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The Persistence of Policy: A Tropological Analysis of Contemporary Education Policy Discourse in the United States

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This dissertation, THE PERSISTENCE OF POLICY: A TROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSE IN THE UNITED STATES, by F. TONY CARUSI, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

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ABSTRACT

THE PERSISTENCE OF POLICY: A TROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSE IN THE UNITED STATES

by
F. Tony Carusi

Contemporary federal education policy discourse from *A Nation at Risk* to the *Race to the Top* program has promoted and extended neoliberal discourse from the national level to the level of the school and its personnel. This study highlights the persistence of neoliberal discourse within federal education policy and the consequences this persistence holds for critiques of current policies and practices. Analyzing reports published by the United States Department of Education and contemporary United States education policy starting from *A Nation at Risk*, moving through *America 2000*, *Goals 2000*, and *No Child Left Behind*, and ending with the *Race to the Top* program, I use rhetorical tropes to provide a method of analysis for education policy. Due to the novelty of this project for the field of education policy studies, I bring in concepts from rhetorical studies and discourse analysis to produce an interdisciplinary approach to policy analysis that fills a particular gap in existing analyses. At present, there exists no framework within the traditional analyses of education policy that offers a theoretical account of how a discourse maintains and propagates itself through policy. This dissertation offers a new method of policy analysis that examines *how* a discourse stabilizes and perpetuates itself through education policy. Specifically, an analysis of these policies and reports demonstrates how neoliberal discourse uses the tropes of metaphor, where two objects are identified with one another, and synecdoche, where the part is made to represent the

whole and *vice-versa*, to ground and naturalize its growing presence in education policy and practice.

Through the tropological analysis of the above cited texts, the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche, what I term “organic identification,” accounts for the persistence of neoliberal discourse through its identification and integration with federal education policy discourse specifically through the constitution of places, e.g., the nation and the school. The conclusion suggests the critical potential for considering the role of tropes in the discursive constitution of place by mapping the persistence of a discourse and providing a critical distance from which contradictions and alternative trajectories can be forwarded.

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IN THE UNITED STATES
by
F. Tony Carusi

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CHAPTER ONE

STUDYING FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY

Over the past decade the United States Congress and Department of Education (USDOE) have focused their policy efforts specifically on schools and, more recently, teachers. This shift in emphasis has been couched in the language of accountability through which states evaluate schools primarily according to standardized test scores in order to measure their success or failure. Standards-based systems of accountability implemented in accordance with the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* exist in all fifty states. The tests themselves are based on standards authored at the state-level—the standards to which schools are held accountable—and the scores from the tests are tabulated at the level of the school to determine whether or not a school is successful. Success, in this case, means that schools will continue to receive federal funding, and failure, the opposite. Accordingly, those states that do not want to lose their federal education funding must adhere to a series of provisions set out by *NCLB*, which focus on the individual school as the locus of accountability for public education within the United States. This series of provisions places individual schools in progressively greater degrees of peril, the final stage resulting in a school's restructuring which includes its closure as a possible course of action. There were 5,776 schools in this final stage for the 2009-10 school year, an increase of more than sixty percent from the 2007-08 school year.¹

¹ The 2009-10 school year statistics are available from U.S. Department of Education, "National Snapshot" <http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-report.cfm?state=US> (accessed February 17 2011). The 2007-08 statistics come from David Hoff, "Schools Struggling to Meet Key Goal on Accountability," *Education Week* (December 19, 2008); available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/12/18/16ayp.h28.html?tkn=ZMVFBGzocK9g4aGS1HGd0b7e4L%2FpzGjIhqBM&intc=es> (accessed February 22, 2011). Hoff cites 3,559 schools in restructuring for the 2007-08 school year. Moreover, Diane Ravitch argues this trend will continue primarily because of how individual states structured Adequate Yearly Progress under *NCLB*. See Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life*

More recently, Congress and the USDOE, through the *Race to the Top* program, have established a competitive grant process for all states which includes as an eligibility requirement that states link test score data to teacher evaluations in an effort to make individual teachers accountable as individual schools are under *NCLB*. Under this policy, a teacher's quality is measured by the test scores of his or her students. In the wake of linking teachers and test scores, mass teacher firings are more frequently appearing as a viable tactic for improving public education, a tactic supported by President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. For example, a school board in Rhode Island voted in favor of firing the entire staff of Central Falls High School, seventy-seven of who were teachers. In Savannah, GA, two hundred teachers and staff were fired from Beach High School in order to be eligible for six million dollars in state funding.² Additionally, the former District of Columbia School Chancellor Michelle Rhee fired two hundred and forty-one teachers from Washington D.C.'s public schools.³ Finally, at present, the Wisconsin State Assembly has passed legislation, supported by their governor Scott Walker, that severely diminishes the rights of state teacher unions to collectively bargain, which could result in teacher salary schedules based on performance

of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010).

² Steven Greenhouse and Sam Dillon, "School's Shake-up Is Embraced by the President," *The New York Times* (March 6, 2010); available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/education/07educ.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=central%20falls%20teacher%20firing%20obama&st=cse (accessed February 22, 2011). Randi Kaye, "All Teachers Fired at Rhode Island School," CNN.com (February 24, 2010); available at http://articles.cnn.com/2010-02-24/us/rhode.island.teachers_1_teachers-union-troubled-school-reading-specialists?_s=PM:US (accessed February 22, 2011). Jenel Few, "Beach High School to Fire All Faculty, Staff," *Savannah Morning News* (March 26, 2010); available at <http://savannahnow.com/news/2010-03-26/beach-high-school-fire-all-faculty-staff> (accessed February 22, 2011).

³ Bill Turque, "Rhee Dismisses 241 D.C. Teachers; Union Vows to Contest Firings," *The Washington Post* (July 24, 2010); available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/23/AR2010072303093.html> (accessed February 22, 2011).

as indicated through student test scores, rather than salary schedules based on experience and education.⁴

Given these controversial approaches to education reform in the U.S., there are a number of contradictory responses that have come from mainstream media editorials, education-focused think tanks and foundations, and teacher unions, to name only a few. These events have been heralded and critiqued in the form of protests, rallies, press conferences, and editorials emanating from a wide and diverse spectrum of political beliefs. One such intervention has taken place through the field of critical education policy studies. Within this field, a body of research focusing on the influence that the economic theory of neoliberalism has on education policy and practice is developing as a way to account for the phenomenon of mass teacher firings.⁵ Generally, this body of research traces the rise of neoliberalism through the deregulation of financial markets that became popular in the United States and the United Kingdom in the early 1980s by way of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations, respectively.⁶ As a next step, scholars link the rise of neoliberalism as an economic theory to one which informs multiple facets and levels of education policy and practice.⁷ The general thesis of this research claims that neoliberalism provides a logic through which public education is becoming more and

⁴ Richard A. O'Connell, "Wisconsin Assembly Passes Anti-Union Bill as Senate Democrats Stay Away," *The New York Times* (February 25, 2011); available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/us/26wisconsin.html?scp=10&sq=wisconsin%20collective%20bargaining&st=cse> (accessed February 27, 2011).

⁵ See, for instance, Henry Giroux, "When Generosity Hurts: Bill Gates, Public School Teachers and the Politics of Humiliation," *Truthout.org* (October 5, 2010); available at <http://archive.truthout.org/when-generosity-hurts-bill-gates-public-school-teachers-and-politics-humiliation63868> (accessed July 16, 2011); and Ken Futernick, "Incompetent Teachers or Dysfunctional Systems?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 92, no. 2 (2010): 59-64.

⁶ See, for example, Michael W. Apple, "Creating Difference: Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Conservatism and the Politics of Educational Reform," *Educational Policy* 18, no. 1 (2004): 12-44.

⁷ See, for example, David Hursh, "Assessing No Child Left Behind and the Rise of Neoliberal Education Policies," *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 3 (2007): 493-518.

more privatized.⁸ Endemic to this critique of neoliberalism is the call to challenge, resist, and ultimately dismantle privatization efforts, and to reshape the motive force of education policy toward more democratic and socially just forms of governance. However, given the persistence of the influence of neoliberalism on U.S. schooling, exemplified by continued school closings and teacher firings, one may conclude that the series of challenges issued by its critics are at best unsuccessful or, at worst, negligible. In other words, for the volumes of critique and research that discuss the many problems institutions of and participants in education face as a result of this economic theory, neoliberalism continues to inform federal education policy in the United States and abroad without showing any sign of abating. This raises the question of how a particular discourse, that of neoliberalism, is able to maintain such a high degree of resiliency against a growing number of criticisms emanating from various groups, not the least of which is critical education policy researchers. Education policy framed according to the maxims of neoliberalism, while resisted on a number of fronts, continues to persist. However, the rise of neoliberalism in education policy is relatively recent, and, arguably, the novelty of this discourse begs the antagonism of counter-discourses to disrupt any smooth application of it to education policy. Yet, in spite of counter-discursive efforts, the neoliberal influence on education policy continues to become more sweeping and generalized across the contexts of public education.

How is it, then, that policy in its current articulations is so impervious to resistance? A great deal of literature critiques and resists the influence of neoliberalism on education policy. Additionally, a subfield of education policy studies that focuses on

⁸ See, for example, Geoff Whitty and Sally Power, "Marketization and Privatization in Mass Education Systems," *International Journal of Educational Development* 20, no. 2 (2000): 93-107.

discourse elicits the normative assumptions contained in policy that coalesce into visions of what public education should be. However, there is a general silence in education policy studies focusing on the operations that comprise its persistence. In other words, the question of *how* such influences in education policy persist remains unaddressed. This entails a shift in perspective from resistance to persistence. In order to foster this shift, I forward a novel approach toward understanding persistence through a mode of analysis traditionally located in the fields of rhetoric and poetics, namely, tropology. As such, this dissertation offers an analysis of education policy that identifies the tropes of metaphor and synecdoche as the operations underpinning the production of persistence. The argument that frames this dissertation draws upon a number of disciplines but its content deals directly with concerns in education policy. With this in mind, the first section of this chapter will begin by reviewing the subject of education policy studies to discern two camps within the field, traditional and critical.⁹ The second section will highlight the concept of discourse used within the critical camp and establish the specific theory of discourse used in this dissertation. The third section will focus on tropology, and, given the absence of this field in education policy studies, some time will be spent providing background on tropology in order to better situate its use for policy analysis.

Doing Education Policy Studies

What does it mean to *do* education policy studies? While education policy studies takes a number of forms, broadly considered, the phrase names a field of interventions into policies and policy analyses directed at multiple levels of practices and institutions of education. At different moments, it offers support, recommends expansions or

⁹ This is not to suggest that such a bifurcation exhausts the realm of possibilities for approaches to education policy studies. Instead, these two camps offer a minimal way of categorizing and focusing the overall direction of this dissertation by locating it within the general field of critical policy studies.

contractions, suggests remediation, and levels counterarguments within the context of education; all of which reiterates the open-ended and provisional nature of policy. In fact, the multiplicity of approaches to policy studies mirrors the perpetual contestation that formulates, revises, and replaces actual policy. The variety of topics debated on the floor of the U.S. Congress is reflected by the diversity of arguments in academic journals. With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that many recent approaches to education policy studies urge an interdisciplinary tack in order to rethink many categories of analysis that have traditionally proceeded as given.¹⁰ With such a broad purview, bounded primarily by what a researcher defines as policy, there exists a small body of research that responds to the question of doing education policy studies.

While policy studies most often engages with particular policies, this question is at one remove from such an engagement, and, as such, requires inductively that one begin reviewing policy studies to isolate more general features found across an array of examples. A number of studies, two of which I highlight below, have taken on this task with the result of a typology that divides policy studies into two broad camps, traditional and critical. Traditional policy studies has several defining characteristics that are typical of the more positivist social science research models. According to Young's use of the distinction,¹¹ in the traditional approach "policy studies [as a field] is typically viewed as a neutral scientific approach carried out by rational and expert researchers who use

¹⁰ See, for example, Stephen J. Ball and Chris Shilling, "At the Cross-Roads: Education Policy Studies," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 42, no. 1 (1994): 1-5; John Fitz and David Halpin, "Implementation Research and Education Policy: Practice and Prospects," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 42, no. 1 (1994): 53-69; Barry Troyna, "Critical Social Research and Educational Policy," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 42, no. 1 (1994): 70-85.

¹¹ Young does not consider these exhaustive categories, pointing to frameworks other than these two, e.g. cultural, feminist, and post-structural, among others. Michelle D. Young, "Multifocal Educational Policy Research: Toward a Method for Enhancing Traditional Educational Policy Studies," *American Educational Research Journal* 36, no. 4 (1999): 681.

theory-supported models that facilitate responsive and effective change.”¹² In contrast to this, she typifies the critical approach of policy studies through four interrelated concerns, namely, the rhetorical representations of reality, power and resource allocation, social stratification, and dominant culture.¹³ As an example of doing education policy studies, Young reviews policies and policy studies pertaining to parental involvement in education.¹⁴ Bradley Levinson, *et al.*, review literature on policy studies, and, similar to Young’s distinction, claim that

[t]he first generation of policy studies attempted to constitute a managerial science... [and] attempted to understand how and why a given policy worked or failed to work as it was intended, with an eye toward policy reformulation and/or the reform of local structures for policy implementation.... Virtually all research in the traditional paradigm is applied, evaluative, and problem oriented, within a technocratic liberal democratic ethos.¹⁵

Traditional policy studies, then, does not bring into question the categories of analysis it operates through, but, instead, takes such categories as given, which allows for problems to be identified within those categories and solutions to be forwarded and applied accordingly. From a technocratic standpoint, resolution of problems is merely a matter of matching the proper technique to the identified impediment. When attached to a

¹² Ibid., 682.

¹³ Ibid., 685.

¹⁴ Young views critical analyses as supplementary to the traditional. However, her operating assumption is that the differences between the critical and traditional frameworks are negotiable and can be oriented toward a broader consensus. This neglects the point that each analysis operates from a set of assumptions that work within the context and framework of the analysis being provided, but are the object of critique, even scorn, for an analysis that does not share such assumptions. While her operating assumption may be the case in some instances, it is not necessarily so. For example, an analysis that relies on statistical management of data, while able to correlate the probability of particular outcomes, such as student test scores, in relation to a combination of variables, such as diet, economic status, and gender, is incapable of critiquing the normative dimensions of the variables their analysis relies upon. In other words, an analysis cannot simultaneously use categories as valid indicators of something while, at the same time, claim that these indicators are invalid. While these sorts of assumptions make it possible for analysts to navigate their inquiry according to the rules of their framework, this is done at the cost of some competing frameworks that are incapable of negotiating an agreeable framework while maintaining their values.

¹⁵ Bradley A. U. Levinson, Margaret Sutton, and Teresa Winstead, "Education Policy as a Practice of Power," *Educational Policy* 23, no. 6 (2009): 768-69.

particular ethos, such as liberal democracy discussed above, traditional policy studies also has its *telos* established, for example a publicly available system of schools to develop the minds of children in accordance with their rational “nature.”¹⁶ The task then becomes algorithmic—to evaluate and remediate any factors and phenomena that prevent such development in order to achieve, or approximate, the realization of a full, liberally democratic society, for example. According to this logic, everything that falls under the purview of the ethos, liberal or otherwise, is ultimately recuperable into the larger normative system assumed at the outset.

Opposing this mode of policy studies, Levinson, *et al.*, describe critical policy studies as a field that reorients analysis away from a technocratic emphasis, towards one which asks “What *is* policy? and What does policy *do*?” in order to address what they term “the discourse of power.”¹⁷ Differently from Young, Levinson, *et al.*, group a number of approaches under the critical tradition as a kind of umbrella term. Membership in this camp is contingent upon a scholar’s willingness and ability to highlight the normative dimensions of policy and the governance such normativity brings with it. On this view, “[p]olicy is the cultural-textual expression of a political practice; it makes governing statements about what can and should be done.”¹⁸ According to the authors—and germane to the present analysis—researchers involve themselves in doing critical education policy studies through the “research practices of institutional and discursive

¹⁶ The centrality of the rational individual in liberal democracy is exemplified in the work of political philosophers such as John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹⁷ Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead, 769.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 770.

mapping, in which policy language is traced across documents.”¹⁹ While Levinson, *et al.*, suggest rather than expound on the notion of institutional and discursive mapping, the proceeding analysis of policy discourse yields such a mapping across documents, thus exhibiting the persistence of neoliberal discourse through a series of interrelated texts. In other words, whereas Levinson, *et al.*, leave discourse as a suggestion for further projects, the analysis that follows in this dissertation takes discourse as a central concept for its argument.

Within the field of critical educational policy studies, there exists a growing body of scholarship critiquing the role of neoliberalism in education systems across the globe. Readers gain from this body of literature what neoliberalism *is* in educational policy, and what its effects and consequences are, i.e. what it *does*. This dissertation argues that what is lacking in these otherwise poignant critiques is a theoretical response to the *how* question. In other words, at present, there exists no framework within educational policy studies that offers a theoretical account of how a discourse maintains and propagates itself, namely, how it persists. Said differently, researchers have analyzed education policies from a number of angles, but, to date, no studies have offered any theoretical account of why it is so difficult to challenge them. The following argument highlights one key quality that figures prominently in the difficulty faced by challengers of neoliberalism: naturalness. The more accustomed individuals and institutions become to a particular discourse—the more unquestionable and habituated a discourse becomes—the ability to challenge that discourse diminishes and alternatives are less and less capable of being articulated or imagined without being considered “unnatural.” However, this naturalness is not merely a matter of custom or habitude. Upon close examination of

¹⁹ Ibid., 789.

education policy discourse, this dissertation brings into relief the operations which introduce and reproduce the naturalness that maintains and extends the discourse of neoliberalism through the institutions of public education in the United States. Specifically, this dissertation claims that one can conceive of the promotion and maintenance of a discourse through the relations in and between tropes, or, tropology.

In order to arrive at a discussion of the role tropes play in the production and maintenance of the natural status of a discourse, some theoretical excursions outside much of the existing literature in the field of education policy studies will be necessary. In particular, poststructural discourse theory provides the framework through which this dissertation examines education policy discourse. Additionally, from rhetorical studies, this dissertation introduces the field of tropology to education policy studies, highlighting the interaction that takes place within education policy discourse between the tropes of metaphor and synecdoche. In brief, metaphor launches and promotes new perceptions of some arbitrary discourse, e.g., neoliberalism, and synecdoche organizes, systematizes, and naturalizes that very discourse. Through tropological analysis, this dissertation elicits the interplay between metaphor and synecdoche as productive of a discourse's persistence.

The Discourse in Education Policy Discourse

Within critical education policy studies there exists a subfield of analysis that considers policy as discourse and the discursive relationships produced through policy texts. This subfield, in keeping with the critical camp of policy studies, looks at policy and its attendant articulations for its normative power. Richard Bowe, *et al.*, argue that understanding policy as discourse renders policy “as a set of claims about how the world

should and might be.... Policies are thus operational statements of values.”²⁰ As such, education policy texts provide an “aspect of a *continual* process in which the locii of power are constantly shifting as the various resources implicit and explicit in texts are recontextualized and employed in the struggle to maintain or change views of schooling.”²¹ Studies from the policy as discourse perspective analyze policy in order to elicit the tactics and strategies embedded in policy texts that serve to define and redefine the role and function of schooling according to particular normative assumptions.

In addition to the normative role of policy, a policy as discourse perspective theorizes the genesis of problems that policy performs. Accordingly, one examines policy with an eye for how it discursively creates its objects and frames its responses, textual or otherwise, specifically in terms of the very objects it produces. Carol Bacchi’s article on what she terms “policy-as-discourse” gives a sense of this when she writes that “it is inappropriate to see governments as responding to ‘problems’ that exist ‘out there’ in the community. Rather ‘problems’ are ‘created’ or ‘given shape’ in the very policy proposals that are offered as ‘responses’.”²² She further claims, “The emphasis in policy-as-discourse analyses is upon the ways in which language, and more broadly discourse, sets limits upon what can be said.”²³ Extending from this, with discourse encapsulating more than just speech, it also sets limits on what can be done, even thought, depending on the degree to which it achieves a natural status.

²⁰ Richard Bowe, Stephen J. Ball, and Anne Gold, *Reforming Education and Changing Schools : Case Studies in Policy Sociology* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992): 13.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Carol Bacchi, "Policy as Discourse: What Does It Mean? Where Does It Get Us?," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 21, no. 1 (2000): 48.

²³ Ibid.

One avenue for the articulation of these limitations is through the enactment of policy. This emphasizes the agentic aspect of discourse. Rather than looking at policy as an unwavering set of rules to which its target populations adhere more or less effectively, policy as discourse manifests actors who engage in the formation of policy as well as those who interpret and implement policy, including those who are subject to it. Taken together, policy as discourse “account(s) for the politics of policy text production,”²⁴ with an emphasis on the constructed nature of the problems and solutions policy offers.

What the concept of discourse offers to education policy studies is a framework that points to policy as an arbitrary construction that comes about through the discourse of multiple agencies, individual and institutional. In fact, nations, states, school districts, schools, even teachers are, in part, objects constituted through discourse. As such, on the one hand, the acknowledgement of the arbitrary in policy formation brings questions concerning power to the fore. For instance, who shapes these policies, what aims are condensed into policy texts that serve to ensconce this arbitrary construction? What systems of privilege are produced and maintained through the policy texts and at whose expense? On the other hand, due to the agency required by discourse and the arbitrary status of the aims and goals articulated in policy, other questions regarding resistance to and new articulations of policy are within the scope of analysis, thus providing theoretical frameworks for policy activism. While the policy analysis that this dissertation provides will focus on questions pertaining to the former, the conclusion will suggest possible approaches to policy analysis which focus on the latter.

²⁴ Trevor Gale, “Policy Trajectories: Treading the Discursive Path of Policy Analysis,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 20, no. 3 (1999): 393-407.

Much of the policy-as-discourse subfield uses the work of Michel Foucault, in particular his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, in order to render education policy as a practice of discourse.²⁵ However, the conceptual use of discourse in this dissertation draws primarily from Ernesto Laclau's discourse theory, partly in conjunction with Chantal Mouffe, for three main reasons. First, Laclau's work remains at the margins of education policy analysis and employing his framework offers policy studies a different theoretical perspective from which to operate, thus providing new and, as of yet, undeveloped modes of analysis for education policy. Second, and more important to the argument of this dissertation, Laclau's work provides a bridge between discourse theory and tropology by arguing that the process whereby a discourse represents itself as a closed system, one which is capable of algorithmically addressing all demands within it, cannot occur without a tropological suturing, i.e., the figuring of closure.²⁶ Third, and different from Foucault, Laclau radicalizes the concept of discourse to claim that there is no object constituted outside of discourse.²⁷

²⁵ Examples of the Foucauldian influence on the link between education policy and discourse are numerous. A brief sampling of this influence includes Stephen J. Ball, *Education Policy and Social Class: The Selected Works of Stephen J. Ball* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); Jennifer L. Cohen, "Teachers in the News: A Critical Analysis of One U.S. Newspaper's Discourse on Education, 2006–2007," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 31, no. 1 (2010): 105–119; Barbara Comber and Helen Nixon, "Teachers' Work and Pedagogy in an Era of Accountability," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 30, no. 3 (2009): 333–345; Olena Fimyar, "Educational Policy-Making in Post-Communist Ukraine as an Example of Emerging Governmentality: Discourse Analysis of Curriculum Choice and Assessment Policy Documents (1999–2003)," *Journal of Education Policy* 23, no. 6 (2008): 571–594; Trevor Gale, "Critical Policy Sociology: Historiography, Archaeology and Genealogy as Methods of Policy Analysis," *Journal of Education Policy* 16, no. 5 (2001): 379–393. An exception to the Foucauldian analysis of discourse in education policy studies can be found in Sandra Taylor, "Researching Educational Policy and Change in 'New Times': Using Critical Discourse Analysis," *Journal of Education Policy* 19, no. 4 (2004): 433–451. Here the author uses a concept of discourse from the field of sociolinguistics especially as theorized by Norman Fairclough.

²⁶ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, (London: Verso, 2000): 67–68.

²⁷ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Verso, 2001), 107.

Discourse as a theoretical and analytical concept gained a great deal of ground through the work of Michel Foucault and the subsequent formation of the school of French discourse analysis.²⁸ Foucault's work on discourse relies, in part, on the relationship between the discursive and non-discursive in order to theorize the constitution of discursive objects. As he puts it,

Discursive relations are not, as we can see, internal to discourse: they do not connect concepts or words with one another; they do not establish a deductive or rhetorical structure between propositions or sentences. Yet they are not relations exterior to discourse, relations that might limit it, or impose certain forms upon it, or force it, in certain circumstances, to state certain things. They are, in a sense, at the limit of discourse: they offer it objects of which it can speak, or rather (for this image of offering presupposes that objects are formed independently of discourse), they determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc.²⁹

Foucault maintains the presence of the non-discursive throughout his work, and, for those scholars working from the perspective of policy as discourse, the role of the non-discursive in the formation of objects of discourse is either taken for granted through an uncritical appropriation of at least this part of Foucault's discourse theory, or is simply not acknowledged.³⁰ While Foucault identifies those relations "between institutions, techniques, social forms, etc.,"³¹ as primary relations which produce objects that are non-discursive, he provides very little discernment as to what classifies institutional relations as non-discursive. Laclau and Mouffe criticize,

²⁸ For further reading on the constellation of theorists and their contribution to French discourse analysis, see Glyn Williams, *French Discourse Analysis: The Method of Poststructuralism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 50-51.

³⁰ A question that requires more investigation on the part of those using Foucault's work in education policy studies is, what counts as non-discursive and what role does the non-discursive play in understanding policy as discourse? Because this dissertation argues that such a distinction is impossible to make, this question falls outside the scope of this analysis.

³¹ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 50.

Foucault, who has maintained a distinction—in our opinion inconsistent—between discursive and non-discursive practices, attempts to determine the relational totality that founds the regularity of dispersions of a discursive formation... if the so-called non-discursive complexes... are analyzed, we will only find more or less complex forms of differential positions among objects, which do not arise from a necessity external to the system structuring them and which can only therefore be conceived as discursive articulations.³²

In other words, Foucault's non-discursive relations—"relations that might limit [discourse], or impose certain forms upon it, or force it, in certain circumstances, to state certain things"—manifest only through discourse. In fact, as Laclau points out, any relation is made as a relation specifically, and exclusively, through discourse.³³ This expansion of the concept of discourse provides a framework in which one may ask questions regarding the constitutive role of discourse for objects such as schools and teachers, without requiring the problematic distinction in Foucault between discursive and non-discursive relations—a distinction that results in grounding discourse in some system outside of discourse rather than theorizing the ways in which discourse produces its own ground. What can be gained from Laclau's radicalization of the notion of discourse in comparison to Foucault's is a mode of discourse analysis that focuses on the non-essential character of objects thus providing a theory in which the play of difference prevents any positivity from taking root and produces objects that are inherently "up for grabs" in their political articulation; given the relative silence in education policy studies on the work of Laclau, I will provide a sketch of his theory of discourse, later highlighting the consequences for my own analysis of education policy.

Laclau's discourse theory draws upon insights from the fields of linguistics and psychoanalysis. From linguistics, he expands the theory of negativity formulated by

³² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 107.

³³ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 68.

Ferdinand de Saussure to the realm of politics and society. Briefly, Saussure shows that linguistic signs made up of a signifier and signified—the word “tree” (signifier) only refers to a concept of tree (signified)—cannot perfectly reflect any material referent. Instead, Saussure shows that a sign acquires its meaning from all the signs that are distinguished from it.³⁴ The sign “tree” gains its meaning from differential relations, i.e., the relations whereby meaning is produced through differences established between signs within language. So, linguistically, the tree is only a “tree” because it is *not* a “dog,” a “house,” a “rock,” etc. From psychoanalysis, Laclau recalls Jacques Lacan’s notion of lack. As Dylan Evans summarizes, “no matter how many signifiers one adds to the signifying chain, the chain is always incomplete; it always lacks the signifier that could complete it.”³⁵ To frame the converse, should some object be capable of complete signification, the signifier and the signified would be identical, thus foreclosing the possibility of change due to the signifier *being* the signified. A rose (or a tree), then, would *not be* by any other name. However, because of the inability for full signification to take place, i.e., because of the lack, we are always producing, negotiating, and demolishing meaning. The lack is both constitutive of meaning production and prevents any permanent fixity of meaning.

By combining differential relations and the non-fixity of meaning Laclau extends the work of Saussure and Lacan to formulate his concept of discourse. As “a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed... [and also] precisely the

³⁴ See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1986).

³⁵ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 96.

moment of nonfixity,”³⁶ *a* discourse is incapable of becoming *the* discourse because of its constitutive lack, much like *a* tree cannot be *the* tree. A discourse can only ever *partially* map that which it represents onto what is represented. This is because

such a system [of differential entities, i.e., discourse,] only exists as a partial limitation of a “surplus of meaning” which subverts it. Being inherent in every discursive formation, this “surplus” is the necessary terrain for the constitution of every social practice. We will call it the *field of discursivity*. This term indicates the form of its relation with every concrete discourse: it determines at the same time the necessarily discursive character of any object, and the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture.³⁷

A discourse will always be overflowed by this surplus, preventing its complete closure. However, the impossibility of a final suture does not equate to the impossibility of suturing. The question then becomes: if meaning cannot be fixed in any complete way, by what process does discourse incompletely fix meaning. Laclau and Mouffe call this the practice of articulation, claiming,

Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, *nodal points*.... The practice of articulation, therefore consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity.³⁸

A discourse is constituted through the articulation of nodal points, and, subsequently, represents its partial fixity as a fully sutured system, one in which difference is arrested, and capable of identifying signified with signifier.³⁹ Important, though, is that this partial

³⁶ Ernesto Laclau, “Metaphor and Social Antagonisms,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 254.

³⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 111. Emphasis in original.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 112-13. Emphasis in original.

³⁹ The arresting of difference, as partial and fleeting as it is, may also serve as the historical moment of a discourse, i.e., once the play of difference stops, one may map the sutured discourse within time as a moment in history, which can serve to ground the discourse as a culmination of multiple events that are

fixation is exactly that, partial. In order to fix meaning, a discourse excludes and disavows as antagonisms those meanings that are incapable of producing such fixity. For instance, the discourse of conservatism promotes abstinence-only sex education which is to say sex education is about *not* having sex. By disavowing the need to consider school-age students in terms of their sexual desire the discourse of conservatism maintains the “innocence” of childhood through abstinence-only sex education and conservatism fixes its meaning as a discourse of conserving and protecting children from any mention of sex, but only partially in the sense that the mention of sex is not the only avenue for sexual desire to manifest. The partial character of fixity produces the need for a discourse, in its desire to “dominate the field of discursivity,” to paper over the partiality with which it fixes meaning at the expense of other, antagonistic meanings. Laclau argues that “the failure of this process of constitution, the presence of the lack within the structure, must itself be signified.”⁴⁰ A discourse is required to signify its absent presence, i.e., the presence of the lack, in order to constitute the ground from which a discourse establishes its veracity and authority as *the* discourse, to the exclusion of all other discourses. Otherwise, a discourse would be unable to organize itself in the first place or differentiate itself as capable of dominance. As described above, the articulation of nodal points constitutes for a discourse that exclusive ground.

Laclau’s terminology shifts as he further refines his theory. One such shift that is important to his concept of discourse and the analysis within this dissertation is his de-emphasis of nodal points in favor of his concept of empty signifiers. While empty signifiers do the work of nodal points in that they are the signifiers articulated within a

fully realized in the present discourse, or can establish further an antagonism from which the present discourse breaks.

⁴⁰ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York, NY: Verso, 1996), 94.

discourse to provide a partial fixation of meaning, thereby constituting the ground of the discourse, there are further characteristics that are not captured by nodal points, namely the role of emptiness. Laclau reiterates that “if the systematicity of the system is a direct result of the exclusionary limit, it is only that exclusion which grounds the system as such...[and] what is excluded from the system, far from being something positive, is the simple principle of positivity—pure being.”⁴¹ In other words, what is excluded is not some particular positive object, but positivity itself. However, given the constitutive role of lack, “any system of signification [read discourse] is structured around an empty place resulting from the impossibility of producing an object which, none the less, is required by the systematicity of the system.”⁴² It is precisely this empty place that a discourse must signify in order to systematize itself, hence the importance of the empty signifier. Emptiness allows signification of the lack within a discourse to be filled, always partially, by the meanings a discourse authorizes. However, empty signifiers, because of their emptiness, never belong to a single discourse. This is readily apparent when one considers the prevalence of empty signifiers such as “freedom” or “justice.” As empty signifiers, they exist as the suture point that fixes (partially) the entirety of a discourse. In isolation, they mean very little, but within particular, radically heterogeneous discourses they mean everything. One need only use “freedom” or “justice” among neoliberal and socialist groups, for example, to see how empty each signifier is, in that each group fills it with radically opposed content. However, at the same time, these are the mobilizing signifiers for such antagonistic groups. While neoliberals and socialists fill “freedom” and “justice” in conflicting ways, these signifiers stand as the organizing principle for

⁴¹ Ibid., 38.

⁴² Ibid., 40.

each. This dual function of emptiness (to be filled) and systematicity (to be mobilized) gives the empty signifier a central role in the formation of discourse through the practice of articulation.

