

A COMPARISON OF MAGNET SCHOOLS TO TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS
APPLICATION OF CRITICAL EDUCATION THEORY

by

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Acknowledgements

If I can adapt sentiment from Cus D'Amato, I wish to state the following. My parents saw a son with a spark of interest; they fed the spark, and it became a flame. They fed the flame, and it became a fire. They fed the fire, and it became a roaring blaze. Thanks for the gift of curiosity. Thanks also to my committee members, with special thanks to Dr.Arvidson and the late Dr.Agger.

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Abstract

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APPLICATION OF CRITICAL EDUCATION THEORY

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After considerable research, it was determined that a research gap exists that examines the overall impact of school choice concerning magnet and traditional high schools. The timing is especially critical in Texas with the passing of House Bill 5, which attempts to loosen the stranglehold of standardized testing. High schools will be given the opportunity to provide creative educational opportunities to students. Many school districts are transitioning to pathway programs in an attempt to increase the academic performance of an urban population as well as high school completion.

Accordingly, this dissertation attempts to operationalize critical education theory, by comparing traditional schools to magnet schools. It is believed that magnet schools offer students greater public good, in the form of a real student interaction that is supportive of students that are capable of critical thought with teachers who are viewed as professionals, not technicians. In direct opposition to this view, traditional schools have become entrenched in neoliberal practice, resulting in less alignment to student needs. What follows is an exploration of the origins of the public school system in conjunction with the examination of opposing theoretical perspectives.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

“It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx, 1859).

Background: Why Public Education Policy Matters

According to national reports compiled by organizations, such as the National Center For Education Statistics, the dropout rate in America is becoming a problem relegated to the past. Statistics indicate that the high school dropout rate has decreased from 12 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2011 (Institute of Education Science, 2013). The problem resides in the fact that the high school dropout rate is still high in large metropolitan areas. An illustration of the disparity is seen in the highly populated regions in Cleveland, where only 38 percent of high school freshman graduated in four years, compared with a graduation rate of 80 percent in Cleveland suburban areas. Population-dense cities lag behind in high school graduation (Dillon, 2009).

The integrity of the methods used to calculate the dropout rate in America is also in question. There is no standardized method employed to calculate the high school dropout rate (Dillon, 2009). In 2002, the No Child Left Behind law permitted using the percentage of 12th graders who obtained a diploma; this means that students who left before 12th grade did not count as a dropout (Rumberger, 2011). Further dropout rate misrepresentation occurs by including students who left school and acquired a G.E.D. as graduates of their originally assigned schools (Dillon, 2009). When the changes in measurement are standardized the high school graduation rate in the United States is lower than it was forty years ago (Rumberger, 2011).

Lower-income students are the group most likely not to graduate; this population segment is composed primarily of minorities who are more adversely affected by economic downturns. As of late 2010, only half of high school dropouts were employed

(Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). With a lack of higher education, the high school dropouts who do find work do so with a much lower salary than that of graduates. Economically, this means that the dropout's earning potential is restricted (Rumberger, 2011). As illuminated by Robert Reich, former United States Secretary of Labor, Americans are now in competition with each other for a smaller pool of jobs (Reich, 2012). Dropouts contribute less to taxation, and research indicates that high school graduates generate an excess of \$353,000 in tax revenue over their lifetime; college graduates pay \$874,000 in taxation; while dropouts pay only \$200,000 (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). Therefore, dropouts represent a segment of the population destined to require governmental assistance. Dropouts have lower vitality and greater mortality that translates to a less healthy populace. Even those who do graduate from high school but fail to gain more education are at risk. For example, in 1914, workers at the Ford Automotive Company assembly line were paid five dollars a day, this was triple what other factory workers were paid (Reich, 2012). In modern times, Ford's workers only make \$14 an hour, or about \$112 per day, which represents a stagnated wage when adjusted for inflation; today's wage of \$112 a day is equivalent adjusted for inflation to \$5 a day in 1914. Workers with less education find fewer options and less pay than in the past (Reich, 2012).

Even more troubling is the fact that public schools are less of a public good and more focused on the transformation of private enterprise (Giroux, 2015). Students are not viewed as citizens entitled to a public good, but relinquished to the role of consumers. Consumers are asked not to be critical thinkers but rather to be assimilated into popular corporate culture (Giroux, 2015). The chief agent that drives decisions is that of the free market. The term for such trust in a free market is neoliberalism or a belief in the application of laissez-faire market logic to all aspects of society. Under the umbrella of

the neoliberalism power, public control was transferred to the private sector; the primary interest was efficiency (Harvey, 2005).

In the United States, the rise of neoliberalism can be traced back to 1987 when then-President Ronald Reagan issued the Executive Order 12607, which established the Commission on Privatization. The primary objective of the commission was to identify the elements of the federal government that could be shifted to the private sector. The findings of the Commission in 1988 was that many public government activities could be transferred to the private sector. These activities included low-income housing, prisons, Naval Petroleum Reserves, and educational choices (Baizas, 2014). The problem that emerged was that the original intent of public goods was violated; private interests were for private profit while the public sector served the common good (Baizas, 2014). The hunt for private profit can cause less-than-satisfactory service when there is no oversight metric in place.

There is no dearth of research that examines dropout from a positivist methodological framework. Statistics that present numerical data are available to support the fact that high school dropout is not an issue that needs to be reinvigorated by the new policy. On the contrary, there is a scarcity of research that critiques educational policy espoused to abate dropouts, such as magnet schools or advanced academic programs. It should be noted that the term magnet schools is used as a proxy to represent any alternative school that offers specialized programs beyond that of the student's regularly assigned school. What remains to be seen is if alternative educational policies, i.e. magnet/pathway programs, as well as International Baccalaureate (IB) policy, lead to more success in graduation and better overall education. As it relates to this study, better education is seen as conducive to reducing dropout and increasing academic performance.

Statement of Problem

The question emerges as to what is the cause of the high school dropout problem in America. Is the problem cultural, or economic, or a mix of factors that unite to create a problem? Once the cause is understood, policies might be more effective in addressing the problem. One might also ask why this problem is of immediate importance. The answer is simply that the educational system faces conditions that are beyond the original intentions of the nascent educational system. The original educational system as envisioned by Thomas Jefferson in the 1700s was based on an American-European demographic. Current American demographic projections reveal a different emerging demographic. For instance, the Hispanic population could reach upwards of 100 million by the year 2050 (Buchanan, 2006). Changes in demographic represent the need to adapt education to facilitate further future student success. Many new students are English language learners as well as lack the socioeconomic status needed for academic progression (Rumberger, 2011).

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. Does the implementation of magnet school policy, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serve students better than the traditional school model regarding student success i.e. graduation rates, selection of advanced graduation plan (post-secondary readiness)?

2. Do magnet schools employ more of the elements of critical education theory, i.e. critical thinking, teacher autonomy, non-profit elements, when measured using quantitative methods than that of traditional schools?

3. Thematically, do magnet schools have more narratives that represent the elements of critical education theory, i.e. critical thinking, and citizenship when compared to that of traditional schools?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of education policy, especially in the neoliberal era, in relation to high school achievement and dropout in urban school districts. As is covered in the later sections of this study, magnet schools have emerged as a solution to many of the problems that have plagued the public school system. On the surface, magnet schools provide specialized education programs and appear to be in line with student empowerment and choice in a diverse student learning environment (Kellner, n.d.). However, research shows that magnet schools have not provided all students with the opportunity needed for success, and are unable to attract students from diverse backgrounds (Curry, 2014). This study examines magnet school policy and intends to determine whether magnet schools address the root causes, or simply address more superficial symptoms of the problem and, thus, whether they are an effective policy alternative.

Conceptual Framework

In the twentieth century, with the absence of revolution as predicted by the original Marxist, new theories began to emerge to explain the entrenchment of capitalism. These theories would go beyond explaining how capitalism maintained control through violence and coercion. Instead of looking at the surface issues, a critical lens was applied to reveal how capitalism propagated an ideology that supplanted revolution (Germino, 1990). Theoretical frameworks were applied to explain how the bourgeoisie promoted ideals that placed the greatest benefit to those at the top of the system; meanwhile, the common people were the agents of the status quo (Gramsci, Hoare, Smith, & Nowell-Smith, 2007). Twentieth-century theorists such as Antonio Gramsci were among the first

to apply critical theoretical practice, exposing the underpinning of power in the capitalist system (Germino, 1990). Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory was used to explain how power was maintained in societies based on capitalist systems (Gramsci, Hoare, Smith, & Nowell-Smith, 2007). Hegemony called for a public educational system for the working class capable of creating a culture of informed intellectuals who were agents of critical thought. The educated working public was called upon not to spread simply Marxist ideology, but rather to be critical of the status quo (Germino, 1990). It was the writings of Gramsci while imprisoned that the basis of critical theory was born in what was referred to as the Prison Notebooks. The philosophy of Gramsci would later be embraced by Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Bowles and Gintis, as well as many other educational neo-Marxists (Gramsci, Hoare, Smith, & Nowell-Smith, 2007).

