advantaged.

Learning and Schooling

Where does learning happen? When does it happen? If you would have asked me to define learning a couple of years ago, I would probably say that learning happens in schools. *The place I disliked most growing up, with all its rules and expectations.* For so long I believed that good grades and good behavior made me a "good" student (Love, 2019, p. 70). Learning at this time meant making the least number of mistakes to reap the most rewards. I believed that I only learned

if I got high grades on a test and that if I failed that test, I had not learned enough (*as if learning were quantifiable*). A belief that many teachers and administrators have (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 71). I believed learning and schooling were the same things!

My time spent at the Graduate Center taught me many lessons but the main one has been that schooling and learning are not the same things and the way we define these terms carries implications. The "terms we use to control our perceptions, shape our understanding and lead us to particular proposals for improvement" (Milner 2007, 389). The way the United States tackles schooling and education research go hand in hand, it aims to maintain the status quo. Now I define learning as, "departing from known automatic practices, venturing into experiences that aren't wholly predictable, and experiencing temporary, productive failure" (Patel 2016, 397). *Learning cannot be solely quantified into numbers. Learning occurs anywhere and everywhere*. This type of learning requires an abolitionist teacher that invites, "struggles, setbacks, and disagreements because one understands the complexity of uprooting injustice but finds beauty in the struggle" (Love, 2019, p. 90).

I define schooling, on the other hand, as institutionalized learning where the nation-State disseminates its agenda of creating a palatable worker for the ever-increasing needs of the capitalist elites. Once I chose this definition, I no longer saw the neoliberal agenda of creating reforms to help decrease the "achievement gap" as a solution. I perceived it as a distraction to avoid dealing with the root of the problem, white supremacy, and its legacy. Wording, such as "achievement gap" and the so-called science of learning disability labels, placed the blame on students for not reaching adult-centered milestones. Academic works, usually written under adult/Eurocentric frameworks, treat children as deficient products of their environment. Symptoms usually focused about in these canonized texts center *low* assessment scores and *high* dropout rates. The "achievement gap" crowd does not place enough importance on questioning how learning can be quantified? What is

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the reason for needing to quantify learning? Who benefits from this framework of positioning students and their families as deficient? *Learning does not occur in a linear trajectory ... it is messy... It is complicated to trace because not everything needs to be placed in a data set.* The way we learn is specific to our lived realities. The way we define labels like "learning" is nuanced.

Everyone learns differently and each child should have a loving environment that fosters curiosity, independence, and cooperation. Ladson-Billings (2021) found that the current state of schooling that many Black and Brown children receive does not foster innovation or positive interactions with authority, rather it further alienates an already vulnerable group (69). For instance, Black children, although they are only 18% of preschool enrollment, account for 48% of preschoolers receiving more than one out-of-school suspensions. (69). Teachers play a big role in the way children feel about school. Unfortunately, "Poor students of color are more likely to have an unqualified or under-qualified teacher in critical twenty-first century subject areas such as mathematics and science" (69).

Although I was successful in school, my mother lacked the repertoire of cultural capital to navigate this system. For parents like mine: young, non-English speakers, immigrants with an elementary education wanting the best for your child is not enough. Parents that have wealth and cultural capital know what channels to use to ensure their concerns are answered. By using their arsenal of professional skills, time, and money they can influence district decisions they reject (Mahnken, 2019). For a Black and Brown student to successfully complete public education (K-12) they must have some of these characteristics:

1. English speaking

2. Guardian with a flexible schedule to meet with school staff and knowledge of school procedures

3. Safe home, access to a minimum of three hot meals and financial security

4. Internet/technology access

5. Reliable transportation

6. Neurotypical with little to no behavioral issues

7. Culturally relevant curriculum

Higher education is another setting where having an arsenal of cultural capital is essential. Applying to colleges, getting accepted, and graduating are very tough when you face many hurdles and uncertainties. Schools may be abundant in New York City but they are not intended to serve their students and their caretakers.

The purpose of this thesis is to display the various ways public schools, specifically charter schools, in New York City, do not prioritize their students. The COVID-19 pandemic shed light to the many ways students and their caretakers relied on schools. My aim is to push discussions around education to center children and their communities by considering the many components that make up the schooling system. Schools, for many, were not places of joy and by considering personal narratives, news reports, academic texts, and research reports I display the many ways the current model of schooling does not effectively serve all children. I divide my thesis into four parts, an introduction, theoretical framework, literature review and a conclusion. The introduction provides my reflections of my schooling experience in NYC and the way I view schooling and learning. The second section focuses on the theories I use to frame my argument. While the literature review focuses on providing a brief history of charter schools, their rise to popularity, and their problematic connections to elites and politicians. My conclusion provides some possible short-term solutions but its main goal is a call to action to not lose hope in uncertain times.

Theoretical Framework

In this following section I will discuss the following frameworks that guided this paper:

Neoliberalism, Critical Race Theory, and Pedagogy of Love. These three frameworks helped display how the current state of schooling that many urban low-income, Black/children of color receive is not serving them from a place of love and thus needs to adapt to change the way it serves children. The current state of schooling is not detrimental solely because white people in power *believe* they are superior*,* there is also an economic component that must be explored. Darder (2011a) explains, "it is the exploitation and domination of the majority of the population in the interest of sustaining the power of capital. This is inextricably tied to retaining dominion over the world's populations and natural resources by the ruling elite" (120). Neoliberalism and CRT help me display the way politics and the economy are tied in the type of schooling being offered to low-income urban children, Black/Children of color. CRT does not explicitly incorporate analysis on the class component of identity. Yes, race/ethnicity is an important aspect of how people face their lived reality. But so is class, class determines what your school options are, how you eat, where you live, how clean your air is (Lumen Learning, n.d.). I chose neoliberalism as another guiding theory because I wanted to display a bigger picture on how as a society we are not serving all children adequately. How well could a child learn with the safety of a home, access to a warm meal and care? Pedagogy of love helps lead the path with hope in this tough arena.

Neoliberalism: Unleashing the Magic of the Markets

Neoliberalism has touched all aspects of life with its emphasis on privatization, competition, and hyper-focus on the markets. Everything can be bought and sold… everything has been commodified. Corporations are designing society to fit their needs and the ultra-elite are stronger than ever. Neoliberalism is based on short term investments to garner the most profits (but young people are long-term investments and thus are suffering to merely survive) (França, 2019).