One final component this analysis borrows from Laclau is the notion of floating signifiers. While floating signifiers function similarly to empty signifiers,⁴³ there is one particular feature that bears highlighting. When Laclau details his notion of the empty signifier, he locates a possible problem with the way he initially defines it. Given that a discourse's empty signifier necessarily excludes meanings in order to systematize itself, the assumption could be made that the empty signifier produces a single antagonism between that which is included and that which is excluded, thus producing a clean frontier between two discursive camps. Laclau terms this the dichotomic, and later the antagonistic, frontier, and asks, "what happens, however, if the dichotomic frontier, without disappearing, is blurred as a result of the oppressive regime itself becoming hegemonic."⁴⁴ So, while the dichotomic frontier may form in the isolated event of a particular discourse challenging another, this "us" vs. "them" model of antagonism fails to account for the possibility of an empty signifier being co-opted by those on the other side of the frontier, i.e., floated across the frontier, as an attempt to nullify the threat of an antagonistic discourse. As an example, one could point to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's insistence that "education is the civil rights issue of our time."⁴⁵ By suggesting an affinity between his own work and the U.S. civil rights movements of the

⁴³ Laclau compares the two, saying "[a] situation where only the category of empty signifier was relevant, with total exclusion of the floating moment, would be one in which we would have an entirely immobile frontier -- something that is hardly imaginable. Conversely, a purely psychotic universe, where we would have a pure floating without any partial fixation, is not thinkable either." *On Populist Reason*, 133.

⁴⁴ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 131.

⁴⁵ From Arne Duncan's biography page located at <http://www2.ed.gov/news/staff/bios/duncan.html> (Last accessed March 5, 2011).

1960s, he is floating the signifier of civil rights, a signifier packed with a number of meanings, over to the U.S. Department of Education whose policies are currently responsible for the closing of schools and mass firing of teachers, many of which serve the marginalized populations the 1960s civil rights movement formed around. While there is certainly some logical inconsistency in such an association, the point of identifying floating signifiers is to emphasize the tactics and strategies that realign discourses in order to mitigate, even nullify, discursive antagonisms. In fact, because of the indeterminable character of floating signifiers, their use by a particular discourse requires that their meaning be articulated such that a discourse can claim possession of a floating signifier. Where one discourse may say that accountability, for instance, is precisely what it supports, another discourse may float that signifier across the antagonistic frontier to lay claim to it, such that accountability may have previously been coded according to broad notions of self-critical responsibility, but, after accountability floats across the antagonistic frontier, it may mean top-down punishment for transgressing the law. But, because of the emptiness of the floating signifier, it can mean both, and one discourse may come to dominate the other through the successful coding of a floating signifier belonging to both.

Given Laclau's discourse theory above, I now turn to my own use of the concept of federal education policy discourse. By federal education policy discourse, I mean both specific governmental policy that passes through the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches of the U.S. government, e.g. *NCLB*, as well as the commissioned reports and other statements that issue from the USDOE. This dissertation looks at a series of discursive moments articulated via texts published by the USDOE and education policies

passed by U.S. legislative bodies with a particular interest in locating empty signifiers within the texts that are “floated” by neoliberal discourse. In this sense, then, federal education policy discourse extends beyond policies that the U.S. Congress has ratified, e.g. *NCLB*, to reports that the USDOE has authorized and issued, e.g. *A Nation at Risk*, as well as myriad policy briefs published by non-profit organizations and think tanks, to name only a few examples. However, the following analysis delimits its use of federal education policy discourse to the following federally published documents: *A Nation at Risk*, *America 2000*, *Goals 2000*, *NCLB*, and the *Race to the Top Fund*. As such, the discourse of federal education policy allows for a broader treatment of federal involvement in public education than merely the specific policies Congress enacts; yet it also concentrates analysis on the federal level of education policy. This sampling does not comprise the totality of education policy discourse; one might, for instance, include the debates on the floor of Congress prior to the passing of legislation.⁴⁶ This collection reviews published examples of federal discourse across the presidential administrations of the U.S. from the 1980s up to the present in order to highlight the ways neoliberalism has figured, and continues to figure, the problems, solutions, and practices of public education specifically within and through a series of texts central to setting the education policy reform agenda of the federal government. This is not to suggest that neoliberalism operates homogenously across this historical span, i.e. that it is applied smoothly and evenly to all institutions of public education. Instead, it works unevenly, through multiple perceived crises in public education contingent upon the historical moment and across different places, such as schools and states. In fact, it is through tropological analysis that

⁴⁶ For an analysis that uses U.S. Congress floor debates see Sandra J. Stein, *The Culture of Education Policy* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2004).

one can surmise the simultaneous flexibility and persistence of neoliberalism within education policy discourse. Tropological analysis is valuable for this dissertation because, as the argument will be developed through the following chapters, discourse persists through the operation of different tropes. However, this sort of analysis is relatively unknown within education policy analysis, so I will first foreground the field of tropology, and then outline the use this dissertation makes of it.

Tropology

Tropology in general is a mode of analysis exploring how various meanings are linked, integrated, and/or reconstituted apart from their literal sense. The unit of analysis for tropology is the trope, a term which has taken a number of definitions across disciplinary lines.⁴⁷ One can analyze linguistic, social, political, etc., objects through the lens of a single trope, such as metaphor analysis, within the field of tropology. However, another approach taken within the field, and used within the current study, is to consider how multiple tropes work together to produce distinct yet interrelated objects, for instance the psychoanalytic emphasis on the roles of metaphor and metonymy in subject production. Given the broad range that tropology affords, it is little surprise to see its use across a number of fields. One can find tropological models throughout the history of Western rhetoric; tropes have been taken up by Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Ramus. Within this tradition, tropes are devices primarily used to ornament oratory or writing. Differently, Giambattista Vico, while deeply familiar with the Western rhetorical tradition, signals a qualitative break in the use of tropology by formulating a philosophy

⁴⁷ For a good resource on the various uses of tropes, see the section on “rhetorical tropes,” by Daniel Chandler, “Semiotics for Beginners,” <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html> (accessed September 28, 2010).

of history which cycles through tropological stages.⁴⁸ Through Vico's work, tropology ceases to be tied to its tradition of mere ornamentation, and one can find tropes used to analyze a number of diverse topics. For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche famously claims that truth is "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms... truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power."⁴⁹ Differently, Roman Jakobson grafts metaphor and metonymy onto paradigmatic/syntagmatic axes, respectively, in order to diagnose types of aphasia.⁵⁰ Jacques Lacan picks up metaphor and metonymy from Jakobson as further support for his oft-cited maxim that the unconscious is structured like a language.⁵¹ Within the field of literary analysis, Paul de Man identifies tropes as constitutive to his genre theory of literature.⁵² Hayden White and Kenneth Burke, both recalling Vico, make a number of strides in the constitutive role of tropes in the fields of history and rhetoric, respectively.⁵³ More recently, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, operating from the field of cognitive linguistics, argue that the trope of metaphor is fundamental to cognition.⁵⁴ Finally, a point I will argue in more detail below, Ernesto Laclau theorizes the tropological constitution of hegemony and discourse.

⁴⁸ Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. by Thomas Bergin and Max Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," *The Viking Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1954), 46-47.

⁵⁰ Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 95-120.

⁵¹ Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2005), 412-444.

⁵² Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," *Diacritics* 3, no. 3 (1973): 27-33.

⁵³ For White, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). For Burke see Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

⁵⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Tropology, as I employ the term, examines the invention, maintenance and destruction of discourse through figurative devices. A more traditional definition of tropology may understand tropes as merely stylistic devices used as flourish and ornament in poetry, prose, and oratory. This definition operates at the more superficial level of the word, which neglects the ways in which tropes can produce and reproduce relations of power. However, proceeding from Laclau's discourse theory and its emphasis on the political and social consequences discourse holds, my use of tropology emphasizes the constitutive role of tropes in articulating and systematizing a discourse, and the subsequent social and political configurations embedded within it. In particular, I will elicit the roles that metaphor and synecdoche play in the naturalization of neoliberal discourse with and through federal education policy discourse.

Two of the more popular taxonomies of tropology are twofold tropology (metaphor and metonymy) and fourfold tropology (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony). While this project is not aligned with either specifically, I will draw upon elements of each in order to make a case for the importance of the trope of synecdoche to discourse analysis. As chapter four will show, the trope of synecdoche has the unique ability of naturalizing a discourse as an organism whose parts contribute or detract from the health of that discourse, thus providing a biological rationale for maintaining certain parts and excising others. I will draw this understanding of synecdoche from White who deploys a fourfold tropology; however, I will refrain from supporting a closed taxonomy that both two- and fourfold tropology embody because, if discourse is to retain its inessential status, prescribing a limitation on the sorts of tropes at work within discourse seems counter-intuitive if not impossible. Instead, my use of tropology will isolate the

relations between metaphor and synecdoche, not to create a new taxonomy, but rather to demonstrate the productive analysis that the interrelation of tropes brings to education policy analysis. Through this analysis, I will theorize the persistence of neoliberal discourse in terms of the co-operative work of metaphor and synecdoche. For now, though, I will turn to the uses made of twofold tropology to draw out some concepts and consequences for this dissertation.

The work of Jakobson and Lacan are central to the development of twofold tropology. Within their work, they share an interest in the role metaphor and metonymy play in constituting social relations and the subject, respectively. Relying heavily on Saussure, Jakobson identifies two poles of discourse, substitution/selection and combination/context, and associates metaphor with the former and metonymy with the latter.⁵⁵ Metaphor, then, is the trope that allows words to be substituted for other words—“den” for “hut” to use Jakobson’s example—whereas metonymy is the trope that allows the combination of words across context, e.g., “poverty” for “hut.” Initially he arranges this polarity in terms of aphasia, i.e., there are two types of aphasia, metaphoric, in which the patient finds difficulty in expressing some similarity between dissimilar things, and metonymic, when the patient suppresses the contiguity between things. He then extrapolates this dichotomy to literature where he associates metaphor with romanticism and metonymy with realism, as well in painting, metaphor with surrealism and metonymy with cubism. Finally, he generalizes his findings in the claim that two tropes form “a competition... manifest in any symbolic process, either intrapersonal or social.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956). Jakobson’s use of the term discourse is restricted to language and, so, should not be conflated with the broader scope of discourse Laclau offers, which, recall, is comprised more broadly as the process of constituting objects.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

Accordingly, Jakobson establishes the tropes of metaphor and metonymy as *the* fundamental tropes, thus providing a tropological model that explains all symbolic processes exclusively through the interaction of metaphor and metonymy.

Lacan appropriates Jakobson's twofold tropology into the field of psychoanalysis. When arguing for the linguistic structure of the unconscious he focuses on the role of metaphor and metonymy in terms of subject production. Initially in line with Jakobson, Lacan defines metonymy as a "word-to-word" connection and produces the "one word for another" formula for metaphor.⁵⁷ However, he later draws from Sigmund Freud's dream-work to claim that metaphor operates according to condensation and metonymy to displacement.⁵⁸ Lacan sees metaphor as the spark "that fixes in a symptom" whereby the trauma of becoming a subject, characterized as a loss, is substituted through symptomatic manifestations of that trauma. Lacan locates metonymy, then, in the subject's desire that attempts to recuperate this traumatic loss. As such, metaphor is productive of something new, the symptom, which is in a continual, yet unsatisfiable, process of desiring an object only to desire still through metonymic linking, *ad infinitum*. Lacan ascribes the limits of subject production to the tropes of metaphor and metonymy, and, similar to Jakobson, constitutes tropology by means of these two tropes exclusively.

Basing his own work largely on the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, Laclau extends the twofold tropology of metaphor and metonymy to the discursive production of hegemonies. Laclau summarizes as follows:

[D]ifferent theoretical traditions interrogated in this exploration have shown, with remarkable regularity, the recurrence of a distinction which is crucial in any discursive approach to the question of social identities. In linguistics, this is the distinction between syntagms and paradigms (identities created on the basis of

⁵⁷ Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," 421-22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 425.

either relations of substitution or relations of combination); in rhetoric, it is the distinction between metonymy and metaphor; in politics, that between equivalence and difference.⁵⁹

Equivalence and difference, for Laclau, formulate two logics, both of which draw from Lacan's use of metaphor and metonymy. Laclau associates the logic of difference with metaphor; however, on my view, this logic is perhaps more precisely the logic of the failure of difference. Said differently, Laclau shows that the very antagonism produced along the antagonistic frontier is one which, metaphorically, substitutes the "us" as a symptom, recalling Lacan, of what cannot be retrieved, i.e., the fullness of society. What is substituted in its place is the empty signifier, and, as such, the empty signifier becomes a symptom of the society, or discourse, or hegemony, that can never be fully sutured. Laclau also analogizes this to Saussurean linguistics saying, "if language is a system of differences, then antagonism is the failure of difference. And in this sense antagonism locates itself in the limits of language and can only exist as a disruption of language, that is, as a metaphor."⁶⁰ The logic of difference, then, operates metaphorically by substituting empty signifier for empty signifier always as an attempt, one which will always fail, to produce that final suture.

The logic of equivalence is responsible for the rise of an empty signifier. When a set of particular demands remain unanswered by a dominant hegemony, those subjects with unanswered demands universalize their demands equivalentially in order to challenge the dominant hegemony. For example, when teachers argue for pensions, plumbers argue for collective bargaining rights, and nurses argue for higher pay, their demands are particular to them, i.e., the nurses constitute their justification for higher pay

⁵⁹ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*., 221.

⁶⁰ Laclau, "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms", 256.

in nursing-related terms that do not yet equivalentially link to the teacher-related terms that justify their demands for a pension. However, by bringing their demands together in order to protest against a perceived common enemy, for instance a state government that does not allow unionization, their demands, in part, universalize into an empty signifier that serves as the ground for establishing an antagonistic frontier against their enemy.⁶¹ Laclau terms the logic that partially equates particular demands with one another the logic of equivalence and identifies this logic as a metonymic movement.⁶² Recalling Lacan's use of metonymy as the trope through which a subject perpetually links desire to object, only to realize that the object has not fulfilled the desire, the linking of demands to an equivalential, and thus universalized, demand has a similar result. Because of the inability of a discourse to obtain its final suture, should a set of demands successfully challenge and overthrow a dominant hegemony, the challengers will not find or produce a fully closed discursive formation to take the place of the old regime. Instead, the new hegemony will remain in power until it can no longer incorporate the demands of its subjects and those demands, in turn, form a new antagonistic frontier through their own logic of equivalence. The metonymic chaining of the logic of equivalence, then, maintains the same feature as Lacan's in that it proceeds *ad infinitum*.

One can witness in twofold tropology the infinite process of metonymic chaining.

This successfully accounts for the perpetuity of discourses in the field of discursivity:

⁶¹ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 231.

⁶² While Laclau emphasizes the metonymic qualities of hegemonic formations, he does briefly characterize synecdoche as a "central" trope when he says, "synecdoche is not simply one more rhetorical device, simply to be taxonomically added to other figures such as metaphor and metonymy, but has a different ontological function." (*On Populist Reason*, 72). However, he defers any further discussion of synecdoche outside the scope of his current work (an odd exclusion given its professed centrality). I argue that the naturalizing function of synecdoche, briefly mentioned above, i.e., the operation whereby a discourse is organized, makes synecdoche unique among other tropes. As will be detailed later, synecdoche deploys a logic according to which parts either contribute or detract from the health of a discourse, thus this trope, different from any other, renders the inclusion or exclusion of parts as a life or death matter.

through metonymic chaining, there will always be another discourse. However, within the framework of this dissertation, what is not sufficiently addressed is the moment when the chaining stops and a system becomes fixed, however precariously. Given the discussion of discourse above, this can only ever be a partial fixation, and to this point, twofold tropology's use of metonymy explains the process that leads up to fixity. I argue, though, that metonymy is insufficient to account for the moments where fixity occurs, however tenuous. The point of metonymy is that it does not stop; it continues linking. The question then arises: how does the fixing of a discourse manifest? I contend that the trope of synecdoche accounts for this fixation. In the chapter dedicated to synecdoche, I will draw upon the literature that calls upon this trope, and, through the analysis of education policy, show that neoliberal discourse synecdochically fixes its meaning by reconstituting different places, e.g., states, schools and teachers, as parts of the neoliberal whole.

Of particular interest to this project, then, is the role of synecdoche in fixing meaning and, subsequently organizing the systematicity of a discourse according to an organicist logic. In order to assign synecdoche this operation, I will examine the role of synecdoche in authors who promote a fourfold tropology⁶³ by drawing upon Vico's notion of synecdoche as the stabilizer of civilization, Burke's linking of synecdoche to representation, and White's claim that synecdoche establishes the argument of organicism. In particular, I will draw upon White's association of synecdoche with

⁶³ Again, questions regarding the number of tropes allowable within a tropological model are not at issue for this project because my interest lies, not in essentializing discourse to a defined set of tropes, but, more experimentally, to consider the tropes of synecdoche and metaphor in their relation to the persistence of a discourse.

organicism in order to return to the conversation of naturalizing the arbitrary that gives rise to the persistence of a discourse.

Chapter two defines neoliberalism through its historical context and theoretical content via the neoliberal economists Friedrich A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, and covers some scholarship done in the field of education that attempts to apply neoliberal economic theory to federal education policy discourse. This chapter also provides examples of criticisms from the fields of education policy analysis and social foundations leveled against the role of neoliberalism in education. Chapter three focuses on the trope of metaphor and its role in situating neoliberalism in the education policy texts listed above. Given the significance of Laclau's work to this project, this chapter will examine more closely his use of metaphor in order to locate empty and floating signifiers of neoliberal discourse within the selected education policy texts. Chapter four considers the role of synecdoche in the persistence of neoliberal discourse in education policy. This chapter provides a more detailed analysis of synecdoche as a trope, drawing from the authors mentioned above, and shows how it serves to systematize neoliberal discourse into an organic whole that incorporates more and more parts through the selected policy texts particularly at the level of place, e.g., the nation, state, and school. The fifth chapter concludes the dissertation by surveying the enlarged framework resulting from my tropological analysis, returning to the notion of persistence and the naturalization of the arbitrary as it pertains to the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche, a co-operation I call organic identification. Finally, I will suggest a further extension of tropological analysis in its role of figuring place.

CHAPTER TWO

NEOLIBERAL DISCOURSE: FROM ECONOMICS TO EDUCATION

Neoliberalism is a new liberalism. David Harvey explains that this label combines the liberal notion of personal freedom and neoclassical economic theory while recalling Adam Smith's invisible hand, i.e., the trope used by Smith to represent the self-regulation of the market.¹ Following this trajectory, neoliberal theory claims that the less government involvement in an economy, the better that economy will be able to self-regulate and, therefore, maximize the freedom of economic actors. This freedom creates a balance sheet of self interests that grants all participants of a free market an avenue to provide for and obtain goods of their own choosing. Moreover, through this self-regulation, the free market becomes the final arbiter of many ethical quandaries whereby those goods that are deemed unworthy in an economy, due to social mores and conventions, will be marginalized, though perhaps not eradicated, through lack of supply and/or demand. Under neoliberalism, the free market, through self-regulated (non-governmental) interactions of supply and demand, will, in utilitarian fashion, lead to the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. In accepting a neoliberal framework, a person appropriates a number of terms, often in the form of floating signifiers (discussed below), which serve to ground an array of more specific actions and lines of argument. For example, when using the term "free markets" as a ground for argument in education reform, one has a logical framework that is critical of market regulation and can criticize teacher unions specifically as a regulation of the education labor market. Subsequently, neoliberal reformers can couch teacher unions as counter to freedom in that unions limit

¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.

the free operation of labor market supply and demand that manifests through self-interest. Neoliberalism, though at base an economic theory, presents itself as a cohesive and comprehensive response to society's ills, or, to borrow from the terminology of the previous chapter, as a discourse that is capable of covering the field of discursivity. However, neoliberalism is only a discourse, and, as such, its historic formation centers on antagonisms.

Some exposition of the theory's development within the field of economics will better situate its later adoption by researchers and policy advocates who use free market principles as a framework for education reforms. The first part of this chapter, then, provides context to the development of neoliberal discourse as antagonistic toward prior economic theories, namely socialist and Keynesian theories. Following this brief historical exposition, the next section examines more closely the work of free market economist Milton Friedman with particular attention to his vision of the role of education in a neoliberal society.² Following Friedman's work, the subsequent section reviews authors from the field of education who appropriate free market ideas in order to promote education policy reform. The third section briefly turns to criticism brought against neoliberalism, highlighting the descriptive and consequence-oriented tenor of these criticisms to further argue that what is absent from these criticisms is an account of the persistence of neoliberalism. In other words, while there exists much literature that

² Theodore Schultz is another University of Chicago economist who, through the concept of human capital, provided a market-oriented understanding of education. However, Schultz also took interest in the economic status of the poor and argued that the government was in a position to help the poor through certain economic strategies. While there could be more said on Schultz's complicated application of neoliberal theory, this would be too much of a digression for the argument of the present project. For more on Schultz's theories on human capital, see Theodore Schultz, *The Economic Value of Education* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1963) and *Investment in Human Capital; the Role of Education and of Research* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1970). For more on his economic theories on the role of government for poverty see *The Economics of Being Poor* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993) and *Investment in Poor People* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1967).

answers what neoliberalism *is* and *does*, and often follows with recommendations for resisting the work of neoliberal discourse in education policy and practice, as of yet there is no theoretical attention paid to *how* neoliberalism persists and continues to persist in light of these often cogent and compelling criticisms. As such, this dissertation signals a shift in analysis from resistance to persistence. This shift requires close analysis of federal education policy discourse with an eye for the ways in which neoliberal discourse is operative within its texts. But before such an analysis starts, I must address the development of neoliberalism as a discourse which will then provide a sense of the operations and floating signifiers that federal education policy discourse subsequently adopts.

In order to further develop the actions and arguments of neoliberal discourse made within federal education policy discourse, I begin by eliciting the antagonisms through which neoliberalism formed. Given the theory of discourse laid out in the preceding chapter, a primary task for identifying a particular discourse is to elicit the antagonisms that serve to constitute the terms of that discourse. What antagonisms are singled out in those initial texts that seek to implement a neoliberal organization of society? To what is neoliberalism a response? However, the approach of asking these questions potentially renders a discursive shift that exchanges the positive content of one discourse with another, thus contradicting the negativity inherent to the system of differences upon which any discourse constitutes itself. In other words, if one takes neoliberalism as a positive discourse that supplants another positive discourse, e.g., socialism, the formation of neoliberal discourse requires only a content that, while in contention with socialism, is not constituted through socialism, thus failing to

acknowledge the constitutive role that antagonism plays in the formation of a discourse. To hold that neoliberalism is a discourse that contains x, y, and z positive thing(s) which “responds” to a socialist discourse that contains a, b, and c positive thing(s), fails to capture the point that a, b, and c constitute x, y, and z by way of negativity, i.e., a system of differences. Bluntly put, neoliberalism is neoliberalism only because it is *not* socialism, or some other discourse. Neoliberalism is not, then, a positive response to socialism, or some other antagonism, but, instead, is a discourse that is constituted by the very discourse(s) that it is *not*. In this sense, one might say that neoliberalism is a *negative* response that forms according to those discourses that it claims not to be.

Neoliberal Discourse’s Antagonists

Antagonism is key to understanding shifts between discourses and this first section examines texts which bring this antagonism to the fore. Neoliberalism did not appear overnight, nor did it develop in a vacuum. Its roots are in Vienna, Austria, where economists, such as Karl Menger, Ludwig von Mises, and Friedrich A. Hayek, concerned with the success of socialism in Eastern Europe and its spread across the rest of Europe over to the United States, sought to combat the rise of a centralized economy by returning to and reworking the theory of *laissez-faire* capitalism located in the works of Adam Smith, most notably *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. As the climate for capitalist economists became more hostile in Vienna, several of them left to teach in American universities, bringing with them a theory of capitalist freedom that roundly critiqued what they considered the totalitarian nature of socialism. Friedrich A. Hayek was instrumental in solidifying the connection between capitalism and freedom.

From Austria, he initially relocated to the London School of Economics and was later appointed to the University of Chicago.

Hayek is of particular interest for the development of neoliberalism in the U.S. because of his move from the University of Vienna to the University of Chicago and the subsequent growth of the neoliberal theories of economics that took place there, particularly through the work of Milton Friedman. Hayek's theories on the necessary freedom entailed in capitalism and servitude in socialism provide a major bridge for the Chicago School's later critique of the use of Keynesian economic theory in U.S. policy. A prominent theme of Hayek's work contrasts the inefficiencies of socialist economic theory that relied upon a centralized decision making body with what he saw as the greater efficiency entailed in the free market. As such, socialism served as an initial antagonism for the constitution of neoliberal discourse, and it is to this antagonism that I now turn.

Antagonism 1: Socialism

In his popular work *The Road to Serfdom*, one of Hayek's main themes is the link between economics and freedom. Specifically, he attaches servitude to socialism and, as the logical converse, freedom to capitalism. Hayek begins this work by warning of the omnipresence of socialism, claiming that those in charge of development are all socialists.³ He identifies socialism at different points as the enemy, slavery, the killer of liberalism, and totalitarianism.⁴ Read discursively, socialism is "them," the nebulous other that simultaneously embodies all that is wrong with the world and licenses the establishing of a new world order. The enemy is all pervasive and has set its intent on

³ F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1944), 5.

⁴ For socialism as "enemy," see *ibid.*; For "slavery," see *ibid.*, 13; For "the killer of liberalism," see *ibid.*, 31; For "totalitarianism," see *ibid.*, 103 and 145.

enslavement and killing those who refuse to submit. The depiction of socialism in such stark language, while certainly useful for the affective engagement of his audience, begins contouring the terms of the antagonism that neoliberalism will then be able to constitute itself through. By naming socialism as a murderous, enslaving enemy, Hayek's work produces an exigency that requires the construction of a challenging discourse, one which, perhaps too conveniently, will be socialism's opposite—an "us" identified as friend, freeing, life-giving, and democratic. And Hayek delivers such a vision.

In a revealing, lengthy, passage, Hayek succinctly displays the manner in which a word, *freedom*, was co-opted by the socialists and how it must now be redefined according to the new vision of liberalism as choice.

To the great apostles of political freedom the word had meant freedom from coercion, freedom from the arbitrary power of other men, release from the ties which left the individual no choice but obedience to the orders of a superior to whom he was attached. The new freedom promised, however, was to be freedom from necessity, release from the compulsion of the circumstances which inevitably limit the range of choice of all of us, although for some very much more than for others. Before man could be truly free, the "despotism of physical want" had to be broken, the "restraints of the economic system" relaxed. Freedom in this sense is, of course, merely another name for power or wealth.... What the promise [of this new sense of freedom] really amounted to was that the great existing disparities in the range of choice of different people were to disappear. The demand for the new freedom was thus only another name for the old demand for an equal distribution of wealth. But the new name gave the socialists another word in common with the liberals and they exploited it to the full. And although the word was used in a different sense by the two groups, few people noticed this and still fewer asked themselves whether the two kinds of freedom promised really could be combined.⁵

He begins with a story of origins. Freedom belonged to the apostolic liberals;⁶ it's meaning apparently sacrosanct. Later, the enemy appeared, saw the power of the word

⁵ Ibid., 26-27.

⁶ Recalling Harvey's distinction that neoliberalism is a combination of liberalism and neoclassical economics, this nostalgia for liberalism, while rhetorically savvy, brings with it economic understandings of choice that produce the novel conflation of liberal political freedom with economic choice, thus this

freedom, and smuggled it into their vocabulary, thus changing its meaning to one which didn't mean freedom at all, but meant its destruction. Now those who remain, liberal or socialist, are wedded to a freedom that brings their exploitation. The imperative rests on those who want freedom in the sense that Hayek outlines it above, where freedom means choice. But, in keeping with the notion of the negative constitution of a discourse, Hayek's work constitutes the new liberalism along the contours of socialism's kind of freedom. Choice, then, is not some positive content of neoliberalism, but is precisely what socialism is not. Moreover, choice, an empty word in its own right, is now a (the?) necessary condition of freedom, perhaps the emptiest of words, and, following this logic, wherever one perceives a limitation or regulation of choice, one may articulate an array of claims that further instantiate the us/them divide.⁷

Additionally, Hayek repeatedly frames socialism as a centrally planned economy. While this may seem an innocuous connection, i.e., one may point out that a socialist government serves as a central body that manages the supply and demand of a nation, this way of describing socialism holds important consequences. By associating socialism with central planning, Hayek subsequently portrays socialism as an attack on choice, where planning "consists essentially in depriving us of choice, in order to give us whatever fits best into the plan and that at a time determined by the plan;" an attack on the individual, because "[c]entral planning means that the economic problem is to be solved by the community instead of by the individual;" an attack on competition, where socialism means "the end of competition and the creation of a planned economy;" and ultimately an

nostalgic projection performs the function of rooting something new, neoliberalism, in the past and provides neoliberalism with an historical narrative.

⁷ One example is the recent popular cry of the Tea Party claiming that Barack Obama is a socialist because of the limitations on freedom of choice they perceived as embedded in his administration's healthcare plan.

attack on democracy, when “[t]he clash between planning and democracy arises simply from the fact that the latter is an obstacle to the suppression of freedom which the direction of economic activity requires.”⁸ Had Hayek framed socialism as the dissolution of the division of labor, or the public ownership of the means of production, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels do,⁹ the antagonism required to constitute another discourse would need to be arranged along different lines, lines which perhaps would emphasize division rather than decentralization. While this ultimately may produce something very similar to what neoliberal discourse maintains, its opposition of socialism would take a different angle, thus shifting the terms of the antagonism and the differences according to which neoliberal discourse constitutes itself. The significance of using central planning to form neoliberal discourse is that the antagonistic frontier separating them from us falls along the terms of centralization and decentralization. In other words, by identifying socialism as an antagonism, and framing it as central planning, neoliberal discourse constitutes itself around an absence, the terms of which are captured by what central planning is not, namely, decentralization.

The point for neoliberal discourse is that with the enemy identified, the antagonistic frontier can be drawn to distinguish between us and them, thus allowing for the differential constitution of the us as not them—they are centralized, we are not. Socialism serves this purpose for the initial formation of neoliberalism, and, later, the themes mentioned above (choice, competition, etc.) will become a central feature of neoliberal education reform in the United States. However, this feature would not begin to enter the realm of education policy until the early 1980s when the Reagan

⁸ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 104; 95; 149; and 74.

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2008).

administration began shaping policy in line with the work of Milton Friedman, a student and professor of economics at the University of Chicago, who drew many themes from Hayek's work and applied them to the Keynesian economic policy of the United States.

Antagonism 2: Keynesianism

Briefly, Keynesianism is an economic theory based on the work of British economist John Maynard Keynes. During the period after World War II up to the late 1970s, the U.S. government, under the influence of Keynesian economic theory, established a fixed exchange rate between economies that was backed by gold and, as well, sought to eliminate unemployment through the rationale that full employment within an economy provided a rate of growth that would outstrip rates of inflation. Additionally, with the aid of government intervention, the objective of full employment, according to the theory, would work as a corrective to periodic market weaknesses and failures like the ones experienced during the Great Depression.¹⁰ Important to Keynesian theory is its use of government as an agency that provides support to its citizens' social welfare. To paraphrase Keynes, while the government cannot make anyone drink, it can provide water.¹¹ According to a Keynesian framework, federal education policy in the U.S. must provide for the social well being of those students attending government run schools across the nation. One example of a Keynesian influenced policy is the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, which emphasized the school's role in ameliorating the effects of poverty on student learning.

The emphasis on the government's role as an agency that shields underserved populations from the negative consequences of turbulent market forces required a great

¹⁰ John Maynard Keynes, *The Means to Prosperity* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1933).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

deal of regulatory practices which constrained the accumulation and concentration of capital in the affluent sectors of the economy; however, due to the broad-based growth that the U.S. economy experienced post-WWII, the compromise between labor and capital, while not quite peaceful, was at least manageable.¹² Due to economic downturns, for example the stagflation of the U.S. economy in the 1970s, criticism against Keynesianism began to develop strong public sympathy.¹³ Among the critics, Milton Friedman gained a great deal of popularity, in part due to his use of empirical data as a base for economic theory, as well as being awarded the Nobel Prize in economic science, and hosting an internationally broadcast, ten part public television series titled “Free to Choose.”¹⁴

Similar to Hayek’s assertion of socialism’s omnipresence, Friedman famously claims, “We are all Keynesians now.”¹⁵ This stood as a comment on the use of fiscal policy, which directs government spending and taxation with the aim of regulating the economy by the U.S. government in order to maintain economic and employment growth. Friedman saw in this Keynesian expansion of the government’s economic role the provision of “an appealing justification and a prescription for extensive government

¹² See Thomas I. Palley, “From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism: Shifting Paradigms in Economics,” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2005), 20-29.

¹³ See Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, “The Neoliberal (Counter-)Revolution,” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2005), 9-19.

¹⁴ For more information on Friedman’s career, his curriculum vitae is available at <http://www.edchoice.org/The-Friedmans/Milton-Friedman-s-Bio.aspx>. (Accessed March 31, 2011). Note the irony of Friedman spreading his economic message through public television programming, a mode of communication that is heavily subsidized through government funding.

¹⁵ Milton Friedman quoted in “The Economy: We Are All Keynesians Now,” *Time*, Dec. 31, 1965. Interestingly, Friedman later writes a letter to *Time* to clarify that, as he remembers, he said ““In one sense, we are all Keynesians now; in another, nobody is any longer a Keynesian.” (“Letters,” *Time*, Feb. 4, 1966). He does not provide further exposition as to why this is the case, leaving the sentence in a state of ambivalence. Without embarking on too much of a digression, I do wonder what consequences such decontextual claims arguing for better context hold for discourse. Perhaps these utterances signify attempts at asserting a new discourse, as Friedman desired to do for neoliberalism in the predominantly Keynesian 1960s.

intervention.”¹⁶ Whereas a Keynesian would reason that such intervention served as a corrective to market forces, neoliberals cast this intervention as a distortion. Friedman explains that “interference by government, through minimum wages, for example, or by trade unions, through restricting entry, may distort the information transmitted or may prevent individuals from freely acting on that information,” and later, “price and wage controls are counterproductive for this purpose [curing inflation]. They distort the price structure, which reduces the efficiency with which the system works.”¹⁷ By articulating that everyone is Keynesian and framing Keynesianism as a distortive power that functions through government interference, Friedman in effect identifies the enemy and establishes an antagonistic frontier against those who interfere with markets (them). Subsequently, what remains to be constituted on the other side of the frontier is those who do not interfere (us). Friedman constitutes this side according to free markets.