Neo-Marxism marks a departure from the economic determinism of traditional Marxist theory and represents an attempt to study variables of not just class, but also race, culture, and gender (Gidwani, 1996). Foremost, this study is based on the Frankfurt School that championed the usage of the critical approach to understanding the world. This study hopes to further the work of modern critical theorists such as Jean Anyon, who was an American critical thinker, who spent time investigating the role of critical educational studies (Fox, 2013). It is also a goal of this study to add to the work of Douglas Kellner, whom many would call a third generation critical theorist. In his essay "Toward a Critical Theory of Education," he laid the groundwork for a unified critical theory of education. The underpinnings of this study are perhaps best stated by Kellner (2003):

I use the metatheoretical concept of "critical theory" as a cover concept for this project to signify the critical dimension, the theoretical aspirations, and the political dynamics that will strive to link theory and practice. My conception of "critical" is synoptic and wide-ranging encompassing "critical" in the Greek sense of the verb *krinein*, which signifies to discern, reflect, and judge, and "theory" in the sense of the Greek noun *theoria*

which refers to a way of seeing and contemplation. Greek critique is rooted in everyday life and exemplified in the Socratic practice of examining social life, its institutions, values and dominant ideas, as one's own thought and action. (p.2)

The uniting thread of the importance of public education was first mentioned by Thomas Jefferson. Who understood the importance of having a well-educated population to maintaining democracy. Later John Dewey an American philosopher would expand the thoughts of Jefferson, in concern for public education and democracy (Dewey, 1910). Dewey believed that for there to be complete democracy citizens had to have the capacity to make informed decisions. Dewey believed that democracy and education were interrelated and required so students could be taught how to be better citizens who had a full understanding of self in relation to their social status (Dewey, 1910). The importance of education was to give students the ability to cause social change if need be. Dewey would later write in concern to the role of the public school teacher, student and public education in general (Dewey, 1910). Much like the teachings of Dewey, specifically, about the creation of pedagogy that creates and inform students, Paulo Freire would create what he termed *critical pedagogy*. Critical pedagogy was the formal uniting of the role of public education in the application of critical theory (Freire, 2000). The *philosophy of praxis* would be evoked by Freire; praxis had origins that began in nineteenth-century Marxism. The ideas of praxis would resurface in the above mentioned Gramsci's Prison Notebooks, and then again in the Frankfurt school, that will be mentioned below (Freire, 2000). Praxis, as defined by Freire, was a reflective process that can transform oppressive structures. As Freire saw it, Praxis could be used as a tool of the oppressed to gain a critical understanding of their social condition or consciousness (Freire, 2000). The praxis cycle involves applications, evaluation and reflection (Freire, 2000).

Like previous critical scholars, Henry Giroux would evoke the usage of critical thought in the educational system (Giroux, 2011). Giroux would place an emphasis on the importance of teachers being professionals that had the ability to operate autonomously, as well as, a curriculum that demanded that students think in a critical manner (Giroux, 2011). Giroux rejected the implications of neoliberal systems within the context of the educational system (Giroux, 2011).

Bowles and Gintis, as well as Mike Apple, transitioned educational discussions away from the capacity of children to learn, to a critique of the educational system itself (Anyon, 2011). These critical thinkers rejected Horace Mann's notion that school was the great equalizer (Anyon, 2011). Bowles and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America*, sought to explain the role of social class in a capitalist driven educational system (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). Bowles and Gintis attempted to provide an explanation of how the dominant class uses the educational system to further their agendas. In accordance with Bowles and Gintis, schools and neutrality do not exist in harmony (Bowles & Gintis, 1977).

As Marx himself believed, people made their history, but not in a vacuum, history was made under the conditions that existed. It is important to note that the framework of Neo-Marxist critical theory should not limit an understanding of the positive aspects of the current educational system. As Bowles and Gintis noted, the system can produce critical thinkers and non-conformists (Bowles & Gintis, 1977).

Hypotheses

The following will be explored about the role of public education choice and student success.

1. Does the implementation of magnet school policy, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serve students better than the traditional school model regarding student success i.e. graduation rates, selection of advanced graduation plan (post-secondary readiness)?

2. Do magnet schools employ more of the elements of critical education theory, i.e. critical thinking, teacher autonomy, non-profit elements, when measured using quantitative methods than that of traditional schools?

3. Thematically, do magnet schools have more narratives that represent the elements of critical education theory, i.e. critical thinking, and citizenship, when compared to that of traditional schools?

Significance of the Study

It is hypothesized that education policy, especially in the neoliberal era, addresses only the symptoms of the problem and does not get to the underlying issues. As an alternative to contemporary neoliberal education policies, this study considers the effect of applying principles such as those of Paulo Freire to dropout as a way of engaging the underlying issues. At the nucleus of the issue is an understanding of whether school districts would benefit from magnet program policies that adopt elements of critical education theory over that of traditional schools.

The timing of this study is especially critical in Texas with the passing of House Bill 5, which attempts to loosen the stranglehold of standardized testing. High schools will be given the opportunity to provide more creative educational opportunities to students ("House Bill 5," n.d.). Many school districts are transitioning to pathway programs in conjunction with magnet schools, in an attempt to increase the academic performance of an increasingly urban population. What is not known is if the implementation of pathway programs, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serves students better than the traditional school model.

Another reason that public schools are important is that public schools represent public goods. Perhaps Reich (2012) states it best: "A society is embodied most visibly in public institutions" (p.28). Reich's thoughts are analogous to sociologist Robert Park's explanation of the city. Park saw the city created in the image that man found most desirable, the only caveat being that man is limited to live in his own creation (Harvey, 2012). As time has progressed and with the hegemonic rise in the 1980s of neoliberal policies, public goods have become less public, instead what once was considered a public good is consumed with user fees (Harvey, 2012). Overall, there is less governmental support of public education. In a comparison to years past, there is less public funding per pupil, which is a result of the 2007-08 recession. Positive externalities of well-educated citizens translate into education being less personal investment and more of public good (Reich, 2012). According to Reich, the changes in government spending on educational infrastructure has dropped from 12 percent of the GDP in the 1970s to only 3 percent in 2011 (p.30). There could be as many as two million more students present in school by 2015. This study is created in hopes that future concerns could be addressed in relation to high school dropout in America.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter provides a theoretical background to serve as guidance for school districts that are embracing the newfound liberty expounded by House Bill 5 in Texas. Texas, like many of the other states in the United States, is embracing new educational policies. However, the question still remains as to what policies will lead to student achievement in conjunction with less high school dropouts. This literature review commences with a brief historical look at the evolution of the public education system in America. Next, the origin of magnet schools and career clusters are explored. After the historical development of the public education system is explained, the neoliberal shift in the policy environment of schooling is covered. The final element of the literature review is a retort to the neoliberal perspective in the form of the operationalization of critical education theory.

A History of Public Schools in America

Public education can be traced back to 1647, in Massachusetts Bay Colony, with the decree of 100 families. The decree wanted each family to be provided training to become better versed in the Bible (Altenbaugh, 1999). For this study, the history of public education in America will begin with Thomas Jefferson, who believed that democracy and education were bound together. Jefferson recognized that an uneducated populace could be easily manipulated and rendered inept to stop the erosion of personal liberties (Jewett, 1997). Education was essential if citizens were ever expected to be able to practice self-governance (Jewett, 1997). Jefferson, who was an antifederalist, wanted to create informed voters who could ensure that the government never became too dominant (Densford, 1961). Jefferson also believed that universal education could be used as a

method to create a cultural identity (Jewett, 1997). In 1817, Jefferson affirmed the need for the poor to be educated to cultivate art as well as science, which in turn would lead to a higher free society standard (Densford, 1961). The universal schooling system sought by Jefferson was designed to foster the development of geniuses regardless of social condition; ability alone would determine leadership. According to Jefferson (1942), "No class has a monopoly on talent and the 'true aristoi' coming out of every group rise to their rightful place" (pp. 72–73). Jefferson divided the public school into three spheres: an elementary sphere, a secondary sphere, and what he termed university. The primary sphere provided reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography knowledge, while the secondary sphere was designed to deliver subjects such as history, modern and ancient linguistics, and advanced mathematics (Densford, 1961). The university level of education consisted of professional schools. Universities were designed to develop engineers, economists, and lawyers. The advanced nature of Jefferson's educational plan created friction in the legislature, and it was not until 1818 that Jefferson was able to gain any funding for his endeavor (Densford, 1961). However, the funding was only for the university portion of his plan; the rest was never embraced.

Jefferson's public education did not require mandatory attendance nor did it align with religious tenets. The Jeffersonian version of public education was based on empiricism and the creation of happiness. Jefferson equated happiness to knowledge acquisition, which translated into power (Densford, 1961). Jefferson had garnered much of his inspiration for what public education could be from his excursions in France.

Subsequently, as time progressed, most laws passed were intended for poorer immigrants as a way of assimilating into American culture and creating an industrial workforce (Farley, 1977). It was not until 1865-1877 that African Americans sought to gain a public education in the South. However, many of the privileges gained began to

erode as federal troops left the South (Farley, 1977). The result was the creation of laws to have segregated public education. By 1896, with the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, “separate but equal” became the dominant sentiment in the public school system (“PLESSY v. FERGUSON,” n.d.). In 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act led to the first version of vocational schools in the public school system, as a way of fostering worker skills in large manufacturing companies (Prosser, Hawkins, & Carris, n.d.). With pressure mounting from the North many schools began losing labor, which led to increased spending in the South. The NAACP used money that had been set aside in 1925, the “Garland Fund,” to mount a legal defense for the equal pay of African American educators, who had left Southern schools (Kirk, 2009). Foremost, this was an indirect attempt to place a sufficient enough financial burden on white schools to force desegregation (Kirk, 2009).

Through the years 1932-1948, methods were created to standardize the testing of students (Sen, n.d.). Funded by grants from Rockefeller and Carnegie, testing pioneers such as Carl Brigham used standardized testing to prove that many immigrants lacked full mental capacity (Brigham, 1923). In 1954, with the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were unequal. The issue of segregation, which is still prevalent today, would be bolstered in 1974 with the *Milliken v. Bradley* ruling, which allowed for segregation as long as segregation was not an implicit policy of schools (“MILLIKEN v. BRADLEY, 418 U.S. 717 (1974),” n.d.). As time progressed, it was clear that *Brown v. Education* would prove difficult to enforce, as there are many different ways in which segregation can transpire.