Using this framework allows me to display the way low-income Black children and children of color are being underserved by the current way society functions. The current state of

public education has become a booming business with children getting the least amount of benefits. Saltman (2006) describes the situation: "Educational language has been overrun with neoliberal terms that undergird the framing of educational issues through the ideal of 'achievement,' 'excellence,' and 'performance-based assessment'" (346). Many charter networks that mainly serve marginalized black/children of color (also known as no-nonsense schools) center data as their driving force for their decisions. Little to no importance is placed on their overall well-being as humans (Khost, 2020, Gray, 2017). They are being prepared to take over as the next generation of underpaid and overworked workers.
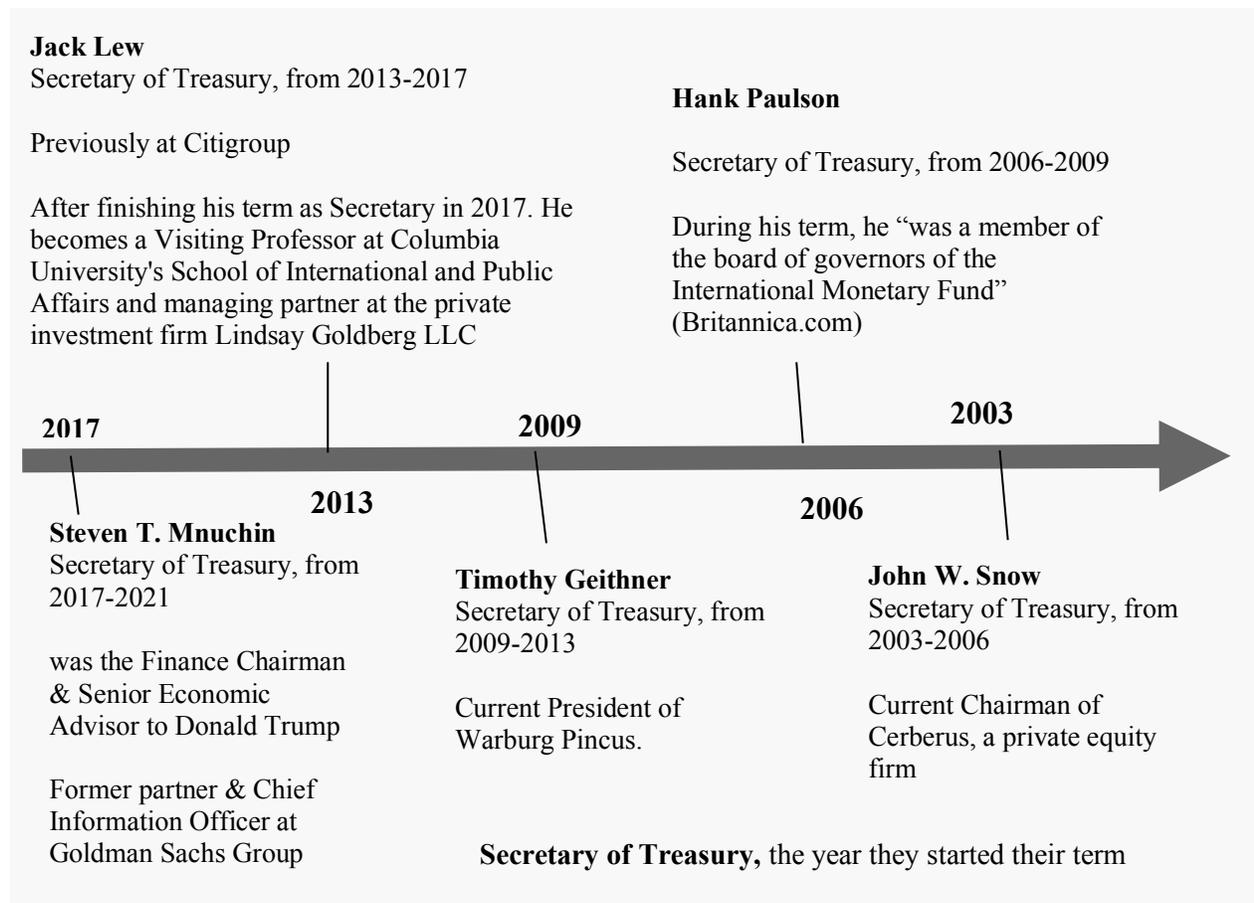
The Rise of the Financial Sector

The finance sector has always had a big influence on the United States but after the 1929 stock market crash, the government put in place laws, such as the Glass-Steagall Act, "to rein in the financial sector and increase stability" (Mukunda, 2014). But with the adoption of neoliberalism, many of these laws were undone because the, "governing logic [was] that corporations could do just about everything better than the government could" and thus the "magic of the marketplace" was unleashed (Baradaran, 2020). Neoliberalism's key pillars are cutting taxes on the already wealthy, deregulation, and cutting social safety nets (Leopold, 2015, pp. 30-32). It was believed that with the cut on taxes and deregulation, the wealthy would invest in the economy by creating new jobs and thus wages would rise. But neoliberalism has only worked for the elite, as they pay less (or no) taxes and receive federal aid when things take a turn for the worse. Deregulation allowed for Wall St. bankers to expand and merge institutions, and develop new high-risk investments (Leopold, 2015, p. 35). This sector is able to stay in power because of its close relationship with the government. It is no secret that many of our politicians are backed by big corporations, just look at the amount of lobbying money is spent.

- 1998-2013 → The finance, insurance, and real estate industries (FIRE) spent $6 billion in lobbying (Mukunda, 2014)

- As of March 2014, FIRE had spent almost $485 million on lobbying and donated almost $149 million to the campaigns of federal candidates (Mukunda, 2014)

After their term in government, many of these former officials have no problems finding well-paying positions in the financial sector (see Figure 1). For instance, the "most important financial regulator is the Treasury secretary" and this position has been held by (former and present) high ranking officials from Citigroup, Warburg Pincus (a Wall Street private equity firm), and Goldman Sachs, to name a few (Mukunda, 2014).

Figure 1, An Example of the close relationship between the government and the finance sector

Jack Lew
Secretary of Treasury, from 2013-2017

Previously at Citigroup

After finishing his term as Secretary in 2017. He becomes a Visiting Professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and managing partner at the private investment firm Lindsay Goldberg LLC

Hank Paulson

Secretary of Treasury, from 2006-2009

During his term, he "was a member of the board of governors of the International Monetary Fund" (Britannica.com)

2017

2013

2009

2006

2003

Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary of Treasury, from 2017-2021

was the Finance Chairman & Senior Economic Advisor to Donald Trump

Former partner & Chief Information Officer at Goldman Sachs Group

Timothy Geithner
Secretary of Treasury, from 2009-2013

Current President of Warburg Pincus.

John W. Snow
Secretary of Treasury, from 2003-2006

Current Chairman of Cerberus, a private equity firm

Secretary of Treasury, the year they started their term

Mukunda's (2014) research shows, "leaders' paths to power crucially shape their actions in office",

so it is no surprise they place profits over people once in public office because they deeply believe in their system.

So, what does this mean for us (folks in the lower income bracket)?

Well for starters, the financialization of Wall Street has led to "short-term thinking" meaning that regardless of the consequences of high-risk investments, Wall Street always wins (Mukunda, 2014). These big corporations want to make big money fast, they do not have time to wait for the long-term profits of investing in the public good. Wall Street's main priority is shareholder maximization (Leopold, 2015, p. 50, Khanna, 2020, as cited in "Who Are Corporations Accountable To").