For Friedman, “arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself.”¹⁸ With such a far-reaching claim, one can expect to find a number of areas that are capable of taking on a free-market approach. In *Capitalism and Freedom*, Friedman applies the free market to economic theory. However, he extends the free market to institutions that are less directly affiliated with the field of economics. For instance, he argues that military recruitment should be based on voluntary participation, reasoning that, according to a free market, “there is no justification for not paying whatever price is necessary [by the military] to attract the required number of men.”¹⁹ Additionally, he suggests a free market of ideas “so that ideas get a chance to win majority or near-

¹⁶ Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman, *Free to Choose : A Personal Statement* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 71.

¹⁷ Ibid., 19-20; and 279.

¹⁸ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., 36, *fn* 11.

unanimous acceptance, even if initially held only by a few.”²⁰ By rendering the draft and the circulation of ideas as free markets, Friedman brings these phenomena into the economic fold. Understood through free markets, the draft and ideas become integral parts of the military and knowledge economies, respectively. Such a shift cannot be overstated, because when ideas, for instance, are understood economically, terms that would not make sense otherwise appear as perfectly compatible, such as intellectual copyrights and universities as knowledge factories.²¹ Of all the areas toward which Friedman turned his attention, most germane to this chapter is his application of the free market to education.

Neoliberalism and Education

With the rise of neoliberalism as a discourse constituted through the above outlined antagonisms, I now turn to the connection between neoliberalism and education. I will pick back up with Friedman’s free market vision of education and then proceed to work by authors in the field of education to portray what a neoliberal version of education looks like. In its initial formation, neoliberal discourse set itself against socialist and Keynesian economic theories. Education, while certainly an area with economic concerns, was of marginal concern for Hayek and one of many secondary foci for Friedman. However, given the antagonism that neoliberalism set in terms of central planning and government regulation, a government funded system of public education reflects in many ways the very enemy that neoliberalism sought to attack.

²⁰ Ibid., 114.

²¹ See economist Fritz Machlup’s *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972) for a concise example of economizing knowledge. For a critical take on intellectual copyright law, see Benjamin Baez, “Private Knowledge, Public Domain: The Politics of Intellectual Property in Higher Education,” in *Schools or Markets? Commercialization, Privatization, and School-Business Partnerships*, Deron R. Boyles, ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 119-148.

While Friedman's work does not extensively engage with education, he does provide a sketch of the reforms necessary to open education to the free market and release it from government interference. In its origins and to present, Friedman describes the U.S. system of education as an "island of socialism in a free market sea."²² While the metaphor may seem hyperbolic, given the use of socialism as a primary antagonism to neoliberal discourse, the comparison of U.S. public education to socialism serves as shorthand to identify a system in need of neoliberal reform. To flood these islands, then, Friedman suggests reforms that fall into three interrelated categories: choice, competition, and merit. As will be shown below, allowing parents to choose which school their children attend will encourage competition between schools to attract good students and employees. Furthermore, merit-based employment will offer a competitive edge to schools in that those schools with better incentives, like salary and benefits, will attract better teachers and thus be more likely the first choice of parents.

In terms of discourse, choice, competition, and merit perform the role of floating signifiers to the degree that all three of these terms are capable of being taken up by any discourse, yet neoliberalism has successfully floated these signifiers within the horizon of its own discourse thus partially fixing the meaning of each in order to evoke the rules and assumptions of free market economics. In other words, choice signifies a number of things across a number of contexts; consider, for instance, the pro-choice movement within the discourse of abortion rights. However, when this signifier is floated as a means of partially fixing neoliberal discourse, choice becomes a specifically economic exercise that intones that other floating signifier: freedom.

²² *Free to Choose*, 154.

Choice

A system of education based on choice, as conceived through Friedman's work, allows for parents to choose which school their children attend rather than having students assigned to schools based on the school district linked to their geographical location. Couching schools in terms of industrial economies of scale, Friedman claims "If the consumer is free to choose, an enterprise can grow in size only if it produces an item that the consumer prefers because of either its quality or its price."²³ On what basis do parents (consumers) make such a choice? While Friedman does not focus in any detail on the processes that would need to be implemented in order to evaluate the quality of a school, he does provide the benefits a choice model would provide parents. Through the implementation of choice, "parents could express their views about schools directly by withdrawing their children from one school and sending them to another, to a much greater extent than is now possible."²⁴ As a kind of "voting with your feet" approach, parents who are unsatisfied with the school to which they send their children could find a school that would meet their demands for a good education and send their children there. Following this logic, schools would then take a greater interest in meeting the demands of parents to prevent them from leaving and allowing the school to remain open. However, the closure of those schools that parents deem unsatisfactory requires that government funding follow the student, rather than the school. In other words, by attaching government funding to students, whichever school a student attends receives the funding to educate that student. Friedman argues that this sort of funding could take the form of vouchers "redeemable for a specified maximum sum per child per year if spent on

²³ Ibid., 156.

²⁴ *Capitalism and Freedom*, 91.

"approved" educational services."²⁵ As an enactment of neoliberalism, choice for education would reduce government interference in education by decentralizing the funding mechanism for education, passing money in the form of vouchers directly to the parents so, as consumers, they would be allowed to choose a school for their children rather than have the government regulate funding for education through millage taxes and the like.

Competition

One of the consequences of choice, and a central feature of neoliberal discourse, is the development of competition. By allowing parents to choose which school their children will attend, so the logic goes, schools will need to adjust their products, programs, curricula, services, etc., to make themselves more desirable to parents. Schools that successfully adjust to these parental demands will gain more students based on their greater appeal to parents. In neoliberal terms, schools who respond appropriately to demand will garner a larger market share of customers who wish to consume their unique products. The better a school meets demand, the more successful that school will be in the education market. Conversely, a school that does not meet that demand with the products they make available will fail to obtain a market share that will sustain them as an enterprise. Schools understood as enterprises will compete for market share and focus their efforts on making products that consumers want more than what is made available by other schools.

Differently from the islands of socialism, "competitive enterprise is likely to be far more efficient in meeting consumer demand than either nationalized enterprises or

²⁵ Ibid., 89.

enterprises run to serve other purposes.”²⁶ Competition in education, understood through neoliberal discourse, emphasizes the efficiency of meeting parents’ demands—addressing market demand must be done with a minimum of bureaucracy—and the content of education—products must be appealing to parents. Taken together, if schools can be understood as enterprises in a free market, then “the development and improvement of all schools would thus be stimulated. The injection of competition would do much to promote a healthy variety of schools.”²⁷ Because consumers have a diverse set of demands, it follows that parents’ demands for education products and services would not all fall into a single category. This would allow for an array of schools to remain in business in order to cater to the multiple, even contradictory, demands of parents. For example, Friedman goes so far as to point out that such a model would respond to the local market forces centering on racism in the form of integration and segregation of schools. He argues that choice and competition would produce both segregated and integrated schools, thus “avoid[ing] the harsh political conflict that has been doing so much to raise social tensions and disrupt the community... [and] permit[ting] co-operation without conformity.”²⁸ Locating himself on the side of integration, Friedman maintains that racism is not solved through free markets; rather, markets are a reflection of the social mores of the community that comprises the market. As such, should society become less racist, which Friedman wishes, competition will foster this shift by marginalizing products that serve racist demands, such as segregated schools, and more

²⁶ Ibid., 91.

²⁷ Ibid., 93.

²⁸ Ibid., 117-18.

and more nonracist products, such as integrated schools, will be on offer.²⁹ By implementing unfettered competition, free markets are capable of responding to social tensions obliquely by providing those products which address the demands of market participants, and, if structured around a set of moral assumptions, those demands will economically determine the success or failure of those moral assumptions within that market. However, as Friedman frames it, to impinge competition is to enforce conformity, and, thereby, mitigate choice and restrict freedom. What remains, then, is to establish the terms of competition such that a market will not require government interference or regulation in order to determine the winners and losers. Friedman argues that one way to ensure free competition is by allowing merit to arbitrate the contest.

Merit

Merit is generally couched in terms of labor for Friedman. He contrasts an employment system based on licensure, degrees received, and tenure with a merit based system in which those who do a “good” job are rewarded and those who do a “bad” job are either unrewarded or, ultimately, fired. Though he speaks little of the ways in which one can evaluate in order to distinguish between good or bad employees, perhaps justifiably considering such evaluation would rely upon the contexts of the particular field under scrutiny and his concern is at a more general level: a merit-based system of employment provides incentives for employees to excel at their work in order to be deemed good at their job and be rewarded accordingly. Friedman locates the obstacle to merit-based employment in education as a matter of centralization saying, “in any bureaucratic, essentially civil-service organization, standard salary scales are almost

²⁹ An anti-racist could easily point to the fact that for this argument the converse must also hold, that a market containing a predominantly racist set of demands would allow for segregated schools to flourish. However, Friedman’s point is to encourage a system free of enforced conformity.

inevitable; it is next to impossible to simulate competition capable of providing wide differences in salaries according to merit.”³⁰ The criticism here takes two steps. First, the enormity of the U.S. education system requires uniformity in order to efficiently manage the breadth of employees under its purview, thus preventing any meaningful sense of competition due to the categorical variation across the bureaucratic body. Second, and subsequently, the problem is, once again, the centralization of U.S. education indicative of government involvement. By aggregating all education employees into a centralized, government body, competition is rendered null because what merits belong to one group, elementary educators for instance, do not belong to the merits of another, special education teachers for instance. On this view, the centralized government is incapable of responding to wide differences except monolithically, which reiterates the problems with government regulation, as well as implies the benefits that could come from decentralization.

While the centralized governmental body stands as one obstacle to competition and the possibility of merit-based employment, Friedman also identifies labor unions as an active impediment to realizing merit-based employment in education and, furthermore, argues that the government and unions are in collusion with one another in fixing wages according to “seniority, degrees received, and teaching certificates acquired”³¹ rather than merit-based competition. For Friedman, and neoliberalism in general, by representing the interests of workers, labor unions stand in the way of market forces by intervening upon the consumer-driven supply and demand of the free market. Through practices such as collective bargaining, union members are able to influence decisions, such as salaries,

³⁰ Ibid., 95.

³¹ Ibid., 95.

pensions, and benefits, that competition would otherwise resolve according to the employment packages that best attracted employees. For example, schools that offered the best retirement plan, salary, and health insurance would attract the most teachers. The school could then choose among the best applicants and other schools would offer similar, if not better, packages in order to compete with other schools in attracting the best teachers. In contrast to centralized labor decisions, Friedman urges that the free market “would resolve these problems [of government and labor control] and permit competition to be effective in rewarding merit and attracting ability to teaching.”³² As such, Friedman promotes a system of education with as little government involvement as possible. Through a choice program that relies on vouchers, a full “injection of competition”³³ into education, and implementation of merit-based employment he muses that

parents would then be free to spend this sum [from a voucher] and any additional sum they themselves provided on purchasing educational services from an “approved” institution of their own choice. The educational services could be rendered by private enterprises operated for profit, or by non-profit institutions. The role of the government would be limited to insuring that the schools met certain minimum standards, such as the inclusion of a minimum common content in their programs, much as it now inspects restaurants to insure that they maintain minimum sanitary standards.³⁴

While the comparison of schools with restaurants has its limits, for Friedman, and much of what has followed in the combination of neoliberalism and education, the point of such analogies emphasizes the degree to which schools need to be regarded as a part of the free market, no different from restaurants or any other private enterprise.

³² Ibid., 96.

³³ Ibid., 93.

³⁴ Ibid., 89.

Even though Friedman's association of schools with free market principles is more a suggestive application of what is possible through a neoliberal framework, a great deal of institutions and scholars located on the side of education, rather than economics, have taken great pains to make Friedman's suggestions a thoroughgoing effort toward policy reform. Moreover, this push to reimagine the U.S. system of public education in neoliberal terms has been largely successful in shaping policy at the federal level. In the next section, I will review a number of works that focus specifically on the benefits that choice, competition, and merit, understood through neoliberalism, hold for education.

Education and Neoliberalism

Friedman makes suggestions for education in broad strokes. He argues for choice and merit, but does not give any sense of the criteria a parent-consumer of education would use in order to evaluate schools or teachers as good or bad. In the absence of such criteria, the means by which schools should compete remains undetermined. In other words, Friedman's work provides a framework in which choice, competition, and merit are operative, but the ways in which these operations would function in particular schools is undeveloped and, subsequently, provides those with an interest in implementing this neoliberal framework with an opportunity to specify to a greater degree the criteria on which to base such themes for education reform. Many scholars on the side of education have met this challenge by floating the signifier of accountability to education reform.

As with any floating signifier, the meaning of accountability can take a number of forms depending on the discourse(s) out of which its use arises. A discourse can understand the term "accountability" as a synonym for responsibility whereby to be accountable means that one take responsibility for one's actions. For instance, a teacher

would be responsible for maintaining a safe environment in his classroom. Another discursive usage may emphasize the accounting of accountability, which adumbrates that accountability requires a person be able to provide an account or explanation for his or her actions. This use of accountability might require a teacher to explain why her classroom is a safe environment. Further still, a number of books and articles emanating from the field of education, reviewed in the following section of this chapter, discuss the multiple valences of accountability. As such, accountability serves the function of a floating signifier across multiple discourses. Within neoliberal discourse, accountability serves as the overarching framework, implemented through a number of (quantitative) mechanisms, such as standardized testing, graduation rates, and student attendance, that yields the evaluative criteria for determining whether schools and teachers are good or bad. This positions neoliberal discourse as the arbiter of what counts as good (and bad) education, thus partially fixing its authority as objective evaluator. As well, through the emptiness of floating signifiers, neoliberal discourse is able to fill accountability with the other floating signifiers of choice, competition, and merit to articulate the meaning of education reform. The concern for what follows is the ways in which educationists in favor of neoliberal education reforms make use of accountability to import choice, competition, and merit into a larger model of education for the United States. Recent discussion of accountability centers primarily on its implementation through the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, mainly due to the fact that this policy emphasized accountability to an unprecedented degree in federal education policy. While I will analyze *NCLB*'s use of accountability in the following two chapters, at this point I will sketch its use as the

signifier through which neoliberal reforms, couched in the language of choice, competition, and merit, floated into education reform parlance.

Accountability

Accountability has a historical relationship with testing and measurement. Haertel and Herman trace its roots back to the late nineteenth century search for a way to objectively measure student learning through tests.³⁵ The focus on accountability in its more current manifestations within the United States occurred during the 1970s-1980s when emphasis in education reform shifted from inputs and resources to outputs and results.³⁶ Parallel to this shift, Friedman's neoliberal framework was gaining traction in the U.S. scene as an answer to the economic woes produced, on his view, by Keynesian policy and government regulation.³⁷ Friedman's work could be used to justify this new emphasis given that inputs and resources were in large part provided through government funding. A focus on outputs as central to evaluating education places the onus of success on what schools produce, and the focus on product(ion?) allows reformers to view the government's role of funding education as less and less important.

Under the concept of accountability, education institutions, e.g., school districts and schools, and personnel, e.g., administrators and teachers, are the indicators for success or failure. As Wiliam points out, "differences between students in terms of their educational outcomes, as measured by the tests, should be largely, if not wholly,

³⁵ Edward Haertel and Joan Herman, *A Historical Perspective on Validity Arguments for Accountability Testing* (Los Angeles, CA: National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, June 2005): 2-3.

³⁶ R. F. Elmore, C. H. Abelman, and S. H. Fuhrman, "The New Accountability in State Education Reform: From Process to Performance," *Holding Schools Accountable: Performance Based Reform in Education*, ed. H. F. Ladd, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1996), 65-98: 96.

³⁷ See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

attributable to differences in the quality of education provided by schools.”³⁸

Accountability programs single out institutions and personnel as the factors that most directly influence the learning, and, therefore, the results that take place in systems of education. As such, when learning does not take place, the institutions and personnel are the ones who bear the responsibility.

Within a system of accountability in education, then, there is the need to determine whether or not learning has taken place. While this determination could take a number of forms,³⁹ when attached to a neoliberal framework, this determination takes on a particular trajectory. In what follows, Terry Moe and Frederick Hess’s work is exemplary of what accountability does to bring education into the fold of neoliberal discourse.

According to Terry Moe, three related components comprise accountability: standards, tests, and consequences.⁴⁰ Standards determine the “what” of learning. These are the declared objectives and curricula of an education system that situate the content taught in classrooms. Tests are the measure of learning that has taken place. Based on the standards, the success or failure of a student on a test shows whether or not a student learned the curriculum of the standards and, in turn, whether or not a school and its personnel are doing their job sufficiently. Finally, consequences are the results tied to the

³⁸ Dylan Wiliam, “Standardized Testing and Accountability,” *Educational Psychologist* 45, no. 2 (2010): 110.

³⁹ For instance Casey Cobb, “Looking across the States: Perspectives on School Accountability,” *Educational Foundations* 18, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 2004): 59-79, distinguishes between internal and external accountability: the former assumes an autonomous, self-directed “I am accountable to” and the latter assumes an outside, authoritative “I hold you accountable.”

⁴⁰ Terry Moe, “Politics, Control, and the Future of School Accountability,” in *No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of School Accountability*, ed. Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 80-106. See also John Chubb and Terry Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1990) for an extended version of the same argument.

success or failure of teachers and schools to perform their work. These can take a number of forms but follow the traditional behaviorist approach of rewarding success, such as increasing funding or salaries, and punishing failure, such as decreasing funding or salaries.

With these three components in place, questions arise regarding the management of such a system, and this yields multiple varieties of accountability. For instance, Moe distinguishes between top-down from bottom-up accountability.⁴¹ The first variation of accountability takes the form of policy and mandates from federal and state departments of education and, locally, from school boards and administrators. Following what Moe describes as the classic agency model from economics, top-down accountability requires complicity from those to whom the policies are applied, and, problematically, those agents have their own interests that, while possibly overlapping to some degree, in part stand in contradiction to the interests formulated through policy. A teacher, for example, may be interested in fostering the learning of his students and policy makers could frame policy accordingly. However, a teacher is also interested in maintaining or increasing his salary. A policy that ties test scores as an indicator that learning has occurred to a teacher's salary may stand in direct conflict with the interests of a teacher whose students typically perform poorly on tests. Thus, the top-down model overlaps and contradicts the teacher's interests, and, as an economic agent, the teacher will resist those reforms that go against his interest.

Moe argues that, while the top-down model is an important component to the success of accountability-based reforms, the teacher unions represent a major obstacle to this model. He identifies teacher unions as “the most powerful actor in this realm of

⁴¹ Ibid., 101.

politics”⁴² and argues that as long as strong consequences are tied to accountability, such as salary reduction or employment termination, the teacher unions will prevent this sort of accountability from functioning in any meaningful way related to student learning. The way out of this political stalemate, he argues, is to supplement top-down accountability with a bottom-up strategy. This variety of accountability circumvents the teacher union by placing power in the hands of parents, namely in the form of choice plans. Teacher unions are powerless to control parents choosing a different school for their children. With the enactment of choice plans, accountability means that schools and teachers will have to cater to the demands of parents “or else,” where the “or else” entails the parents removing their children from a school that does not meet their interests. As mentioned briefly above, this reduces the school’s student base and, subsequently, whittles away at its *per-capita* funding. Moreover, this places schools in competition with one another to attract the choice of parents.

Through the combination of top-down and bottom-up accountability, Moe articulates a neoliberal vision for school reform. Through the trifecta of standards, tests, and consequences, Moe brings education into the neoliberal fold of competition (schools must compete for students to maintain their funding), choice (bottom-up accountability), and merit (top-down accountability in the form of merit-based pay). Additionally, Moe’s reform denounces teacher unions as an obstacle to be overcome and ushers in the economic agent who performs according to her self-interest.⁴³

⁴² Ibid., 91.

⁴³ Moe also argues against teacher certification processes and government regulation in the form of certification and union influence. Interesting to the argument of this dissertation is the fact that Moe so closely mirrors the education plan set forth by Friedman but never cites him or any other economist to provide theoretical support for his proposed reforms. Is this unnecessary to cite because these are assumptions that everyone holds? Are these natural and self-evident assumptions from which we all

In a similar fashion to Moe, Frederick Hess discusses the obstacles to and benefits of what he terms high-stakes accountability. Under this notion of accountability, “systems link incentives to demonstrated student performance to ensure that students master specified content and that educators effectively teach that content.... Such transformative systems seek to harness the self-interest of students and educators.”⁴⁴ Mirroring Moe’s three components of accountability, Hess argues that high-stakes accountability requires the imposition of “a prescribed body of content and objectives,” i.e., standards; “assessments must be imposed that render clear indications as to whether students have or have not mastered the requisite skills and content,” i.e., tests; and “designers need to decide what to do with students who fail to demonstrate mastery [and]... educators must be rewarded or sanctioned on the basis of student performance,” i.e., consequences.⁴⁵ Also in line with Moe’s argument, Hess suggests that teacher unions are an obstacle to accountability and that states with “weaker teacher unions” will meet with less resistance to these reforms.⁴⁶ As a final suggestion toward achieving high-stakes accountability in education, Hess forwards a two-pronged approach whereby school systems amplify administrator and teacher turnover, thus removing what Hess identifies as the “leading source of opposition,”⁴⁷ and, in their place, hiring “entrepreneurial administrators and [training] them in the strategies of outcome-based management”⁴⁸ and recruiting teachers who support high-stakes accountability.

proceed? Without providing context or support for his neoliberal vision, Moe’s silence on these points embeds the assumption that his audience already takes these theoretical underpinnings for granted.

⁴⁴ Frederick Hess, “Refining or Retreating? High-Stakes Accountability in the States,” *No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of School Accountability*, ed. Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 55-79: 57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

More recently, Hess has taken up the topic of choice in education.⁴⁹ Here he criticizes choice-centered reforms as missing the mark of improving education. He points to several studies that indicate that choice programs in education have produced ambiguous results at best and concludes that choice is not a panacea but is a means to an end, namely improvement in learning as indicated by rising test scores. However, his goal is not to dismiss choice as a viable path for reform. Instead, he argues that choice is but one instrument for education reform among many and, that as long as it is made to exist in a regulated system, it will not be able to deliver on its promise. Yet, intoning the names of Hayek and Friedman, this promise is not to solve the problems of education but, instead, to create “the conditions in which enterprise could flourish.”⁵⁰ Understood correctly, in Hess’ terms, choice is a means to the prosperity of business. The implication, then, is that education, if it is to flourish, must be deregulated more. In other words, the problem is not with choice, but with its current lack of adherence to the original intentions of deregulation. It must resemble the free market of Hayek and Friedman, and, as such, Hess recommends the following: reformers should emphasize the cost efficiency of free markets; money should follow students in the form of an education savings account to be spent wherever parents wish their children to go; reformers need to take seriously for-profit education as an alternative to traditional schooling; education boards need to institute reliable measures of how much a student has learned which, in turn, will provide clear markers of the quality of a school and allow parents as education consumers to be appropriately informed of what is available on the education market; and, finally, reformers must cultivate investor interest in education to form a “vibrant entrepreneurial

⁴⁹ Frederick Hess, “Does School ‘Choice’ Work?” *National Affairs* 5 (Fall 2010): 35-53.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

ecosystem” in which “growth-oriented providers or savvy investors [screen] potential new entrants and [nurture] those with the most promise.”⁵¹ Accountability as a term has receded in Hess’ more recent work, but the work of accountability remains in full. Standards-based testing tied to consequences underpins Hess’ recommendations to which he adds a new emphasis on market forces, rather than government regulation, as the enactor of consequences. In fact, one could surmise from Hess that accountability measures have been too lax, too hemmed in by governmental regulation, and, therefore, must be extended more robustly in both breadth and depth in order for schools to enter into the free market.

As one might expect, the use of neoliberal discourse to frame educational reform has not proceeded in a smooth and uncontroversial application of the former to the latter. As Hess’ most recent work points out, the government regulation of education in the United States still remains intact, though perhaps more precariously than in the past. However, neoliberal discourse has had a great deal of success in shaping education policy through the introduction of the themes of competition, choice, and merit. A number of critics point to this success and roundly critique this trajectory for education policy on a number of grounds. While the arguments against the neoliberal influence on education policy show logically, empirically, and ethically why it is that concepts such as accountability, in the sense described above, are problematic, there is little to no consideration of processes whereby neoliberal discourse is the natural matrix for the articulation of education policy. In the following section, I briefly review several critics of neoliberal discourse’s influence on education and conclude that, while these criticisms do an excellent job of pointing to the inconsistencies and problematic consequences

⁵¹ Ibid., 52.

neoliberal discourse entails for education, they are as of yet unsuccessful in significantly altering the course of this influence. In fact, one need only point to the recent expansion of charter schools recommended by the U.S. Department of Education to see that a central feature of neoliberal discourse, choice, is stronger than ever.⁵²

Critiquing Neoliberal Education

Critical engagement with the influence of neoliberal discourse in education is well developed and even compelling; however, its arguments remain insular and ineffectual in terms of policy reform. While reviewing the entirety of criticisms brought against neoliberal discourse would be a book length project in itself, I narrow my focus to tease out the broader points that emanate from this field. There exists research and scholarship that critiques neoliberalism in its general, global application. For instance, David Harvey shows the effects of neoliberal economic policies across multiple nations in terms of the ever-increasing percentage of capital accumulation into the hands of a smaller and smaller percentage of international populations.⁵³ Research done by a collection of economists points to the same effects.⁵⁴ These authors critique the consequences that neoliberal economic policies hold for those who are marginalized according to their lack of capital and the resulting problematic this poses for the possibility of a democratic mode of governance and society.

⁵² While there is a logical inconsistency between the increased role of federal government in education during the ascendancy of neoliberal discourse within the field of education, this points all the more emphatically to the notion that logical consistency of a discourse and its degree of success are not directly correlated nor necessarily linked. As will be shown in the next two chapters, the maintenance and persistence of a discourse relies, not on the logical consistency of and correspondence between its principles and application, but, instead, on the tropological naturalization of its empty signifiers.

⁵³ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

⁵⁴ *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2005).

Within the field of education, various scholars draw many of the same conclusions within multiple contexts of schooling. One critique argues that the link between neoliberalism and education, understood through the lens of choice, does not produce the gains in test scores its proponents promise,⁵⁵ thus bringing in to question the ability of market forces to improve student learning. Another tack argues that the consequence of market-oriented accountability is a complete redefining of education in terms of managerialism, thus removing any “opportunity to participate in a public, democratic discourse about education.”⁵⁶ Add to this the numerous critiques of the consequences neoliberalism holds for teachers, whereby teachers are “deskilled,” their unions are rendered impotent, and teacher education is liquidated.⁵⁷ Moreover, authors point out that the institution of public education itself will become privatized under neoliberal reform.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Damian Betebenner and Kenneth Howe, “On School Choice and Test-Based Accountability,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 13, no. 41 (October 8, 2005): 1-22.

⁵⁶ Gert Biesta, “Education, Accountability, and the Ethical Demand: Can the Democratic Potential of Accountability Be Regained?” *Educational Theory* 54, no. 3 (2004): 240.

⁵⁷ For examples of “deskilling,” see Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1988); Michael W. Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988); Richard Hatcher, “Market Relationships and the Management of Teachers,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 15, no. 1 (1994): 41-61. For examples of disempowerment of unions, see *The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers, and Their Unions*, ed. Mary Compton and Lois Weiner, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jackie Sinclair, Mike Ironside, and Roger Seifert, “Classroom Struggle? Market Oriented Education Reforms and their Impact on the Teacher Labour Process,” *Work, Employment, and Society* 10, no. 4 (December 1996): 641-661. For examples of the liquidation of teacher education, see Anthony Adams and Witold Tulasiewicz, *The Crisis in Teacher Education: A European Concern?* (London, UK: Falmer Press, 1995); J. Furlong, “New Labour and Teacher Education: The End of an Era,” *Oxford Review of Education* 31, no. 1 (2005): 119-34; Kenneth Saltman, “Schooling in Disaster Capitalism: How the Political Right Is Using Disaster to Privatize Public Schooling,” in *The Corporate Assault on Youth: Commercialism, Exploitation, and the End of Innocence*, ed. Deron Boyles (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2008), 187-218.

⁵⁸ For example see *Knowledge and Power in the Global Economy: The Effects of School Reform in a Neoliberal/Neoconservative Age*, 2nd ed., ed. David Gabbard (New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008); Gerald Bracey, *The War against America’s Public Schools: Privatizing Schools, Commercializing Education* (New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon, 2001); Kenneth Saltman, *The Edison Schools: Corporate Schooling and the Assault on Public Education* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).

These scholars most often articulate their critique in terms of what neoliberalism is and what its effects are. There is a great deal of literature combining a descriptive and consequence-oriented approach to neoliberal discourse. Taken together, this work answers what neoliberal discourse *is* and *does* and draws the ethical and normative implications of neoliberalism in education. However, as stated in the previous chapter, there exists no analysis in the field of education policy studies that focuses on the operations of maintenance and propagation of neoliberal discourse, i.e., *how* it persists and spreads. To my knowledge, this is an entirely new tack for education policy studies and offers a method of policy analysis that simultaneously identifies a discourse as arbitrary, thus de-naturalizing it, and urges new directions for inquiry both when analyzing discourses embedded in education policy and when critically formulating new education policy. The task of the next two chapters, then, will be to show how places are structured tropologically in order to maintain and propagate discourse through education policy, ultimately arriving at a theoretical framework that accounts for how neoliberal discourse persists in education policy.

CHAPTER THREE

PUBLIC EDUCATION IS A MARKET: METAPHOR'S IDENTIFICATION AND GROUNDING

My argument in chapter one introduces the role tropes play in the formation, maintenance and extension of a discourse. Chapter two examines neoliberal discourse specifically, and its consequences for education analysts who espouse a neoliberal stance when arguing for education reform, which takes shape largely in terms of merit, competition, and choice. This chapter analyzes articulations of federal education policy discourse with a specific focus on the role metaphor plays in the persistence of neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse. If every discourse seeks to cover the entire field of discursivity, as Laclau and Mouffe argue, then this chapter exemplifies the role of metaphor in this process, showing, through close analysis of federal reports, policies, and programs issued by the United States Department of Education (USDOE), that neoliberal discourse increasingly covers federal education policy discourse through the metaphor *public education is a market*.¹

While the primary content of this chapter will be analysis of federal education policy discourse, some details about the trope of metaphor and examples of the different uses made of it are necessary to better situate the present use of metaphor within the context of discourse. Keeping with the interest of this dissertation in what tropes *do*, rather than simply what they *are*, the authors I cite all share the focus of what metaphor *does*, i.e., the operations metaphor enacts. With this in mind, I first highlight the work of Giambattista Vico due to his break from the traditional use of tropes as merely an

¹ In order to demarcate specific metaphors, I will write the entire metaphor in italics.

embellishment of language. Second, I consider the work of George Lakoff because of the prominence of his work on metaphor, particularly in the field of education policy studies. Third, I focus on metaphor in Laclau's work to detail the role of metaphor in discourse. Finally, I isolate two key operations of metaphor in the maintenance and extension of discourse, namely identification and grounding. These two functions allow metaphor to serve as a vehicle for the naturalization of a discourse through the metaphor's repetition. With the context of metaphor outlined, the remainder of the chapter examines contemporary federal education policy discourse to show that through the metaphor *public education is a market* neoliberal discourse persists.

The Operations of Metaphor

In his *New Science*, Giambattista Vico argues, in part, for a tropological understanding of the appearance, rise, and fall of civilizations. He examines the histories of Ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilizations and elicits three periods through which each civilization passed before their ultimate demise. In so doing, he argues that each of these civilizations adhered to a poetic logic that operates tropologically, and he locates metaphor as the trope of the second period of civilization, the Heroic Age. Vico defines metaphor as giving "sense and passion to insensate things."² Vico's use of metaphor provides a definition for the animating properties of the trope, rather than a mere description. Vico goes on to say that metaphor is the trope "by which the first poets attributed to bodies the being of animate substances, with capacities measured by their own, namely sense and passion, and in this way made fables of them. Thus every

² Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. by Thomas Bergin and Max Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 116.

metaphor so formed is a fable in brief.”³ For Vico, then, metaphor, more than a literary figure, is the action by which humans identify themselves in the unknown in order to make the unknown known; hence Vico’s aphorism *homo non intelligendo fit omnia*.⁴ In philosophical terms, metaphor lives up to its etymology (*meta-pherein*: to carry or transfer over) in the sense that, upon reaching the limits of epistemology, metaphor carries humans over to metaphysics.⁵ Or, when humans encounter the unknown the trope of metaphor makes the unknown become human. Vico exemplifies what metaphor does by citing a long list of metaphors that describe non-human objects in human terms, e.g., the mouth of a river, the tooth of a saw, the bowels of the earth, etc.⁶ Germane to this dissertation, I draw from Vico’s use of metaphor the constitutive role the trope plays in world-making. Metaphor here is not the stuff of embellishment. Instead, Vico, much more radically, inaugurates metaphor as a trope that functions to bring objects into being which, recalling Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding of discourse as constitutive of objects and their relations, holds importance for the task of naturalizing the arbitrary. Vico defines metaphor as a trope that humans use to make meaning of their surroundings. While Vico maintains that metaphor is necessary to the founding of civilizations,⁷ there is nothing necessary or particular about naming the starting point of a river a mouth (any other orifice would offer a similar resemblance); however, once named, a world comes into being which now contains mouths of rivers everywhere. This is not to say that Vico understood metaphor as arbitrarily formed. His human-centered cosmology, according to

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. Fisch and Bergin translate this as “man becomes all things by not understanding them.”