The public educational system has had many transformations over the course of time. The only constant being a dedication to the capacity of education to create an informed population. Public education has always been the foundation of democracy. The role of education is especially important for the less privileged, who would ordinarily lack

the means to gain a proper scholarship. Jefferson recognized the need to provide citizens with the opportunity to be well-informed democratic participants. As time passed, factors beyond socioeconomics became necessary to public education; providing educational opportunities to minorities became a priority. Ensuring that the public has access to good education is a precursor to having a free society.

Magnet Schools

Magnet schools are not a recent development in the public educational system. A magnet school is defined as a school that offers alternative learning programs as opposed to a student's regularly assigned curriculum (Archbald, 2004). Due to the research work of Mario Fantini, in 1974, school choice became the direction in which public schools ventured as an option for parents. It was believed that student success would significantly improve because students would be learning about subject areas for which they had a passion, with peers who also shared the same passion (Waldrip, 2013). Foremost, magnet schools are located in large dense urban districts. Magnet school conception can be traced back to the 1960s as an alternative to segregated schools (Waldrip, 2013). Many schools in the 1960s became de facto segregated as a result of desegregation resistance. Minority parents tended not to choose private school for their children and were more likely to relocate to suburban districts. In the late 1960s, many magnet schools offered an open curriculum where students could work at their pace and choose their focus. In Texas, Skyline School, Dallas, opened in 1971 and was the first "super" high school. Primarily, Skyline was created for minority students from all across Dallas and was the first to offer a magnet program (Archbald, 2004). It should be noted that the term "magnet" was still not the name designated to these innovative schools until 1975 when the Performing and Visual Arts school located in Houston was described as a magnet for attracting students (Waldrip, 2013). Magnet schools were viewed as a way to encourage voluntary desegregation, especially in the Southern states, which opposed desegregation laws (Waldrip, 2013).

Presently, magnet schools have become representative of public choice, having matured past a mechanism to provide voluntary desegregation. The first magnet

schools provided unique incentives to parents to move beyond their geographical region to provide their children with a special opportunity. Presently, magnet schools can be categorized regarding two variants: curricular focus magnet schools, in terms of career clusters (pathway programs), as mentioned below, or schools that employ distinct philosophical outlooks, like the International Baccalaureate (IB) approach, as explored below. At any rate, the mission of magnet schools to provide an incentive for students to explore learning tailored to their personal interest has not wavered (Wilmore, 2015). As research has shown, proper alignment of school mission or vision to student needs greatly improves student success (Wilmore, 2015).

International Baccalaureate Schools

The International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, which began in the 1940s, after the Second World War, left Europe in shambles. A peaceful, global educational platform emerged, called International Baccalaureate, whose primary purpose was to focus on humanistic values such social autonomy (Tarc, 2009). The program also had an international focus that was designed to provide students with an understanding of the world around them, as a retort to the Cold War politics of the time. Unfortunately, the tenants of transnational education were not embraced until the rise of globalization, in the 1990's (Tarc, 2009).

To become an IB school, schools must meet the rigorous qualifications of the IB governing body; which includes certified IB teachers, as well as the ability to offer the full suite of IB classes. International Baccalaureate students must take at least six core IB classes over the course of two years to receive an IB diploma, which is accepted worldwide by colleges and universities. What makes the IB program unique is the dedication to developing students beyond the regular educational requirements. Every IB

diploma candidate has not only to complete the academic requirement but also to demonstrate personal growth.

Central to IB are three components:

- Theory of knowledge: This is integrated into the IB curriculum, and students are encouraged to think critically about what knowing means.
- The extended essay: Each student must complete a 4,000-word essay that demonstrates mastery of self-directed, independent research.
- Creativity, activity, service (CAS): These are the student's complete activities, which combine all aspects of IB, beyond classroom learning (Coca et al., 2012). Students must also complete a series of assessments in each subject area and gain at least twenty-four points to be awarded an IB diploma. The IB program is possibly the closest analog of the tenets of critical education theory, in concern for the rejection of the ideals of neoliberal education (Tarc, 2009). In this context, the IB program draws upon active teachers and administrators to advocate the original intentions of the IB program, which are a global understanding and the importance of citizenship paired with critical thought.

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the original intentions of the IB program, which are a global understanding, the importance of citizenship paired with critical thought.

Career Clusters

As mentioned above, the first time that the federal government invested in Career and Technical Education (CTE) was in 1917, as part of the Smith-Hughes Act. The update to this act was passed in 1984 and was called the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, which was later followed by Perkins II in 1990 and Perkins III in 1998 (Ruffing, 2006). It was viewed that the vocational technical schools were not for the academically advanced students. Thus, Perkins III added academic rigor and expected vocational students to maintain the same amount of difficulty as that of their non-vocational counterparts. Through the 1980s and 1990s, the government released reports that expounded that there existed a demand for a workforce with current skills. In 1994, the Educate America Act was passed, which led to the National Skills Standard Board (NSSB). The NSSB was tasked with the creation of standards and pathways to be placed in clusters (Ruffing, 2006). The National School to Work Office (NSTWO), required each state to create program evaluations that aligned to industry standards.

The ideal of career clusters picked up momentum in 1996 during the Building Linkages Project; the primary goal of the project was to create a vocational curriculum that would transition students from school to work. The Building Linkage Project created three pilot programs: retail, banking, and health. Problems emerged as how to integrate tightly focused career classes into more stringent academic standards for K-12 public education (Ruffing, 2006). Integration confusion led to the current career pathways, which are currently being integrated into public schools.

Pathways have students declare a focus after their 8th-grade year, and all schooling is tailored around the chosen path (Sibert, Rowe, & McSpadden, 2007). The modern career cluster model includes three major components: foundational education, pathway, and specialty level (Ruffing, 2006). There are still problems with the new pathway cluster model, such as career mobility is not accounted for, as well as the belief that pathways might be too career focused. Career clusters, unlike magnet schools, were created not to create equality of schools, but to bolster the United States workforce. There are currently 16 career clusters each with their respective pathway ("Career Clusters," n.d.).

Conceptual Frameworks

Understanding the present dropout rate in the public school system is vital. Policy prescriptions to problems are dependent on how the problem is understood and this is dependent on which theoretical approach is chosen. There is a multitude of theories comprised of educational learning theories, critical theories as well as economic theories that could be selected. The most dichotomous view explores the relationship between neoliberalism and critical education theory. Neoliberalism is adopted as a framework, due to the fact that public schools in the United States are designed from a capitalist perspective. Conversely, the main alternative to neoliberalism is critical theory. Each theory offers a perspective and catalyst for a change in the public school system in relation to the dropout rate.

A key element of neoliberalism is built upon the work of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim was a sociologist concerned with how societies stay in a state of "order, harmony, and social solidarity" (Abrahamson, 2003, p. 142). According to Durkheim, order could be created through a division of labor (Abrahamson, 2003).

Durkheim's philosophy is in contrast to critical theorists, such as Karl Marx, who reject any notion of complying with a functional structure (Hansen, 2008). To critical theorists, formal structure perpetuates artificial limits on the lower class (Hansen, 2008). The limits come in the form of a school system designed to place students in particular jobs that require specific skill sets. The following discussion provides explanations as well as possible courses of action to take from the perspective of neoliberalism and critical theory theorists (Hansen, 2008).

Overview of Neoliberalism

The term neoliberalism has had many different meanings from the onset of its creation. The foundational elements of liberalism were laid by Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Manfred & Ravi, 2010). At that time, there was a distrust of governmental regulation, which encompassed amassed wealth for administrative officials at the expense of the rest of the populous. The solution to administrative corruption was the support of the free market (Harvey, 2007). Given a free market situation, the role of government ensures that the free market can function with an open exchange (Chomsky, 2011). The free market is guided by an "invisible hand" or force that ensures that market forces lead to positive outcomes for all parties involved (Manfred & Ravi, 2010). Failure of the free market could be explained as the failure of the government to keep the market free of intrusion (Manfred & Ravi, 2010).

The theory of the free market reigned supreme among classical and neoclassical economists until the Great Depression, which forced economists to rethink free market economics. It was at this time that economists such as John Maynard Keynes recognized the fact that the government would need to take a more active economic role. However, Keynes did not support the Marxists who saw the Great Depression as a sign of the complete failure of the capitalist structure. President Franklin D. Roosevelt expounded

the virtues of the free market, with the addendum of more governmental control and involvement (Chomsky, 2011). Thus, Roosevelt did not rely on the market to correct itself during the Great Depression. Instead, drawing on Keynes's ideas, Roosevelt increased governmental spending to create new jobs (Harvey, 2007; Reich, 2012).

In the context of this review, neoliberalism is defined as a theory that is rooted in free market economic principles. Foremost, the reader of this study must not confuse neoliberalism with liberalism, which is often mentioned in the United States (Harvey, 2007). Although, the political conversation in America is consumed with the differences between liberal left wing politics and conservative right wing politics, the differences among these factions are not that diverse (Kanpol & Yeo, 2007). Both liberals and conservatives support the policies of neoliberal politics but to a different degree (Martinez & Garcia, 2010). The main components of neoliberal policies are an absolute trust in free-market alternatives. Neoliberal policies translate into a lack of governmental regulation and the privatization of public goods (Martinez & Garcia, 2010).