In the early 1980s, the Business Roundtable (a group of CEOs from the largest corporations in the country) stated that the goal of the corporation was to provide high quality goods and services to customers, take care of the workers of their communities, and to provide a return to shareholders (*Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation: Two Year Anniversary*). Because during that time corporate America's philosophy was to "retain and reinvest" which meant placing profits back into the company by investing in wages, training, and any other equipment needed to keep the company prospering (Leopold, 2015, p. 44). But as neoliberalism took off, by the mid-1990s, the Business Roundtable's goals changed to prioritizing the maximum returns of shareholders by extracting out and away from the corporation through downsizing and distributing (Khanna, 2020, as cited in "Who Are Corporations Accountable To", Leopold, 2015, p. 45). The ones downsizing and distributing are labeled private equity and hedge fund managers. Table 1, explains one of the ways the finance sector has prioritized their profit making instead of reinvesting in their workforce and consequently hurt the economy.

Table 1, Downsizing & Distributing

(according to Leopold, 2015, p. 44-45)

"Step 1: Buy a company with borrowed money and then use earnings from the company to pay back the loans."

"Step 2: Take a hefty fee for pulling off the deal." Private equity and hedge fund managers get a quick return on their investment by paying themselves from the borrowed money without improving the company they just paid for.

"Step 3: Change the way CEOs are paid." Investors hire CEOs that will execute their agenda and in return they get company stocks (or shares). As the share prices rise, the more money the investors and CEOs receive.

"Step 4: Raise the stock price by using corporate revenues to buy back the company's own stocks" A quick way to increase the price of your company's stock is by buying back as many shares and taking them out of the market. The less amount of shares out in circulation will increase its cost. CEOs are driven to raise the stock price regardless if they're using the firm's revenue to buy up as many shares possible or borrowing it.

"Step 5: From 'retain and invest' to 'downsize and distribute'." CEOs in order to present their company as profitable must extract money instead of investing in their workers and equipment. Instead of giving their employees better benefits and wages they outsource production to other countries that have zero (to very minimal) worker protections and have dirt cheap labor costs. They also replace permanent workers with temporary laborers as well as undermine unions.

On August 2020, the Business Roundtable overturned their 22-year-old policy statement that placed shareholder return as their main priority and stated that "companies should serve not only their shareholders, but also deliver value to their customers, invest in employees, deal fairly with suppliers and support the communities in which they operate" ("Purpose of a Corporation,"

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2020). And although this sounds great, it is not true. The financialization of our economy has placed the country's investment capital towards the FIRE sector instead of placing it back in the hands of the workers and industries that make this country run.

Implications - Distributive Economy

According to British economist Roger Bootle, all economic activity can be divided between "creative" or "distributive". The financial sector handles distributive work, moving capital within their elite circles (Mukunda, 2014). Creative work increases the wealth of society, overall. While distributive work moves wealth from one pocket to another.

Our economy has been on a rent-seeking spiral meaning that, "many useless activities are more profitable than innovation [instead of] seeking new markets, and creating value, useless things like collusion with competitors and betting on stock performance rather than investing in stocks directly(derivatives) [have taken over]" (VannPashak, 2018). The financial sector makes profits easily by lobbying on policies that hurt various marginalized communities that have no financial safety net. This predatory sector focuses on creating debt. Baradaran states "In the last decade, private equity management has led to approximately 1.3 million job losses due to retail bankruptcies and liquidation" (2020).

Many businesses, scared of being closed down, have fired many of their full-time employees and cut their hours to be deemed profitable (on their balance sheets). The government and financial sector's relationship is hurting regular folks because of the lack of investment in innovation, infrastructure, public services… in the people that would benefit the most from government social programs. The belief that if Wall Street is strong and backed by the government, their success will trickle down to the population is false and most governmental aid and bailout money stays within the hands of the 1 percent (Dallavalle & Parenti, 2020). Rather than invest in public goods (public education, public banking, free healthcare) that would over time (slowly)

return its initial invested capital, the 1 percent is investing in the demise of the economy, just to make profit (Eisenger & Bernstein, 2011). For the economy to rise, there must be investment in innovation that not only creates jobs (and keeps jobs) but benefits society overall.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory, building from Critical Legal Studies, has 6 tenets. CRT states that "racism is normal, [an] inherent feature of American society (Picower, 2009). CRT does not argue whether there is or isn't racism in the United States, it stands on the truth that the United States is built on racism. CRT also states that whiteness works as property; it is something worth acquiring/having (Harris, 1993). One's proximity to whiteness attracts many benefits because whiteness, "is built upon both exclusion and racial subjugation (Harris). A third component is counter-storytelling, as a way to critique common and mainstream racist ideas and views. CRT allows for muted voices to tell their own stories, in their own voices (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT's critique of liberalism provides a much-needed analysis on the current language and solutions provided by the State to calm the waters. Interest convergence displays how the elite will actively work for their own benefit, regardless of the actual effects on the supposed intended audience. The elite will provide "solutions" because they converge to their interests, their solutions do not disrupt the status quo (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). The final component of CRT is intersectionality, the, "believe that the world is multidimensional, and similarly, research about the world should reflect multiple perspectives" (Howard & Navarro, 2016). CRT provides an essential framework to my paper by examining normalized systems of schooling through a lens that scrutinizes whiteness, uplifts muted voices and displays complexities.

Children require love but many Black and Brown children suffer in schools throughout the United States. Violence does not discriminate and reaches all people. I use the Chicago Center for Health Equity Research (n.d.) definition of structural violence, that "refers to the multiple ways in

which social, economic, and political systems expose particular populations to risks and vulnerabilities leading to increased morbidity and mortality. Those systems include inequality, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, ableism, and other means of social exclusion leading to vulnerabilities, such as poverty, stress, trauma, crime, incarceration, lack of access to care, healthy food, and physical activity." Most children spend the majority of their time in school. So why would we not ensure schools are a safe and caring environment?

It takes a village to raise children and many children lack a loving community within their schools. Schools, a place where many children spend most of their time, have not been the safest and most welcoming environment for Black and Brown children (Johnson et al. 2019, pp. 47-48). More and more schools and jails are coming to look the same. Officers walking up and down the hallways ensuring there is compliance and order … single file lines… and if you behave you maybe be allowed to get some fresh air. Charter schools are not nurturing learning environments for many children; rather, it is a place that is sorting children from desirable/undesirable … from moldable/unmoldable (Khost, 2020) . To be successful in a school you must be submissive and compliant… you must buy-in to a meritocratic myth. The current landscape of reforms in instruction methods and school models will not work now or in the future because it is still defining learning in an adult-centered way.

Associate Professor of Law, Atinuke Adediran (2022) states that in 2019 87% of U.S nonprofit CEOs and 78% of nonprofit board members were white. White people make up approximately 60.1% of the U.S. population yet still they maintain authority via positions of power. "Only 5% of nonprofit CEOs were black, 3% Hispanic and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander" (Adediran, 2022). Faulk et al. (2021) found that 37% of nonprofit organizations have no staff of color (15). Faith Mitchell (2021), an Institute Fellow working with the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy and the Health Policy Center, found that:

[L]eaders of color can increase an organization's effectiveness and social relevance by introducing fresh perspectives and lived experience that enrich programming, broaden the organization's reach, and engage in new networks that reflect and inform its mission… At the board level, diversity of members helps maintain the relevance and effectiveness of decision making and programming.