⁵ For a more developed sense of the philosophical implications of the metaphysical status of metaphor in Vico, see Donald P. Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico’s New Science and Joyce’s Finnegans Wake*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁶ *New Science*, 116.

⁷ See, for instance, his example of the “necessary metaphor” whereby cultivated grains are called golden apples found in nature, thus bridging foraging with agriculture (Ibid., 168).

which the first humans named the unknown in terms of human features, behaviors, etc., necessarily involves a strictly human-oriented component of metaphor. Nevertheless, by using Vico as a point of departure for isolating the operations of metaphor, his work serves as an introduction for the role metaphor plays in world-making, as well as all tropes in the figuring of human reality.

While Vico's work represents an early understanding of tropes as constitutive of human reality, his work is often peripheral to subsequent metaphor-centered analyses. Within the field of education policy studies, his work is entirely absent. Instead, the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson is the primary touchstone for most of the already existing body of scholarship in education policy studies that takes metaphor as its unit of analysis.⁸ However, their notion of metaphor comes from the field of cognitive linguistics. Because this dissertation interrogates the way metaphor operates at the level of discourse, I engage more thoroughly with Laclau's use of metaphor. But, due to the prominence of Lakoff and Johnson's work in education policy studies, I will outline their use of metaphor briefly to show that a cognitive theory of metaphor, while perhaps useful within the various fields of cognitive studies, is not salient to projects of discourse analysis. Cognitive metaphor analysis operates on an experiential basis, but within the discourse analysis employed in this dissertation, metaphor has no necessary ground. In other words, there is no essential content of metaphor that is not itself constituted discursively.

⁸ See, for instance, Holly G. McIntush, "Defining Education: The Rhetorical Enactment of Ideology in *A Nation at Risk*," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2000): 419-43; Ann Q. Staton and Jennifer A. Peeples, "Educational Reform Discourse: President George Bush on 'America 2000,'" *Communication Education* 49, no. 4 (October 2000): 303-19; Andrew Goatly, "Conflicting Metaphors in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Educational Reform Proposals," *Metaphor and Symbol* 17, no. 4 (2002): 263-94; Nina Taylor, "Metaphors, Discourse, and Identity in Adult Literacy Policy," *Literacy* 42, no. 3 (November 2008): 131-136; and Christine Marie Beckman, "A Rhetorical Analysis of the No Child Left Behind Act: A Metaphoric Perspective," (Ph.D. diss., Northern Arizona University, 2007).

Lakoff and Johnson generally claim, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”⁹ Within cognitive studies this entails that concepts, the things according to which we think, are metaphorical.¹⁰ They give the example of the metaphor *argument is war*. Through this metaphor, people are given “a systematic way of talking about the battling aspects of argument,”¹¹ and this systematicity is evidenced by a metaphor’s subsequent claims. In other words, *argument is war* allows for a series of expressions, e.g., “Your claims are *indefensible*; He *attacked every weak point* in my argument; His criticisms were *right on target*,”¹² according to which the concept of argument is understood in terms of the concept of war. The authors then merge their essential definition of metaphor with concepts: “[b]ecause so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience..., we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms.”¹³

Lakoff and Johnson provide an inductive cognitive theory of conceptual metaphor. They identify experience as the ground of metaphor, saying, “we feel that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis.”¹⁴ They then base metaphorical concepts on the presence of “concepts that are directly understood.”¹⁵ They offer spatial concepts, e.g., “up,” as prime examples of concepts that are directly understood because a person’s physical activity produces an up-down orientation. “Up” receives this special status because people repeatedly

⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4. Emphasis in original.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

encounter this concept of spatial orientation in their everyday practices such that “the structure of our spatial concepts emerges from our constant experience, that is, our interaction with the physical environment. Concepts that emerge in this way are concepts that we live by in the most fundamental way.”¹⁶ What this means for Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of cognitive metaphor is that, in a unidirectional way, experiential concepts fundamentally constitute metaphorical concepts. The basis of metaphor on experience, while perhaps valid within the terms of cognition, is untenable when approached in the terms of discourse employed in this dissertation due to the essential status Lakoff and Johnson give to metaphorical concepts and metaphor in general.¹⁷

Within discourse, the operations of metaphor have the ability to constitute reality in such a way that metaphor renders some arbitrary discourse as a natural part of reality. In order for metaphor to perform this function, it cannot be grounded in experience or have any other fundament which serves as an essential feature of its articulation. For Lakoff and Johnson, experience of the everyday variety is unidirectional: it provides the experiential material of the spatial concept which, in turn, provides a ground for a system of metaphorical concepts. However, metaphor is, at the level of discourse, a bidirectional, mutually constituting process, i.e., metaphor, as an operation of discourse, constitutes experience as much as experience constitutes metaphor. By positing experience outside of and, therefore, capable of grounding metaphor, cognitive metaphor theory renders experience as a non-discursive phenomenon. This approach takes experience for granted, blind to the ways in which discourse constitutes experience. To use an example from Lakoff and Johnson, “[o]ur constant physical activity in the world, even when we sleep,

¹⁶ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁷ For a critique of Lakoff and Johnson’s work within the field of cognitive studies see Gregory Murphy, “On Metaphoric Representation,” *Cognition* 60 (1990): 173-204.

makes an up-down orientation not merely relevant to our physical activity but centrally relevant.”¹⁸ The implication of the above example is that constant physical activity centers individuals’ orientation, thus providing the ground for metaphor by understanding different experiences in terms of individuals’ experiences of up and down through physical activity. What remains unaddressed in this cognitive take on metaphor is the fact that physical activity takes place within multiple discourses. In fact, one need only make mention of having had a “bad night’s sleep” and a series of multiple, even contradictory, meanings come to the fore. Add to this the industries of pharmaceutical companies, mattress makers, and hotel chains, all dedicated to selling a “good night’s sleep,” and we can begin to take into consideration the discursive production of sleep that serves to constitute the physical experience of sleep. In other words, multiple discourses differently fix the meaning of sleep in a way that constitutes the physical activity of sleep. Pharmaceutical companies, for instance, provide such a fix by producing and advertising an understanding of sleep that requires biochemical supplements, thus reconstituting the physical activity of sleep. Aligning this metaphorically, discourses produce an understanding and experience of sleep (Lakoff’s and Johnson’s “one kind of thing”) in terms of another, for example, drugs, beds, and quiet, comfortable rooms.

The discourse theory that this dissertation employs focuses on the processes whereby discourse partially fixes meaning such that it can constitute a system of meaning that operates to the benefit of that particular discourse. Laclau and Mouffe point out that “all discourse of fixation becomes metaphorical”¹⁹ where such fixation is always partial and contingent. This fixation, Laclau argues, occurs when “metaphor establishes a

¹⁸ *Metaphors We Live By*, 56.

¹⁹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Verso, 2001), 111.

relation of substitution between terms on the basis of the principle of analogy.”²⁰

Following his logic of the relation of substitution in terms of the metaphor *public education is a market*, market is substituted for public education in a way that analogizes one to the other. However, there remains a problem of generality in Laclau’s use of metaphor whereby he neglects the multiple modes according to which the trope operates. One may adduce that this oversight in Laclau’s work derives from his reliance on the role of metaphor in the work of Jacques Lacan, who borrows from Roman Jakobson’s use of metaphor to identify a particular kind of aphasia. This tradition of metaphor operates according to substitution. Russell Grigg argues that there are other, non-substitutive operations performed by metaphor, such as appositive (*silence is golden*, for example) and extension (*the mouth of a river*) metaphors.²¹ He views the reliance on substitutive metaphor as an unnecessary limitation on metaphor theory, particularly as Jakobson and Lacan engage with it. By employing a Lacanian framework when theorizing the operation of metaphor in discourse, Laclau continues the singular sense of metaphor prevalent in this tradition. This is not to reject the particular use Laclau makes of metaphor, but to acknowledge that when approaching metaphor in multiple modes different analyses become possible. With this in mind, the following analysis employs the copular metaphor, which expands the operations of metaphor in Laclau’s theory of discourse beyond the substitutive, as it emphasizes the twin operations of identification and grounding. Through these operations, neoliberal discourse fixes the meaning of public education as federal education policy discourse conceives it.

²⁰ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 19.

²¹ Russell Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

The copular metaphor is represented by the formula *A is B*. As the formula illustrates, the copular metaphor requires three components: the A term, the copula, and the B term. Within this formula, the A term is the tenor of the metaphor and the B term is the vehicle. So when using the copular metaphor *war is hell*, war, as the A term, is the tenor that the metaphor presents in terms of hell, the B term or vehicle. A substitutive theory of metaphor would claim that the vehicle substitutes for the tenor. As such, a substitutive analysis reads *public education is a market* in federal education policy discourse as a metaphor wherein a market substitutes for public education. However, by isolating of the operations of identification and grounding metaphor elicits a different emphasis. As I will make clear in the following analysis of federal education policy discourse, *public education is a market* both identifies neoliberal discourse with public education, thus making them indistinguishable, and reaffirms this identity by grounding public education in neoliberal discourse through the deployment of a number of floating signifiers, e.g., competition and accountability. These floating signifiers then retroactively justify the identification of public education with neoliberal discourse resulting in a circular logic that justifies the neoliberalization of education reform. Thus, the copular metaphor at the level of discourse, or discursive metaphor, proves its identification of the vehicle and tenor through the grounding that proceeds from the identification in the first place.

A Nation at Risk and International Competition

As indicated in chapter two, neoliberal discourse grew dramatically during the 1980s with the work of Milton Friedman, who served as one of Ronald Reagan's economic advisers during this period. A watershed moment for neoliberal discourse came

in the form of a small report released through the USDOE. Convened in 1981 at the behest of President Reagan by the Secretary of Education, Terrel H. Bell, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released the report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983.²² Previous to this report, President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" argued for a vision of education in which schools took specific interest in educating the poor as a process of remediation to foster greater equality.²³ *ANR* shifts focus from equality to securing a competitive edge for the U.S. in the global economy. This Reagan-era report inaugurates a new ground from which U.S. education policy has proceeded up to the present. The shift to the identification of public education with the market of neoliberal discourse centers in large part on the use of competition within this document. And examination of the use of competition within *ANR* reveals that this concept serves as both the result and affirmation of neoliberal discourse within U.S. education. But first I turn to the function of discursive metaphor as embodied by *ANR*.

ANR marks a shift in federal education policy discourse from remediation to competition that is accomplished through discursive metaphor, which holds the twin functions of identification and grounding. *ANR* uses discursive metaphor first by identifying public education with the free market, and, subsequently, this identification serves as the ground from which the goals of U.S. public education emanate. In terms of policy-as-discourse analysis, the document *ANR* relies upon the metaphor of *public education is a market* that establishes a set of rules and guidelines that pre-structure the

²² National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1983). This work will be cited as *ANR* for all subsequent references.

²³ For an excellent criticism of the "deficit model" of poverty underpinning Johnson's "War on Poverty" as it pertains to education, see Sandra J. Stein, *The Culture of Education Policy* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2004).

very problems it identifies, as well as structures many of the recommendations it prescribes.²⁴ The proceeding analysis, then, first identifies the articulation of the *public education is a market* metaphor, and, second, highlights the recommendations made by the document deployed as a result of this primary metaphor. This recalls points made in the previous chapter concerning the tenets of neoliberalism and their infusion into education, linking this development to the text of *ANR*. Through the metaphor *public education is a market*, *ANR* establishes the terms in which the problem is couched, namely, the problems of public education are market-based. Subsequently, the metaphor *public education is a market* both delimits and reiterates the field of possibilities from which *ANR* draws its recommendations. In other words, through the metaphorical identification of public education with markets, the solutions to the problems located in U.S. education operate from neoliberal assumptions and serve to ground those very assumptions in neoliberal discourse. *Public education is a market* entails both the invention of the problem—public education is not working—as well as the field of possible solutions to the invented problem—if public schools operate according to neoliberal rules the problem will be solved. When metaphorically identifying and grounding public education with and in neoliberalism, the task for policy makers is to make education policy adhere more and better to neoliberal discourse.

But the question remains as to how this process operates. *ANR* nowhere explicitly states *public education is a market*. Nor does the document lay claim to the work of

²⁴ *Public education is a market* is not the only metaphor that can be drawn from this document. For example, there are ample identifications between public education and acts of war whereby a different metaphor analysis could yield *public education is war*. However, as will become clear, the metaphor *public education is a market* persists through U.S. education policy discourse up to its most recent iteration, namely the *Race to the Top* program. As such, this specific metaphor deserves singular treatment given the guiding role it has played in nearly thirty years of U.S. education policy.

Hayek or Friedman, nor tell its readers that the document proceeds from the standpoint of neoliberal discourse. Instead, *public education is a market* works behind the explicit language of *ANR* to inform its premises and the problems it locates within U.S. public education, as the following paragraph will show. And it achieves this by way of floating signifiers. Recalling that the emptiness of a floating signifier allows a discourse to fix meaning, always partially, according to what counts as legitimate within that discourse, and that such signifiers never belong entirely to a single discourse, thus allowing a discourse to extend beyond its own members to invite others who may attach themselves to the floating signifier in use, *public education is a market* relies upon its metaphoric ability to identify and ground neoliberal discourse as and in education through floating signifiers. Within the text of *ANR* this is achieved through the floating signifiers of competition and the individual. Key to these terms as floating signifiers is the ability to render them along any number of lines; this would be another way of claiming that as floating signifiers they do not belong to any one discourse. Readers may support a number of benefits implied by competition. In an evaluative sense, competition may be key to producing the best. Simply asked, who doesn't want the best? The individual, as well, can mean a range of things. Within a democratic context, an individual can vote for the political changes she wishes to see manifest in her society. Given the breadth of contexts to which competition and the individual can attune, their usage as floating signifiers invites a number of readers to agree with the idea of the terms, however its readers understand them. Yet, within neoliberal discourse, competition and the individual play a specific role and, these floating signifiers serve to employ the metaphor of *public education is a market* in *ANR* while simultaneously relying on it to critique the current

state of education in ways that prefigure neoliberal discourse as the solution to these critiques.

As discussed earlier, unregulated economic competition is central to neoliberal discourse. Within economics, competition is the motive force of the market, and the further one is willing to extend the boundaries of the market, the larger the unit of analysis becomes when determining the winners and losers. The increase in competition creates an increase in choice for consumers given that as the number of competitors grows, the number of products on offer rises as well. Friedman's title *Free to Choose* further claims that the growth of choices results in a proliferation of freedom. As *ANR*'s title indicates, the unit of analysis is the nation, and the clear and present risk is losing the competition. The second sentence of the report makes this clear: "Our [America's] once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world."²⁵ The report then famously warns against "a rising tide of mediocrity" in education that has resulted in the "unimaginable" event that "others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments."²⁶ The report identifies the overextended scope of education institutions in the U.S., claiming that "[t]hey are routinely called upon to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve."²⁷ This overextension is a problem that "exact[s] an educational cost as well as a financial one."²⁸ This produces a twofold critique of education for not living up to the standards of a neoliberal market. First, personal, social, and political problems are

²⁵ *ANR*, 5. I use the word "America" for the United States in keeping with the vocabulary of the report.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

beyond the reach of education institutions. Thus, the role of schooling is delimited apart from these problems and should not interfere with or regulate them because of their, second, educational and financial costs. By identifying public education with markets and using this as the ground for argument, the authors of the report produce a logic for criticizing public education in terms of costs. While they mention both financial and educational costs, the very term “costs” collapses education into an economic calculus, e.g., a cost-benefit analysis.

ANR’s reliance on the metaphor *public education is a market* ties education to a globally competitive labor market.

The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America’s position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer.²⁹

Barring interplanetary colonization, this passage conceives of competition at its broadest level, that of the global. We Americans are surrounded by competitors in the form of nations.³⁰ The units of measure for global competition are products and ideas, and the spoils are markets and global repute. The way of the victor, to whom go the spoils, is labor, in the form of good training. By this account, then, America is losing. And the American institution responsible for the nation’s loss of markets and glory is the U.S. system of education. The report also ties education to the competitiveness of the U.S.:

[k]nowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce... If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Later in the report some of these international competitors are identified through the superiority of their products: Japanese automobiles, South Korean steel mills, and German machine tools (*ANR*, 6-7).

the reform of our educational system... Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the 'information age' we are entering.³¹

Education reform, then, must focus on the raw materials of its production in order to secure victory over international competitors. The metaphor *public education is a market* provides the ground from which a litany of further terminology emanates. The identification of education with markets renders education into a semantic field that includes raw materials, competition, and investment. This exemplifies well the role of metaphor in discourse. The merger of neoliberalism and education discursive domains through metaphor renders education in terms of neoliberal discourse: the entire vocabulary of neoliberal discourse becomes the vocabulary of education through identification. Additionally, the metaphor serves as a ground from which neoliberal discourse operates through education. Referring to the raw materials of education, for example, both arises and extends from the identification of neoliberal discourse with education.

ANR emphasizes competition consistently. In the "Indicators of Risk," the text judges U.S. student achievement as subpar compared to "other industrialized nations."³² In "The Learning Society," *ANR* argues that education reform must occur in the context of "a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace."³³ And the report concludes optimistically, saying that Americans through willingness and resolve "have succeeded before and so [they] shall again."³⁴ Add to this the frequent use of international comparisons between the U.S. and other countries,³⁵

³¹ Ibid., 7.

³² Ibid., 8.

³³ Ibid., 13.

³⁴ Ibid., 36.

³⁵ Ibid., 6-7, 8, 18, 20, 21, and 34.

always to the detriment of the U.S. education system, and *public education is a market* proves a solid support for inserting competition into the domain of U.S. education.

But how is it that competition operates in conjunction with this metaphor?

Competition simultaneously performs two functions that serve to substantiate *public schools are markets*. In each iteration, competition both presupposes the acceptance of the metaphor and serves to justify the metaphor's use. The report's authors assume a neoliberal framework for understanding education through their use of competition as the benchmark for evaluating education in economic terms. Moreover, each use of competition in the report further entrenches education in neoliberal discourse by way of reiteration. Every use of competition in *ANR* serves to further justify the presence of neoliberal discourse to evaluate education. This simultaneity renders free markets and competition into a circular logic. When asked, "why competition?" the response follows, "because that's how free markets work." And when asked, "why free markets?" the response follows, "because we must remain competitive." Each is the proof of the other, thus producing the ground from which further application of the metaphor may proceed and identification between public education and markets crystallizes further.

In close connection with competition, the role of the individual in education is also a formative theme for *ANR*. Keeping in mind the attenuation of government that neoliberal discourse seeks, the individual plays a special part in the realization of a neoliberal order. Neoliberalism considers government to be a force that curtails the freedom of the individual. Namely, the government is precisely the body that inhibits the individual through the regulation of market processes that, when unregulated, both comprise and foster the individual's freedom to choose. Consequently, the responsibility

for performing successfully within a neoliberal framework falls squarely on the shoulders of the individual. Through neoliberal discourse, the individual has primary responsibility for his education.

The text of *ANR* emphasizes the individual's role in his education repeatedly. In detailing "the risk" *ANR* implores, "individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life."³⁶ At the level of the individual, then, each person must possess education, in the form of skills, literacy, and training in the context of the "information age," or they can neither gain wealth nor membership in the nation. *ANR* sees this as more than a matter of economics; this is a matter of citizenship as well. Reinforcing the centrality of the individual, *ANR* goes on to say,

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself.³⁷

According to *ANR*, education should provide the opportunity for individual development and guidance toward employment, autonomy (understood as a matter of management), and foster self-interest that contributes to the fulfillment of society. Again, the government's role in this process remains invisible if not entirely absent. While the government determines funding for public education, a point which remains unacknowledged in the above quote, when *public education is a market* the onus rests on

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Ibid., 8.

individuals to approach education in accordance with their self-interests, and this, in turn, assures the progress of society without government involvement.

In fact, *ANR* determines the individual learner as the foundation on which education excels. The section “Excellence in Education” introduces the individual as the initial measure of excellence and, moving from the ground up, proceeds to base excellence in schools and society on the individual.

We [the authors] define "excellence" to mean several related things. At the level of the *individual learner*, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a *school or college* that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. Excellence characterizes a *society* that has adopted these policies, for it will then be prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Our Nation's people and its schools and colleges must be committed to achieving excellence in all these senses.³⁸

In order for education to be excellent, the individual must surpass their personal limits.³⁹

Schools must set high expectations in a way that fosters individuals' ability to surpass these limits. Finally, society at large must reiterate these first two criteria, the second of which is a reiteration of the first from the level of schools, for excellence. The link between evaluation and the individual will grow through the trajectory of education policy detailed in the remainder of this chapter; however, *ANR* brings into prime relief the role of the self-interested individual in federal education policy discourse.

³⁸ Ibid., 12-13. Emphasis in original.

³⁹ There is an interesting tautology embedded in this first criterion. An individual who supersedes their ability in the form of personal limits is an individual who is becoming more of an individual by removing the limits she places on herself. In other words, and tautologically, the individual must become the individual. Though beyond the scope of the present analysis, it is interesting to note the shared use of the copula in tautology and metaphor where the former claims A is A and the latter claims A is B, and how tautology renders identification as a matter of repetition rather than introduction. In other words, metaphor introduces the identification of A and B, whereas tautology strictly repeats A and A.

Competition and the individual are the prominent themes in *ANR*. Even though there are other indications of neoliberal discourse's influence in the text of *ANR*, e.g., the report's mention of business and military leaders' complaints of having to spend millions of dollars to educate individuals who are not work- or soldier-ready upon graduation,⁴⁰ the broad categories of competition and the individual function as floating signifiers within the document because they do not contain any specific content; they do not belong *in toto* to any particular discourse but their emptiness is capable of being partially filled by a particular discourse. In the context of *ANR*, neoliberal discourse takes competition and the individual as its floating signifiers to produce an argument that supports the metaphor *public education is a market*. Understood through this metaphor, the text embeds neoliberalism discursively through competition to criticize the institution of education for dulling the U.S.'s competitive edge among other nations, specifically in terms of economic market share. This also provides a ground for the evaluation of education. The better the U.S. does in the global market, the better its educational system is. Similarly, *ANR* uses the individual to identify education with neoliberal discourse. *ANR* "fills" the individual according to self-interest and as the basic unit around which an excellent education system must build itself to attain the fruits of self-interest and citizenship. From this rendition of the individual, then, market forces ruled by self-interest, and the success of a nation-state as embodied by its citizenry, without mention of or reliance on its government, become inextricable from the institution of education. Moreover, *ANR*'s linking of citizenship to the success of the U.S. has a specifically economic valence such that being a good citizen means contributing to the economic success of the U.S. Thereby, *public education is a market* identifies education with

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9.

neoliberal discourse and provides the ground from which competition and the individual launch and further validate the identification of neoliberal discourse with the institution of education.

The Reagan administration commissioned *ANR* initially as an attempt to show U.S. citizens that state and local education authorities were doing an adequate job of maintaining the U.S. school system, which would provide a rationale for achieving Reagan's goal of closing the USDOE in order to shrink government involvement in social life. Unexpectedly, the report showed the opposite: the U.S. education system was woefully inadequate. Ironically, Reagan's attempt to realize the neoliberal tenet of reducing government was contradicted by the use of *public education is a market* because the U.S. education system was failing to meet the neoliberal standards of competition and the individual. Consequently, the role of the USDOE shifted from an excess of government to an agency that could serve the U.S. to reform education according to neoliberal discourse. The mass popularity of the report suggests that, while its initial charge of closing the USDOE failed, its ability to frame education reform in terms of competition and the individual and further cement the metaphor *public education is a market* as the ground from which proceeding federal reform efforts would launch makes *ANR* a success for neoliberal discourse. With the identification of education with markets grounded, the policy discourse that came in the wake of *ANR* could rely on the success of *ANR*'s metaphor and focus on different areas of education with the presuppositional link between education and neoliberal discourse. Competition and the individual recede from the *America 2000* text and accountability and communities, respectively, arise, which both presume that *public education is a market* as well as import the functions of

competition and the individual. Accountability and communities reiterate the metaphor and broaden the collection of floating signifiers used in its service.

America 2000 and Accountability

Following Reagan's presidency, George H. Bush established much of his educational platform on the momentum of *ANR*. In order to answer the call of the report, Bush convened the governors of the United States for the Education Summit Conference (ESC) in 1989. His reasoning, familiar to readers of *ANR*, was to protect "the very leadership position of America in the next century" from an inadequate public school system.⁴¹ With this concern in mind, the ESC issued a call for national goals for education. The goals were to "guarantee that we [the United States] are internationally competitive" in several areas, such as "the performance of students on international achievement tests, especially in math and science" and "the level of training necessary to guarantee a competitive workforce."⁴²

In April of 1991, Bush announced *America 2000*, a policy that followed the recommendations of *ANR* and the ESC. *America 2000* stresses the role education plays in the global economy throughout its text, again reinforcing the link between public schooling and national economic success.⁴³ This document is structured as a four-fold strategy to achieve six goals by the year 2000:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.

⁴¹ Edward Fiske, "Lessons," *New York Times*, September 13, 1989. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/09/13/us/education-lessons.html?scp=4&sq=edward+fiske+lessons&st=nyt> [accessed on 10/08/10].

⁴² Education Summit Conference, "Joint Statement on the Education Summit with the Nation's Governors in Charlottesville, Virginia," September 28, 1989. Available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=971&year=1989&month=9>. Last accessed on 10/08/10.

⁴³ See George H. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the National Education Strategy," April 18, 1991. Available at http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2895&year=1991&month=4. Last accessed on 10/08/10. Emphasis added.

2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
4. U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
5. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.⁴⁴

These goals and the strategies to achieve them arise from what *America 2000* calls the skills and knowledge gap. In the report's glossary this gap means that "[t]oo many of us lack the knowledge—especially of English, mathematics, science, history, and geography—and the skills necessary to live and work successfully in the world as it is today."⁴⁵ In "The Challenge: America's Skills and Knowledge Gap," *America 2000* reminds readers of *ANR*'s reform imperative and that the U.S. has not acted on this call. As a result, the U.S. suffers from "not knowing enough [knowledge] nor being able to do enough [skills] to make America all that it should be."⁴⁶ While the document infers that the goals and strategies of *America 2000* will close this gap, the meaning of this gap is constituted by the goals and strategies that *America 2000* couches as its solution. In other words, by establishing a general problem—Americans don't know enough and aren't doing enough— and then offering specific solutions to this problem—the goals and

⁴⁴ *America 2000, An Education Strategy: Sourcebook*, United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, (Educational Resources Information Center: Washington, D.C., 1990), 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

strategies—the problem gains its specificity retroactively from the very solutions promised.

So what is this gap once understood through the solutions that retroactively constitute it? By combining the goals, *America 2000* presents readers with students who are ready to learn, most likely will graduate high school, will prove their facility in subject matter (presumably through test results) in order to be economically productive citizens, and will be the best in math and science, all within a disciplined, drug- and violence-free environment. Additionally, adults will become students of literacy, citizenship and the global economy. *America 2000* demands, “‘A Nation at Risk’ must become ‘A Nation of Students.’”⁴⁷ Much like *ANR*, *America 2000* attaches citizenship to the economic success of the U.S. *America 2000* defines education as the institution within which students, young and old, develop the knowledge and skills to be a citizen of the U.S. in the context of a globally competitive economy.

Once again, the metaphor *public education is a market* finds a home. By identifying all students with all citizens (A Nation of Students), and defining citizens within the context of a globally competitive economy, neoliberal discourse serves as the ground from which *America 2000* produces its vision of education, and this production serves as further proof that neoliberal discourse can solve the problems of U.S. education. With the gap identified as the space between students, young and old, and their success in a globally competitive market, *America 2000* must answer how the education system can close this gap. This comes in the form of four strategies, each linked to all six goals and some with a particular emphasis on specific goals:

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12.

1. Through a 15-point accountability package, parents, teachers, schools, and communities will be encouraged to measure results, compare results, and insist on change when the results aren't good enough.⁴⁸
2. We will unleash America's creative genius to invent and establish a New Generation of American Schools, one by one, community by community. These will be the best schools in the world, schools that enable their students to reach the national education goals, to achieve a quantum leap in learning and to help make America all that it should be.⁴⁹
3. Eighty-five percent of America's work force for the year 2000 is already in the work force today, so improving schools for today's and tomorrow's students is not enough to assure a competitive America in 2000. And we need more than job skills to live well in America today. We need to learn more to become better parents, neighbors, citizens, and friends. Education is not just about making a living; it is also about making a life.⁵⁰
4. Even if we successfully complete the first, second, and third parts of the AMERICA 2000 education strategy, we still will not have done the job. Even with accountability embedded in every aspect of education, achieving the goals requires a renaissance of sound American values—proven values such as strength of family, parental responsibility, neighborly commitment, the community-wide caring of churches, civic organizations, business, labor and the media.⁵¹

Noticeably absent from all of the strategies is the body from which they issue, namely, the federal government. Consequently, each of these strategies shifts the responsibility of education away from the federal government. The first strategy brings into federal policy discourse the notion of accountability. Recalling from the previous chapter that accountability denotes an emphasis on outputs, subsequently making education institutions and personnel the primary locus of reform, *America 2000* further envelops education within neoliberal discourse, such that those unsatisfied with the system of education must direct their insistence for change toward schools and staff, rather than government. The second strategy again emphasizes the local focus on schools as the site

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21. This strategy, as well as the remaining three, are linked to all six goals. However, this strategy, according to the report, emphasizes numbers 2, 3, and 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 25. Linked to all six goals, the report goes on to say “[i]n fact, they [the goals] are the principal standards against which every New American School will be measured” (25).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 29. This strategy emphasizes goal number 5.

⁵¹ Ibid., 31. This strategy emphasized goals 1 and 6.

of change, “one by one, community by community.” The converse, of course, is that if this reform proves unsuccessful, it is the fault of those schools and those communities who failed to make “America all that it should be,” rather than the government. Strategies three and four repeat this omission of government, both of which list the responsible parties for education reform and link this reform to making America competitive and pinning *America 2000*’s success on the values embodied in a cadre of non-governmental institutions.

Additionally, these strategies introduce accountability into federal education policy discourse. Given the particular meaning accountability takes within this discourse, *America 2000* extends from *ANR*’s emphasis on competition to suggest the means by which such competition will manifest. The fourth strategy favorably promotes the omnipresence of accountability in education, though the strategy claims such accountability is insufficient without the values of non-governmental America undergoing a renaissance. The “15-point accountability package” of strategy one affirms Terry Moe’s three components of accountability: standards, tests, and consequences.⁵² The first point is World Class Standards, defined as “represent[ing] what young Americans need to know and be able to do if they are to live and work successfully in today’s world... [and] to ensure that, when they leave school, young Americans are prepared for further study and the work force.”⁵³ While the third strategy acknowledges that education is not merely careerist, these standards suggest that education should prepare students for further study or the work force. Presumably if students pursue further

⁵² Terry Moe, “Politics, Control, and the Future of School Accountability,” *No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practice of School Accountability*, ed. Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 80-106.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 21.

study, once they complete their studies, they will be referred to the workforce. Thus *America 2000* remains silent about, if not contradictory to, whatever part of education is not careerist. The second point is American Achievement Tests, which is “a new (voluntary) nationwide examination system... tied to World Class Standards... designed to foster good teaching and learning as well as to monitor student progress.”⁵⁴ Again *America 2000* steers clear of government involvement, parenthetically, to assure readers that these tests are a choice, therefore, according to neoliberal discourse, an exercise of individual freedom.

Finally, consequences appear in the form of encouraging colleges, universities, and employers to use the test results for admittance and hiring decisions (point three), awards for students who do well on the tests in the form of certificates and scholarships (points four and five), report cards that “provide clear (and comparable) public information on how schools, school districts, and states are doing, as well as the entire nation,”⁵⁵ and collection of this data at the state level (points six and seven). These data can then be used by parents through school choice (point eight) “to ensure that federal dollars follow the child.”⁵⁶ Point nine locates “the school as the site of reform,”⁵⁷ which focuses reform efforts on individual schools because “[f]ederal and state red tape that gets in the way needs to be cut.”⁵⁸ In place of these governmental obstacles, *America 2000* invites private sector involvement.

The Business Roundtable, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and other private groups representing the private sector are to be commended—and encouraged—in

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

their important efforts to create state and local policy environments in which school-by-school reform can succeed.⁵⁹

Whereas goals three and four invite a long list of non-governmental groups to education reform, within the accountability package, *America 2000* extends the invitation only to parents and the private sector to participate in the bottom-up side of accountability. The parents can get involved through choice and the private sector through policy making, thus securing the increased presence of neoliberal discourse within education reform and policy. With schools as the site of reform, point ten attaches federal funding to individual schools, with the consequence of rewarding schools for their progress toward the goals set by *America 2000*. State governors, with federal monies, will establish academies for administrators and teachers (points 11 and 12), where the former will “be able to make their schools better and more accountable” and the latter “will be ready to help their students attain the World Class Standards and pass the American Achievement Tests.”⁶⁰ Points thirteen through fifteen focus on teacher pay and personnel certification. Point Thirteen provides differential pay for teachers according to their teaching ability and environment, i.e., teachers in “dangerous or challenging settings,” fourteen provides federal monies for alternative certification programs for teachers and principals because “college graduates and others seeking a career change are often frustrated by certification requirements unrelated to subject area knowledge or leadership ability,” and fifteen establishes awards for outstanding teachers.⁶¹

Even though *America 2000* reiterates neoliberal discourse in its language of education reform, particularly with the introduction of accountability, the document does

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 23-24.

not acknowledge explicitly its use of neoliberal economic theory to structure education policy. Instead, the metaphor *public education is a market* permeates the entirety of the document such that no acknowledgement need be made. By assuming the metaphor, the document identifies education with the market and uses this identification as the ground from which all further reform measures can proceed. When asking, why promote school choice, or accountability in terms of standards, testing, and consequences, or merit pay or what role does the government play in this reform, neoliberal discourse answers with the increasingly self-affirming metaphor *public education is a market*. This metaphor is not ontological; rather, through the operations of identification and grounding, neoliberal discourse becomes more and more federal education policy discourse to the exclusion of other discursive possibilities. Thus, recalling Laclau's discourse theory, *America 2000* is a document of neoliberal discourse that further covers the field of discursivity by mapping itself onto federal education policy discourse.