Neoliberalism and Public Education

Public education represents a market size of more than 1 trillion dollars globally (Kanpol & Yeo, 2007). To neoliberals, this represents a strong market opportunity to privatize the educational system (Kanpol & Yeo, 2007). The manifestation of neoliberalism in the public educational system has had a distinct effect on school retention. Perhaps the best demonstration of the impact of neoliberalism in the educational system involves "No Child Left Behind," and the rise of standardized testing (Downing, 2008). Initially, the standardization of testing was used as a metric to determine which students were not on the level (Chomsky, 2011). The standardization of tests was also intended as a way to stop low minority student achievement. The problem

stems from linking incentives to student performance under neoliberal education policy. Schools that frequently score low are in danger of losing funding (Chomsky, 2011). New teachers whose students fail are in immediate danger of termination. Administrators whose schools have a low passing rate are at risk of not receiving bonuses (Downing, 2008). Many schools are unable to avoid the pressure to seek creative ways to raise scores. Consequently, schools employ the usage of waivers to limit some student accountability. Research indicates that many schools that might lose funding due to low-test scores encourage students to drop out and seek alternative educational methods (Chomsky, 2011).

The high school dropout rate from a neoliberal perspective is not viewed as a problem. Instead, high dropout rates are seen as a necessary element for society to function properly (Grabe, 1999). The dropouts represent the lowest portion of the school system, while conversely, graduates represent the highest point in the school system (Hansen, 2008). Students at the highest point are only aware that they are socially in the correct position as a result of the dropouts (Davis & Moore, 1945). The difference between dropouts and graduates is what neoliberal describes as social stratification. Stratification is an important aspect of neoliberalism, and vital to maintaining social order (Davis & Moore, 1945). Social stratification is the division of how people are ranked in society (Davis & Moore, 1945). According to neoliberalism, the students who dropped out failed to work hard enough to secure future success, since this theory understands the system as meritocratic, in which the best jobs go to the most hard-working citizens (Davis & Moore, 1945). The school is sorting students who lack the skills to contribute to careers that require more talent and specialization (Davis & Moore, 1945).

According to Emile Durkheim, rituals are needed to enforce social norms (Grabe, 1999). The findings of Grabe indicate that the rituals of past societies have been replaced

by media representation. Grabe (1999) suggests that the media, through various channels, contribute to ensuring social order. Grabe's research concerns the issue of crime, but it is still applicable to the dropout problem. From a neoliberal perspective, the punishment for crime is functional and demonstrates to the rest of society what is socially acceptable, and through television and printed text this message is dispersed (Grabe, 1999). The media reports the statistics concerning dropouts. The "collective sentiment" of society must unite against the dropouts, condemning such behavior as not being socially acceptable (Grabe, 1999, p. 155). The presentation and negative connotation of the dropout statistics alone serve the functional purpose of being a "social control" (Grabe, 1999, p. 156). Social control ensures that parents and students decide against choices that lead to dropping out (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Parents ensure that students fully participate in the school process; students ensure that they conform to acceptable standards (Grabe, 1999). The media is used to show the profitability of education; thus, getting an education is tied to a reward system (Grabe, 1999).

The proper reward ensures that the "correct" students graduate. Students should be motivated by the promoted aspects of acquiring an education (Hansen, 2008). From the neoliberal perspective, full commitment to the educational system results in a higher, more rewarding place in society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The media outlets affirm pro-education statistics; for example, in a lifetime, the lack of education ensures a greater chance of unemployment and lower monetary compensation (Ribitzky, 2011). According to Davis and Moore (1945), "It, therefore, becomes convenient for the society to use unequal economic returns as a principal means of controlling the entrance of persons into positions" (p. 449). Beyond compensation, the reward of social status is adopted to ensure the right people are aligned to the right jobs; more education is viewed as prestigious by the social system (Davis & Moore, 1945).

Critical Theory Perspective

Karl Marx's Educational Response

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels did not address the issue of education very often in their writing. However, there remains a wealth of knowledge that can be applied to education via the principles of how they believed society functions. Marx as well as Engels were products of bourgeois families, which they left to learn more about the world around them. Engels' family was part of the capitalist class and owned factories in Germany. It was his parents' factories that first made Engels' question the plight of the working class (Sarup, 1978). He experienced the broken spirit of the factory workers who worked until their demise. Many of the poverty-stricken workers died of diseases. The children of the workers lacked the opportunity to get an education and were destined for factory life. After observing the working class, Marx and Engels saw education as the key to the future success of the working class. The more well-known expression of their beliefs resulted in the creation of the "Communist Manifesto," in 1848. The manifesto expounded on the fact that the middle class would soon become part of the lower class, creating a unified class that shared goals. The manifesto's main demand was the creation of progressive public education available to the working class. The liberal education system that Marx and Engels called for was designed to educate students in a system that was not ruled by the bourgeoisie capitalist system. The new educational system would expose the failure of the political and economic systems championed by the ruling class (Sarup, 1978). Marx believed that life in the alternative society would not

be structured around production but around free time. The free time envisioned by Marx was to be used to cultivate a productive society.

In accordance with critical theorists, the social structure of the school is the primary reason why students are dropping out of school. As argued by Henry Giroux, drawing on the thoughts of Paulo Freire, private problems can only be understood in the context of the larger prevailing public issue (Giroux, 2011). To critical theorists such as Freire, social issues should not be attributed to individual failure or attacks on personal character. Freire believed that the underlying problem was a systemic failure that was intertwined with complex economic systems and that these economic systems create inequity through the overall purpose of private economic profit over social good (Giroux, 2011).

The system inherently cannot consider the needs of economically disadvantaged students. Economically disadvantaged students are usually in schools that lack the order necessary for advancement, with little emphasis placed on the creation of an open system (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The root of the issue is the overall purpose of school's structure, which is designed to reproduce the class system (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Schooling leads low-income students to accept their role in the system. Bowles & Gintis (1976) state the following:

Failing this, and lacking a vision of an alternative that might significantly improve their situation, they might fatalistically accept their condition. Even with such a vision, they might passively submit to the framework of economic life, and seek individual solutions to social problems if they believe that the possibilities for realizing change are remote. (p. 127)

The educational structure alone is not the only culprit contributing to the high dropout rate among low-income families. The class system is also reproduced through family structure, which can have a detrimental effect on student success (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Parents transfer their current social position to their children (Bowles & Gintis,

1976). The transfer of social status leaves students in low-income families who are unable to prepare for jobs at the level reached by their parents (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Change According to Marx

According to the traditional Marxist theory, the system has to be drastically changed by the working class' recognition of their oppression. This is what Marx called class-consciousness, which leads to the unification of the lower classes to instigate systemic change (Hansen, 2008). The shaping of education is a collective effort in which individuals must join together for the collective good. The power of the collective right has been noted by many scholars such as David Harvey and Henry Giroux, who believe that there is power in the collective good uniting for change (Harvey, 2012; Reich, 2012).

An example is best provided by the school's intended successor, which is work. In the workplace, workers are given "token gestures" of power to ensure employees comply with the system (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 128). "Token gestures" of power do not lead to change until the workers unite (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 128). As Bowles & Gintis (1976) found, "Management will accede to such changes only under extreme duress of worker rebellion and rapidly disintegrating morale if at all" (p. 128). It is this type of rebellion that is needed by parents and students to cause the dropout rate problem to be addressed. Freire believed that government as well as politics should be focused on fostering an environment of self-governance, in which individuals can take an active role in the creation of social movements that respond to oppressive social structures.

Neo-Marxism and Education

Although Marx and Engels provided an alternative social narrative in concern of the quandary of the working class, neo-marxism is needed because Marx failed to create a unified educational theory that could be used in practice or theory (Kellner, 2003).

Traditional understandings of Marx's narrative were not comprehensive enough for many who wanted to embrace his teachings in the context of culture and not just economics (Sarup, 1978). Foremost, traditional Marxism lacked insight into other elements of the human condition, such as race, gender, and sexuality, which are seen as a "superstructure" and subsumed in importance under the singular privileged identity—labor (Kellner, 2003). Marx positioned democracy as important yet did not place an emphasis on the systems already in place in bourgeois society (Kellner, 2003).

Kellner, (2003) reasons the following:

... Marx had an inadequate theory of education and democracy, and failed to develop an institutional theory of democracy, its constraints under capitalism, and how socialism would make possible fuller and richer democracy. These lacunae in the classical Marxian theory would be filled by later generations of Marxist theorists. (p.5)

The scaffolding that neo-Marxists use is based upon the tenets of Marxism, with the addition of reimaged Marxist principles (Sarup, 1978). There is an ongoing discourse among Marxists concerning the issue of the development of class consciousness. Traditional Marxists held the belief that class consciousness could happen spontaneously or occur from the outside (Kellner, 2003). Neo-Marxists created more sophisticated methods to analyze social change and the education system (Kellner, 2003). It is true that traditional Marxists and neo-Marxists are both critical theorists; both groups believe that there is contention for resources among competing factions (Sarup, 1978). The schools and the ruling class promulgate the cultural dimension that is added by neo-Marxism. Neo-Marxists believe that the current education system is composed of methodologies, a curriculum, and a biased testing system designed to reproduce inequality (Sarup, 1978). The inequality of the public school system reproduces capitalist class relations by implementing grouping methods of students. Neo-Marxists argue that

the current educational system prepares students to participate in capitalist divisions of labor and to be consumers.

Frankfurt School's Educational Perspective

The Frankfurt School was created by Marxist academics free from the dogma of the Communist Party. The Frankfurt School has taken over the ideology associated with Marxism, with less emphasis placed on the working class. The Frankfurt School, also known as the "Institute," was the ideal of Felix Weil, who wanted to advance Marxist practice. Weil wanted Marxism to be more scientific and cross-disciplinary. The Frankfurt School began as a weeklong consortium in 1922, where prominent Marxists met. The consortium was attended by Marxists such as Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Karl August Wittfogel, and many other notable Marxists ("The Frankfurt School and "Critical Theory," n.d.). As time progressed, the institute had many influential directors, who led the school in important directions. Max Horkheimer was instrumental in the usage of cultural dimensions in relation to capitalism. Research conducted by the Frankfurt School in the early 1930s revealed a shift away from family as the primary agent of authority. With a shift away from family influence, institutions such as the public educational system would be implemented as a consciousness culture proxy (Kellner, n.d.). The Frankfurt School was the first to take a critical look at the prevailing culture. It was the Frankfurt School that created the term "culture industries," a term that signified the mass production of culture. Culture has become a good like any other that could be commoditized, standardized, and mass-produced (Kellner, n.d.). The primary purpose of industrial culture is to legitimize the prevailing capitalist system. The Frankfurt School took issue with popular culture; many of the members began to study the effects of music, literature, and radio at that time. The result was the rise of the critical approach to viewing society.