But Race to Lead's 2019 report found that people of color are less likely to receive support in the organizations they work and that White people are more likely to rate their organization positively (42). Key findings from a 2021 BoardSource report found that "Boards that prioritize fundraising above all else when it comes to the board's role do so at the expense of organizational strategy, relevance, and impact" (5). Another key finding was that Boards felt disconnected from the communities and people they serve. It is no coincidence that many non-profit organizations working with Brown and Black youth, led by white liberals that have never been on welfare and do not understand the reality of the kids and families they work with, cannot understand that extra tutoring and extracurriculars will not fix the dehumanization of the community they are supposed to serve.

Pedagogy of Love

After a discussion with Professor Stesenko about my thesis, she gave me words of encouragement and wisdom: "Academia is not ready to let go of its exclusionary tendencies and regulations … it is not ready to look beyond the present". With this cautionary advice I sought a framework that still encompassed my beliefs and I aligned with a pedagogy of love. This framework, I believe, will get my point across without tampering with the essence of my beliefs. Like Lopez (2019), I agree that, "it will take multiple perspectives from multiple fields through multiple methodological approaches to build an equitable educational system" (284). But one key component to educating children is that you need love to do this work (*intentionally)*. Ethnic

studies Professor Fabiola Torres (2018) states that the "pedagogy of love humanizes learning by engaging students in an ongoing process of self-exploration. When love is embedded in our pedagogical practices, we enable students to recognize that their needs, their desires, their wants, or whatever it is that motivates them, *matter*". Children spend a majority of their time in schools… Why would they want to be in a setting that does not love them?

Children deserve/need schools that will love them … Freire's concept of an "armed love – the fighting love of those convinced of the right and duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce" (as cited in Darder 2011b, p. 179). Love that requires to ask critical questions and push past fear of destabilizing the status quo. Love that, according to Freire, would allow people to fight against the main enemy (as cited in Darder 2011b, p. 184). A revolutionary love that "help[s] Black children embrace and build on authentic and liberatory love which works against the self-hate and miseducation that often begins in schools" (Johnson et al. 2019, p. 56). Love that would, according to Freire, allow for dialogue … how could an educator know who the student is as a human without this? Love becomes a guiding force to keep striving and pushing for better days where both educators and students are respected and valued (Darder 2011b, p. 190). I agree that in "educational settings, love connotes that all humans deserve the right to dignity, freedom, and equal opportunities" (Johnson et al. 2019, p. 48).

While hate in schools can be defined by lack of compassion and respect for the rights/humanity of all people resulting in many forms of explicit and implicit violence (Johnson et al., 2019, p. 48). Johnson et al. (2019) argues that urban schools are unsafe spaces for marginalized students, specifically Black students. These schools are pathologized and negatively depicted (49-50). After analyzing the 45th U.S. President Donald Trump's racist/patriarchal discourse, Jackson and Flowers (2017) found, "that the deficit ideologies that 45 has about Black people and Black schools reflect similar beliefs and perceptions many white teachers hold about Black youth and

their communities" (as cited in Johnson et al. 2019, p. 50). The Eurocentric curriculum, notions of existing in the world that portray marginalized communities through a deficit lens informs the way educators behave in schools (53). Johnson et al, (2019) states that urban schools are filled with teachers that display fake love. Fake love can be described as inauthentic and defined as a way to hide the hate white teachers feel about Black youth (54).

To protect a child's potential requires love because it is no easy task. Former charter school teacher Jazmine Denise says, "To be an effective teacher is a helluva lot of work. It takes everything out of you" (Bamberger, 2019). It is not luxurious but very meaningful because it helps prepare the future generation of citizens. It is not a temporary job meant to be filled for a year or two; rather, it is a profession that requires constant learning and re-learning. Love (2019) finds that her village (the community that uplifted her), "were not just people who volunteered once a year with children from low-income neighborhoods or donated canned goods to the local food bank for a community service project; they were committed to building a relationship with [her], [her] family, and community in ways that were authentic and honored [her] knowledge of growing Black and woman in America" (81). Love allows for people to hold difficult/uncomfortable (but necessary) conversations. Love (2019) describes the positive impact of having adult figures affirm her lived reality:

> I remember Coach Nally, who is White, explaining how he had grown up in Rochester and how the city had changed over the years and how racism impacted the city. He never ran away from hard conversations about racism, and he always discussed and confronted the imbalance of power and privilege within our relationship. Mrs. Knight, who is also White, would tell me about her difficult childhood and the struggles of her mother, but always with understanding that while our life stories may have intersected and overlapped, that my darkness was a factor that further complicated my life, while her Whiteness eased hers (82).

Love requires teachers to be visionaries that want to enact change not only for their students but for all students, in the present and future. Love (2019) states that these abolitionist teachers, "fight for a world that has yet to be created and for children's dreams that yet to be crushed by anti-Blackness (90). Love is a long-term project that moves away from society's over-reliance on "gimmicks and quick fixes" (Love, 2019, p. 104). It is a commitment to providing children a loving/safe learning environment rather than an indoctrinating environment.

Love (2019) finds it essential to use students' culture to show them they and their community matter and are very much needed (105). Humanizing the way students learn means incorporating texts/curriculums that affirm them. This poem by Chicano playwright and poet, Luis Valdez (as cited in Fong, 2014), displays Freire's (2017) point that once you dehumanize others you are in return dehumanizing yourself (20):

In Lak 'ech

Tú eres mi otro yo/ You are my other me

Si te hago daño a ti,/ If I do harm to you,

Me hago daño a mi mismo/ I do harm to myself.

Si te amo y respeto,/ If I love and respect you,

Me amo y respeto yo/ I love and respect myself

We must strive to uplift students while simultaneously uplifting ourselves by rehumanizing the classroom.

Literature Review

Charter Takeover

In this section, I will specifically look into charter schools, their elite advocates/financiers and how this agenda to destabilize public education has affected the most vulnerable... children. I

graduated from a magnet high school in the South Bronx in 2014. At that time, I was unaware of the meaning behind this label, "magnet". My high school was public, and did not boast many luxuries. It required me to take two MTA buses to get there. According to NYC Magnet Schools (n.d.), these schools are "public schools of choice". They are not assigned based on zip code, and usually have a theme. Consequently, I did not learn much about charter schools until 2019, when I was accepted a non-instructional position in a charter school in Manhattan. For a while, I only knew of traditional public schools, private schools, and Catholic schools. My time at the Graduate Center and working at a charter school expanded my knowledge in the vast schooling models there are such as Waldorf, Montessori, and Unschooling to name a few. Many of which are not accessible to students on welfare, with parents working paycheck to paycheck. The affordable schooling options for many Black and Brown students in NYC are traditional public schools, magnet or charter schools (a very short menu of "choices"). Charter schools, compared to the other two, are allowed to receive private funding and do not adhere to all state regulations, they adhere to their charter.