While the rhetoric of *America 2000* was able to ride on the momentum created by *ANR*, as legislation it ultimately died in Congress.⁶² Nevertheless, *America 2000*, as a text that furthers the metaphor of *public education is a market*, is salient to this analysis because readers can locate within it new consequences of this metaphor that extend from *ANR* and influence the later *Goals 2000* legislation of the Clinton administration. *America 2000* not only maintains and extends the role of competition and the individual established in *ANR*, but it also introduces accountability to the metaphor of *public education is a market*. Moreover, *America 2000* inaugurates merit pay and school choice

⁶² For further reading on the rise and fall of *America 2000* as legislation, see "Special Issue: *America 2000*," *Phi Delta Kappan* 73 (November 1991). This issue contains four different evaluations of Bush's plan, providing detailed contexts of different issues working for and against its passage. Also, see Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* for further historical analysis of *America 2000*.

as a new feature of federal education policy discourse that is a further expansion of neoliberal discourse. However, while *America 2000* brings these terms into federal education policy discourse, it does so in a rather thin manner. For instance, while the document acknowledges the need for school accountability, it provides very little detail as to what accountability means. The above analysis of the 15-point accountability package shows the way in which *America 2000* identifies and grounds education reform in neoliberal discourse; yet, these fifteen points provide very little detail regarding their implementation or operation. The same thinness holds for what choice will actually look like for parents or merit pay for teachers. Subsequently, *America 2000*'s influence on the policy language of *Goals 2000* provides little substance for the terms of accountability forwarded by *Goals 2000*, and the merit pay and school choice components disappear as well.⁶³ Yet, *Goals 2000* represents an extension of *public education is a market* within federal education policy discourse because of its importation of the six goals introduced by *America 2000* into legislation, as well as its own introduction of a competitive sub-grant system into which all school districts must enter in order to receive federal monies for education.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the Implementation of Competition

In February of 1994, Congress passed the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, and Clinton signed it into law the following month. It became the centerpiece of the Clinton administration's education policy that built on the momentum established by *ANR* and *America 2000*. While governor of Arkansas, Clinton co-hosted the ESC with Bush, and

⁶³ While merit pay was not a part of the Clinton administration's education agenda, school choice is present in the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA)*, a reauthorization of *ESEA*. School choice appears as a subsection of *IASA*, and I will provide some analysis of this subsection in what follows. However, given the brevity of its mention and detail in *IASA*, school choice remains relatively undeveloped within the federal education policy that corresponds to the Clinton administration.

his *Goals 2000* plan did not stray far from what the ESC had established and what Bush attempted to implement with *America 2000*. This act was comprised of the same six goals of Bush's *America 2000* proposal with the addition of two more goals for teachers' continuing education and the increase of parental involvement.⁶⁴ The primary significance of *Goals 2000* is the shift from the realm of reports to the realm of law. With the passage of *Goals 2000*, the metaphor *public education is a market* that informs the previous documents now holds consequences for state-level institutions of education in the form of federal funding. While *Goals 2000* maintains a voluntary basis for accepting national goals and standards for education, the federal government is now in a position to give additional monies to states that adhere to the federal policy in order to support the education agenda set by *ANR* and *America 2000*. The metaphor of the previous reports now holds the promise of monetary rewards for states, and, in turn, the decision to accept *public education is a market* has financial consequences.

Goals 2000 reiterates *America 2000*'s goals, namely the requirement of education institutions to develop students' and workers' knowledge and skills understood through U.S. citizenship in the context of a globally competitive economy, and offers additional policy components. *Goals 2000* uses federal funding to enter school districts into competition with one another.⁶⁵ The law mandates that "at least 90 percent of each State's *Goals 2000* allocation is awarded to local districts through a competitive sub-

⁶⁴ United States Congress, *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, 103rd Congress, 2nd sess. January 25, 1994, H.R. 1804, Title I, Sec. 102.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Title 2, Sec. 219. A. 1; Title 3, Sec. 309. a. 1. A. and b. 1. A.

grant process. In a few States, that rate is near 99 percent.”⁶⁶ The link between funding and competition is a major shift in the federal government’s focus on public schooling.

Given the role competition plays in neoliberal discourse, having school districts compete for federal sub-grants further promotes *public education is a market*. Recalling the logic of neoliberal discourse, the state will award funding to the best school districts, which must compete based on *Goals 2000*’s vision of standards and assessments for evaluation. Districts that succeed in the competition will receive extra funding and those who fail will receive their standard amount of funding. Furthermore, with the winners decided, the other, losing districts can model their schools according to the plans of the winning districts and, again following a neoliberal logic, all districts will improve as a result. The U.S. Department of Education released the following statement as typical of the success of *Goals 2000*:

Goals 2000 has facilitated the development of State content standards (approved in January 1998) and currently supports the alignment of local curricula in all 66 Louisiana school systems. The State is also moving aggressively to complete the initial design and implementation of a comprehensive school and district accountability system.⁶⁷

Standards, defined in terms of international competition within *Goals 2000*, are set at the state-level and districts compete for federal funding allocated by the state. The state measures success (greater allocation of funding, i.e, greater market share) by students’ scores on statewide standardized tests. Scores are aggregated by school and indicate the success or failure to adhere to the particular state’s standards. Schools and districts, in this model, are accountable to the state for their students’ performance on these tests and

⁶⁶ United States Department of Education, *Goals 2000: Reforming Education to Improve Student Achievement* (April 30, 1998), 10. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/g2kfinal.pdf> (Last accessed on 10/08/10).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

in competition with one another in securing federal funding. The degree to which states and districts align themselves with the policy of *Goals 2000* is the degree to which the state is willing to accept the metaphor *public education is a market*, and, upon acceptance, education reform takes shape according to this metaphor.

Goals 2000 also focuses on the roles of teachers and parents in producing economically competitive students. All teachers, according to *Goals 2000*, “will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.”⁶⁸ Accordingly, *Goals 2000* understands teachers and their continuing education in similar terms to *America 2000*’s “Nation of Students.” They are workers who must obtain the knowledge and skills that will then be passed, through instruction and preparation, to students. Given the connection between knowledge and skills and America’s competitive status in the global economy established in *America 2000*, *Goals 2000* brings teachers into the fold of neoliberal discourse as another group of workers who contribute to the success of the U.S. in the global market. The work of teachers will be to instruct and prepare students in accordance with the policy’s focus on America’s competitive status. *Goals 2000* affirms this through its purposes of “assisting in the development and certification of high-quality, internationally competitive content and student performance standards,” and “assisting in the development and certification of high-quality assessment measures that reflect the internationally competitive content and student performance standards.”⁶⁹ And teachers

⁶⁸ *Goals 2000*, Title I, Sec. 102. 4. A.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Sec. 2. 4. B.; and Sec. 2. 4. D.

are solely responsible for implementing these standards and assessments in the classroom in order to prepare students for the year 2000 and beyond.

In addition, *Goals 2000* folds parents into a model of education based on *public education is a market*. *Goals 2000*'s primary focus for parents is to increase their involvement with their local schools and other education institutions. One of the ways the policy promotes this involvement is through accountability: "parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability."⁷⁰ While a definition of accountability remains unavailable within *Goals 2000*, recalling Moe's distinction between bottom-up and top-down accountability shows that the policy, at least in this section, encourages bottom-up accountability on the part of parents, though the policy stops short of legislating a school choice program, or some other consequence.⁷¹ The policy does promote standards and assessments in terms of international competition, thus meeting two of the three components of an accountability system. However, the meaning of accountability lacks details on what consequences it holds.

School choice, while not mentioned in *Goals 2000*, does appear in the Clinton administration's reauthorization of the *ESEA*. Renamed *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA)*, school choice comprises a subpart of Title I amendments to *ESEA*. While this subpart is brief, it does provide some general guidelines that recall the notion of school choice discussed in chapter two. According to *IASA*, a local educational agency (LEA) can provide school choice through a combination of public and private funding with the requirement that these "choice schools" are subject to the same state-based

⁷⁰ Ibid., Sec. 2. 8. B. iii.

⁷¹ Terry Moe, "Politics, Control, and the Future of School Accountability."

standards and assessments as other, non-choice public schools.⁷² While this rudimentary introduction of school choice into federal education policy marks when federal funding became attached to school choice, its later manifestation in *No Child Left Behind* (*NCLB*) extends school choice in federal education policy to a much greater degree. As such, a closer consideration of school choice follows in the analysis of *NCLB* below. Also, *IASA* introduces the term Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as the determinant of whether a school is successfully meeting the standards set forth by its state Board of Education as indicated by student test scores in the subjects of mathematics and reading or language arts.⁷³ However, not until *NCLB* does AYP take part in a larger, specifically competitive framework. With this in mind, this analysis turns to the major reforms implemented through *NCLB* that serve to further identify and ground education in neoliberal discourse.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and Systems of Accountability

NCLB marks the identification of public education with markets in an unprecedented fashion. The legislation of consequences within an accountability framework is the primary component absent in the previous reports and policies that *NCLB* adds to education policy discourse. These consequences take the form of a four-part plan for schools designated as in need of improvement, a designation based on the measure of AYP. *NCLB* relies upon a number of terms already familiar to previous articulations of federal education policy discourse, but defines and arranges them all with a focus on the consequences that result from the success or failure of LEAs and schools to adhere to them. In the proceeding analysis, then, terms mentioned above now belong to a new register of accountability. As such, *NCLB* represents federal education policy

⁷² United States Congress, *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994*, 103rd Congress, 2nd sess., January 25, 1994 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994), Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1115. A. a. and b. 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Title I, Part A, Subpart 1, Sec. 1111.

constituted by *public education is a market* to such a degree that the distance between the figural and the literal nearly collapses, or, said differently, the metaphor approximates tautology in the sense that *NCLB* exclusively offers market-based solutions to the problems of public education. This analysis highlights the operation of metaphor through the policy's definition and expansion of accountability, designated as "accountability systems," that include the measure of AYP, the four-tiered improvement plan, and federally provided financial incentives for those who successfully meet AYP.

NCLB identifies an achievement gap in education between minority and non-minority students in the United States. As a response to this problem, *NCLB* proposes "[t]o close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind."⁷⁴ *NCLB* links each of its ten Titles to federal funding provided to states. Titles I through VI contain clauses that require state-wide implementation of accountability systems in exchange for federal monies linked to those Titles. Refusal to implement a state accountability system already holds the consequence of reducing federal funding for schools; however, acceptance of an accountability system entails that schools enter into competition with one another, through choice programs, and even risk their own closure for failure to meet the system's requirements.

In addition to being a part of the act's most general purpose, the definition of accountability, unlike its previous uses, includes specific consequences for schools, their personnel, and students should they fail to perform to the state-based standards initially implemented through *Goals 2000*. According to the policy, accountability must

be based on the academic standards and academic assessments adopted [by individual states]... be the same accountability system the State uses for all public

⁷⁴ United States Congress, *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 107th Congress, January 8, 2002 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994).

elementary and secondary schools or all local education agencies in the State; and... include sanctions and rewards, such as bonuses and recognition, the State will use to hold local educational agencies and public elementary schools and secondary schools accountable for student achievement and for ensuring that they make adequate yearly progress in accordance with the State's definition.⁷⁵

Here readers can locate Moe's three components of accountability. Standards and assessments will bring the consequences of sanctions and rewards across the entirety of the education system for any state that receives federal funding. The accountability systems developed in *NCLB* are statistically intricate models that rely on a number of terms and operations to function within each state uniformly across all states. The central feature of these systems is AYP, which is a measure of how much a school has progressed from year to year as determined by assessment score fluctuation.

The policy establishes AYP as the determining factor of success or failure for schools. Initially introduced in *IASA*, *NCLB* uses AYP as the metric that shows whether or not a school is performing its duties. In order to calculate the AYP measure, states must first set the initial benchmark that indicates the point from which each school enters into a state's accountability system. States derive this benchmark from assessment data linked to the 2001-2002 school year to calculate "the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the State's proficient level of academic achievement on the State assessments."⁷⁶ Subsequent to this initial measure, states must devise a plan with the goal "that not later than 12 years after the end of the 2001–2002 school year, all students in each group [described below] will meet or exceed the State's proficient level of academic achievement on the State assessments."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1111, 2.A.

⁷⁶ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1111, 2.E.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1111, 3.F.

In an effort to address its general purpose of closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, *NCLB* requires schools to disaggregate the assessment score data according to specific subgroups of students, namely, economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.⁷⁸ If a school meets their AYP benchmark, this means all subgroups of students achieved a rank of proficient or better on the assessments administered at that school. Moreover, if any single subgroup does not meet the AYP requirement, then the entire school fails to meet AYP. In terms of closing the achievement gap, the disaggregation of students into these subgroups, so the logic goes, will show the achievement levels of each group and allow comparison and remediation for those groups who are scoring lower on the assessments. Taken together, then, AYP is the measure that identifies student achievement and, by the 2013-2014 school year, if *NCLB*'s plan is realized, all students of all subgroups will be proficient in the state standards as indicated by assessment scores. In effect, not only will *NCLB* close the achievement gap, but it will also ensure that all students are proficient according to the academic standards of their state. AYP combines standards and assessments into a single measure that shows whether or not a school is successfully meeting state standards through assessment scores. However, in order to be a full-fledged accountability system, consequences must still link directly to the AYP measure.

NCLB offers a four-tiered improvement plan for schools that fail to meet AYP. The policy authorizes local educational agencies (LEA) to identify a school as "in need of improvement" if any single subgroup in that school does not reach the AYP proficiency

⁷⁸ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1111, 3.C.v.II. aa-dd.

level for two consecutive years.⁷⁹ Once a school is in improvement status, *NCLB* enacts the first tier of sanctions, which falls under the umbrella of school choice. As the policy states, a LEA must “provide all students enrolled in the school [that failed to meet AYP for two consecutive years] with the option to transfer to another public school served by the LEA, which may include a public charter school, that has not been identified for school improvement.”⁸⁰ In other words, the first sanction employed by *NCLB* is school choice, which assumes at the outset that *public education is a market* making the ability for parents to “vote with their feet” a matter of law and basing school reform on the neoliberal idea that parents dissatisfied with the school on supply may select another school that meets their demand. Should a school fail to meet AYP the following year, the state-level Department of Education invites Supplemental Educational Services (SES) into the school to tutor students who are not meeting proficiency on the state assessments. The SES can be a non-profit, for-profit, or LEA organization,⁸¹ and state educational agencies must “promote maximum participation by [SES] providers to ensure, to the extent practicable, that parents have as many choices as possible.”⁸² Again, with the metaphor of *public school is a market*, *NCLB* mandates that state educational agencies produce a list of approved providers that maximizes choice for parents.

Whereas the first sanction focuses on choice between schools, this second section extends choice beyond schools into the realm of nongovernmental organizations, i.e. non-profit and for-profit providers. With this sanction, the neoliberal aim of reducing the role of government finds its place as a law. Should a school remain unable to meet its AYP

⁷⁹ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, b.1.A.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, b.1.E.i.

⁸¹ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, e.12.B.ii.

⁸² Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, e.4.A.

requirement after the implementation of school choice and the provision of SES, the third sanction requires that a school select one “corrective action” from the following menu:

1. Replace the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress.
2. Institute and fully implement a new curriculum, including providing appropriate professional development for all relevant staff, that is based on scientifically based research and offers substantial promise of improving educational achievement for low-achieving students and enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress.
3. Significantly decrease management authority at the school level.
4. Appoint an outside expert to advise the school on its progress toward making adequate yearly progress.
5. Extend the school year or school day for the school.
6. Restructure the internal organizational structure of the school.⁸³

The policy maintains its emphasis on choice, granting schools the ability to select one of the six options most relevant to their failure to meet AYP. Yet, the consequences for this sanction broaden to include school staff directly in the first three options, and at least indirectly in the last three. While schools remain the primary focus for reform, this sanction indicates a shift away from parents as the agent of reform, whereby individuals with more and more choices will allow market forces of supply and demand to promote school reform, and towards school staff as the ones “relevant to the failure.” Keeping in mind that the sanctions of school choice and SES remain in effect with the implementation of this third sanction, the “corrective action” consequence folds school staff into the market.⁸⁴ Within the context of neoliberal discourse, this sanction illustrates what market forces entail for workers who are unable to offer a product or service that meets the demand of consumers, i.e., parents, and the concluding fourth sanction follows this logic.

⁸³ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, b.7.C.iv.

⁸⁴ While the influence of teachers and administrators on the ability of a school to meet AYP may be significant, the details of this correspondence are assumed rather than addressed within *NCLB*.

Should a school fail to meet AYP under the third sanction, *NCLB* requires that school to undergo restructuring through “alternative governance.”⁸⁵ As with the “corrective action” sanction, *NCLB* lists a series of alternatives from which a school must choose one. They are as follows:

1. Reopening the school as a public charter school.
2. Replacing all or most of the school staff (which may include the principal) who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress.
3. Entering into a contract with an entity, such as a private management company, with a demonstrated record of effectiveness, to operate the public school.
4. Turning the operation of the school over to the State educational agency, if permitted under State law and agreed to by the State.
5. Any other major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms, such as significant changes in the school’s staffing and governance, to improve student academic achievement in the school and that has substantial promise of enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress.⁸⁶

Under this sanction, the policy requires states to liquidate the failed school in its current form. Thus the school must undergo a complete restructuring that dissolves any semblance of its former organization such that the majority of its personnel and the governing system of the school vacate the building to make room for a charter school, a private management company, or the state to offer an education that meets the demands of its parents. As a function of neoliberal discourse, *public education is a market* requires schools that do not meet the market demand, as represented and evaluated through the AYP metric, to go out of business, so to speak. The clearest example of the success of this metaphor is that, in place of the failing school, the policy invites private management companies to operate public schools, thus further grounding public education within the market. Moreover, the reopening of a school as a charter school promotes the metaphor

⁸⁵ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, b.8.B.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, b.8.B.i-v.

public education is a market when considering that the policy defines a charter school as “exempt from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools,... a school to which parents choose to send their children,” and developed by “an individual or group of individuals (including a public or private nonprofit organization),”⁸⁷ i.e., a nongovernmental organization.

With the four sanctions detailed, *NCLB* ushers in the consequences of accountability lacking in previous federal education policy discourse. The sanctions individually promote the further entrenchment of the metaphor *public education is a market* by using the neoliberal notions of choice, the individual, reduction of government involvement, and expansion of the use of market forces. Collectively, the sanctions produce a model of education that closely adheres to the tenets of neoliberal discourse in such a way that *NCLB* takes for granted the identification of public education with markets and launches its accountability systems with neoliberal discourse as its ground. This marks a watershed for neoliberal discourse in the sense that each discourse seeks to cover the field of discursivity. Said differently, *NCLB* displays the covering of federal education policy discourse by neoliberal discourse in securing a greater discursive territory for the operation of neoliberalism. Neoliberal discourse continues to extend its reach through federal education policy discourse in the most recent program *Race to the Top*, where neoliberal discourse makes further determinations through the metaphor *public education is a market*.

The *Race to the Top* Program: A Marketplace of States and Staff

In the midst of a global economic downturn, the Obama administration and U.S. Congress passed the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)*. Part of

⁸⁷ Ibid., Title I, Part B, SubPart 1, Sec. 5210, 1.A.; 1.H.; and 2.

this act appropriates unprecedented funds to U.S. public education, \$4.35 billion of which goes to the *Race to the Top (RTT)* program. *RTT* is the most recent articulation of federal education policy discourse considered in this dissertation and, it maintains the metaphor *public education is a market* with new consequences directed primarily at school personnel that emphasize the roles of teachers and administrators.

RTT articulates “four core education reform areas”:

1. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
2. Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
3. Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
4. Turning around our lowest-achieving schools.⁸⁸

The first area repeats the neoliberal connection between education and a globally competitive work force seen in each of the above articulations of federal education policy discourse, as well as the emphasis on standards and assessments as the means by which education can produce such a work force. This is not to diminish the importance of this first reform area as a mere repetition. In fact, when compared against the six goals of *America 2000* and the eight goals of *Goals 2000*, the USDOE has reduced federal education reform to four goals, the first of which connects standards and assessments to a globally competitive work force in a condensed formula. In other words, previous federal policy discourse produces a similar connection between standards and assessments, but *RTT* is able to reduce the number of steps readers must take in order to arrive at this connection. Within the terms of metaphor analysis employed herein, *RTT* shortens the circuit between public education and a market such that their identification is nearly total

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of Education, *Race to the Top Program: Executive Summary* (November 2009), <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2011), 2. Subsequently referred to as *RTT Executive Summary*.

and the grounding close to concrete. Consequently, the first reform area admits of no remainder for public education when understood as a market. When reformed according to *RTT*, public education *is* standards and assessments that produce a globally competitive work force. And the three subsequent reform areas proceed with this identification as their ground, i.e., *because* public education produces a globally competitive work force, reform efforts must create data systems that improve this work force, hire and retain personnel who effectively develop this work force, and “turn around” schools that are failing to produce this work force.

By using the first reform area as a ground, readers can begin to flesh out the indeterminate language used in the remaining three areas. For instance, in the second reform area, student growth and success as well as instructional improvement all point to an unstated goal. When a reader asks, “Growth toward what? Success in what? Improvement according to what?” unlike the other reform areas, the first offers the specific answer of growing toward and preparing successfully global economic competition. Readers can similarly refer questions regarding the determination of effectiveness in area three and the terms of achievement in area four to the production of a globally competitive work force identified in area one.

In addition to the four reform areas, *RTT* requires states to apply for funding on a competitive basis. Any state seeking funds through the *RTT* program must submit to the USDOE an application that contains six criteria, each divided into two to five sub-criteria, to which the USDOE allots various point amounts. The higher the score the USDOE gives a state, the more likely the USDOE will designate that state a “winner.” Even though the specific point amount given to each criterion is arbitrary, the point

system produces a quantitative representation of the importance the USDOE assigns to particular areas of reform *RTT* funds. The highest point value belongs to the “Great Teachers and Leaders” criterion (138 points) that includes the second most valued sub-criterion, “Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance” (58 points).⁸⁹ The highest valued sub-criterion is “Articulating State’s education reform agenda and LEAs’ participation in it”⁹⁰ (65 points). If, as I claim, the point value assigned to different criteria and sub-criteria is an indication of the importance of that reform to the USDOE, then performance-based evaluation of teachers and principals and a state’s commitment to *RTT* reforms indicated by their ability to make LEAs follow the state’s agenda are of primary importance to this instance of federal education policy discourse. Given the fact that this latter, and most highly valued, sub-criterion simply requires assurances on the part of states that their LEAs will in fact adhere to the reforms of *RTT*, and the fact that *NCLB* previously funded state adherence to federal education policy, the former sub-criterion of performance-based evaluation for teachers and principals is the most highly valued reform in *RTT* that enacts a substantial shift in federal education policy discourse. Moreover, recalling the use of merit within neoliberal discourse, *RTT* marks a new application of *public education is a market* that focuses on performance-based evaluation of teachers and principals to the exclusion of previous evaluative criteria, such as years of experience and education. Within this new facet of federal education policy discourse, one must judge school employees exclusively on their performance in a discourse that already successfully passed into law through *NCLB* wherein AYP is the measure of performance. Whereas *NCLB* focuses on individual

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

schools as the locus of performance, *RTT* expands this focus to teachers and principals and does so with the ground that *public education is a market*, further strengthening the identification between public education and the neoliberal market.

Within *RTT* a three-way tie occurs for the third most highly valued sub-criteria. Each receiving forty points, they are “Developing and adopting common standards;” “Turning around the lowest- achieving schools;” and “Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters and other innovative schools.”⁹¹ The first in this list requires that states form an inter-state consensus around standards that “define what students must know and be able to do and that are substantially identical across all States in a consortium.”⁹² The program allows for a maximum of fifteen percent difference for each state’s standards, thus a minimum of eighty-five percent of standards must be identical across a consortium. While the program offers no indication as to how it derives fifteen percent as an acceptable margin of difference, those states that participate in and “win” *RTT* funding do so by structuring standards that, in alignment with the first area of reform, “prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.”

The second sub-criterion of “turning around lowest-achieving schools” operates in a similar way to the accountability systems established by *NCLB*. Should a state contain schools that are unable to meet the standards of the consortium, similar to the four-tier sanctioning process of *NCLB*, that state requires the relevant LEA to implement one of four intervention models to improve the achievement levels (again something determined already through *NCLB*’s implementation of AYP) of those schools designated

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 12.

as “low-achieving.” *RTT* provides the four interventions of “turnaround model,” “restart model,” “school closure,” and “transformation model.” The turnaround model requires that an LEA enact a series of changes within a school that include replacing the principal, rehiring no more than fifty percent of the staff, and, in selecting new staff, “[i]mplement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions,” and adopting a new governance structure to which the school reports.⁹³ In this model, a school’s staff is altered significantly with the reasoning that the current employees are largely responsible for the failure of students to be college and workplace ready. The restart model “is one in which an LEA converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO).”⁹⁴ Under this model *RTT* focuses on the traditional public school as a failed project that can be turned into a successful one by restarting the project through the non-governmental organizations of CMOs, such as the Knowledge Is Power Program, Aspire, and Green Dot Public Schools, and EMOs, such as Edison Learning, Imagine Schools, Inc., and The Leona Group, LLC. Should an LEA choose this model, then, the neoliberal reduction of government is realized by transferring schools to the non-profit and for-profit sectors of the economy thereby enlarging the domain of the free market. The school closure model, as its name indicates, entails the closure of a “lowest-achieving” school and the transfer of students enrolled at that school to “other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving.”⁹⁵ While there is no mention of what consequences school closure holds for

⁹³ U.S. Department of Education, “Appendix C: School Intervention Models,” *Federal Register* 74, no. 221 (November 18, 2009): 59866.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

the personnel of the closed school, readers once again encounter the logic of neoliberal discourse according to which market forces close businesses that fail to meet demand and its former customers “take their business elsewhere,” namely to higher achieving schools.

The transformation model is the most detailed of the four options for LEAs. It is comprised of four “strategies”: “Developing and increasing teacher and school leader effectiveness; Comprehensive instructional reform strategies; Increasing learning time and creating community-oriented schools; Providing operational flexibility and sustained support.”⁹⁶ Each of these strategies contains requirements that an LEA must meet in order for a state to approve this model. Under the first strategy, an LEA must “[r]eplace the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation model,”⁹⁷ thus reinforcing the causal connection between school personnel and school achievement. In addition to hiring a new principal, a school must implement an evaluation system for teachers and the principal that takes student growth as a significant measure. While student growth can mean a number of things, *RTT* defines it as “the change in student achievement for an individual student between two or more points in time,” where student achievement means:

- (a) For tested grades and subjects: (1) a student’s score on the State’s assessments under the ESEA; and, as appropriate, (2) other measures of student learning, such as those described in paragraph (b) of this definition, provided they are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.
- (b) For non-tested grades and subjects: alternative measures of student learning and performance such as student scores on pre-tests and end-of-course tests; student performance on English language proficiency assessments; and other measures of student achievement that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., 59866-67.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 59866.

⁹⁸ *RTT Executive Summary*, 14.

This second requirement of the transformation model's first strategy stresses that a significant component of evaluations of principals and teachers depend on the change in test scores of individual students. *RTT* thereby constitutes the role of teachers and principals in terms of test scores. Said differently, the *RTT* method of evaluation shows that a teacher or principal is "doing their job" when students "grow," where a rise in test scores is the primary indicator of growth. Conversely, when students' test scores are not sufficiently increasing, *RTT* requires LEAs to evaluate the teacher and principal negatively as an impediment to growth. The third requirement is for LEAs to "[i]dentify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who... have increased student achievement and high-school graduation rates and identify and remove those who... have not done so."⁹⁹ When combining the second and third requirements, LEAs are able to institute a merit-based system of employment for teachers and principals. Under these requirements, first a LEA implements an evaluation system that defines the job of teachers and principals according to fluctuation in individual students' test scores; Second, a LEA uses this evaluation system to identify those personnel who contribute to or detract from student achievement; Third, and finally, the LEA rewards the contributors and removes the detractors based on the merit of their job performance, namely whether or not students' test scores increased. Given the role merit plays in neoliberal discourse, this first strategy renders the operation of public education as identical to the operation of free markets promoted by Milton Friedman and subsequent educational researchers who applied Friedman's work to federal educational policy discourse.

The second strategy of the transformation model, comprehensive instructional reform, holds two requirements for LEAs. First, somewhat ambiguously, a LEA must

⁹⁹ "Appendix C," 59866.

“use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and ‘vertically aligned’ from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards.”¹⁰⁰ The term “data” is ambiguous because *RTT* does not provide a definition that indicates what does or does not count as data. However, given *NCLB*’s emphasis on test scores continued by *RTT*, one may assume with some confidence that these represent at least one acceptable form of data for a LEA to determine whether or not a program aligns across grades and with state standards, whereby the students’ scores provide the data that determines a school’s success or failure. If this holds as a partial disambiguation, then this requirement further validates the use of test scores as the arbiter of success or failure, which, once again, serves to maintain *public education is a market*: in order to be successful, a school must supply a product that addresses the demands of the market, namely an instructional program that prepares students to compete in a global economy. The second requirement mandates that LEAs must proliferate data, because they must “[p]romote the continuous use of student data... to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students,”¹⁰¹ which creates a recursive process of gathering and using data in order to improve achievement based on data.

The third strategy in the transformation model requires that a LEA increase learning time and create community-oriented schools. *RTT* defines “increased learning time” as

using a longer school day, week, or year schedule to significantly increase the total number of school hours to include additional time for (a) instruction in core academic subjects, including English; reading or language arts; mathematics; science; foreign languages; civics and government; economics; arts; history; and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 59867.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

geography; (b) instruction in other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education, including, for example, physical education, service learning, and experiential and work-based learning opportunities that are provided by partnering, as appropriate, with other organizations; and (c) teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects.¹⁰²

Here *RTT* presents readers with two logics. The first works according to the familiar adage “more is better.” The more time students spend in school, the more curriculum they can learn, and the better educated they will be. However, germane to this analysis, there is a second, less commonsensical, logic operating here. Within the transformation model, *RTT* attaches both a wide array of subjects that promote a well-rounded education and time for teacher collaboration to the need for extra time in the school day, week, or year. Conversely, the time that schools use currently is not enough to include a well-rounded education or teacher collaboration. Given the priority of student growth as determined by test scores, it seems that schools’ current allotment of time is directed properly toward this particular kind of achievement. Transformation of a school requires that teacher collaboration, a well-rounded education, or those subjects that do not figure into growth measurements are helpful supplements to the primary use of a school’s learning time, and, therefore, learning time must be extended to include these supplements. As an articulation of federal education policy discourse, *RTT* bifurcates the time for learning allotted to schools whereby the primary use of time, the current school day, is when students learn according to those features of *public education is a market*, e.g., standards and assessments that prepare students to compete in the global economy. The supplemental use of time, whatever time extends beyond the current school day, is when students gain a well-rounded education and teachers collaborate. This bifurcation once

¹⁰² *RTT Executive Summary*, 13.

again reinforces the primacy of neoliberal discourse within federal education policy discourse. *Public education is a market* informs the curriculum to such a degree that a transformed school must add learning time to its schedule, thus rendering teacher collaboration and a well-rounded education, among other things, extra-curricular.

The last of the four transformation strategies is for LEAs to “provide operational flexibility and sustained support.” While *RTT* does not provide a specific definition for operational flexibility, it does provide the examples of “staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting” in order “to implement fully a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates.”¹⁰³ Given the emphasis on merit-based evaluation for teachers and principals from the first strategy and the increase in learning time described in the third strategy, the requirement of operational flexibility provides schools the means to enact reforms that chafe against the practices of experience- and education-based salary schedules for teachers and principals, as well as deploy the “learning time” of *RTT* that makes collaboration and a well-rounded education supplemental rather than fundamental. Understood through neoliberal discourse, this requirement renders schools as agents in need of greater flexibility that LEAs, among other government institutions, inhibit. Furthermore, by linking this flexibility to the goal of improving student achievement outcomes, this strategy invokes once more the centrality of testing to public education and, thereby, reiterates *public education is a market*. Where this first requirement establishes the agency of schools against the inflexible rules of LEAs, the second requirement opens these agent-schools to larger market forces in the language of assistance and support: a LEA must “[e]nsure that the school receives ongoing, intensive technical assistance and

¹⁰³ “Appendix C,” 59867.

related support from the LEA, the SEA [State Educational Agency], or a designated external lead partner organization (such as a school turnaround organization or an EMO).”¹⁰⁴ While assistance and support are arguably the roles LEAs and SEAs have played traditionally for schools, and in some sense this may run counter to the flexibility on offer in the previous requirement, the inclusion of partner organizations exemplified by non-governmental agencies provides further avenues for reducing the responsibilities of government in schools. In other words, this requirement gives for-profit and non-profit organizations another opportunity, namely “intensive technical assistance and related support,” through which they can embed themselves in the everyday operations of a transformed school. This insertion of non-governmental organizations reduces the need for government provision of support and assistance and increases the role of market-based interventions taking place within schools.