Critical Theory in Relation to Education

Critical theorists question the social functions of culture and the reproduction of social norms. The primary belief of critical theorists is that cultural industries help delineate the roles of the working class in a capitalist society (Kellner, n.d.). Critical theorists call for a new form of education that would allow subjects to learn in an objective manner. The fears of critical theorists would be realized in the 1930s as capitalism began to become corporation focused at the state level. It also marks the rise of what was called "Fordism" and the loss of individualism ("The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory," n.d.). Individual choice became the result of standardized marketing, which was rampant in the 1950s. As in the market, education began to become more standardized, into what Herbert Marcuse termed the "one-dimensional man." The one-dimensional man conformed to society and accepted what was taught in educational institutions (Kellner, n.d.).

Neoliberalism is evolutionary and critical theory is revolutionary (Abrahamson, 2003). Critical theory involves an understanding of present environmental factors as compared to neoliberalism's evolutionary market-driven approach (Hansen, 2008). As in the case of nature, organisms do not change rapidly. Organisms survive only through a long process of evolution or small changes that occur over extended periods of time (Hansen, 2008). The neoliberal solution to the dropout rate mirrors the solution to crime, which relies on self-correction (Abrahamson, 2003). The overall goal is not to stop crime nor decrease the dropout rate, but rather to keep occurrences to a socially acceptable level (Abrahamson, 2003). Social change is in direct conflict with neoliberalism; change leads to market destabilization (Abrahamson, 2003).

To neoliberals, the scale of change does not matter; even minute changes could have unintended consequences (Abrahamson, 2003). Change is the primary reason neoliberalism offers no solution for school dropouts. Instead, neoliberals incorporate dropouts as part of the system, which leads to the acceptance of norms. Neoliberalism avoids the separation of parts of society; in this view, dropouts cannot benefit from being apart from society. "For Durkheim, it will be recalled, the 'beneficiary' of practices was the society, which he conceptualized as a thing apart (and which therefore could not be equated with any particular segment or group)" (Abrahamson, 2003, p. 145).

On the other hand, in accordance with critical theory, the structural system is designed to further capitalism and reproduce the class structure by placing lower-income students at risk of educational failure (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Critical theory offers an alternative analysis of education, enabling alternative policy recommendations to change education as well as the dropout rate.

To attempt to understand student achievement in accordance with critical theory, we need to comprehend neoliberalism in relation to a Marxist perspective of the current educational system. Research has shown that the dropout rate is related to many different issues, such as student mobility, socio-economic factors, and the quality of the school itself (Rumberger, 2011). It could be concluded that there is a correlation between school effectiveness and student dropout. Thus, studying the problem requires a framework that draws from an economic and sociological perspective.

Paulo Freire created the most promising alternative to the neoliberal school system. Freire created what is known as critical pedagogy, which is an educational philosophy that emphasizes the student (Kanpol & Yeo, 2007). The students have a definitive role to play in garnering the education that they deserve. This translates into students who are well-informed participants of the educational system (Abrahamson,

2003). The work started by Freire is continued today by theorists such as Henry Giroux, who was one of the founders of critical pedagogy (Kanpol & Yeo, 2007). In accordance with critical pedagogy, education is seen as an influential vehicle. The influence of education steers social commentary in the direction of what values are seen as important to those who create educational policy. It is in this context that it becomes necessary to guide students' understanding of their part within the educational system as well as their overall role in the world which they inhabit (Giroux, 2011). As Giroux states, the fundamental understanding that must be reached in conjunction with education is an understanding that youth education is the cornerstone for ensuring greater social justice and the prevalence of democracy itself (Giroux, 2011). It should be noted that the critical pedagogy was never meant to be a means to an end. Freire believed that it was the role of the individual to continue with the social conversation that would lead to change. For critical pedagogy to work, it has to be placed into the context of the current political structure and used primarily as a tool to increase one's overall mindfulness.

The core tenants of critical education theory are a rejection of neoliberal education, which treats public schools as a business, not a public good. Critical education theory includes schools that are primarily concerned with creating students that are critical thinkers and embrace the importance of being citizens in a global and local community. According to the critical education theory, schools provide services that might not be economical but service the student and the community. The ties that bind the critical education schools are teachers that are autonomous agents of change not limited to merely teaching a standardized curriculum. A summation of how critical education theory build upon the work of the Freire is provided at the top of the next page in Figure 2-1.

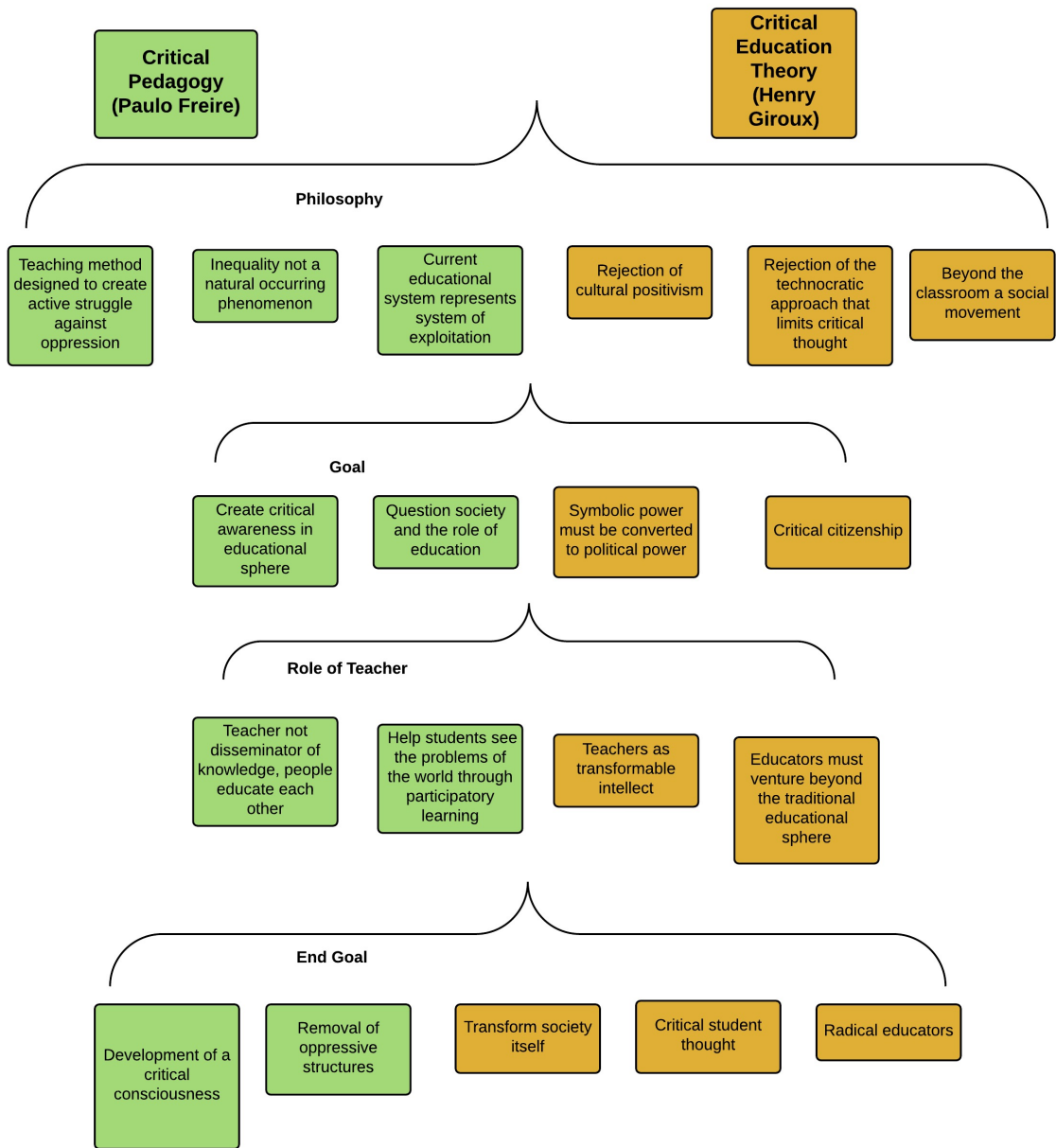


Figure 2-1 From Critical Pedagogy to Critical Education Theory

The consciousness of the burgeoning roots of the public education system is needed to understanding how the public education system has evolved to meet the changing needs of the student population. Jefferson recognized the need to have a public that is well-educated; democracy cannot function properly without a population that can make informed decisions. Although not every specific element of Jefferson's public education plan was fully embraced, its core ideas can still be seen today in public schools. After the establishment of a public education system, the issue of who would receive the public service had to be settled. A series of landmark court cases resulted in a call for desegregation of public schools in America. Not wanting to rely on federal action to force desegregation, the government implemented a carrot and stick approach and created magnet schools. Magnet schools were designed to offer the incentive of advanced study programs not available in local schools. The result were schools that were racially integrated and had a good academic performance.