The expansion of the federal government's role in education reached a peak after the 2001 NCLB legislation. Their participation in education demanded quantitative results and thus gave rise to the high-stakes accountability era. Consequently, according to Love (2019), "we stopped being accountable for the pain, hurt, trauma, and wrongdoings" students face in school (122). This federal priority only grew, under President Obama and Department of Education Secretary Duncan, as states and districts were required to hold teachers accountable for academic outcomes to secure funding and avoid school closures (Hening, 2018, pp. 15-16). As these changes were occurring, charter schools and charter networks were expanding throughout the country. Charter schools at the beginning were believed to be a "small, stand-alone school launched by a group of dedicated educators and parents convinced that freed from homogenizing effects of top-down bureaucracy,

they could develop new and exciting ways to develop young minds" (Hening, 2018, p. 6). But charters were no exception and aligned with various external forces resulting in negative consequences for underserved youth. For instance, most charters in urban areas follow a "no excuses approach" for teaching that require obedience and punishment resulting in high numbers of suspensions for students of color. However, in Hoboken that is not the case, where charter school demographics are very white and follow certain themes and missions. These "boutique" charter schools "do not have the intensive militaristic discipline of some 'no excuses' charter schools, and they do not have exceedingly long school days or school years to prepare students for testing and keep them safe and engaged inside the school building" (Makris, 2015, p. 106). This demonstrates that charter school experiences are different depending on the population being served.

This high proportion of white crusaders in non-profit organizations is part of the ongoing issue with staying within safe confines of the known. By using different frameworks, like CRT and pedagogy of love, we can scrutinize the implicit intentions of these organizations, which guides students to assimilate to the mainstream culture (Love, 2019, p. 90). Most of these organizations aim to defeat low test scores and get students into college because this is how success is defined in the United States. Student success for marginalized populations in the current landscape comes "at the expense of their cultural and psychological well-being" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, as cited in Salazar, 2013). Why is success not defined in terms of health, happiness, and safety? Because it is easier to treat the symptoms than the cause. It is easier to continue the known than disrupt and be left in the unknown… in the chaotic (Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfeld n.d., 45). Ladson-Billings (2021) finds that, staying in the, "Normal is where the problems reside" (68).

Albert Shanker and the American Federation of Teachers are to credit for the development of charter schools in the 1980s. A school model that would receive both private and public funding that would not be required to follow all state guidelines and ultimately lead to innovative success in

academic achievement. The charter school model of the 80's was educator led and rooted in the communities they served. It was thought that less State restrictions would lead to "new forms of practice" and ultimately result in better academic performance. According to Gleason (2019), "Shanker pictured the founders being groups of teachers who would operate the schools with district approval, though freed from many regulations" (1054). But over time, like any other product, it went through transformations to compete in the current market, which "was not part of Shanker's vision" (Gleason, 2019, p. 1054). By the 1990s, "charter movement ideology veered to the Right" leading to an environment obsessed with high stakes testing and punishment (Fabricant and Fine, 2012, p. 19). By 2008 what was meant to be an alternative within public education transformed to an alternative placed against public education (Fabricant and Fine, 2012, p. 20). Fabricant and Fine (2013) find that the financial crisis of 2008 was a catalyst for charter reform due to the state's dire budget deficits and the overall decline in economic stability (59). Two years later, the charter movement gained legitimacy and popularity with the help of Obama's Race to the Top initiative that required states to lift the cap on charters (Fabricant and Fine, 2012, p. 21, Fabricant and Fine, 2013, p. 59). Now, many NYC charters are led by corporate hedge-funds and real estate interests that effectively use social justice jargon and have federal government sponsorship (Fabricant and Fine, 2012, p. 21). *So, what changed?*

In 1981, the National Commission on Excellence in Education was created and tasked with writing up a report on the quality of education by the Reagan administration. Two years later, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was published. This report came out the same year Reagan proposed, "his intention to embark upon groundbreaking research into a national defense system that could make nuclear weapons obsolete" (U.S. Department of State, Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), 1983). The same year both Apple and IBM released personal computers and Microsoft Word launched. As technological advancements became a norm, the workforce was

feared would not be able to keep up. *A Nation at Risk*, was a warning to citizens that, "We are

raising a new generation of Americans that is scientifically and technologically illiterate" (National

Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.10). According to Bruno Manno, senior advisor

to the Walton Family Foundation's K-12 Education Program, the use of apocalyptic wording

helped the authors create a sense of panic and urgency, "to expose the system for what it was – a

dual system with a big achievement gap between mostly white and minority kids" (Patterson,

2018). Fabricant and Fine (2012) found that, "the report helped advance aggressive federal policies

on matters of educational accountability and centralized standard setting; boosting business

leaders' agenda of efficiency, market reform, and privatization" (13). This report narrowly focused

on achievement in a flawed system without any regard to factors that affect students and their

families such as poverty, violence, food and housing insecurity to name a few.

The charter school movement of today is led and funded by powerful organizations like the

Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and Walton Foundation (to name a few). To illustrate, in

2015 SA received a $8.5 million donation from billionaire hedge fund manager, John Paulson.

Paulson made his money by betting against subprime mortgages in 2007 (Ibarra, 2015). Politicians,

like former Governor Andrew Cuomo, are also big supporters and have ensured charters stay well-

funded (Singer, 2018). Professor of Teaching, Learning and Technology Alan J. Singer (2018)

notes that Billionaire Dan Loeb (chair of SA's board) and Cuomo have a well-documented

financial connection. For instance, "Loeb and his wife contribute directly to Cuomo's campaigns

and to a political action committee, the Great Public Schools PAC, set up by Moskowitz, which

also invests heavily in Cuomo". Cuomo has received thousands of dollars for his reelection

campaigns from various charter advocates like, Home Depot founder, Kenneth G.Langone,

Walmart heir Jim Walton, and SA board member, John Perry to name a few (Singer, 2018). This

powerful and well-funded movement led by elites as the best answer to counter failing schools and

thus "low-performing" students has had more negative effects than positive ones. A 2017 New York Times article found that due to charters, like SA, having troubles recruiting teachers, SUNY's board of trustees (one out of two of NY's charter-granting entities) voted to allow charter schools to certify their teachers via their own teacher training programs leading to more uncertified/inexperienced teachers in classrooms (Taylor). In the charter world, politicians and elite work together to advocate on behalf of this school model (Singer, 2018).

By taking a look at the data and personal narratives, students in charter schools are not outperforming students in public schools (Ladd, 2019, p. 1064).

Every state determines which entity has the authorizing power to authorize a charter school. "The role of the authorizer is to solicit proposals for charters, review the proposals, grant or deny the charters, and oversee/monitor schools' compliance with their charter agreements and state law" (Fabricant and Fine, 2012, p. 23). Charter schools are required to be managed by a governing board, who can then subcontract management of the school to either a for-profit Education Management Organization (EMO) or a nonprofit Charter Management Organization (CMO) (Fabricant and Fine, 2012, p. 23, Baker and Miron, 2015, p. 11). Unfortunately, community-based groups applying for charter approval had a slight to none chance, thus CMO charters are the norm (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 73). Baker and Miron (2015) find that the use of multiple private entities can pose a risk to students, parents, and employees due to the possibility of documents being shielded and lack of accountability if there is no transparency in policy changes/processes within these schools (12-14). Traditional public school's financial data is openly accessible via state/federal reports while CMO/EMO charters data varies due to the varied precision/type of information these organizations decide to display (which unfortunately makes it hard to paint a comprehensive picture of the impact charters truly have) (Baker and Miron, 2015, p. 17). The lack of accountability that charters, like SA, benefit from allow them to abuse their power.