RTT simultaneously continues the trajectory of neoliberal discourse established through *NCLB* and extends the domain of neoliberal discourse through its new emphasis on school personnel. Similar to *NCLB*, *RTT* requires that schools who fail to produce higher test scores must undergo reforms that rely on the logic of neoliberal discourse. While *RTT* downplays the language of accountability, standards, assessments, and consequences are central to the program. The four reform models *RTT* requires of schools that lack achievement gains articulated by state standards and measured by state tests exhibits the centrality of accountability. *RTT*, unlike *NCLB*, implements successfully merit-based evaluation systems whereby student growth, as defined above, determines salary-schedules for school personnel, rather than experience and education, and teachers and principals are at risk of dismissal if they do not produce such growth. *RTT*, as an

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

articulation of federal education policy discourse, further extends the metaphor *public education is a market* by expanding and encouraging school operation by non-governmental organizations, namely by increasing the amount of charter schools and inviting non-profit and for-profit agencies to take a substantial role in managing reformed schools. The identification of student growth as the product of public education also extends the metaphor. Student growth as product provides the ground for understanding teachers and principals as the primary workers responsible for successful production. When test scores show that school personnel are not fostering this growth, *public education is a market* justifies the firing of the personnel due to their inability to meet the demand of the education market.

Conclusion

The above analysis of federal education policy discourse from *ANR* to *RTT* makes clear the repetition of the metaphor *public education is a market*. But this is not mere repetition in the sense that the metaphor operates the same across each articulation of this discourse. Instead each instance of the metaphor's repetition introduces different areas of public education into neoliberal discourse such that the level of application for the metaphor receives different emphases. For example, *ANR* deploys *public education is a market* primarily in terms of international competition to claim that U.S. public education at large is in need of reform to the tune of neoliberal discourse. While this claim is maintained throughout the remaining policies and reports analyzed above, subsequent iterations find new areas to which the metaphor must be extended in order for U.S. public education to become internationally competitive. In *America 2000*, readers find an emphasis on the neoliberal tenet of government reduction in public education as a reform

solution to produce a successful U.S. public education system. *Goals 2000* adopts the same goals of *America 2000* with the addition of two more goals but, different from previous articulations, enters school districts into a competitive sub-grant system of funding, thus encouraging a market-based solution to how much money school districts receive from the state. *NCLB* signals an unprecedented identification of public education with market-based reforms through its implementation of systems of accountability, wherein AYP determines whether a school is meeting the demands of the education market and, as with all market-based systems, closes those schools that do not successfully meet that demand. Finally, *RTT*, while maintaining the application of neoliberal discourse from previous articulations of federal education policy discourse, brings school personnel into the metaphor by implementing merit-based evaluation for teachers and principals.

Repetition, as described at this chapter's outset, is one facet of naturalization. Recalling that the more successful a metaphor is in identifying its vehicle with its tenor, the more essential one becomes for the other, the above analysis traces the naturalization of the arbitrary within federal education policy discourse. One may just as readily claim metaphorically that *public education is a bureaucracy*, or *public education is a democracy*. In other words, the selection of the vehicle, be it a market, a bureaucracy, or a democracy, is arbitrary, i.e. there is no necessary connection between public education and a market; but this is not to say it is unimportant. There is nothing necessary to public education *being* a market; yet, as the above analysis shows, there is a great deal of evidence within federal education policy discourse that shows it is the primary metaphor in operation and results in a specific trajectory along which neoliberal discourse

increasingly has covered federal education policy discourse over the past four decades. Subsequently, through the repetition of *public education is a market*, federal education policy discourse identifies public education more and more, over and over again, with a neoliberal market to the point that the market is essential to public education and, therefore, a part of public education's nature.

The naturalization of the arbitrary engendered by metaphor illustrates one facet of the role tropes play in the persistence of policy. Repetition is the primary technique of persistence for the trope of metaphor. As the above analysis shows, *public education is a market* persists across a significant span of federal education policy discourse through its repetition. However, this is not the only means by which tropes contribute to persistence through naturalization. In the next chapter, I introduce the concept of organicism employed by the trope of synecdoche whereby a discourse closes itself off as an independent whole. This encapsulation makes the application of that discourse one which naturalizes multiple phenomena as parts integral to the operation of the whole such that the whole becomes an organism whose well-being relies upon the proper ordering and functioning of its parts.

CHAPTER FOUR

SYNECDOCHE AND THE FIGURATION OF PLACE IN FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSE

While several education policy studies have paid close attention to the trope of metaphor as a tool for policy analysis, synecdoche remains unacknowledged. This chapter speaks to this silence in order to show that synecdoche offers a different tack of engagement for policy analysis, particularly regarding the naturalization of a discourse through the organic arrangement of parts and wholes. One purpose of this engagement is to provide an analysis that isolates neoliberal discourse's formative role across several policies, and it is in this sense that this chapter mirrors the previous metaphor analysis. Different from the previous chapter, however, the following synecdochic analysis focuses on how neoliberal discourse produces and reconfigures *places* of public education into an organic whole. This shift in focus shows how the text of federal education policy discourse inscribes the places of public education according to neoliberal discourse. More specifically, I examine the same texts of federal education policy discourse analyzed in chapter three to show how a specific discourse, in this case neoliberalism, discursively perpetuates itself through the synecdochic mapping and remapping of a range of places, namely from the nation to the schoolhouse and, most recently, to school personnel. Given this dissertation's emphasis on what tropes *do*, this chapter's second purpose argues that discursive synecdoche operates to figure place in terms of neoliberal discourse.

In order to arrive at this conclusion, I first consider a small body of literature that uses synecdoche as a central trope in order to better situate my use of synecdoche as an operation of discourse. Then I detail the concept of discursive synecdoche as employed

for the subsequent policy analysis. And finally, I turn to the texts of federal education policy discourse used in the previous chapter to illustrate what synecdoche does to naturalize neoliberal discourse through a place-based inscription of the free market, thus accounting for the persistence of this discourse through the figuring of part and wholes rendered such that each can stand in for the other.

What Is Synecdoche?

In general, synecdoche is the trope that figures a relationship between parts and wholes such that a part stands in for the whole or *vice versa*. For instance, to use a traditional example, when a sailor refers to a ship as a sail he uses a part of the ship to represent the entire ship. Or when a cattle rancher refers to her thirty cows as thirty head the head stands in for the entire cow. The relationship also works in reverse: the whole can represent the part. I can say “the world is against me” when I am referring to some particular circumstance that I represent as the whole world. With the general figure of synecdoche so defined, there are particular modes of synecdoche which will help delineate the specific use I make of the trope in analyzing federal education policy discourse.¹

Much in the way that tropology serves a number of functions, so synecdoche can be used for figurations of part and whole at different levels of analysis. For instance, what I call literary synecdoche involves the use of the part to whole relationship to figure poetry and prose. In T.S. Eliot’s lines “And time for all the works and days of hands/

¹ In what follows I describe three modes of synecdoche. This is not to claim there is no overlap between modes or that this is an exhaustive rendering of all synecdochic modes. I present the following modes to highlight that there are multiple uses of synecdoche, and more generally tropology, of which this chapter is but one example.

That lift and drop a question on your plate,”² synecdoche allows hands to represent both workers and clocks. This mode operates at the level of the word or sentence and represents the more classical rendering of the figure of speech or thought. Another usage operates at the level of thought, and, recalling Lakoff’s theory of metaphor, this mode offers a cognitive theory of synecdoche. Cognitive synecdoche explains lived experience in terms of parts and wholes where lived experience has ontological priority over the discursive production of experience. In other words, lived experience is a result of being and acts as evidence and expression of this being. Plato’s macrocosm/microcosm story in his *Republic* exemplifies this mode. When Socrates begins his conversation on justice he claims the soul is writ large in the city, which leads him to establish the tripartite division of the soul onto the whole of *kallipolis* (the city in speech).³ Socrates represents the part and the whole by the soul and the city, respectively, and each can stand in place of the other cognitively. This cognitive mode of synecdoche prioritizes an ontology of experience such that the soul of the citizen of *kallipolis*, to continue with the example, and *kallipolis* itself are manifestations of perfected being, i.e., if human error weren’t always getting in the way of the perfect operation of the soul, *kallipolis* would be actual. Given this dissertation’s anti-foundational tack, the ontological ground required by cognitive synecdoche yields to an analysis of the modes of ground production, one of which is discursive synecdoche. *Discursive synecdoche entails the ways in which a discourse articulates part and whole relationships to further extend and maintain its coverage of the field of discursivity.* Here some totalizing discourse, a term I explicate

² Thomas Stearns Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006), 2611.

³ Harold Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1968). See in particular p. 45 (line 368d).

below, represents the whole, and the parts include the places inscribed according to that discourse. While the microcosm/macrocosm relationship found in the cognitive approach remains operative within discursive synecdoche, the difference for discursive synecdoche is how discourse articulates its cosmos, rather than reveals a pre-existing one. Within the terms of this chapter's analysis, neoliberalism as a totalizing discourse articulates itself as whole capable of representing the parts of the nation, states, school districts, schools, and teachers in such a way that these parts can also stand in for the whole of neoliberal discourse.

The Operations of Synecdoche

The present use of synecdoche emanates largely from the scholarship surrounding fourfold tropology.⁴ As such, I rely on this typology of tropes as a point of comparison, not to present it as a final solution. In other words, my use of synecdoche, while deriving from fourfold tropology, does not follow from the idea that tropology in general operates along the lines of only these four tropes; rather, due to the lack of tropological analysis in policy, I use this model as a starting point, but my intention is not to marry future tropological projects to it. Of particular interest to this chapter is the role of synecdoche in naturalization. Drawing upon Vico's use of synecdoche as the trope that centers man as the qualification for mortality, Burke's link of synecdoche to representation, and White's claim that synecdoche establishes the argument of organicism, the significance

⁴ Fourfold tropology can be traced to Petrus Ramus' *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian*; however, I will identify this variation of tropology in *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976); Kenneth Burke, "Appendix D: Four Master Tropes," in *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1945): 503-17; and Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

of this trope within these frameworks is synecdoche's ability to create a system, though the details of what constitutes a system vary somewhat across these authors.

As with metaphor, the work of Vico inaugurates the trope of synecdoche in terms of what it does. In his *New Science*, he claims that through synecdoche "particulars were elevated into universals or parts united with the other parts together with which they make up their wholes."⁵ In the trope of synecdoche, Vico locates what might stand as the founding gesture of humanism: "the term 'mortals' was originally and properly applied only to men, as the only beings whose mortality there was any occasion to notice."⁶ Synecdoche for Vico extends beyond mere literary status and functions to attribute the whole of mortality to only one of its parts, i.e., men. The ability to set criteria for membership into mortality that synecdoche performs in this example shows the role this trope plays in figuring a system. With man representing mortality, synecdoche functions to discern what may and may not be included within the whole of mortality. Because man becomes the included part, mortality is defined anthro-centrally and, given the sweeping effects of anthro-centrism throughout modernity, such as deforestation, Vico's work intimates the power synecdoche holds in figuring a discourse.

More recently, Kenneth Burke looks at synecdoche's representative function. Drawing upon the field of politics, he locates synecdoche in "all theories of political representation where some part of the social body (either traditionally established, or elected, or coming into authority by revolution) is held to be 'representative' of the society as a whole."⁷ And he further generalizes, "in a complex civilization any act of

⁵ Vico, 117.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Burke, 508.

representation automatically implies a synecdochic relationship.”⁸ Here, like in Vico, synecdoche engages in the process of system creation, i.e., a social group comes to represent the entire social body, thus establishing a political system for all on the basis of a particular group.⁹ This operation of synecdoche comes closer to the one employed within this chapter in the sense that the synecdochic operation of neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse produces a system of public education according to which each of its parts stands in for the whole of neoliberal discourse. Moreover, as Burke points out, synecdoche “stresses a *relationship* or *connectedness* between two sides of an equation, a connectedness that, like a road, extends in either direction.”¹⁰ This chapter approaches synecdoche’s “relationship between two sides” as the mutually constitutive relationship between the whole and the part, or, neoliberal discourse and the places inscribed in federal education policy discourse. The point taken from Burke, then, is that a synecdochic analysis does not proceed in a unidirectional fashion. Neoliberal discourse is not an unchanging whole that can apply “wholesale” to all the places of education. Instead, neoliberal discourse requires a flexibility that allows adjustment in order to fit the parts under consideration. For example, neoliberal discourse applies differently to the nation compared to its application to the school. However, this flexibility aids in its persistence in the sense that the more a discourse can rearticulate itself according to different parts, the further and wider it can spread.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ While Burke is not alone in theorizing the phenomenon of one group constructing a political system that represents all members of the body politic, his originality comes by identifying this process as an operation of synecdoche. See, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, “The Bourgeois Public Sphere: Idea and Ideology,” in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 89-129.

¹⁰ Burke, 509.

Of central importance to the use of synecdoche in the following analysis is the operation of organicism it employs, a connection first made by Hayden White.¹¹ The concept of organicism has been theorized across a number of disciplines when addressing the surplus of the whole in relation to its parts. In biology, arguably the field most intimately connected to organicism because of its focus on living organisms, an organicist model maintains that all the parts of an organism collaborate in ways that, when taken together, yield emergent properties belonging to none of the parts individually.¹² According to Scott Gilbert and Sahotra Sarkar, this means that “the properties of each part are dependent upon the context of the part within the whole in which they operate. Thus, when we try to explain how the whole system behaves, we have to talk about the context of the whole and cannot get away talking only about the parts.”¹³ In economics, one finds organicism in the invisible hand of Adam Smith as the manipulation which exceeds the self-interested individual and manifests in the common weal, as well as in the work of John Maynard Keynes who arranged the individual within the economic whole whereby economics is the integument binding individuals and their relationships to one another.¹⁴ In social theory, the works of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, in their own ways, argue that society is a unified organism wherein its members function as parts of the greater whole.

¹¹ White, *Metahistory*.

¹² For an historical look at the concept of organicism in biology, see Garland E. Allen, "Mechanism, Vitalism and Organicism in Late Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Biology: The Importance of Historical Context," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 36, no. 2 (2005): 261-83.

¹³ Scott F. Gilbert and Sahotra Sarkar, "Embracing Complexity: Organicism for the 21st Century," *Developmental Dynamics* 219, no. 1 (2000): 1.

¹⁴ For a concise look at Keynes' qualified sense of organicism, see John B. Davis, "Keynes on Atomism and Organicism," *The Economic Journal* 99, no. 398 (1989): 1159-72.

The function of organicism, then, is to organize parts in such a way as to be able to point to the overall benefit of the whole. In biology, homeostasis is the healthy outcome of the interaction of an organism's parts that allows for the continuation of its life. Additionally, organicism in economics and social theory argue that the collaboration of parts, economic and social actors, respectively, manifests in some greater good, be it a stronger economy or a more just society, for example. This is not to say organicism is a better or worse paradigm than any other, but when organicism is employed as a "mode of explanation," to use Hayden White's term,¹⁵ a unique set of options are made available, not the least of which is the ability to base a normative system, in terms of health, growth, or justice, for instance, upon the perpetuation of whichever whole is identified as an organism.

White's *Metahistory* elicits a number of variables from the work of major historians and philosophers of history to claim that historical writing is figured tropologically and, as such, different tropological figurations render multiple structures from which historians and philosophers of history build their narrative. One arrangement he focuses on is the role of synecdoche in figuring the structure of organicism. White typifies the organicist historian as tending "to see individual entities as components of processes which aggregate into wholes that are greater than or qualitatively different from, the sum of their parts, [resulting in] some integrated entity whose importance is greater than that of any of the individual entities analyzed or described in the course of the narrative."¹⁶ Organicism, then, is integrative, and, recalling the synthetic work attributed to organicism referenced above, this integration organizes parts in such a

¹⁵ Hayden V. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 73.

¹⁶ White, *Metahistory*, 15.

manner that they are embedded in a whole which subsists (and persists) on the synthesized effort of those parts. Already readers can see the terms of synecdoche within the organicist framework; however, by aligning synecdoche with organicism, a specialized sense of synecdoche emerges, and it is in this sense that White utilizes synecdoche within historiography.

White defines synecdoche's part-whole relationship operation as specifically integrative. As such, he takes the classic sail standing in for the ship example as metonymic rather than synecdochic because the sail is not integrated into the whole of the ship; the ship and the sail share some quality but the ship is *reduced* to one of its parts, the sail. White uses, "He is all heart," as an example of synecdoche that integrates rather than reduces. If read metonymically, the He is reduced to his heart organ. However, the heart in this example is more than the organ that pumps blood throughout the body. The heart stands symbolically for a number of non-biological qualities. It is the *quality* of the heart that integrates both the heart and the He when read as synecdoche. Moreover, synecdoche holds constitutive powers for the formation of an essential nature. This is not a nature that, in the tradition of Ancient Greek philosophy, eternally belongs to and defines a substance; instead, synecdoche invents nature by arranging parts within a whole such that an instance of its articulation constitutes what is natural. Specifically, White emphasizes that synecdoche "designat[es] a totality ('He') which possesses some quality (generosity, compassion, etc.) that *suffuses and constitutes the essential nature of all the parts that make it up.*"¹⁷ The trope of synecdoche, then, constitutes nature by arranging an organic system of parts and wholes, and these operations are the focus of my analysis of the discursive functions of synecdoche. According to White's specialized sense of

¹⁷ Ibid., 36. Emphasis added.

synecdoche, I isolate two operations peculiar to this trope relevant to the persistence of a discourse. First, through its organicist function, synecdoche figures a closed totality whose persistence depends upon the functioning of the parts it fixes as integral to the whole. And second, synecdoche performs the operation of naturalization, i.e., the invention of nature such that, if successful, synecdoche naturalizes an arbitrary discourse across a number of parts. When taken together, discursive synecdoche produces a closure whereupon a discourse can fix itself as natural.

The Operations of Discursive Synecdoche

This section addresses the role synecdoche performs in the naturalization and fixation of a discourse. While the following analysis of U.S. education policy portrays discursive synecdoche at work, this section addresses the role synecdoche performs in the naturalization and fixation of a discourse. I rely upon Ernesto Laclau's theoretical framework and, different from Laclau, the role of discursive synecdoche in the formation of a totality in order to foreground and support my analysis with a more general set of guidelines through which the significance of discursive synecdoche in policy formation will become more salient.

Discursive synecdoche focuses on the operation of discourse in an integrative whole to part and part to whole relationship. I identify the whole as the totalizing discourse¹⁸ of neoliberalism found in U.S. education policy and reports and the integral parts as specific places that receive emphasis across these policies, namely, the nation, the state, the school district, the school, and the teacher. These places emphasized in federal education policy discourse are integral to neoliberal discourse, which performs as

¹⁸ See section below for theoretical grounding of the term "totalizing discourse."

the whole by mapping itself on to the various parts and reconstituting them. As such, neoliberalism becomes the essential nature of public education in the U.S.

In *On Populist Reason* Laclau presents his theory of hegemony as it relates to the formation of “a people.” Hegemony for Laclau is the “taking up, by a particularity, of an incommensurable universal signification.”¹⁹ Later, drawing on psychoanalytic notions of the drive, he writes, “the partial object ceases to be a partiality evoking a totality, and becomes... the *name* of that totality.”²⁰ Still later he phrases his theory in terms that echo the definition of synecdoche, claiming that “[t]he whole is always going to be embodied by the part. In terms of our analysis: there is no universality which is not a hegemonic one.”²¹ Laclau cites a number of historical examples, for instance the call for “Bread, Peace, and Land” from the Russian Revolution.²² These three simple words summate the entirety of the anti-Tsarist movement. Certainly they do not represent all the complex demands of each revolutionary member, hence Laclau’s emphasis on incommensurability. However, this slogan came to signify all the heterogeneous demands that fell under it. In terms of discursive synecdoche, the parts, i.e., demands, that make up the revolutionaries and their party establish a discourse of demands that becomes totalizing in its shift from particularity to universality. Given the above consideration of synecdoche, Laclau’s theory of hegemony is at least in part synecdochic.²³

¹⁹ *OPR*, 70. Laclau does not use the term hegemony as a pejorative. The hegemonic relation is “the kind of relation inherent to the political as such,” and, therefore, is neither a defamatory nor laudatory mark, but an expression of the political *par excellence*. For more on this point, see Ernesto Laclau, “Why Constructing a People Is the Main Task of Radical Politics,” *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Summer, 2006): 650.

²⁰ *OPR*, 114.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

²² See Laclau, “Why Constructing a People Is the Main Task of Radical Politics,” 655.

²³ In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau claims that “[The particular elevated to the status of a universal] gives clear centrality to a particular figure within the arsenal of classical rhetoric: synecdoche (the part representing the whole). It also suggests that synecdoche is not simply one more rhetorical device, simply to be taxonomically added to other figures such as metaphor and metonymy, but has a different ontological

To recall from chapter one, Laclau summarizes discourse as “any complex of elements in which *relations* play the constitutive role... elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it.”²⁴ Discourses all arise within the field of discursivity, which is always more than any discourse, or as Laclau and Mouffe put it, “all discourse is subverted by a field of discursivity which overflows it.”²⁵ The significant point here is that there is no total discourse. A discourse is totalizing by representing itself *as* a totality even though this totality is impossible to achieve due to the radical heterogeneity of demands the totality excludes. In this sense, the excluded demands constitute the limits of a discourse so that discourse can represent itself *as* a totality. In Laclau’s words, “totalization requires that one differential element should assume the representation of an impossible whole,”²⁶ where a differential element is the empty signifier that crystallizes the particular demands and serves to reconstitute the demands in question into a totalizing discourse. In other words, a discourse positions itself as the singular resolution to any and all demands. However, because of the inability of any discourse to answer all demands and cover completely the field of discursivity, a discourse does contain limits expressed through antagonisms. Laclau describes the antagonistic limits of discourse in neoliberalism:

[Neoliberalism] presents itself as a panacea for a fissureless society—with the difference that in this case [as compared to the discourse in favor of the welfare

function” (72). However, in his more recent work, he has done exactly this, claiming that “metaphor and metonymy... are not just some figures among many, but the two fundamental matrices around which all other figures and tropes should be ordered.” See Ernesto Laclau, “Articulation and the Limits of Metaphor,” in *A Time for the Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy*, ed. James Bono, Tim Dean, and Ewa Olonowska-Ziarek (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 66. While Laclau has, as of yet, offered no explanation as to why synecdoche has gone from centrally important to collapsible within the metaphor/metonymy spectrum, perhaps the present use of synecdoche will sway others to be cautious of simply deflating its role to a bit part in the larger play of metaphor and metonymy.

²⁴ *OPR*, 68.

²⁵ *HSS*, 113.

²⁶ *OPR*, 80-81.

state], the trick is performed by the market, not by the state... at some point, Margaret Thatcher found “obstacles,” started denouncing the parasites of social security and others, and ended up with one of the most aggressive discourses of social division in British history.²⁷

The welfare state, for Thatcher, represents the antagonistic limit of neoliberal discourse.

Recalling the work of Hayek and Friedman, readers can add to this list of the limits of neoliberal discourse socialism and Keynesianism. More generally, he later states that “no institutional totality can inscribe within itself, as positive moments, the ensemble of social demands.”²⁸ The point for this analysis, then, is that a totalizing discourse is one which represents itself as the whole while seeking wholeness; in short, it totalizes.

Discursive synecdoche within the context of neoliberal discourse performs the function of closure through the limits of the welfare state, socialism, and Keynesianism, among others. Through this closure, neoliberal discourse becomes a totalizing whole that requires the integration of parts for its persistence. Simultaneously, neoliberal discourse constitutes its parts such that they become its essential nature. For instance, once neoliberal discourse constitutes public education as one of its integral parts through the operation of discursive synecdoche, public education is essential to the free market and *vice versa*. Discursive synecdoche is successful in this example, when the nature of public education is neoliberal discourse. However, while instructive in its simplicity, this is a rather general example of discursive synecdoche in the context of public education. I now turn to federal education policy discourse to show in detail the more complex role discursive synecdoche plays in the persistence of neoliberal discourse.

²⁷ Ibid., 79.

²⁸ Ibid., 94.

Discursive Synecdoche in Federal Education Policy Discourse

As discussed in chapter three, the period between the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (ANR) and current education policy and reports is emblematic of bringing public schools into the domain of free market rule. When considered through discursive synecdoche, tracing the development of themes from ANR through *Goals 2000, America 2000*, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), and *Race to the Top* (RTT) indicates that their application has incrementally constricted the place of interest from the national level to the level of school personnel. At the federal level, policymakers map the totalizing discourse of free market rule onto smaller and smaller places of education. By isolating this process as an example of synecdoche, I forward the general thesis that *totalizing discourses use synecdoche in order to figure and contour places in ways that maintain and stabilize the discourse allowing further totalization with the net effect of a discourse's persistence*. Within the context of federal education policy discourse's relationship with neoliberal discourse, the specific thesis reads *neoliberal discourse uses synecdoche in order to figure and contour the nation, state, school district, school, and school staff in ways that allow further totalization of neoliberal discourse with the net effect of the persistence of neoliberal discourse*.

I apply synecdoche to place in order to provide a mode of analysis that examines the discursive figuration of place through tropes. This combination is useful in highlighting the figurations of political, historical, and social places with the express interest of depicting the transitory and contingent character of these formations. This combinatory methodology elicits the figurative logics at work in the formation, maintenance, and disintegration of those places. The following analysis uses the trope of

synecdoche to expose the discursive construction and maintenance of the places engendered by federal education policy discourse. This chapter, then, elicits, through the trope of synecdoche, the discourse of neoliberalism in U.S. education policy to show how federal education policy renders places in competition with one another and, subsequently, naturalizes those places as integral parts of the larger marketplace.

The analysis proceeds along the following trajectory: 1) At the national level, federal policy for public education links schooling with the United States' position in the globally competitive marketplace; 2) At the state and district levels, this national position is assured through competition for funding between districts as distributed at the states' discretion; 3) At the level of the school, through current policy measures, public schools are conceived as individual enterprises which, if they fail to serve the market of students and parents, are closed for business; 4) At the level of the school personnel, competitive funding federally allocated based upon the state-wide implementation of merit pay, value-added assessment, and linking test scores to evaluations establishes competitive frameworks for and between school personnel.²⁹ Restated in terms of the specific documents analyzed herein, *ANR*, as its title indicates, deals primarily with the national level. *America 2000* maintains the national level emphasis of *ANR*, and uniquely articulates a bottom-up notion of reform which it vaguely locates in communities. *Goals 2000* is unique in folding states and districts into a competitive framework. *NCLB*

²⁹ This is not to claim that the different levels of application, from nation to school, even further to classroom and teacher, are not all influenced by education policy. However, the documents differently and continually evoke a cardinal level of application for policy. *ANR* and *America 2000*, as their title exhibits, deal primarily with the national level. *Goals 2000* is unique in identifying states and districts in particular. *NCLB* articulates individual schools as its particular place of application. And *RTT* focuses on linking test scores to individual teachers as a means of evaluation.

articulates individual schools as its particular place of application. And *RTT* focuses on linking test scores to individual teachers and principals as a means of evaluation.

The National Level: *A Nation at Risk*

Recalling how the discourse of neoliberalism in education grew dramatically during the 1980s with the election of Ronald Reagan and his use of Milton Friedman's neoliberal theory of economics, the first example of federal education policy discourse for this analysis is *ANR*. It is in this document that I locate, at the national level, the application of the totalizing discourse of neoliberalism to education. This report famously warns that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people."³⁰ In particular, the U.S. is under threat of losing its place in the global market: "our once preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world."³¹ The document locates competition in the efficiency of Japanese automobile manufacturing, South Korean steel mills, and German tools. *ANR* positions the United States' public school system as the cause of the nation's losing economic ground to these global competitors. The report lists thirteen educational indicators of risk, but it hones in on low literacy rates, standardized test scores, and complaints from business and military leaders about their publicly schooled workers. *ANR* maps all of these indicators onto the national system of education. Additionally, this report marks the federal government's involvement in public schooling by forwarding a link between public schooling and the economic success of the United States. As the report states, "the public understands the primary importance of education

³⁰ *ANR*, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*

as the foundation for a satisfying life, an enlightened and civil society, a strong economy, and a secure Nation.”³² Simply put, everyone knows that if the public school system persists in its “mediocrity,” the United States cannot secure its place as a viable competitor in the global market.

The report points to the place of the U.S. among other countries throughout its pages. In its introduction, “[America’s] once unchallenged preeminence... is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world... [and] others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.”³³ *ANR* articulates the goals of the competition among nations in terms of place as well, stating that

[Americans] live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America’s position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer.³⁴

ANR couches goals in terms of an international competition for standing and markets, and these are obtained through laboratories and workshops that articulate America’s positioning therein. In other words, the U.S. competes for a place (standing and markets) and succeeds in this competition through other places (labs and workshops) in order to secure its place (position). The report insists on the connection between public education at the national level and the place of the U.S. in the global market. *ANR* articulates a worldview in which the U.S. is in economic competition with a number of other countries and pins the success or failure of the U.S. to its institutions of public education. Thus, *ANR* renders U.S. public education as *the* constitutive factor for the economic standing of

³² Ibid., 16.

³³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴ Ibid., 6.

the U.S. among other nations. Subsequently, public education constitutes the essential nature of the place of the United States to such a degree that the report concludes, “America’s *place* in the world will be either secured or forfeited”³⁵ depending on the ability of public education to make the U.S. into a winner in the marketplace. In fact, as the emphasis notes, *ANR* claims that what is at stake for the U.S. is specifically a place in the world among other nations.

At this point of the analysis, *ANR*, as an articulation of federal education policy discourse, renders U.S. public education essential to the place of the U.S. among other nations in terms of economic competition. As an example of discursive synecdoche, public education is not merely a part of the United States, but a part that suffuses and determines the place of the whole nation. Within *ANR*, public education’s essential-ness to the place of the U.S. among other nations constitutes the nation according to its place. This articulation of essential-ness and constitution of place makes clear the part standing in for the whole, i.e., U.S. public education stands in for America’s place in international competition. Yet this place is specifically one defined by neoliberal discourse, as the repeated reference to international competition makes clear, and, within this totalizing discourse, *ANR* provides an example of the other direction of discursive synecdoche, namely from whole to part.

In the direction of whole to part, neoliberal discourse stands in for public education: neoliberal discourse claims that public education is an undifferentiated place that naturally and organically operates according to the rules of neoliberalism. For instance, *ANR* takes a level by level approach to constituting different parts of education

³⁵ Ibid., 36. Emphasis added.

according to “excellence” which contains a particularly neoliberal meaning. The report proceeds from the level of the individual to that of society.

[The authors of the report] define “excellence” to mean several related things. At the level of the *individual learner*, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a *school or college* that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. Excellence characterizes a *society* that has adopted these policies, for it will then be prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Our Nation’s people and its schools and colleges must be committed to achieving excellence in all the senses.³⁶

Taking into account that *ANR* regards performance, expectations, goals, and the challenges of the rapidly changing world in terms of the place of the U.S. in economic competition, neoliberal discourse constitutes individuals, education institutions, and society at large all as integral parts to its persistence. The whole of neoliberal discourse stands in for each of these parts and constitutes them according to its rules and assumptions.

Elsewhere, *ANR* forecasts the end of times unless the American people “demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry.”³⁷ *ANR* synecdochically conjures countless parts—all citizens, all students, all Americans—into a singular, totalizing discursive whole—the U.S. position in the global market. And, finally, *ANR* concludes with the same aggregative tactic, but in much more detail, to argue for neoliberal education reform. The report enlists,

the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, Science Service, National Science Foundation, Social Science Research Council, American Council of Learned Societies, National Endowment

³⁶ Ibid., 12-13.

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, and other scholarly, scientific, and learned societies for their help in this effort. Help should come from students themselves; from parents, teachers, and school boards; from colleges and universities; from local, State, and Federal officials; from teachers' and administrators' organizations; from industrial and labor councils; and from other groups with interest in and responsibility for educational reform.³⁸

Taken together, it is difficult to imagine a more inclusive way of addressing what falls within the limits of the United States. *ANR* composes governmental and non-governmental institutions as well as individuals of every sort, from individual learners to the conglomeration of the American people, and even American society, all according to education reform in the key of neoliberal discourse. Thus, in the whole to part operation of discursive synecdoche, the totalizing discourse of neoliberalism stands in for education reform and all the parts that are associated with it.

ANR represents a major victory for neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse in terms of its use of discursive synecdoche. *ANR* is a document that articulates the desire for more and more places needed by a discourse in order to continue its totalizing expansion. Given that the system of public schools in the U.S. is one of the largest public programs in the nation, a mapping of neoliberal discourse on and in this terrain represents a major victory for the free market. However, *ANR* is a mitigated victory due to its status as a commissioned report. Once the policy of later presidential administrations takes up its recommendations, neoliberal discourse, through discursive synecdoche, further contours the places of education.

The National and Community Levels: *America 2000*

Through discursive synecdoche, *America 2000* operates at the levels of the nation and the community. The national level is in many ways a repetition of what *ANR* entails

³⁸ Ibid., 36.

in the sense that they both articulate the nation as a place bounded by international competition. As *America 2000* warns,

Serious efforts at education improvement are under way by most of our international competitors and trading partners. Yet while we spend as much per student as almost any country in the world, American students are at or near the back of the pack in international comparisons. If we don't make radical changes, that is where we are going to stay.³⁹

The report presents the problem in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. Public education costs the U.S. *x* amount of dollars comparable to other nations, yet the U.S. is not benefiting from this expenditure. Without “radical changes,” the U.S. is, once again, at risk of losing the competition with other nations. Moreover, the report argues,

[w]hile the age of technology, information, and communications rewards those nations whose people learn new skills to stay ahead, we are still a nation that groans at the prospect of going back to school. At best, we are reluctant students in a world that rewards learning.⁴⁰

America 2000 intones the national level here specifically in terms of the rewards the winners of the competition will receive and links the unsatisfactory position of the U.S. in this international competition with a national sense of apathy towards education, a disaffection that apparently typifies the current education system at large so that “[u]ntil last year [when the ESC convened], few could even describe our education goals. As a nation, we didn't really have any.”⁴¹ *America 2000* in this sense briefly reminds its readers of the points established in *ANR*, namely that the U.S. is losing its preeminence in the global marketplace and that the evidence and cause of this loss of place is the U.S. public education system. As such, this report applies the whole of neoliberal discourse to the nation in order to call for education reform that will restore the nation to its top

³⁹ *America 2000*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

position in the global marketplace. Under the auspices of this particular kind of reform, neoliberal discourse can then stand in for the nation, i.e., the more the nation resembles neoliberal discourse the better economic position the nation will hold, and recursively the nation can stand in for neoliberal discourse, i.e., the more neoliberal discourse resembles the nation the more territory the discourse can cover.