Currently, new problems have arisen that the public education system face. Much like in the past, the public school system must adapt to changing demographics that are no longer divided along racial lines. Instead, some students are of lower economic status or are not being educated in a manner appropriate to their learning style, all of which results in frustrated students who dropout of the public education system. These students will be subjected to a life deprived of many of the amenities of that better educated people enjoy. The problem is that the public schools are under attack from neoliberal interests that train students to be little more than non-critical-thinking consumers. The main rebuttal of neoliberalism is applying a critical lens to the public education system. In the terms of this study, neoliberalism is seen as the status quo of education or traditional schools. Conversely, magnet schools are viewed as the preferred

public school option, especially magnet schools that venture beyond a specialized curriculum but instead provide critical discourse such as international baccalaureate magnet schools. The critical discourse offered by magnet schools can be used to increase academic performance and provide specialized learning, improving the overall quality of the public good of education. In conjunction with improved education, the critical nature of the curriculum can be used to foster student engagement, leading to greater student retention. After all, it is not the job of the student to conform to the school but rather the responsibility of the school to align with the needs of the student.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

After considerable research, it was determined that a research gap exists that examines the overall impact of school program policy. The timing is especially critical in Texas with the passing of House Bill 5, which attempts to loosen the stranglehold of standardized testing. High schools will be given the opportunity to provide creative educational opportunities to students ("House Bill 5," n.d.). Many school districts are transitioning to pathway programs in an attempt to increase the academic performance of an urban population as well as high school completion. What is not known is if the implementation of pathway programs, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serves students better than the traditional school model.

The literature review revealed that the current public education system is in need of new programs to address the changing demands of school. Dropping out is still a problem in public high school in America, especially in large urban populations (Dillon, 2009). High school dropouts represent individuals that are destined to require governmental assistance (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). As the literature review elucidated, the primary culprit of the failure of public schools is a rejection of the original intent public goods. Students are now viewed as consumers who are not asked to be critical thinkers but rather to be subservient to the logic of the free-market (Giroux, 2015). Neoliberalism, or the laissez-faire market ideology, is used in public schools to justify budget cutbacks and increased demands of efficiency.

Texas was chosen as the case study for this dissertation because it represents a diverse student population and is comprised of some of the largest districts in the United States. As for the collection time of this study, which used data from 2013-14 Texas

Academic Performance Reports, there were over five million students; of those five million students, more than three million were economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2014). In accordance to Bowles & Gintis (1976), lower income students are most susceptible to submission of an educational framework that is more conducive to acceptance of social position rather than the creation of a more holistic, democratically principled citizens. It is this latter type of citizen that critical theorists such as Henry Giroux believe the school should be cultivating, namely, well-educated citizens that have knowledge beyond standardized tests; that is, citizens for which public education has empowered to become critical thinking agents capable of generating societal, as opposed to merely personal, change (Giroux, 2015).

In the past, solutions emerged to address the current demands of the period, as evident in the creation of magnet schools as a method of voluntary integration. With abatement of laws such as No Child Left Behind, there exists a chance to champion a new solution that offers a retort to the neoliberal education policies of the past.

In the course of this study, the neo-Marxian educational theory is the lens that guides the analysis. Specifically, what this study terms "critical education theory" is derived from the principles of neo-Marxism in connection with education. As Bronner (2011) states "Theory is surely not reducible to practice" (p. 94); for practical application, there must be concrete variables to judge validity. Accordingly, this paper attempts to operationalize critical educational theory, by comparing traditional schools to magnet schools. It is believed that magnet schools offer students greater public good, in the form of a real student interaction that is supportive of students that are capable of critical thought, with teachers who are viewed as professionals, not technicians. In direct opposition to this view, traditional schools have become entrenched in neoliberal practice, resulting in less alignment to student needs.

This study offers a method to determine if schools which employ the tenets of critical education theory are a better alternative to that of their traditional school counterparts. These tenants include a focus on citizenship and teacher autonomy, all coupled with critical thought. The overall design of this study, data collection methods, and research goals are covered in this chapter. The research questions are as follows: The research questions are as follows:

- Does the implementation of magnet school policy, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serve students better than the traditional school model regarding student success, i.e., graduation rates and the selection of an advanced graduation plan (post-secondary readiness)?
- Do magnet schools employ more of the elements of critical education theory – i.e., critical thinking, teacher autonomy, non-profit elements – when measured using quantitative methods than those of traditional schools?
- Thematically, do magnet schools have more narratives that represent the elements of critical education theory – i.e., critical thinking and citizenship – when compared to that of traditional schools? What follows is a description of this study's research design, an explanation of study measures, a description of variables this study used, and data sources and data analysis implemented.

What follows is a description of this study's research design, an explanation of study measures, a description of variables this study used, as well as, data sources and data analysis implemented.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design was quantitative and qualitative. There was a belief that the greatest amount of understanding could be provided by taking a mixed methods approach. Research began by implementing a case study approach. The case study approach is best suited when the questions being asked venture beyond what or how many but ask for deeper understanding (Yin, 2009). Under the umbrella of the case study, two groups of schools were selected, eighty traditional schools and eighty magnet schools. Traditional schools are those that have no specialized focus but take a broad approach to student learning. To ensure that the schools were representative of the urban population, they were matched using the Texas Education Agency comparison group database. The comparison group database lets users select schools that have similar size, grade span, percentage of economically disadvantaged, mobility, and limited English proficiency. The database results yielded over two hundred schools, which were then divided by school type, i.e. traditional or magnet, leaving eighty magnet schools and eighty traditional schools.

Independent-samples t-test was used to test if the schools were properly matched for economic disadvantage. After, verification of economic disadvantage matching for traditional and magnet schools, it had to establish if magnet schools indeed yielded greater student achievement (postsecondary readiness), which was accomplished by using an independent-samples t-test. Postsecondary readiness is an aggregate measure that includes STAAR scores, graduation rate, and the difficulty of student graduation plan, in addition to how well students did on advanced tests such ACT, SAT, or IB/AP. Texas designates a target score for all schools in Texas; it is, currently, fifty-five. To meet the Texas requirements, each high school must score, at

least, fifty-five to be considered as a school that prepares the students for success in high school.

The theoretical frameworks in critical education were tested to compare magnet schools to their traditional school counterparts. The t-test teacher autonomy was conducted, using independent samples, as represented by the teacher's years of experience. Studies have shown that as the teachers' experiences increase, they venture beyond the standard curriculum due to the fact that they had spent longer times in professional development endeavors (O'Hara, 2006). The final quantitative test was the Mann-Whitney U test, which was designed to measure critical thought. It was composed of schools that were members of the University Interscholastic League (UIL). This dissertation used cohorts of the upperclassman years, 2013 and 2014, as well as schools that were part of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program.

It was believed that the UIL represented a good measure of critical thought due to the UIL competition's primary goal, which is stated by Pannoni (2015):

These activities, which exist to complement the academic curriculum, are designed to motivate students as they acquire higher levels of knowledge, to challenge students to confront issues of importance, and to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of specific skills. Students are challenged to think critically and creatively, exhibiting much more than knowledge and comprehension.

Clearly, the primary purpose of UIL is to give students an opportunity to think critically. While UIL is a competition environment, AVID represents critical thought in routine classroom procedure. AVID is an academic support program that is more than thirty years old. Currently, it is used in more than forty-four states. Primarily, AVID is used to provide a critical framework for students to use that can help improve success rates regarding college or career (Center, 2015). While AVID is for all students, the target students are urban minority students of lower economic status. AVID is built upon

students apply critical learning techniques to all classes, for example, all students must be trained to take Cornell Notes (Center, 2015). This form of note taking requires that students not only write down what teachers say but instead think critically about the subjects covered by the teachers. AVID students must create notes that have built in questions, as a method of critically interacting with information covered in class (Center, 2015).

At the qualitative level, narratives were used to explore critical theory. Narratives have the power to go beyond numbers and reveal hidden truths, which are latent in research (Gilbert, 2002). Two narrative approaches were implemented in this dissertation, thematic narrative analysis, conjointly, with autoethnography, both of which will be explained in detail in the later sections of the methodology.

A thematic narrative analysis was used to explore school mission and/or vision statements. On the surface, mission statements seem to do little more than state the overall intent of the school, with no actual function. However, this could not be farther from their real purposes. Research has shown that the mere act of public schools, drafting a mission statement, can galvanize a school (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2006). Public school mission statements are not ancillary documents; they are legal, binding documents between the school and the community. The vision of a public school is the primary purpose for its existence (Wilmore, 2015). All principals are first tasked with creating a school mission statement that they will use to guide the campus and to focus on the goals in times of frustration (Wilmore, 2015). Mission and vision statements require not only the participation of the school principal but also of the community representatives, parents, and teachers. The mission statements are created, by a federal statute, as part of the school's campus improvement plan (CIP) (Wilmore, 2015). Federal public school funding is linked to the creation of an accurately

accountable mission statement as part of Title I, Part A. Title I is a funding program for lower income school districts to provide funding beyond the local tax base (Wilmore, 2015). With the importance placed on mission statements, they are seen as the primary point of contact for schools to demonstrate intent and general purpose. This dissertation identified which public high schools had visible mission statements using school websites, then categorized the mission and/or vision statements to determine if there were more elements of critical education theory in magnet or traditional high schools.

The final narrative technique was autoethnography, which I embraced as a method because I wanted to provide classroom level depth to this study; with information that could not be obtained from a top-down view of education. When I set out to discover possible remedies for dropout, guided by the lens of critical education theory, I knew that just using positivist methods would not allow for a rich enough understanding of the core issues. Autoethnography was done in the spirit of Henry Giroux who called for teachers to be able to leverage their skills as a trained professional, or in conjunction with the teachings of John Dewey, an American education reformer. Dewey believed that it was the duty of the teacher to maintain a natural curiosity that could be used to solicit the greatest degree of public good (Good, 2006). These ideas were used in conjunction with the usage of praxis, which Freire believed could be used to gain a critical understanding of the structures that need to be transformed through personal reflection.