A 2015 Wall Street Journal article found that the Real Estate sector has had an increased interest in the charter school movement due to the increased demand of classrooms (Grant). This interest has risen due CMO-operated charters renting and buying buildings from private real-estate developers.

My focus is on charters that are managed like franchises, operated by CMOS, aiming to scale yearly and follow a "cookie-cutter style" (Fabricant and Fine, 2012, p. 22). The New York City Charter (2022), a nonprofit that helps start new charter schools and helps maintain existing charters, states that this is the most common charter school management structure in NYC. CMOs prioritize making successful charter models scalable (Baker and Miron, 2015, p. 7). CMO advocates argue that there are many advantages to this system such as, "economies or efficiencies of scale, potential to disseminate innovation from one region to another, and entrepreneurial drive to build robust networks and establish uniform standards, providing ever-more powerful competitive counterpoints to established bureaucratic public education" (Fabricant and Fine, 2013, p. 58). Ironically, CMO-ran charters see a less flexible/innovative curriculum and no school-based decision making (Fabricant and Fine, 2013, p. 59). Charter advocates argue that because this specific model provides choice and competes with traditional schools that consequently public schools will be transformed. "Competition is seen as the vital stimulant for efficiency, innovation, and effectiveness in the development of any marketplace good or service" (Fabricant and Fine, 2013, p. 60). The issue with this view is that it assumes transformation will arise automatically once state/local bureaucracy is relinquished. Is freedom to innovate sufficient to transform education?

Fabricant and Fine (2013) found that these cookie-cutter charters target poor communities of color as sites for their schools (63). They brand themselves as elite schools due to their limited seats, which consequently lures their targeted market, poor parents of color. CMO's intentional

branding strategy disseminates images of a "good education" via high stakes testing (Lipman 2004a as cited in Fabricant and Fine, 2013, p. 64). The NYC Charter Center states that NYC currently has 140,000 students enrolled in charter schools (that is 14% of NYC public school students. The Charter Center (2022) finds that 80% of students are economically disadvantaged, 49% are Black and 41% are Latino. Only 9% of students served by charters are multilingual learners and 18% receive special education services. These charters target certain students while pushing away students that require more school support (non-native speakers and students receiving special education). Fabricant and Fine (2013) find that "in an environment of intensifying competition and scarce resources, academically challenged students are an increasingly inefficient, unproductive charter investment" (66). While traditional public schools have legal requirements to serve all students. Charter schools are not reaching the most vulnerable kids. Baker and Miron (2015) find that charters avoid serving children with severe (and thus costlier) disabilities and instead aim to accept students with mild learning disabilities and speech impediments (19-20). Children are receiving the short end of the stick with the current way schools are structured.

SA has been applauded for its high-test scores but a quick Google search portrays a sad reality for the students being served by this CMO. SA has been accused of kicking out "weak or difficult students" (Taylor, 2015). The claim that SA has a "go-to-go" list has been confirmed by 10 former/current employees. For instance, in 2020, a press associate for SA resigned and stated that the network was racist and used abusive practices that were detrimental to the wellbeing of its students (Singer, 2020). Another former employee, Erika Johnson, also accused the network of being racist because of its pattern of suspending young, Black boys for being non-compliant to the school's strict rules (Singer, 2020). A PBS NewsHour report (2015) displayed how SA had a zero-tolerance policy with a tendency to suspend kindergarteners while traditional schools did not have such rigid structure. Traditional schools require principals to have district approval to suspend

students. Moskowitz states that one of the reasons a kindergartener can get an out-of- school suspension is for using sexually explicit language, once. She believes a rigid code of conduct like the one SA has helps prepare students for success. The PBS NewsHour report (2015) also found that one child received 12 repeated out-of-school suspensions which consequently led to his transfer out of SA. At another SA site, 32 students were given 101 suspensions.

SA, like other charters, have the ability to hold back students throughout the year (Zimmerman, 2018). In 2018, 28 out of 300 of SA high school students were required to move back a grade after the school year started. This caused much frustration and as a result teacher left and did not return for the next school year (Zimmerman, 2018). Missing assignment is one of the many reasons why a student would be held back a grade. Another example of SA's lack of cultural knowledge arose when wearing a headscarf was considered a uniform violation, which had consequences. Consequences according to Moskowitz help students prepare for college. But students did not perceive that way, rather they saw it as "taking away part of our identity" (Zimmerman, 2018).

The New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Educator Diversity Report (2019) states that although diversity in student population for the state has increased over time, the teacher workforce has remained constant. 80% (approximately 170,000) of the New York teacher workforce is white, this includes charter schools. Non-white teachers make less than 10% of the workforce (16-17). de Brey et al. in 2015-2016 found that 29% of charter school teachers were people of color compared to 19% in traditional public schools (11). Unfortunately, the higher percentage of teachers of color in charters does not translate to high retention rates. For instance, in 2018, SA's high school had fewer than a third of teachers and administrators returning for the upcoming fall (Singer, 2020). For 2018-2019, 85% of district leaders and 69% of building leaders were white. 6% of school district leaders are Black while Latino/Hispanic and Black school leaders

combined make up 30% of NYS school leadership. In NYC, 47% of school building leaders are leaders of color. NYSED defines school building leaders as principals and assistant principals while school district leaders are Assistant/Associate/Deputy/Executive, and other superintendents (25-26). Research finds that school board members are more likely to be republican, wealthy, and white (Mahnken, 2019). "The National Center for Suburban Studies pointed out that the lack of diversity -- particularly in school leadership- can itself become an obstacle for hiring educators of color into schools and districts" (as cited in the Educator Diversity Report, 2019, 57).

For charters to intentionally serve their students and community, one possible strategy would be to create accessible pathways to increase the amount of Black and Latino educators/leaders by focusing on professional development and retention. Cherng and Davis (2015) find that Latino and Black teachers are more multiculturally aware than White educators, which leads to a better classroom environment (as cited in Cherng & Halpin, 2016, p. 416). We must move away from "no excuses" policies that "combine teachers' high academic expectations for students with strict behavior rules" (Disare, 2016). It is to be noted that some charter networks have been doing some work to move away from zero-tolerance to focus on creating a more positive learning environment for students (Disare, 2016). Not surprising SA does not show any attempts to change their disciplinary methods because according to Moskowitz, "it should serve as a model" since they produce high test scores (Disare, 2016).

Conclusion

Putting Children First

How do we fix public education, when a student's proximity to whiteness determines the quality of education they receive? Factors such as race, (dis)ability, gender, zip code, and socioeconomic status play an essential role in shaping one's schooling experience. The issues that

surround public education are not hidden, nor unknown, rather they are just not prioritized for addressing.

Throughout my time at the CUNY Graduate Center, I have read many texts that bring light to vast issues within education that offer partial solutions. However, to tackle the issues within education, there must be a collective responsibility for the holistic nurturing of all children and educators. The teaching profession in this country is made up of mostly women, and it is no coincidence that it is perceived as a low-status profession (Wong, 2019). To address the issues which plague public education there must be a critical look at who benefits from legislations that destabilize the education system.