America 2000 recalls the national level of competition with which *ANR* familiarizes its readers; however, it also introduces the level of communities to federal education policy discourse. While this latter level is articulated vaguely as a conglomeration of local institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, and individuals, *America 2000* assigns a unique role to communities. They function in a bottom-up manner as the locus of neoliberal education reform and, as such, serve to close the loop, so to speak, between the part/whole relationship typical of discursive synecdoche. In other words, it is a discourse that persists through its own maintenance and extension by arranging parts and wholes in a co-constitutive manner. Through the articulation of what the report terms “AMERICA 2000 Communities,” *America 2000* names local institutions and individuals as agents of neoliberal discourse upon whom the extension of neoliberal discourse is incumbent. This move reinforces the reduction of governmental intervention in public education and renders these communities constituted by and constitutive of neoliberal discourse. Under *America 2000*,

The president will call on every community in the land to do four things: adopt the six national education goals for itself, establish a community-wide strategy for achieving them, develop a report card for measuring its progress and demonstrate its readiness to create and support a New American School. Communities that accept this challenge will be designated... as ‘AMERICA 2000 Communities.’⁴²

⁴² Ibid., 27.

Recalling the ways in which neoliberal discourse informs the six education goals of *America 2000* from the previous chapter, as an operation of discursive synecdoche, “every community in the land” addresses all the parts of the nation and directs each part to the same goals while the strategy for achieving them is community-based.

Nevertheless, *America 2000* does not define the term community clearly. Instead the report relies upon the collective yet local sense of community in order to place the responsibility of reform within community’s undefined (undefinable?) bounds: “[*America 2000*] recognizes that real education reform happens community by community,”⁴³ and “much of the work of creating and sustaining healthy communities, communities where education really happens, can only be performed by those who live in them.”⁴⁴ This report, then, shows how communities comprise the organic whole of neoliberal discourse for federal education policy discourse. *America 2000* shifts focus on education reform away from government involvement and places its enactment into communities, a place which, while comprised in part by local government, is notable because of its largely non-governmental composition. Specifically, education reform is a community matter and must take place there and, subsequently, even though this education reform emanates from the federal level, its success or failure is linked to the local, rather than federal, level. The report emphasizes its non-federal status, claiming, “*America 2000* is a national strategy, not a federal program. It honors local control, relies on local initiative, affirms states and localities as the senior partners in paying for education and recognizes the private sector as a vital partner.”⁴⁵ While one may argue logically that this claim confuses the reform it creates and promotes nationally as taking place at the community

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

level, when taken as an articulation of discursive synecdoche, the success of this statement is precisely this confusion. Namely, by conflating the nation with the community, the whole of neoliberal discourse smoothly applies to the nation and all its communities, thus aligning the parts organically into a discourse that calls for the drastic reduction of government and making the parts integral to the whole of the discourse. Yet, because of the bidirectionality of discursive synecdoche, this is not a purely bottom-up reform effort, from community to nation. Instead, while communities are the places in which “real education reform” takes place, the *kind* of reform to take place still occurs at the national level.

America 2000 calls for the establishment and national dissemination of the American Achievement Test tied to World Class Standards. While these were discussed in terms of metaphor above, through the mode of discursive synecdoche, the emphasis shifts to the part and whole relationship. The report articulates the bidirectional relationship of synecdoche when it describes itself as “enlist[ing] communities...in devising their own plans to break the mold and create their one-of-a-kind high-performance schools. It also relies on clear, rigorous measures of success—the World Class Standards and American Achievement Tests.”⁴⁶ While the parts are responsible for achieving this neoliberal model of reform, the report directs these parts to the whole of neoliberal discourse which, in this case, appears at the level of international competition. Hence, the “world class” categorization of the standards, and the indicator of the place of the nation in that competition is American achievement. The report reiterates this bidirectionality:

⁴⁶ Ibid, 25.

We will unleash America's creative genius to invent and establish a New Generation of American Schools, one by one, community by community. These will be the best schools in the world, schools that enable their students to reach the national education goals, to achieve a quantum leap in learning and to help make America all that it should be.⁴⁷

In this example, the whole of America's genius invents each individual school and community and these schools will, in turn, be the best in the whole world specifically through their adherence to goals set at the national level, thus attaining America's proper place. Discursive synecdoche is operative in both of these passages to the degree that they forward an organic system which provides the logic for uninterrupted movement between the world, the nation, the community, and the school.

Through the trope of discursive synecdoche, *America 2000* figures parts and wholes between which the report can transition. Additionally, given the particular aim of international competition through workforce production the report attributes to U.S. public education, neoliberal discourse underpins these transitions and provides the logic for their seamless integration. Neoliberal discourse defines the parts and wholes of education reform in this report. Thus, whether at the level of the nation or the community, neoliberal discourse constitutes the essential nature of education reform.

The Level of the School District: *Goals 2000*

In the adoption of *America 2000*'s six goals and the addition of two more, *Goals 2000* offers a new level of application for neoliberal discourse. It also holds a unique position within this analysis because it is the first articulation of federal education policy discourse that is a policy; therefore, *Goals 2000* assigns trajectories for national education reform and ties consequences to institutions of U.S. public education based on their adherence to this model of reform. Repeating the goals of *America 2000*, *Goals*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

2000 aggregates all the parts of education into the national level. Its introduction exemplifies this aggregation, announcing itself as

An act [t]o improve learning and teaching by providing *a national framework for education reform*; to promote the research, consensus building, and systemic changes needed to ensure equitable educational opportunities and high levels of educational achievement for *all students*; to provide a framework for reauthorization of *all Federal education programs*; to promote the development and adoption of *a voluntary national system of skill standards and certifications*; and for other purposes.⁴⁸

This policy extends its purview to education reform, students, federal programs, and skills-based standards and certification, each at the national level, thus articulating multiple parts into a cohesive whole that the policy directs toward the National Education Goals.

By aggregating a number of parts at the national level, the policy is able to direct this singular national body toward a list of purposes which include “internationally competitive content and student performance standards,” measures that “reflect the internationally competitive content and student performance standards” by “providing a framework for the reauthorization of all Federal education programs” through “internationally competitive content and student performance standards and strategies that all students will be expected to achieve,” and “internationally competitive opportunity-to-learn standards that all States, local educational agencies, and schools should achieve.”⁴⁹ Add to this the purpose of “stimulating the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards and certification to serve as a cornerstone of the national strategy to enhance workforce skills”⁵⁰ and *Goals 2000*

⁴⁸ United States Congress, *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, 103rd Congress, 2nd sess. January 25, 1994 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994). Emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Sec. 2. 4. A; Sec. 2. 4. B; Sec. 2. 6; Sec. 2. 6. B; and Sec. 2. 6. C.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Sec. 2. 7.

declares international competition a significant objective of national education reform and constitutes the direction of U.S. education as one which prepares students and trains workers for this neoliberal version of competition. As an operation of discursive synecdoche, in both its introduction and its stated purposes, *Goals 2000* aggregates multiple education-related institutions, subjects, and activities into a singular national body and renders this body according to the whole of neoliberal discourse such that schools, students, and education reform are each constituted according to international competition. This aggregation at the national level and succeeding constitution according to neoliberal discourse is nothing new for federal education policy discourse, as illustrated by the above analysis of *ANR* and *America 2000*. Different from the previous policies, however, *Goals 2000* figures the school district into a microcosm of neoliberal discourse.

Goals 2000 establishes a competitive framework for district-based allocation of federal funding. The policy states, “largely through State awards that are distributed on a competitive basis to local school districts, *Goals 2000* promotes education reform in every State and thousands of districts and schools.”⁵¹ *Goals 2000* requires that the school districts compete with one another for sub-grants issued by their respective states.⁵² All school districts seeking funding through *Goals 2000* must submit a “local improvement plan” to their state educational agency (SEA) that will

address districtwide education improvement, directed at enabling all students to meet the State content standards and State student performance standards, including specific goals and benchmarks, reflect the priorities of the State improvement plan (either approved or under development) [and] promote the

⁵¹ United States Department of Education, *Goals 2000: Reforming Education to Improve Student Achievement* (April 30, 1998), i. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/g2kfinal.pdf>. (Last accessed on 10/08/10)..

⁵² *Goals 2000*, Title III, Sec. 309. a. 1. A.

flexibility of local schools in developing plans which address the particular needs of their school and community and are consistent with the local improvement plan.⁵³

Here, the policy orchestrates an array of places (parts) toward state standards and assessments that, as discussed in the previous chapter, set the goals of U.S. public education in terms of producing students with knowledge and skills that will allow them to compete in the marketplace.

When considered as an operation of discursive synecdoche, *Goals 2000* maintains the national level of application in *ANR* and *America 2000*, but elicits a new part, the school district, to which neoliberal discourse serves as the whole. Whereas the prior efforts of *ANR* and *America 2000* mapped neoliberal discourse at the national level, the former in terms of the U.S. loss of place in international competition and the latter in similar terms with the addition of the American Achievement Test and World Class Standards, *Goals 2000* refines the place of application to states and school districts and, thereby, creates a new collection of parts onto which federal education policy discourse maps the whole of neoliberal discourse. This policy offers a new focus that refigures the relationship between states and districts. By requiring that states disburse funds to school districts on a competitive model, neoliberal discourse entrenches itself in the relations between nation, state, and district in new ways for education.

Moreover, *Goals 2000* generates the macrocosm/microcosm relationship characteristic of discursive synecdoche, wherein discourse invents rather than reveals its cosmos. By entering school districts into competition with one another, *Goals 2000* invents a micro-market within the macro-market of neoliberalism. School districts, in order to receive federal funding under this policy, submit an improvement plan that

⁵³ Ibid., Title III, Sec. 309. a. 3. B. and C.

shows how their district is able to produce the reform of standards and assessments geared toward “creative and innovative approaches by individual schools to help all students achieve internationally competitive standards.”⁵⁴ And, in order to be awarded a sub-grant from their state, a school district must be able to show that it can achieve this reform better than the other school districts in its state. In neoliberal terms, enterprises (school districts) are better competitors when they supply what the market demands (internationally competitive standards). *Goals 2000* successfully refigures school districts according to market logic, thus the policy invents school districts anew so they become a microcosm of the neoliberal discourse macrocosm. Said differently, the competition of the school district market can stand in for the competition of neoliberal discourse and neoliberal discourse now informs the relationships between school districts as well as with the state.

The unique focus of *Goals 2000* when considered with its predecessors exhibits a movement, or trajectory, of neoliberal discourse in education. *ANR* and *America 2000* attune education reform to neoliberal discourse with an emphasis on international competition and the place of the U.S. within that competition. *Goals 2000* maintains this attunement and introduces the relationship between states and school districts to neoliberal discourse, thus creating a macrocosm/microcosm relationship between neoliberal markets and school districts. Considered diachronically, readers can trace a trajectory moving from the national level to the level of the state and the school district. With the first movement of this trajectory outlined, the next movement will remake the relationship of whole to part on a smaller scale, that of the individual school.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Title III, Sec. 301. 4.

The School Level: *No Child Left Behind*

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* brings into heavy relief the neoliberal discourse that currently shapes educational policy. However, the policy also represents a major shift away from the language of international competition. Whereas the policies considered above make frequent use of this phrase, it appears nowhere in *NCLB*. Consequently, the aggregative qualities of *ANR*, *America 2000*, and *Goals 2000* that manifest a link between U.S. public education and a national crisis of competition in the international marketplace yields to a disaggregative emphasis at the level of the school in *NCLB* through the implementation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This is not to say that competition is not operative in *NCLB*. But the register of competition within the text of *NCLB* is predominantly evoked in terms of providing federal grants, i.e., SEAs and LEAs compete for a multitude of federal grants under *NCLB*. *NCLB* gears competition toward the closure of the achievement gap as indicated through the disaggregated AYP measure.

As mentioned previously, the overarching goal of *NCLB* is to close the achievement gap. The policy locates this gap “between high- and low-performing children, especially... between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.”⁵⁵ Accordingly, AYP is a measurement based on the performance of subgroups of students within a school on standards-based assessments developed and distributed at the state level. *NCLB* requires that schools reduce or erase the difference in test scores that correlate with the racial and socio-economic makeup of that school. In addition to these categories, *NCLB* requires

⁵⁵ United States Congress, *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 107th Congress, January 8, 2002 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994), Title I, Sec. 1101, 3.

that schools measure AYP for students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. In other words, a school that has a significant difference in assessment scores between minority and non-minority students, differently advantaged students, etc., must reduce the differences in scores such that all students are performing at a proficient level regardless of their race, class, or ability. AYP is the basis for accountability systems that states use to measure and determine whether a school must undergo sanctioning, and, as detailed earlier, *NCLB* holds a unique place in the trajectory of neoliberal discourse traced in this dissertation in that it is the first federal policy to attach consequences to accountability. With these approaches to closing the achievement gap, the AYP measure extends neoliberal discourse to the racial and socio-economic makeup of individual schools. *NCLB* accomplishes this extension through the disaggregation of AYP data which

includes separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for each of the following: (I) The achievement of all public elementary school and secondary school students. (II) The achievement of economically disadvantaged students; students from major racial and ethnic groups; students with disabilities; and students with limited English proficiency.⁵⁶

AYP, while aggregated at the school level for all students, is simultaneously disaggregated based on race, class, ability, and English proficiency, which means that schools must calculate AYP for each subgroup of students in addition to their entire student body. Moreover, according to the policy,

Each State shall establish statewide annual measurable objectives... which... shall identify a single minimum percentage of students who are required to meet or exceed the proficient level on the academic assessments that applies separately to each group of students described in [the paragraph quoted directly above].⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., Title I, SubPart A, Sec. 1111. b. 2. C.v.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Title I, SubPart A, Sec. 1111. b. 2. G. iii.

With the addition of this clause, the AYP measure calculated according to the test scores of all students within a school is equal to the disaggregated AYP measure of each individual subgroup of students. Said differently, if a single subgroup within a school does not meet the AYP measure for an academic year, the state identifies the entire school as failing to meet AYP.

Understood as an operation of discursive synecdoche, AYP designates the totality of a school as successful or failing according to the aggregate test scores of the students within that school and, simultaneously, constitutes the essential nature of that totality's parts whereby each individual subgroup stands in for the whole school's success or failure depending upon that subgroups ability to meet AYP. As parts, the subgroups of race, class, ability, and English proficiency each stands for the whole of AYP in the sense that if any one subgroup (part) fails to obtain an acceptable score on a test, the entire school (whole) fails. Also, given the link between AYP and neoliberal discourse by way of accountability, *NCLB* further fixes neoliberal discourse as a natural framework for education reform by suffusing the entire school as well as the subgroups that comprise its student population in an environment based on AYP and accountability. However, this is not the only manner in which discursive synecdoche operates through *NCLB* to naturalize neoliberal discourse's persistence in federal education policy discourse.

In addition to the disaggregative component of *NCLB* represented through the AYP measure, *NCLB* also establishes the macrocosm/microcosm relationship of neoliberal discourse to individual schools. *Goals 2000* produces this relationship by placing school districts into a competitive relationship for state issued sub-grants, a relationship *NCLB* maintains; however, *NCLB* extends the macrocosm/microcosm

relationship through its tiered sanctioning process for schools that fail to meet AYP. Recall from the previous chapter, should a school fail to meet AYP, a series of annual cumulative sanctions defined by *NCLB* are implemented, thus bolstering, as an operation of discursive metaphor, the identification and grounding of neoliberal discourse within federal education policy discourse. As an operation of discursive synecdoche, these sanctions incrementally refigure individual schools into parts of neoliberal discourse such that they mirror the whole of neoliberalism as constitutive organs of the free market. As detailed earlier, the first sanction applied to schools that fail to meet AYP is the implementation of choice. The parents of students who attend a failing school, under *NCLB*, can take their child out of that school and place them in one that is successfully meeting AYP. This first sanction, then, renders schools as individual enterprises that must keep up with demand (meet AYP) in order to maintain their customer base (students and their parents) or risk losing that base to another enterprise that successfully meets demand. Thus, through this initial sanction, schools operate according to the free market principle of decreased government involvement, i.e., the government no longer dictates the particular school a student must attend, and increased consumer choice. Through the school choice provision, *NCLB* collapses the school into neoliberal discourse such that the free market is the school writ large. Furthermore, through this measure, schools become examples of neoliberal discourse, thus allowing the discourse to further cover the field of discursivity.

The second sanction further suffuses schools with neoliberal discourse. After failing to meet AYP for three consecutive years, with school choice remaining in effect, a failing school must open its doors to supplementary educational service providers (SES).

SEs are often private companies who offer tutoring services. The use of for- and non-profit companies, such as Sylvan Learning Centers,⁵⁸ for public school remediation embeds neoliberal discourse in two ways. First, SEs further reduce the role of government in public schools by shifting the responsibility of school reform away from itself and toward non-governmental organizations. Second, by advancing non-governmental school reform, the enlistment of private companies to do what public schools have failed to do reiterates the operation of neoliberal discourse by endorsing the ability of private companies to succeed where public institutions have failed. Additionally, by requiring schools to obtain SEs, schools become a market for private companies to compete for a share: the policy fashions schools into a microcosm of neoliberalism such that with and through SEs neoliberal discourse finds new inroads for its extension and persistence.

The third sanction takes the form of selecting one corrective action from a menu. While, again, this reinforces the notion of choice, the focal point of school improvement changes direction—from the parents and students served by the school to the staff employed by it. In other words, whereas *NCLB* initially seeks school improvement by opening up other schools to parents and students, or, in neoliberal terms, expanding the market choices available to consumers, this third sanction focuses on the school as a failing (though not yet failed) enterprise. According to the principles of neoliberal discourse, this means that the employees of the failing enterprise, those workers who produce, manage, and deliver the education-product, have thus far not met the demand of

⁵⁸ Each State Dept. of Education has a directory of SEs available online. One example, from Georgia, can be found at <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/2007-2008%20Alphabetical%20List%20of%20SEs%20Providers.PDF?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6A249535CC646219008FA12563DF8B79090D914C7C3E25FDF&Type=D>. Last accessed on 10/08/10.

the market; therefore, the enterprise must re-evaluate its processes and producers in order to correct this lapse. Under *NCLB* correction takes the form of either replacing those workers “relevant to the failure,” retraining the entire staff with a new curriculum, reducing the ability of management to make decisions (assuming that the previous decisions by management are what landed the school in this predicament), appointing an outside expert with whom the school can consult on the best course of action for meeting AYP, extending the amount of time the school is in session, or restructuring the school’s internal organization.⁵⁹ Different from the previous sanctions, each of the corrective actions focuses on the failing school and the role its staff takes in that failure. Whereas the first sanction situates a school among other schools through choice, and the second offers a supplement to schools in the form of non-governmental organizations, this third sanction enters into the school to change its operations and staff. As such, *NCLB* turns the failing school into a failing enterprise that, in line with neoliberal discourse, must substantially reform its internal organization, through staff replacement, retraining, expert consultation, or extended hours of operation, in order to meet the demand that it is currently failing to supply. On a finer scale, then, this sanction represents the school as a failing business and understands this failure as one which the operations of neoliberal discourse can correct. As such, the failing school becomes an essential part of neoliberal discourse in the sense that *NCLB* both manifests and remediates failure through the specifically neoliberal consequences of failing to meet the demands of a free market.

The fourth and final sanction of *NCLB* represents the shift from failing to failed. If a school still does not meet AYP after implementing the corrective action, the district must initiate “restructuring” of the school. As stated in chapter three, restructuring “may

⁵⁹ Ibid., Title I, Part A, SubPart 1, Sec. 1116, b.7.C.iv.

include reopening the school as a charter school, replacing all or most of the school staff or turning over school operations either to the state or to a private company with a demonstrated record of effectiveness.”⁶⁰ According to Sara Mead, “In the 2005–06 school year—the fourth year since passage of NCLB—there were some 1,750 schools in 42 states in NCLB restructuring. That number is expected to grow dramatically over the next few years.”⁶¹ More recent research done by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) confirms this point, estimating that for the 2007-08 school year, schools in the restructuring phase increased by 56% to 3,599 schools.⁶² While Mead and the CEP discuss the fact that most schools undergoing restructuring have done little to change, as an example of federal education policy discourse, the sanctions of *NCLB* follow the order of neoliberal discourse closely enough to close schools in a similar fashion to the closing of businesses that fail to meet market demand. In terms of organicism, the sanctions, as they incrementally progress from choice to supplement to correction to closure, mirror the life-cycle of a failing business in neoliberal discourse. As both schools and businesses fail to meet the demands of the free market, they will progressively become less and less capable of supporting themselves and eventually close.

The neoliberal logic of the business and the school are so seamless in this sanctioning process that one might be tempted to collapse the microcosm/macrocosm concept into a simple cosmos. As an operation of discursive synecdoche, this final

⁶⁰ United States Department of Education, “Questions and Answers on No Child Left Behind,” September 7, 2003. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/schools/accountability.html#5> (Last accessed on March 3, 2011). .

⁶¹ Sara Mead, “Easy Way Out: Restructured Usually Means Little Has Changed,” *Education Next* (Winter 2007): 52.

⁶² Center on Education Policy, “A Call to Restructure Restructuring: Lessons from the No Child Left Behind Act in Five States,” (September, 2008). Available at <<http://www.cep-dc.org/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=248&documentFormatId=3862>>. Last accessed on 04/05/09.

sanction shows the consequences of not aligning the microcosm of the school with the macrocosm of neoliberal discourse. The failed school becomes a part to be excised from the whole of neoliberal discourse because, organically, the failed school is one which does not promote the health, and thus the maintenance, extension, and persistence, of the discourse. But readers should not take this excision as one which places the school outside of neoliberal discourse. It is neoliberal discourse that brought the school to this point, and, subsequently, it is this final point where neoliberal discourse has determined the essence of the school to the point of its non-existence. In other words, the school does not obtain some status outside of neoliberal discourse upon its closure. The school is, to extend the organic sense of synecdoche, dead. And new life can now sprout in its place, perhaps as a state-run, charter, private, or for-profit school in the former shell of the failed school, which *NCLB* encourages through this sanction.

Taken together, the synecdochic operations of AYP and the tiered-sanctioning process of *NCLB* figure the place of individual schools according to neoliberal discourse. This provides a third example of how synecdoche works to extend and maintain a discourse and, specific to this chapter, to continue the trajectory of neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse. Through *ANR*, *America 2000*, *Goals 2000*, and *NCLB*, neoliberal discourse has persisted across a number of places—from the nation to the state to the school district to individual schools. While *NCLB* is currently the primary federal education policy in effect, new efforts in federal education policy discourse show an extension of this trajectory in the form of the *Race to the Top* program (*RTT*). *RTT* refigures the part to whole relationship of discursive synecdoche by organically folding states and school staff into the whole of neoliberal discourse.

The State and Staff Levels: The *Race to the Top* Program

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *RTT* is a federal program that invites states into a competition whose winners receive a portion of a \$4.35 billion fund. Different from *NCLB*, which requires that states comply in order to receive basic federal funding, *RTT* offers significant supplemental funding to states, i.e. funds that come in addition to what states already receive. As such, *RTT* collaborates with *NCLB* in the sense that it does not alter the way in which *NCLB* manages federal funding, i.e., AYP remains the measure that determines whether or not a school undergoes the four-tiered sanctioning process, but provides additional funding to states on a strictly competitive basis and introduces a new reform model that emphasizes the role of teachers and administrators in student achievement. As an operation of discursive synecdoche, *RTT* produces a macrocosm/microcosm relationship that relies on neoliberal discourse for its cosmos and, within the span of federal education policy discourse presented here, uniquely integrates states and staff as essential parts to the proper functioning of the whole of neoliberal discourse.

RTT sustains international competition as a central feature of federal education policy discourse. As stated in the previous chapter, the first reform area requires “internationally- benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace”⁶³ and, added in the *RTT Executive Summary*, “to compete in the global economy.”⁶⁴ While international competition recedes within the text of *NCLB*, *RTT* resumes this priority and, thus, reiterates the aggregative dimension of

⁶³ U.S. Department of Education, “Funding Opportunity Description,” *Federal Register* 74, no. 221 (November 18, 2009): 59836. Available at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fedreg/a091118c.html (accessed May 13, 2011).

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Education, *Race to the Top Program: Executive Summary* (November 2009), <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2011), 2.

federal education policy discourse that emphasizes the national level of public education within the broader terrain of international competition. In context of the tradition of *ANR*, *America 2000*, and *Goals 2000*, *RTT* reconnects public education with the economic success of the U.S. within the global marketplace through the articulation of schools as places where students are trained to become internationally competitive workers in a global marketplace. Additionally, given the omnibus *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)* of which *RTT* is a part, by evoking this connection between economic success and public education, *RTT* can also rely on the exigency of the national and global economic recession of its time to strengthen the particular crisis of U.S. public education's failure to prevent the recession, subsequently spurring the need for education reform. Said differently, if U.S. public education is the cornerstone of U.S. economic success, then the recession to which *ARRA* is a response could have been avoided had U.S. public education produced better, globally-competitive workers.

With the national level of federal education policy discourse present in *RTT*, much of the analysis of the earlier policies and reports carries over to *RTT*. However, reminiscent of *Goals 2000*, *RTT* establishes a competitive funding model for states. Recalling the *Goals 2000* mandate that states distribute federal funds to school districts on a competitive basis, *RTT* refigures the relationship between states such that they must each apply for funding under this program, and the USDOE awards funding at the state level on a strictly competitive basis. Applications made by states for *RTT* funding proceeded in two phases and, when combined, the USDOE awarded *RTT* funds to a total of eleven states and the District of Columbia. Accordingly, *RTT* renders public education as an arena in which states must compete in order to receive a significant portion of

federal funding for their schools. For instance, on the USDOE website, visitors can click on a link for both Phase One and Phase Two of *RTT* that reads “winners.”⁶⁵ Thus, *RTT* demarcates and categorizes states as winners and losers.⁶⁶ Within the context of neoliberal discourse, eleven states and the District of Columbia “win” the market share of federal education funding because of their ability to better meet the demands of education reform understood through *RTT*, and the remaining states “lose” because of their inability to meet those same demands as well as their competitors.

While the previous chapter details the features of the application to show how discursive metaphor operates to ground the selection criteria through neoliberal discourse, what is of interest here is the relationship in which *RTT* places states in competition with other states and how this placement is exemplary of discursive synecdoche, and it in this sense that *RTT* recalls the macrocosm/microcosm relationship established by *Goals 2000*. Whereas the Clinton Administration policy places school districts in a competitive relationship through state awarded sub-grants, the reforms of *RTT* changes the level of application to states themselves. As defined in its statement of purpose, *RTT* is specifically and singularly a “competitive grant program... [that] is to encourage and reward States”⁶⁷ based on a state’s grant application. Only the states that conform best to the four reform areas of *RTT*, as determined by the total score on a state’s application, receive funds allocated by *RTT*. While the operation of the metaphor *public*

⁶⁵ Find the link to Phase One “winners” at U.S. Department of Education, “Race to the Top Fund: Phase One Resources,” <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-resources.html> (accessed May 12, 2011). The Phase Two “winners” link is U.S. Department of Education, “Race to the Top Fund: Phase Two Resources,” <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase2-resources.html> (accessed May 12, 2011).

⁶⁶ Though the states who were not awarded funding in either phase of *RTT* are not directly cited as losers, the implication that they are something other than winners at least maintains the logic of inter-state competition introduced by *RTT* and, thus, the notion of the free market persists whether the USDOE refers to the remaining states as losers, not-winners, or doesn’t mention them at all.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of Education, “Funding Opportunity Description,” *Federal Register*: 59836.

education is a market is at work here, so too is discursive synecdoche. By placing states in competition with one another in order to receive a significant amount of funding, *RTT* enters states into a competitive relationship based on the neoliberal logic that says those enterprises which best address the demands of the market, in this case the metaphorical education market, will succeed and persist; whereas those enterprises that do not, will fail and “go out of business” in the sense that they will no longer be constructors of education reform, but recipients.⁶⁸ As such, through discursive synecdoche, states become a microcosm of the neoliberal macrocosm whereby state-level education reform operates according to the rules of free market competition and the consequences for winning and losing manifest for both in terms of financial resources.

In addition to the new inter-state relationship *RTT* figures, the program also refigures on a finer scale the relationship of teachers and administrators through its requirement of merit-based pay. As shown in the previous chapter, the *RTT* application sub-criterion with the highest available score that signals a significant shift in federal education policy discourse is “Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance.”⁶⁹ As well, the second and third reform areas, when taken together, establish a system whereby SEAs and LEAs gather data, evaluate teachers and principals, and reward effective teachers and principals. *RTT* defines effective principals as “a principal whose students, overall and for each subgroup, achieve acceptable rates (*e.g.*, at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth” and, nearly identically, an

⁶⁸ Obviously, this is not to say that “losing” states will close, but, as *RTT* makes clear, the expectation is for “losing” states to adopt the education reform systems of the “winning” states. Thus, a loss in the *Race* is ultimately a loss, not only of funding, but of a central feature of neoliberal discourse, namely individual choice.

⁶⁹ *RTT Executive Summary*, 3. As stated in the previous chapter, while the subcriterion of “Articulating State’s education reform agenda and LEAs’ participation in it” is technically the highest valued within the application, it is the sub-criterion of performance-based pay that distinguishes *RTT* from previous articulations of federal education policy discourse.

effective teacher as “a teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates (*e.g.*, at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth.”⁷⁰ Student growth, as explicated earlier, is the primary determinant for effectiveness of teachers and principals. Thus, by basing evaluations on the rise and fall of student test scores, *RTT* defines effective teachers and principals in line with the first reform area of *RTT*, specifically their ability to “prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.”⁷¹ Such preparation, then, is a measurable product and end goal of teachers and principals.

By constituting the product of school personnel as measurable through test scores, *RTT* exhibits the operation of discursive synecdoche in the constitution of teachers and principals as integral parts of neoliberal discourse. Under this program, states that successfully “win” federal funding craft state-level policy for SEAs and LEAs that institute data systems geared toward assessment-based evaluation of school personnel. By declaring school personnel as the primary factor in the fluctuations of student test scores, these scores become evidence for whether teachers and principals are “doing their job.” Moreover, by constituting test scores as products, SEAs and LEAs, as well as anyone with an interest in education institutions, are able to determine at the level of the individual teacher and principal which person makes the best product. Simply put, those personnel who produce the largest rise in test scores are the best. As such, according to neoliberal discourse, they are the ones who will draw the greatest market share (here in terms of salaries, bonuses, benefits, etc.) and schools, already members of neoliberal discourse through *NCLB*, will seek out those principals and teachers who produce such

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Education, “Funding Opportunity Description,” *Federal Register*: 59838.

⁷¹ *RTT Executive Summary*, 2.

scores. This will create a free market of employment unhindered by traditional practices of experience- and education-based pay, wherein schools, LEAs, and SEAs will make their hiring packages more desirable to attract the best teachers and principals. Teachers and principals, conversely, will be in competition with one another to produce the greatest score gains in order to be attractive to those schools and other education agencies that offer the best salaries, etc. Throughout this back and forth of competition and test score production between employees and hiring enterprises, the labor/capital divide will regulate itself, i.e. they will respond to market forces without government involvement, thus nullifying any need for tenure, unions, or licensure. Through discursive synecdoche, the parts of school staff now stand in for the essential nature of neoliberal discourse. Through *RTT*, neoliberal discourse suffuses the performance of principal and teacher alike such that their nature is a microcosm of the neoliberal macrocosm.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows the role discursive synecdoche plays in organizing the relationships between parts and wholes such that each suffuses the other to constitute the essential nature of each. Namely, neoliberal discourse locates multiple parts through the trajectory of contemporary federal education policy discourse and renders them each as its constituent parts. Subsequently, each of the parts figured according to neoliberal discourse serve as examples of neoliberal discourse. In other words, the parts can, upon their constitution, stand in for the whole such that they stand as evidence for the totality of the whole. If one questions whether neoliberal discourse is merely a chimera, we need only point to the competition between nations, states, school districts, schools, or teachers. Any one example is sufficient as evidence of the whole, and the presence of

multiple examples only strengthens the verification of the whole. *ANR* is unique in this trajectory because it links the U.S. public education system to America's declining status within international economic competition. *America 2000*, while reiterating the refrain of international competition, constitutes the primary site of education reform as the community, thus diminishing the role of the government for education reform. *Goals 2000* maintains the connection between public education and international competition, but places school districts into competition with one another for state-issued sub-grants, thus rendering school districts as a microcosm of a neoliberal macrocosm. While international competition recedes from focus in *NCLB*, this policy generates a disaggregative function according to which the success or failure of a school is equally determined by its whole student population as well as its integral parts, i.e. student subgroups of race, class, ability, and English proficiency. Moreover, *NCLB* figures a microcosm/macrocosm relationship between schools and neoliberal discourse through its four-tiered sanctioning system. Finally, *RTT* is distinctive among the articulations of federal education policy considered here in its treatment of states and staff whereby both states and school personnel are each a microcosm of a neoliberal macrocosm.