Adams, Linn, and Ellis (2014) state the following:

Rather than deny or separate the researcher from the research and the personal from the relational, cultural, and political, qualitative researchers embrace methods that recognized and used personal-cultural entanglements. After all, as researchers, we are interested in exploring and understanding the experiences that have salience. (p.21)

The authors recognize the transformative power of autoethnography when done properly.

I am afforded a unique opportunity to view the IB program from multiple perspectives.

Foremost, in this study, I leverage the power of autoethnography as a means of relating my dichotomous personal experiences as both an IB film teacher and a traditional film class teacher. The autoethnography was written as an attempt to report the current state of the United States public educational system, which favors economic market dependency over adding value to public goods (Giroux, 2015). Critical thought is no longer an integral part of public education but rather a standardization of thought coupled with reduced autonomy (Giroux, 2015).

What follows is an expanded explanation of the merits of the case study approach, as well as, an explanation of quantitative and qualitative techniques used in this dissertation. Figure 3-1 on the following page provides a graphic representation of the methods utilized in this dissertation.

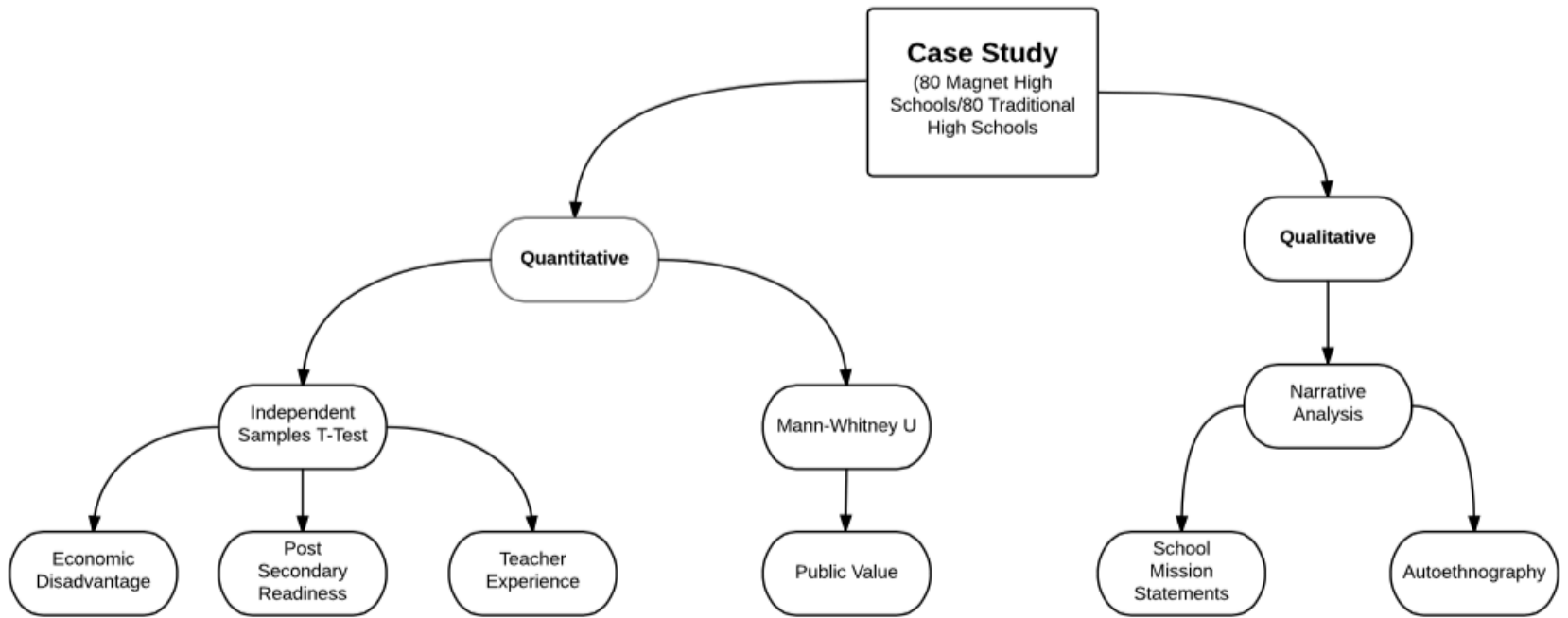


Figure 3-1 Methodology Overview

Case Study

Although the original usage of the case study was social work, the implementation and definition have evolved to encompass a more standardized meaning (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Case studies are used when the question that is being asked is more than a matter of what or how many (Yin, 2009). Case studies are used to reach a deeper understanding of meaning in relation to personal experiences while taking into account stimuli and environmental elements that help create the discovered outcome (Yin, 2009). The positivist use of quantitative methods is limited to a correlation, with little insight into causation or context. Case studies are instrumental in the creation of knowledge that is context-dependent; it is this type of knowledge that aids in human learning (Flyvbjerg, 2006). According to Flyvbjerg (2006), it is this kind of knowledge that elevates a novice to the level of an expert. Rule-based learning is not conducive to the creation of a comprehensive understanding of a particular subject. Rule-based learning is not as helpful in social science because there exists no unified predictive theory of human behavior that is context-independent (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, the greatest degree of understanding is created in the usage of studies that are context-dependent; which are more in line with human learning (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Issues of case study versatility and universal application can be addressed in the selection phase of case study process. The key is to select a case that is most linked to the research question that is being asked (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It should also be noted that issues of validity in concern to case size are of little merit. Research shows that tightly focused research has yielded more discoveries than that of quantitative studies applied to large sample sizes (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It is especially important to select cases that spawn the most substantial amount of information in concern to the selected topic. The best

method is to select cases that are divergent. Fringe cases are useful because they reveal more of the inner workings of an issue that is being studied. It is in this way that it is more important to expose the underlying issues of a matter than to learn frequency of occurrence from an average case. Case study methodology deems these types of situations as critical cases or cases of an extreme nature. Critical cases can either be cases that are most likely or least likely. Most likely critical cases represent case study selection in which the variables are well-suited for the maximum positive outcome. In essence, these types of cases suggest that if a particular occurrence does not happen here, it is not likely to happen anywhere.

Conversely, the least likely cases are primarily used for verification purposes. An attributed problem of case studies is the summarization issue, which can lead to the loss of data richness. The effects of data loss can be mitigated by implementing a methodology that leaves the case studies as a completely unedited narrative (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, following the story alone is not enough to maintain the purity of case study findings. When doing an interpretive case study, the researcher must be prepared to shed preconceived notions and submit to the act of writing. To avoid researcher bias, there has to be a strong commitment to a theoretical basis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Case studies, unlike other related forms of research like ethnography, rely heavily on the development of a theoretical basis in the design phase of case study research (Yin, 2009).

Quantitative Techniques

At the quantitative level, magnet and traditional schools were compared, using independent samples for t-test and a Mann-U Whitney Test to establish, statistically, if magnet schools produce students who perform better in academics than those in traditional schools. Further, a comparison was used to determine if any of the critical theory variables could be captured quantitatively. These variables included establishing if teacher autonomy, critical thinking, and community involvement were statistically different in magnet schools and traditional schools.

Independent Samples T-Test

The independent samples T-test can be used to determine if there are any differences between the means of two independent groups. In the case of this study of traditional and magnet schools, the independent samples T-test was a good match because the first two assumptions of the independent samples T-test were met: the dependent variable was continuous, and the independent variable was categorical dichotomous, for both magnet and traditional schools. SPSS was used to explore for outliers using boxplots. The Shapiro-Wilks test was used to check for normal distribution of the independent variable.

The independent samples T-test was used to verify that there was no mean statistical difference between traditional and magnet schools for the control variable, economic disadvantage. Matching the schools socioeconomically ensured that the groups being compared were of similar economic composition. Next, after it was determined that the groups were similar, the means of traditional and magnet schools were compared in terms of postsecondary readiness. Postsecondary readiness is a new measure that is part of the school report card of every public Texas school. It is a powerful composite indicator, composed of STAAR scores, high school graduation rate,

the percentage of students who choose advanced degree plans, and enrollment in college-ready courses.

Mann-Whitney U Test

It was determined that the best way to test public value was the usage of the Mann-Whitney U test. This determination was made because the dependent variable PublicValue was an ordinal scale variable. While the Mann-Whitney test is not a direct mirror of the independent samples t-test, it is well suited as a nonparametric alternative. The Mann-Whitney test can be used in cases such as this report when the data fails to meet the assumptions of the independent samples t-test, which was the presence of an ordinal dependent variable. To run a Mann-Whitney U test, there has to be a single dependent variable and an independent variable that is dichotomous. There must also be the independence of observation for both groups of independent variables; thus, the two groups being tested cannot share participants. The last critical element is that the distribution of scores for both independent groups is determined to be either the same or a different shape.

Qualitative Techniques

Thematic Narrative Analysis

Narratives while not easy to define, are considered to be events selected by a storyteller that are told in a sequence that audiences can use to place meaning on a topic (Riesman, 2008). Narratives are used to bring order into an otherwise chaotic series of events (Gilbert, 2002). As Gilbert (2002) stated, "We live in stories, not statistics" (pg.116). Narratives date back to Aristotle's critique of the Greek tragedy. Aristotle understood that the principal component of narratives was the plot, which could be used to evoke emotion from the audience. To Aristotle, the narrative was not a direct representation of society but, rather, a mirror of the outside world. The term, "narrative," is not limited to written or oral storytelling; in a modern context, it could represent visual mediums as well. Narrative analysis or the study of narratives goes beyond merely interpreting stories. Narrative analysis recognizes that stories can come from not only individuals but also groups and organizations, because organizations can attempt to mold an identity of the self in the public sphere. The identity constructed by groups and agencies is fluid and is always in a state of flux between what is and what it and what could be. Thus, narratives are with a purpose and have a function. However, in the course of the narrative, there might be no actual claim of intention; it is the foreboding end of the narrative that can lead to conclusion and or purpose. Narratives serve different purposes depending on whether the creator is an individual or a group or organization. Individuals use narratives to commemorate, argue, persuade, engage, justify or even mislead target audiences. Groups or organizations use the narrative format mobilize target audiences or garner political support.