Public education has not been the great equalizer it is hyped up to be because it has not been centered around the most vulnerable. Many "solutions" to the vast problems within public education have had minimal to no success because of the denial that racism still exists. Without a critical look into the creation, execution, and impact of legislation on underserved communities more and more partial solutions will come forward without addressing the real issues at hand. Solutions like expanding the role of the federal government in public education, more school choice, and gentrification, have created more problems than solved any because they have not dealt with the root of the problem, racism. When policies are made without the voice of the people they are supposed to serve, they will ultimately serve the elite.

Many advocates of school choice, such as entrepreneurs and school networks, use claims of low student achievement levels and lack of diversity to strengthen their argument that traditional schools are the problem with education and that providing more (unregularized) is the solution (Taylor, 2015). But the reality is that public schools have not been working for a long time and it is because it has not centered the population it is intended to serve, children and families.

In *Public Housing and School Choice in a Gentrified City: Youth Experiences of Uneven*

Opportunity, Professor Makris (2015) employs an interdisciplinary approach to display how policies/legislations, such as the Abbott legislation, real estate, and the use of the coded language of school choice further deepen the equity gap. Makris displays how public policy meant to help under-served communities benefit the already advantaged, looking at two aspects of life in Hoboken, public housing, and public education, both affected by neoliberalism.

She begins the book by providing a historical overview of Hoboken that includes changes in demographics and public housing. In the beginning, Hoboken was purchased and used as a "place for the wealthy to escape the increasingly congested and diverse city" demonstrating that since its inception Hoboken was molded to fit the needs of the economically advantaged (28). With the passage of the 1917 Jones Act and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, Hoboken's Puerto Rican population increased. Eventually, after white flight to the suburbs and economic changes, Hoboken declined and public perception of public housing changed (30). Makris (2015) found that, "Public housing became associated with the inner city, impoverished dependency, African Americans, and crime" (41). The negative connotation of public housing occurred after it stopped serving white bodies because being poor was only okay if you were white. Eventually in the 1970s, things started to change for Hoboken as the first wave of gentrification rolled in and its Puerto Rican population decreased. Supergentrification kicked off in the late 1990s-early 2000s where first wave gentrifiers could no longer afford Hoboken and left for affordable neighborhoods like Jersey City, drastically changing Hoboken's demographics. After setting the tone by providing a historical (and current) context of Hoboken, Makris goes on to discuss how school choice and opportunity are inextricably connected to race, socioeconomic status, and gentrification.

Makris displays how school choice and opportunity vary by presenting the lives of Luis and Olivia. Luis, a Puerto Rican four-year-old, lives on the sixth floor of a public housing project with his mom, dad, and older brother James. Both his parents have no college degrees and only his

mom can work (51-52). Across town lives another four-year-old, Olivia, who also lives on the sixth

floor, but, of a luxury high-rise apartment that has views of the Manhattan skyline with her mom,

dad, and younger sister Ava (53-54). Olivia's mom is Asian and her dad is white and both have

advanced degrees. Her mom works from home running a small business while her father works in

the FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate) industry in Manhattan. Olivia's family are examples of

super gentrifiers hailing originally from New York City. Both Luis and Olivia attended Abbott

preschool programs, a full-day preschool program available to all three- and four-year-olds

established by the Abbott legislation (54). This legislation was a set of progressive reforms that

gave aid to 31 "Abbott" districts based on the argument that school funding formula based on

property taxes hurt "neediest students in New Jersey". Therefore, Abbott district funding must

match those districts with the highest achievement levels. This full-day preschool program is

capitalized on by real estate agents to not only bring in certain types of residents, usually, upper

class, white, college graduated and young, but to also acts as an anchor keeping many established

parents of young children in Hoboken which Makris (2015) calls prolonged gentrification (88-92).

      The gentrification of Hoboken did not alter its classification as an Abbott district and thus

the legislation that, "was intended to level the playing field for urban children from low-income

backgrounds, is instead providing another 'leg up' to advantaged children in this gentrified city"

(Makris, 2015, p. 90). But the preschools are not enough for white-collar families to stay in

Hoboken because after a certain age, advantaged parents do not feel comfortable sending their

children to school with low-income black and brown children. The unwillingness of advantaged

parents to send their children to schools with underserved children of color stems from the

criminalization of poverty and racism. Therefore, while families living in public housing have very

limited school options for their children, the advantaged can choose between charter schools,

private schools, or moving out to the suburbs. These charter schools, unlike New York City charter

schools that have a majority of Black and brown children, are catered to fit the desires of advantaged parents. Hoboken's charters were established, by advantaged parents that organized inside there, "renovated brownstones in the early years of gentrification", to provide more white schools that would then promote the stay of white families in an urban city (Makris, 2015, p. 110). By looking at public housing and public education in a very gentrified city, where 82.2 percent of its population is white and 72.4 percent of the residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher (34), Makris (2015) displays that having a concentration of white people in a previously declining area will only benefit the already advantaged while displacing the marginalized (95).

Advantaged parents that rather not take the risk of sending their children to possibly "diverse" schools move out to the suburbs. These schools provide many benefits to the already advantaged but parents' main requirement is based on demographics (Holmes, 2002, p. 203). The status of the school is dependent on the high-status clientele it serves. Although these schools are public, the "price of admission to many 'public' suburban schools is the ability to purchase a home with hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars and to pay real estate taxes" (Holmes, 2002, p. 178). While the real estate market benefits from the need for white and advantaged parents to attend "good" (i.e., white) schools, students of color face the burden of negative schooling experiences. The need for a high concentration of advantaged white families in public schools to ensure its good quality stems from the culture of poverty theory that, "attributes the low status of people of color to supposed deficiencies in their cultural values, rather than to a long history of racial discrimination" (Holmes, 2002, pp. 180-181). Parents that buy homes to gain access to white schools assume that their local public schools are not good enough, not because they did extensive research on the school but rather, because they gather their opinions from other like-minded families that share the same belief that children of color are deficient.

Catering to advantaged people will not improve education for underserved children, but will

rather exacerbate the equity gap. Hoboken's attempt to keep a certain type of resident aided the development of charter schools as advantaged parents yearned for "better" schools. Suburban schools are seen as the other way out if parents with elementary-aged school children are not given a seat within "boutique" charters. Advantaged parents' ability to secure the quality of their children's schools by residing within a certain zip code (or by having enough material/social wealth to open up their own schools) demonstrates that if educational reform wants to improve, it must start by changing its funding formulas to start catering and even prioritizing underserved families.

Making underserved children of color attend white schools to gain some benefits is not creating macro-level change because it does not center their identity, needs, and wants. The move to diversify schools by placing the responsibilities on families of color to choose whether they want to send their children to white schools is not a sustainable solution because it does nothing to go against the status quo, it ultimately reinforces it. Students that do attend predominantly white schools reap some benefits but at what cost?