Neoliberal discourse persists throughout all five articulations of federal education policy discourse, but this persistence is not rigid or inflexible. With each articulation, through discursive synecdoche, neoliberal discourse suffuses different parts of federal education policy discourse. In other words, through the trajectory above, neoliberal discourse suffuses the United States, individual states, school districts, schools, and school staff such that any one of these parts is capable of standing in for the whole of neoliberal discourse. These parts retroactively constitute the essential nature of neoliberal

discourse as much as neoliberal discourse constitutes the essential nature of each of the parts, in as much as each part stands as a microcosm of the neoliberal macrocosm.

Through these articulations of federal education policy discourse, the role of discursive synecdoche in the maintenance and stabilization of a totalizing discourse becomes clearer. While the parts work together to reiterate the totalizing discourse of neoliberalism, individually they represent a systematization particular to itself. For example, the level of the school district operates in a way specific to itself and dissimilar to the operation at the school level which, as well, functions in its own particular way, different from, say, the national level of education. The neoliberal model of education figures the institutions and agents within the public education system according to free market rule specifically in a part to whole relationship. The whole remains the totalizing discourse of neoliberalism throughout while the parts have changed through the shifting focus of policy discourse.

With the analysis of federal education policy discourse addressed through the operation of discursive synecdoche above, and the preceding analysis through the operation of discursive metaphor, the final chapter begins by surveying the enlarged framework resulting from a combined tropological analysis. While metaphor and synecdoche are certainly powerful tropes in isolation, when taken in tandem, their collaboration provides insight into the naturalization of neoliberal discourse that contributes significantly to its persistence in articulations of federal education policy discourse. As such, the following chapter returns to the notion of persistence and suggests some possibilities for further tropological engagements with education policy discourse that manifest outcomes different from persistence.

CHAPTER FIVE

PERSISTENCE AND THE NATURALIZATION OF THE ARBITRARY

With the tropological analysis of contemporary federal education policy discourse completed, this final chapter approaches the preceding analysis from the perspective of an enlarged tropological framework. While chapter three and four single out the particular tropes of metaphor and synecdoche, the present chapter considers the combined work these tropes do in order to return to the theme of persistence as produced through the naturalization of the arbitrary. I explicate the phenomenon of mass teacher firings introduced in chapter one in order to provide a real example of the combined tropological work, persistence, and the naturalization of the arbitrary. Following this explication, I project possible directions for tropological analysis within the field of education policy studies by pointing to tropological analysis in terms of its production of place, recalling in particular the role of place in the operation of synecdoche within the texts of federal education policy discourse from the previous chapter. In the chapter's final section, I suggest that tropological analysis of the discursive constitution of place yields a critical distance that combats the sense of placelessness that surrounds critics.

The Co-operation of Metaphor and Synecdoche

This dissertation's exigence is critical education policy analysis' lack of consideration of the persistence of a discourse. While it is not my aim to discount the importance of theorizing and enabling the multiple trajectories that resistances may take in response to the dominance of a particular discourse, there remains little to no scholarship addressing the operations by which the persistence of a discourse manifests. Given the success of neoliberal discourse within federal education policy discourse, and

the lack of successful resistance at the federal level to neoliberal discourse, a theoretical framework that addresses the operations of persistence is overdue. It is with this in mind that I consider tropological analysis of central importance. By showing what the tropes of metaphor and synecdoche do, the theorization of the persistence of neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse highlights the operations by which a discourse extends and naturalizes itself across the field of discursivity. Said differently, by examining the role of metaphor and synecdoche, I have shown how neoliberal discourse has entered into federal education policy discourse such that the former is identified organically with the latter. It is this organic identification that manifests through the collaborative work of metaphor and synecdoche as the naturalization of the arbitrary and promotes the persistence of neoliberal discourse in the texts of federal education policy discourse.

Metaphor, in the discursive sense used within this analysis, performs two primary operations, identification and grounding. Through its copular form, i.e., A is B, a metaphor approaches tautology to the degree that it successfully identifies the A term with the B term. Within the context of this dissertation, the more successful the metaphor *public education is a market* is, the more tautological the trope becomes. The trope tautologically approximates the ultimate horizon of complete identification whereby *public education is a market* is no more or less meaningful than *a market is a market*. Grounding, as the name implies, is the process whereby metaphor establishes the foundation for an argument. This process takes place axiomatically: the discursive metaphor is employed as a self-evident truth claim from which further postulates may launch. *Public education is a market* operates axiomatically in such a way that it launches

a series of further signifiers, choice and accountability for example, that rely upon the self-evident status of the metaphor.

Some discourses may posit axiomatically the self-evidence of a truth claim, yet only to such a degree that no evidence to the contrary presents itself. Karl Popper's notion of falsifiability captures this sense of the axiom's status.¹ However, there is another sense that presents itself in federal education policy discourse. Rather than testing the falsifiability of the axiom, the texts of federal education policy discourse axiomatically apply *public education is a market* profusely. In this second sense, *public education is a market* serves as the ground for federal education policy discourse, and it is in this sense that metaphor contributes to persistence. By identifying public education as a neoliberal market and grounding further signifiers in this identification, metaphor produces persistence through its axiomatic proliferation. Should questions concerning the nature of U.S. public education arise; one need only point to federal education policy discourse from the past three decades and respond that *public education is a market*. Neoliberal discourse persists through the operation of metaphor as a ground for international, inter-state, school district, school, and staff competition. As well, *public education is a market* continually reduces the role of government in public education through the implementation of choice programs, negates government enforcement of school district lines, and invites non- and for-profit organizations to provide supplemental educational services and to open and operate their own schools. Through this repetition of a particular metaphor, locatable across a series of texts, neoliberal discourse persists in federal education policy discourse as a consequence of the identification and grounding

¹ See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1959).

of *public education is a market*. Moreover, this repetition characterizes the contribution to persistence that metaphor embodies.

What remains for this analysis of metaphor, then, is the role it plays in the naturalization of the arbitrary. Because of its axiomatic characteristic, whereby federal education policy discourse proliferates through repeating *public education is a market*, the success of metaphor for a discourse depends upon its taken-for-granted status, i.e., its self-evidence. However, this is not to claim that the self-evident nature of the operation of identification is objectively true or necessary, a status one might claim within the strictures of mathematics or formal logic. In fact, just the opposite is the case. Through identification, metaphor does not introduce a necessary or objective identity; rather, it posits an arbitrary one. In terms of this analysis, federal education policy discourse introduces an arbitrary identification between the neoliberal market and public education. Said differently, public education could be a prison, a hospital, or a republic. But through neoliberal discourse, it is a market. There is no object that determines once and for all the identity of public education, and any of the objects just mentioned would hold different outcomes for public education that would be just as axiomatically valid as when federal education policy discourse articulates *public education is a market*. The arbitrary is introduced through the operation of identification characteristic of metaphor. However, if the tropological analysis were to cease at this moment, I would have only theorized discourse up to the point of its repetition. In other words, while repetition is one form of persistence exhibited in federal education policy discourse, its presence only accounts for

the repetition of an arbitrary identification. In terms of the naturalization of the arbitrary, metaphor introduces the arbitrary, but its naturalization takes place through synecdoche.²

As detailed in chapter four, synecdoche operates such that a discourse, quoting White, “suffuses and constitutes the essential nature of all the parts that make it up.”³ The trajectory of contemporary federal education policy discourse traced in terms of synecdoche shows that neoliberal discourse, in its covering of federal education policy discourse, constitutes the parts of public education. From *A Nation at Risk* to *Race to the Top*, every level of the institution of U.S. public education, from the national (the United States) to the individual (teachers, *et al.*), takes shape according to neoliberal discourse. Different from metaphor, however, synecdoche operates in an organicist mode to arrange a number of objects as parts in relation to some whole that exceeds the mere sum of its parts. As previously shown, federal education policy discourse arranges multiple objects (states, schools, etc.) as parts of the whole of neoliberal discourse. Whereas, metaphorically, the operation of identification axiomatically repeats that *public education is a market*, and, by extension, *federal education policy discourse is neoliberal discourse*, synecdoche takes a different, but complementary, tack. Synecdoche organizes organically rather than mechanistically or some other mode. As such, the part to whole relationship

² There are multiple registers through which naturalization could be conceived. For instance, one could consider the operations of identification and grounding that typify metaphor as constituting a kind of naturalization whereby the signifiers launched from the ground of metaphor, e.g., accountability, arise naturally, that is, according to the logic of a discourse, e.g., neoliberalism. However, the register in which I locate naturalization aligns more closely with a biological sense of the term. In this mode, naturalization is the process whereby a discourse produces an organic system that relies upon the homeostasis of its parts, each contributing to the health of that discourse. This is not to say that discourses are natural objects that embody the homeostasis of biological organisms; nor does it imply that all the parts of a discourse operate homogeneously or even smoothly. As will be detailed in the following paragraphs, synecdoche operates to organize a discourse in such a manner that the more successful a discourse is in suffusing the parts with the whole, the more the whole is able to integrate those parts as naturally belonging to it.

³ White, *Metahistory*, 36.

produces an organism whose well-being relies on the collaborative effort, even homeostasis, of its parts.⁴ In this sense, synecdoche naturalizes a discourse.

By arranging multiple objects within the institution of U.S. public education, including the institution itself, as parts in relation to the whole of neoliberal discourse, federal education policy discourse is a site of naturalization. Through naturalization, a new logic becomes available for justifying neoliberal education reform. As mentioned in chapter four, naturalization is a matter of life or death; however, this consequence is not something that appears all at once. It progressively develops through the trajectory of federal education policy starting with *ANR*. Within the text of this report, the nation is under threat of losing its preeminent status in the global marketplace, and while this is equated with an act of war,⁵ the document does not go the extra step of portending the death of the United States. Yet, with the arrival of *NCLB*, the introduction of accountability systems brings with it the criterion for life or death. Specifically, under *NCLB*, when a school fails to meet AYP the ultimate sanction is the closure, or, organically, death, of that school. *RTT* maintains this criterion through the intervention model of school closure as well as other models that allow a school to be “reborn” through takeover by non- and for-profit entities. Additionally, *RTT* extends the matter of life or death to school personnel. When teachers and principals fail to increase the test scores of their students, they are removed from the school. In other words, according to federal education policy discourse, those schools and personnel that are not raising test

⁴ Again, this is not to claim ontologically that a discourse *is* an organism that persists through homeostasis. Instead, a discourse, through the operation of synecdoche, gains a vocabulary that includes homeostasis as a meaningful way of representing itself. Not to convolute the matter, but one could say that synecdoche operates metaphorically such that a discourse can identify itself as an organism. However, the organicism of synecdoche holds consequences for discourse that elide the strictly metaphorical operations of identification and grounding, namely the integration of part and whole and the macrocosm/microcosm relationship.

⁵ *ANR*, 5.

scores must be excised, as one might cut out a tumor, for the health and maintenance of public education. Accordingly, neoliberal discourse, in its synecdochic deployment, can extend the logic of organicism to more and more parts, which progresses through the trajectory of federal education policy discourse analyzed in this dissertation to yield more and more dire consequences.

When comparing texts, like *ANR* and *RTT*, readers can locate the limitations of synecdoche's organicism. In other words, *ANR* does not enter the U.S. explicitly into a logic that manifests the death of the nation.⁶ Yet *NCLB* and *RTT* articulate and codify explicitly the terms according to which states close schools and fire staff. When considering the success with which synecdoche operates, the parts that stand in for the whole are key. Within *ANR*, the national level of public education stands in for the whole of neoliberal discourse. At the national level, then, synecdoche in the service of neoliberal discourse meets a limit that prevents its organicist consequences from taking shape, i.e., synecdoche, in this case, does not have the power to kill the nation, so to speak. But, synecdoche proves sufficient to the task of closing schools and firing teachers, which allows neoliberal discourse to approximate more closely its status as an organism and further figures public education as a natural part of itself. In this sense, the texts of federal education policy discourse taken up in this analysis provide a primary example of synecdoche's role in the naturalization of a discourse.

Persistence takes a different, more biological, register through synecdoche than the repetitive register of persistence that metaphor produces. By rendering a discourse as an organism, and arranging a number of parts as integral to that organism, the trope of

⁶ One could extract an implication of death from *ANR*'s framing of the mediocrity of U.S. public education as an act of war, or by extending the neoliberal logic that by failing to be competitive the U.S. is at risk of death. However, these remain implications.

synecdoche provides a logic that underpins what is or is not permissible within a discourse. Specifically, this logic permits and promotes those actions and institutions that contribute to extending the life of a discourse. The permission and promotion of neoliberal discourse within federal education policy discourse take a number of forms, each of which is met with rewards for contributing to the persistence of neoliberal discourse. For instance, in *ANR* the United States stands to benefit most from reclaiming its top position in the global marketplace. In *Goals 2000*, school districts gain financial rewards in the form of sub-grants for their adherence to a standards-based education reform that emphasizes the role of public education in producing a globally competitive workforce. *RTT* rewards school staff for preparing their students for employment as indicated by increased test scores. However, the converse holds as well. If U.S. public education, at the national, state, school district, school, or staff level fails to contribute to the lifespan of neoliberal discourse, they are placed in peril—the nation is at risk; states and school districts receive less and less funding; schools are closed; teachers and principals are fired. But this is not to the detriment of neoliberal discourse’s persistence. Through the organicist operation of synecdoche, the logic of persistence proceeds biologically. Much like the removal of a malignant tumor contributes to the persistence of an individual’s life; the removal of those institutions and personnel from neoliberal discourse that do not enable its persistence is salutary for the discourse. By extension, when a discourse encounters unhealthy parts, synecdoche produces an exigency, i.e., a sense of urgency inheres to the removal of those parts that do not contribute to a discourse’s persistence lest those parts metastasize.⁷

⁷ Consider, for example, the current predicament of the Atlanta Public School system (APS) in Georgia, where an overall rise in scores on state-mandated tests proved to be statistically improbable. Upon further

Metaphor and synecdoche, at the level of discourse, each have a role in the naturalization of the arbitrary. Metaphor axiomatically introduces and repeats an arbitrary identification between an A term and a B term. Synecdoche naturalizes that arbitrary identification by arranging parts such that they are either integral to the whole of the discourse when contributing to its persistence, or an urgent threat to the whole when they do not. By enlarging the tropological framework to consider the collaborative operations of metaphor and synecdoche at the level of discourse, readers can locate what I will call the operation of organic identification—organic in the sense that synecdoche renders a discourse into an organism thus providing a bio-logic capable of distinguishing between parts that are life-sustaining or death-inducing; identification in the sense that metaphor axiomatically connects one term with another via the copula which, in turn, grounds further articulations in the sense detailed in chapter three. Care should be taken, however, not to reduce synecdoche to metaphor or metaphor to synecdoche, as this reduction makes one a mere subset of the other. Conversely, given the all-encompassing status Laclau attributes to metaphor and metonymy,⁸ the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche should not be taken as an expression of the axes along which all other tropological operations must be located. As argued in the introduction, in order to maintain the inessential character of discourse, the enlarged tropological framework of

inquiry, investigators found that teachers and administrators had corrected student exams prior to submitting them for grading by the state. Media outlets decried the event as a “scandal,” and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the primary accrediting body in Georgia, has threatened to remove APS’s accreditation. See Jaime Sarrio and Kristina Torres, “Atlanta Public Schools Placed on Probation,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, January 18, 2011; available at <http://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-public-schools-placed-807709.html>; accessed June 17, 2011. On July 5, 2011, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* released the three volumes of the investigative report commissioned by the Governor’s Office of Georgia, available online at <http://www.ajc.com/news/volume-1-of-special-1000798.html>; <http://www.ajc.com/news/volume-2-of-special-1000571.html>; and <http://www.ajc.com/news/volume-3-of-special-1000781.html>.

⁸ Laclau, *Articulation and the Limits of Metaphor*.

this dissertation urges the open status of tropology. Organic identification, then, stands primarily as an abbreviation of what metaphor and synecdoche do co-operatively, but it is not exhaustive of the tropological operations within discourse. With this caveat in mind, I now briefly summarize the operation of organic identification in the texts of federal education policy discourse considered in the previous chapters. What will follow, then, is a synthesis of chapters three and four that emphasizes the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche.

Organic Identification in Federal Education Policy Discourse

In *ANR*, the metaphor *public education is a market* operates to identify public education with neoliberal discourse, and, through synecdoche, the report constitutes the economic place of the United States in international competition as secured primarily through its institutions of public education. In terms of organic identification, *ANR* identifies public education with a market and subsequently organicizes the nation as a place that, because of public education's failure, is at risk of becoming an uncompetitive part of the global marketplace, thus sounding the neoliberal death knell. Through the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche, not only does the market become identical with public education, an arbitrary identification to be sure, but the market organically suffuses education such that education is now constitutive of the nation's place. Moreover, *ANR* articulates public education's constitutive role of place as one which "threatens our very future as a Nation and a people."⁹ It is in this sense that *ANR*, through organic identification, introduces the arbitrary and naturalizes it to the point that, without its suggested reforms, the U.S. has no future.

⁹ *ANR*, 5.

America 2000 further deploys a neoliberal solution to the national threat presented by U.S. public education. After repeating *ANR*'s message, it warns, "Our country is idling its engines, not knowing enough or nor being able to do enough to make America all that it should be,"¹⁰ thus deploying the central problem that *America 2000* identifies: the skills and knowledge gap. In this gap lies the reason for America's status "near or at the back of the pack in international comparisons," a place where without education reform "we are going to stay."¹¹ By articulating the reduction of the skills and knowledge gap as the overarching goal of national education reform, public education is once more constituted in terms of neoliberal discourse, i.e. public education is responsible for the economic stagnation of the U.S. in the global marketplace. *America 2000* articulates *ANR*'s organic identification at the national level once again, though, rather than negating the futurity of the U.S., it projects stagnation. Said differently, by identifying public education as a market that is failing to produce workers who know enough or do enough, the organism of America is an immobilized part within an "age [that]... rewards those nations whose people learn new skills to stay ahead."¹² Moreover, *America 2000* urges the further neoliberalization of U.S. public education through the reduction of government involvement by focusing on communities as the privileged authors of education reform. In terms of organic identification, at the community level, *America 2000* places the activity of reducing the skills and knowledge gap, a gap that identifies public education with neoliberal discourse, onto communities achieving not only the reduction of government in public education, but also the organicizing of communities as the most important parts that contribute to the well-being of the U.S.

¹⁰ *America 2000*, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

Repeating the goals of *America 2000* (and adding two more), *Goals 2000* obtains the status of policy and, as such, attaches financial consequences to the achievement of the neoliberal education reform forwarded in *ANR* and *America 2000*. Setting a precedent, *Goals 2000* enters school districts into competition with one another for federal sub-grant funding which, as discussed in chapter three, ties rewards to the ability of school districts to figure schools according to the metaphor *public education is a market*. Moreover, by requiring states to distribute the sub-grants on a competitive basis, school districts are not only encouraged to reform schools in terms of neoliberal discourse; *Goals 2000* also requires that states identify school districts themselves according to neoliberal discourse. Through synecdoche, this identification takes the further step of arranging school districts as a microcosm of a neoliberal macrocosm, and, organically, that which is beneficial to neoliberal discourse, such as economic competition, is beneficial for school districts. In this manner, those life-sustaining or death-inducing components of neoliberal discourse now hold for school districts. Just like in neoliberal markets, the national government rewards school districts that successfully supply the state's demand with sub-grant monies that sustain the district's life. Conversely, those districts unable to supply competitive school reform will have to subsist without sub-grant funding.

The four-tiered sanctioning process of *NCLB* identifies schools as markets through a progressively expansive reform trajectory directed toward a school's ability to meet AYP. Through school choice, supplemental educational services, corrective actions, and restructuring, *NCLB* bases the consequences for an unsuccessful operation of a school specifically in terms of neoliberal discourse, i.e., failure to meet market demand

results in going out of business, and, moreover, as detailed in chapter three, neoliberal discourse informs each of the consequences, e.g., school choice allows education consumers to “vote with their feet.” As well, schools become a microcosm of the neoliberal macrocosm, thus what sustains the free market sustains schools. Through the co-operation of organic identification, *NCLB* codifies the life and death of schools according to the assumption that schools are identical to businesses in a free market.

Finally, *RTT* carries over from *NCLB* the component of school closure and other neoliberal education reforms directed at the school level. As well, similar to *Goals 2000*, in order to receive funding through this program, states must compete with one another. This renders states as a microcosm of the neoliberal macrocosm, and, as a co-operation of organic identification, *RTT* identifies states with neoliberal discourse and the sustaining of an enterprise in the free market is now the state’s *curriculum vitae* writ large. Distinctive to this program, neoliberal education reform identifies school staff, i.e., teachers and principals, through market-based logic. Under *RTT*, SEAs and LEAs are now able to evaluate teachers and principals based on the merit of their performance, where performance is determined according to the rise or fall of student test scores. Organic identification proceeds by identifying the role of teachers and principals with the production of test score gains, whereby individual personnel organically contribute positively or negatively to the vitality of their school and, if the latter, the SEA or LEA can excise that individual for the health of the school. And, as mentioned in chapter one, the removal of teachers *en masse* is a fast growing phenomenon in the United States.

The analysis of *RTT* through the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche brings this dissertation back to the mass teacher firings phenomenon I introduced at its start. The

tropological force of organic identification stands behind each example of mass teacher firings. Rather than couching this phenomenon as an attack on tenure or worker rights, through organic identification these firings are a natural extension of what federal education policy discourse has articulated tropologically over a period of almost three decades. As such, what critics are up against is a force of nature that has already constituted, and continues to constitute, teachers, principals, schools, school districts, states, and the nation in terms of the biological persistence of neoliberal discourse through federal education policy discourse. This is not to say this force is unassailable. Keeping in mind that every discourse is always and only capable of partial fixation, and that this fixity is never to anything objectively true, neoliberal discourse, while dominant in federal education policy discourse, is precariously so. However, through the naturalization of the arbitrary, organic identification embeds neoliberal discourse as the nature of federal education policy discourse. As such, criticism focused on a singular event, like mass teacher firings, faces serious challenges, not the least of which is the ability for a naturalized discourse to denigrate such criticism as unnatural.

The organic identification of neoliberal discourse with federal education policy discourse presents critics of neoliberalism with another, more diffusely-rooted, obstacle that results from the persistence manifested through the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche and its diverse articulations of place. Each text examined in this dissertation organically identifies neoliberal discourse with federal education policy discourse. Yet, this is not a smooth or homogenously-applied operation. There exist variables among the texts, and the preceding tropological analysis elicits the variable of place as primary in the co-operation of organic identification. *ANR* organically identifies neoliberal discourse

with federal education policy through the place of the nation. *ANR* evokes place as a double entendre, sliding between the nation as a place in a geographical and topographical sense, i.e. the territory of the United States of America that people walk upon and around which maps draw borders, and the place of the nation in international competition. And *ANR* imbricates these senses to both locate the place of education reform, the U.S., and to herald the consequences of ignoring its call for reform: “America’s place will either be secured or forfeited.”¹³ *America 2000* recalls the threat of the U.S. losing its place in international competition, but, differently, it calls upon the place of communities to foment and usher in education reform. This change in place aligns education reform with neoliberal discourse by performing the double function of displacing government involvement in education and placing the responsibility of reform in communities. *Goals 2000* articulates the place of school districts, refiguring them into a microcosm of neoliberal discourse through a competitive sub-grant process. *NCLB* shifts the emphasis of federal education policy discourse to the place of schools, enacting education reform that can erase a school as a place through closure, or replace a school through non- or for-profit organization take over. *RTT* repeats the erasure or replacement of the school-place through its “school intervention models.” It also expands the microcosm/macrocosm relationship *Goals 2000* establishes between school districts to the state level, thus the place of states is determined competitively. Moreover, *RTT* places teachers and principals according to neoliberal discourse. While teachers and principals are perhaps more readily construed as subjects rather than places, *RTT* deploys a system of evaluation that places school staff according to fluctuations in test scores and, should

¹³ *ANR*, 36.

staff not produce an acceptable rise in scores, they can be replaced or, as the mass firings indicate, collectively displaced.¹⁴

Given the persistent ways in which neoliberal discourse identifies organically with federal education policy discourse through multiple places, critics of education reform in the key of neoliberal discourse who address one of these places in their criticism face the obstacle of the other places where neoliberal discourse is operative. For instance, a critique of mass teacher layoffs that portrays this phenomenon as an attack on tenure or workers rights informed by neoliberal discourse, while correct, fails to consider the way in which this discourse operates in other places, i.e., schools, school districts, states, and the nation. As such, even in the event of a successful resistance that prevents the firing of large groups of teachers, a teacher's return will be to a place that neoliberal discourse identifies organically at multiple levels. In other words, a teacher who is able to keep their place still must teach in a school, school district, state, and nation that federal education policy discourse has figured according to neoliberal discourse. The same holds for resistances leveled at the state level, national level, or any other place that neoliberal discourse has identified as an organic part of its totality. By considering the articulation of neoliberal discourse in terms of place, this analysis provides a scope of the multiple places that draw their sustenance from neoliberalism and illustrates the enormity of the context in which smaller shifts and critiques can and do occur.

¹⁴ The place of teachers is further articulated in President Obama's remarks: "We know that from the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents – it is the teacher standing at the front of the classroom." See United States Department of Education, *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (March, 2010), 1.

Tropologically Mapping Place in Federal Education Policy Discourse: T(r)opography

This is not to suggest that the displacement of neoliberal discourse is impossible. After all, as with any discourse, it is anything but a permanent fixture. In fact, to conclude this chapter, I suggest that a consideration of place in federal education policy discourse may offer some strategies of mapping and mobility that respond to the persistence of neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse and point to some theoretical work already underway that may be helpful to this end.

In light of the natural status neoliberal discourse has obtained in federal education policy discourse, what are those critical of this development to do? One area I see as potentially important to construct a meaningful response to this question is that of place. In tracing the trajectory of federal education policy discourse, neoliberal discourse repeatedly maps its tenets and signifiers onto education through the invocation of place. *ANR* organically identifies neoliberal education reform at the national level, *America 2000* at the national and community level, *Goals 2000* at the national and school district level, *NCLB* at the school level, and *RTT* at the staff level. This trajectory surrounds critics.

The concept of place is not new to the field of education. In fact, largely through the work of David Sobel, a sub-field called “place-based education” continues to grow in popularity.¹⁵ This field generally links place to community-responsive education and is emblematic of the larger trend of localism. While there may be some productive overlap

¹⁵ See Gregory A. Smith and David Sobel, *Place- and Community-Based Education in Schools* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010); David Sobel, *Mapmaking with Children: Sense-of-Place Education for the Elementary Years* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998); David Sobel, *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*, 2nd ed. (Great Barrington, MA: Orion Society, 2005).

between the above consideration of place and the ways in which place-based education employs the term, particularly through questions of the ways in which localism can negotiate the places figured by the organic identification of federal education policy discourse with neoliberal discourse, what follows here is a theory of place informed tropologically. Within education studies, the tropological figuring of place is novel; however, theorizing the potential of place for critiques of neoliberalism is not.

Fredric Jameson argues that neoliberalism, what he terms late capitalism, produces placelessness for its subjects.¹⁶ Subsequently, he calls for remediation through a topographical response that he terms cognitive mapping, which allows subjects of neoliberalism to locate present contradictions and possibilities for critique and resistance. Jameson, in treating what he calls the postmodern abolition of critical distance, urges “the practical reconquest of a sense of place, and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories.”¹⁷ This mapping and remapping takes place across *multiple places*, and, following Jameson’s advice, creates “an aesthetic of cognitive mapping”¹⁸ that requires careful attention to the differing terrains being mapped, as well as the relations between terrains.¹⁹ As witnessed

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodern Logic, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 53-92. I do not adopt the term late capitalism for the reason that it implies that capitalism is in its final stages. Whether this is or is not the case, I will not speculate. Instead I avoid the task of prognostication by referring to the current, dominant form of capitalism as neoliberalism.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89. In addition to Jameson’s work, those interested in the relations between postmodernity and space may look to Richard Sennett’s work *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1974).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Given the non-essentialist theory of discourse employed by this dissertation, the complete adoption of Jameson’s framework presents a difficulty in its reliance on Marxist essentialism. Specifically, there remains an objective substrate that, for Jameson, capitalist ideology seeks to cover over and displace through the abolition of critical distance. Should one be successful in creating cognitive maps in the strict Jamesonian sense, the true structure will be revealed, whether it arrives as true consciousness or is revealed to be the reproduction of the means of production. Therefore, while Jameson offers the language of

in the preceding tropological analysis, the discursive mapping and remapping that takes place in federal education policy discourse constitutes multiple places—it is not just the school building, it is the boundaries of the district in which the school building relates to other school buildings, and school districts to other school districts—which further complicates the “reconquest of a sense of place” in light of the plurality of places a sense of such mapping may give.

Yet, the abolishment of critical distance and its possible retrieval through topographical projects holds promise for surrounded critics. In other words, at the theoretical and practical levels, neoliberal discourse has yet to be challenged successfully within the field of critical policy analysis. This dissertation shows that the persistence of neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse occurs through the co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche, abbreviated as organic identification and problematizes critical attempts to resist neoliberal discourse within the field of education that focus on a singular place because of the multiplicity of places such local critiques neglect. As such, given the tropological emphasis of this dissertation, and the constitutive role metaphor and synecdoche play in the figuring of multiple places in federal education policy discourse, a possible critical approach to the multiple placements of neoliberal discourse in federal education policy discourse lies in the combination of topography and tropology, i.e., t(r)opography.²⁰

cognitive mapping to considerations of place, and placelessness, there remains a problematic essentialization of place within his theory that I do not carry over from him. In other words, topology, in the sense used within this dissertation, does not reveal some objectively true place, but, instead, manifests the discursive production of all places, none of which is the actual, real, or true place.

²⁰ J. Hillis Miller points to the tropological dimensions of the construction of place within literature and philosophy. In so doing, he coins the term “tropotopography” to describe the ways in which tropology and topography collaborate. Instead, by coining the term t(r)opography, I am taking a part of tropology, the letter r, and inserting it into the whole of topography, thus, synecdochically suffusing topography with tropology. In other words, whereas tropotopography considers the collaborative work topography and

As an instance of t(r)opographical analysis, then, this dissertation provides a map of the places neoliberal discourse constitutes through federal education policy discourse in order to retrieve a sense of place for surrounded critics. As a map, this dissertation guides readers through texts spanning nearly thirty years and locates along the way a number of places constituted through the organic identification of neoliberal discourse with federal education policy discourse. The co-operation of metaphor and synecdoche constitutes a series of places each of which is more or less figured through neoliberal discourse. *ANR* constitutes the place of the nation in international competition as dependent upon the U.S. system of public education. However, at the national level, *ANR* is limited in its ability to fully articulate the provisions of neoliberal discourse given that, should the nation lose its place, this does not mean that the nation will close. Thus organic identification at this point cannot fully articulate neoliberal discourse, and provides critics with the possibility for an alternative trajectory in the gap created by the difference between a nation and a business. *America 2000* also intones the place of the U.S. in international competition but considers it in terms of stagnation, rather than loss. As well, it replaces federal involvement in education reform with community involvement. However, a gap exists between the community-directed education reform it valorizes and the adherence to World Class Standards and American Achievement Tests that it requires its “America 2000 Communities” to adopt. In *Goals 2000*, school districts become a microcosm of a neoliberal macrocosm; however, the market of school districts is state-run rather than unregulated. In other words, *Goals 2000* places the state in charge

tropology do to construct place, t(r)opography is a mode of analysis interested in the specifically tropological constitution of place thus making tropology a part of topography’s essential nature, to recall White’s phrasing. See J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

of awarding funding to school districts and, as such, the hand of Adam Smith's economic theory is all too visible. *NCLB* constitutes schools as private enterprises that will go out of business if they do not supply the demand of AYP. This relies on the concept of test scores as an objectively manufactured product that indicate whether or not a school is performing its job, thus conflating a raise in test scores with successful schooling. Given the broad range of tasks in which schools engage their students, though this certainly narrows as more policies like *NCLB* constitute the place of schools in neoliberal terms, there lies a contradiction between the multiple purposes of public schooling and *NCLB*'s singular purpose of raising test scores. Similarly, *RTT* constitutes the place of school staff in terms of test scores, which reduces the myriad tasks of teachers and principals to the single task of raising scores. As well, by bringing states into competition for federal funding, *RTT*, like *Goals 2000*, reveals the hand of the market, but, in this instance, the hand belongs to the federal government.

Taken together in terms of t(r)opography, the organic identification of neoliberal discourse with federal education policy constitutes new places with each articulation of a text. And, each time a text fixes a new place according to and as an example of neoliberal discourse, the place never quite fits. It is always a partial fixity, and if a policy persists, it always persists precariously. By focusing on the different places constituted through policies, a map emerges that shows the contradictions and gaps between the discourse and its places, or, to recall Laclau, a discourse never covers the entire field of discursivity. By pointing to the contradictions and gaps, t(r)opography offers a critical distance from which critics can engage policy more broadly or, in a locative sense, more globally. This is not to claim that t(r)opography offers the final solution to resisting a

discourse. In fact, through t(r)opographical analysis, one could make the justification that these contradictions must be corrected such that the places of education resemble more and more closely the free market. However, by locating these place-based contradictions, critics are able to locate gaps that suggest alternative trajectories for the constitution of different places of education. Each articulation of place within federal education policy discourse is also a site where, through t(r)opographical analysis, the contradictions of neoliberal discourse manifest. This is not to say that there exists some master discourse that would not suffer the same problematic deployment. Instead, t(r)opography shows the arbitrariness of the natural and the contradictions and replaceability of the arbitrary. And, in this sense, t(r)opography offers a method of critical engagement with policy and its discourse such that critics can map its persistence and locate places for resistance.

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