In "A Black Student's Reflection on Public and Private Schools", Perry (2018) displays the realities of public education for children of color and how the culture of poverty is persistent within this institution. After spending ten years in private schools, Perry wanted to venture into a public school to tackle the cultural/racial isolation she felt in private school. In her short time in public education, Perry defines three major differences between private and public schools. The first difference is in regards to teaching systems, public schools emphasize form and precision, "making things look correct", while private schools emphasize thought and theory (466). This emphasis on form and precision is connected to the second difference, who and what teachers consider intelligent. The third difference was the absence of teacher-student contact and thus to be considered intelligent in public schools you must be well behaved, fit the part, and have good

grades. Perry demonstrates that analytical thinking and creativity are not applauded in public schools because it goes against their agenda to, "merely train students for low-powered or menial jobs that do not require analytical thought" (468). Perry's desire to have a strong Black community, although strong, did not want to sacrifice her educational development and returned to private school.

Schools for many are not a place of love but rather a place of stress with the constant assessments and the lack of regard for student's wellbeing (especially with the ongoing pandemic) is obvious (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 72). Children more than ever require a school setting that cares for their overall well-being, not just the "COVID-19 learning loss" and how they can fix it. Providing safe places to exercise agency and situating their learning in social issues important to them are some key aspects of this framework. Pedagogy of Love provides hope in a time where many of black children and children of color are viewed as deficient. It provides a framework that believes in children's ability to have a voice in what and how they learn. It allows us to shift our focus on, "protecting our students' potential" (Love, 2019, p. 79). A humanizing pedagogy views banking method of education as a means to, "regulate the way the world 'enters into' the students" (Freire, 2017, p. 49). It displays the implications of the current schooling methods many children face. Children can achieve great things when all their needs are fulfilled and we stop focusing on adult metrics of success that are based on the market (Love, 2019, p. 73). .

Solutions to make schools a safe space that serve children and their families need to be created by deploying various intentional strategies/programs. Leading with love is essential because this work is not meant to be easy; rather it is an uphill struggle to maintain and validate the existence and humanity of all students in a schooling system that prioritizes test scores. Many players are required to be involved in order for children to have a chance at experiencing a healthy learning environment. One possible solution to enhance marginalized student's learning experience

is creating programs to make teacher education programs affordable and accessible to underrepresented populations. It is no secret that NYC schools lack teachers and leadership of color because of lack of prioritization of hiring and retaining teachers of color.

Studies show having teachers of color benefits students because of their multicultural awareness and ability to connect with the lived experience of students that have similar backgrounds (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Former NYC Comptroller, Scott M. Stringer (2019) found that traditional university teacher preparation models require student teachers to pay for the opportunity to gain experience and are not paid for their hours served in the classroom (24). This makes it inaccessible to students that are financially restricted and/or students that refuse to go into debt. Stringer (2019) also found that although alternative programs are accessible (and abundant) they have many disadvantages (26). Alternative Preparation programs usually have fast-paced, short training periods to fill hard-to-staff classrooms, or high-need subject areas. They also provide free or reduced tuition, which adds to their appeal with underrepresented groups in the teaching field. Unfortunately, these alternative programs have higher turnover rates than teachers that take the traditional route. High turnover rates in high-need schools is detrimental for students and school culture (Stringer, 2019, 27). Alternative programming also does not provide their teacher candidates with experiential learning opportunities. Key features for a successful teacher residency program may include mentorship for teacher candidates, would require time commitments, and have a living stipend for teacher candidates (Stringer, 2019, pp.34-36).

Creating a curriculum that is culturally competent is essential. By incorporating a student's language/histories/traditions/culture (essentially their lived reality), children would be able to connect with what they learn at school. Schools need to move away from "superficial aspects of diverse cultures" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 72). I agree with Freire (2005) that students need educators that teach them, "how to read both the word and the world" (as cited in Ladson-Billings,

2021, p. 72). Low-income students of color deserve to, "engage with literature that allows them to see themselves as well as literature that shows them a world beyond their own" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 76).

For public education to truly work, it must center and cater to underserved and marginalized families (Making the Grade 2020 Report, p. 10). NCLB (that led to Race to the Top) was a legislation that was caused by nationalistic paranoia that the U.S. was falling behind due to the increase in Black and brown bodies in the country. This legislation has not done much to repair the issues in education and has segregated schools even more. Parents that can afford to go to schools that are not focused on testing stick together pooling resources. The desire to concentrate whiteness in suburban and boutique charters to confer exclusivity demonstrates that integration is not the answer. Placing Black and brown children inside exclusive "good" schools will leave them, a lot of the time, isolated, yearning for community. Community (neighborhood) schools should instead be revamped with programming and funding to fit the needs of the families they serve by considering that white norms are not the norm for everybody. The education system must presume that knowledge has no singular definition nor measure. White structures and institutions must reflect on their continued legacy of racism and work to center structures and processes in public education around underserved youth and their families.

COVID-19 Lessons Learned

Schools do not need to test every year. The pandemic displayed that schooling can occur without constant assessments (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 75). Charter school teacher Anthony Bush helps paint the picture as to why being assessment focused is detrimental to the student/teacher relation (Disare, 2016):

> "It is especially difficult during state testing season, when the pressure to help students
>
> master the rigorous Common Core learning standards allows even less time to have

conversations about discipline"

Another important lesson this pandemic has spotlighted is that schools need to meet parents where they are at. Remote learning showed how important caregivers/parents are in a child's learning experience. But not all parents can be involved the way schools would prefer due to their job type, other children they have, and/or other stressors that prevent them from interacting with the school.

Enhancing in-school mental health services is essential in creating a safe environment for low-income children of color. Freeman & Kendziora (2017) found that the very small number of children who do have access to mental health services receive services in school (3). Children spend the majority of their time in schools. Schools should be a place that facilitates learning by ensuring that children are in the right mental space to learn. Not having preventative mental health measures not only has a high-financial cost it also leads to people having, "a higher risk for dropping out; and increased risk of engaging in substance abuse, criminal behavior, and other risk-taking behaviors" (Freeman & Kedziora, 2017, p. 3). Mental health problems do not stop once students leave high school rather it follows them to college (Mahnken, 2017). Teachers cannot bear all the responsibility to help their students, rather there needs to be an investment in how we staff schools and how we train school staff (Mahnken, 2017). Children should be a priority since schools are meant to cater to them. Rather than trying to cut costs we need to give more money to public schools to provide various supports that do not focus on academic achievement (Lahey, 2016).

As Love (2019) put it, "tweaking the system is not enough" (90). There must be a dual fight to get rid of old measures of tracking/punishment while simultaneously creating sustainable and radically different systems of being (Love, 2019, 91). This ensures we do not recreate two sides of the same coin. While doing this research, it was easy to feel sad and hopeless about the future that awaits my children and future children of color. But Love (2019) finds that freedom dreaming is helpful in this regard (101). The current schooling environment low income children of color face

has become the norm. But if we want to create a new world for students, Maxine Greene states, that we must "commit to looking beyond the given, beyond what appears to be unchangeable. It is a way of warding off the apathy and the feelings of futility that are the greatest obstacles to any sort of learning" (as cited in Love 2019, p. 102). White educators must reflect on, "how Whiteness reproduces poverty, failing schools, high unemployment, school closings, and trauma for people of color" to provide their students of color a safe learning environment built on trust (Love, 2019, p. 127).

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