The modern context of the narrative term has been warped into an ambiguous umbrella term by the media. In the media context, the story stands by itself and requires

no interpretation. Narratives are not created in a vacuum, but rather for a particular audience for at a particular time in history. Narratives assume predisposed discourses associated with the intended audience. Primarily, this means that narratives cannot be viewed from the surface level as factual, but instead require researchers to interpret meaning (Riessman, 2008). As Riessman states, “All talk and text are not narrative” (2008, p. 5).

Specifically, the narrative analysis is part of a narrative inquiry, used as a way to analyze narrative cases. Researchers focus on the actions of particular actors in a given social context. Researchers ask how the storyteller is using narrative to reconstruct the reality around them. The narrative analysis goes beyond merely an essential understanding of narrative context to an understanding of the *how* and *why* of narratives. The narrative analysis must ask who is narrative constructed for? What pre-existing knowledge does the audience need for the narrative to succeed? From this starting point, researchers can generate overarching narratives. Even from the case format narrative analysis can be used to produce thematic categories.

Narrative Strengths and Weakness

The strength of the narrative approach can be seen in the ability to capture the core ideas of situations. Narratives reach audiences from an emotional perspective that cannot easily be obtained in numerical data. There is also a great deal of flexibility of the researcher when narrative analysis is implanted. Unfortunately, it is the flexibility of the narrative process that is critiqued the most. The rigor of the process can be mitigated by the creation of many levels of transparency throughout the narrative research process. The researcher must also be aware of personal discourses that are brought into the research process.

Narrative Analysis Application

As Gilbert (2002) stated, "We live in stories, not statistics" (pg.116). Thus, this study used a narrative analysis method to attempt to uncover what the statistics lacked. Specifically, a thematic narrative analysis was performed on traditional and magnet schools' mission statements. Principal statements were substituted if the mission of the school was presented in this part of the website. Mission statements were chosen as the element to compare because mission statements are used as a guide to represent the purpose of the school, as well as provide an understanding of the overall resource focus of the school, all while creating a unified purpose (Keeling, 2013). First and foremost, mission statements provide a roadmap demonstrating the intentions of the organization (Keeling, 2013).

One hundred and sixty school websites were searched for elements of critical education theory. A total of eighty traditional schools and eighty magnet/IB school websites were viewed. Specifically, websites were searched for the inclusion of a mission statement. Websites that included a mission statement were then archived using Evernote. With Evernote's tagging system, the school mission statements were then classified as having elements of critical theory. Those elements include: 1) citizenship—those mission statements that contain the goal of students becoming prepared to be citizens or active members in the community; 2) critical thought—those mission statements that contain any mention of critical thinking or lifelong learning; and 3) global focus—those mission statements that had a focus beyond the local community.

Autoethnography

Much like thematic narrative analysis, personal narratives can be a powerful tool to explore topics that require proxies when studied using quantitative methods. Specifically, autoethnography (AE) offers a researcher the opportunity to not only share a

personal history narrative but also to provide a viewpoint that is anchored in a sociocultural context (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). Autoethnography is a powerful didactic tool for professionals, such as medical personnel, counselors, and even teachers, in a growing, cultural, and diverse environment (Chang, 2008). On the part of the researcher, a dedication to understanding the self, as an intricate component of the community, is required for full analysis. Autoethnography dates back to 1975; Karl Heider developed the term, "auto-ethnography," to explain how people describe their culture in the context of personal narratives (Adams, Linn, & Ellis, 2014).

Exploring the usage of AE, the unique perspective of the self provides a way to study the society with a rich view. Autoethnography is divided into three unique spheres: "auto" indicates a focus on self, "ethno" represents culture, and "graphy" represents the research process itself (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). The self-focused nature of AE means that the researcher must take on a dual role of researcher and participant, expunging any notion of objectivity (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). Objectivity is replaced with the liberty of transcending positivist research methods, reaching into the inner thoughts of time and place. AE places value on the relationships that the researcher has with others, in conjunction with giving the researcher a creative method of expression (Adams, Linn, & Ellis, 2014). The strength of AE is illuminated by Adams, Linn, and Ellis (2014) below:

The limits of scientific knowledge, particular, particularly what can be discovered, understood, and explained about identities, lives, beliefs, feelings, relationships and behaviors through the use of empirical or experimental methods; researchers recognized that social scientific research often failed to account for the "intuitive leaps, false starts, mistakes, loose ends, and happy accidents that comprise the investigative experience." (p.21)

Autoethnography can take a thematic focus that is rooted in an understanding of a central theme. Past thematic AE research involved teachers who engaged in a self-

reflective narrative to gain an understanding of teacher-student relationships coupled with teaching practice (Chang, 2008).

Autoethnography's primary source of data is the autoethnographers' personal experience (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). The personal experience of the autoethnographer has to be positioned within the context of a societal story to satisfy the ethnographic component of autoethnography (Chang, 2008). To bolster and add credence to personal experience, researchers can use multiple forms of field data. Field data can come in the form of interviews, document review, and observation, all of which can be critically triangulated by the researcher (Chang, 2008).

The final step of autoethnography revolves around the search or confirmation of cultural themes (Adams, Linn, & Ellis, 2014). Cultural themes are defined as the stimulating activity that is promoted throughout society. Themes emerge in the collected autobiographical data or recurring topics that are overarching that link data together (Chang, 2008). It is the job of the researcher to determine what is unique and exceptional and will eventually lead to a greater understanding of culture (Chang, 2008).

A powerful tool that can be used in AE studies is case comparison as a means of comparing and contrasting unique cases. At the heart of AE is data collection and interpretation; the central unique feature of AE is that the researcher must decide what data is not just personally significant.

Autoethnography Drawbacks

Autoethnography is not without problems that can render its findings less than desirable. There must be an understanding by the researcher that the results are connected to the culture as an agent of self. Researchers must balance an understanding of self and not create a narrative that is simply an in-depth personal discovery, devoid of environmental knowledge. Resistance on the part of the researcher to be enchanted by

storytelling and instead focus on the research task is critical to the creation of a good AE. Autoethnographers should take advantage of the power of artifacts or data from external sources (Chang, 2008). Many autoethnographers rely on memory alone, which can be flawed due to the passage of time. The use of artifacts grounds personal experience and adds a level of authenticity to research. Artifacts can add cohesion to AE narratives, filling in the vacant narrative spots left by the autoethnographers' personal story accounts (Chang, 2008).

Autoethnography Application

I began collecting data upwards of two years ago as a way to see beyond the numbers present in similar studies. I wanted to know if magnet programs still offered answers to current problems faced by the public school system, much like they helped with voluntary racial school integration in the past. This time, magnet schools are offered as the last vestige of a quality public good, providing services that transcend standardized academic achievement, especially in urban environments that have students who are more likely not to graduate high school. The school that was used is an International Baccalaureate high school, which means that it has met the full course and personnel requirements to be designated by the IB board. At the high school level, the students become IB diploma candidates their junior year and IB diploma graduates if they fulfill the requirements of the IB program. The school is composed of nearly 60 percent economically disadvantaged students with approximately 70 percent of all students being of ethnic descent (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Thus, the urban nature of the school being studied meets the aspiration of this study.

Variables

The following is an explanation of the variables associated with this dissertation. Each variable is accompanied by a definition of the variable, as well as, an explanation of the usage of the chosen variable. Table 3.1 provides a summary of the coding scheme of this research project used for the quantitative portion of this study, followed by an explanation of each variable.

Table 3-1 Variable Names, Description, Coding and Source

Variable Name	Description	Coding	Source
Schooltype	School Type	0=Traditional 1=Magnet	Reported by TEA
PostReady	Postsecondary Score	Percentage	Reported by TEA
EconDis	Economic Disadvantage	Percentage	Reported by TEA
TeacherEXP	Teacher Experience	Percentage	Reported by TEA
PublicValue	UIL + AVID	1=WEAK 2=SOMEWHAT STRONG 3=STRONG 4=VERY STRONG	UIL/AVID
Mission Statements	School Mission Statements	Citizenship Critical Thought Global Awareness	School Websites

Independent Variables

Schooltype is considered the following:

- Traditional School is defined as public school that has no particular program designation.

- Magnet/IB School is defined as public school that offers programs not available throughout the district.

Dependent Variables

Teacher experience (TeacherEXP) (District Profile only):

Teacher experience was used to represent teacher autonomy, which is an element of critical education theory because studies have shown a link between teacher years of experience and autonomy (O'Hara, 2006). According to research, teachers develop greater autonomy as their years of experience increase. Due to the fact teachers are called upon to be lifelong learners, more time teaching equates to more professional development (O'Hara, 2006).

In this study teacher experience is the total years of experience for the individual, not years of experience in the reporting district or campus. Teacher counts within each range of experience are expressed as a percent of total teacher FTEs. A beginning teacher is a teacher reported with zero years of experience.

Post-secondary Readiness (PostReady)

Post-secondary Readiness (PostReady) is defined as a composite score of factors such as graduation rate, dropout rate, as well as, distinguished achievement graduates. This indicator is longitudinal and is composed of the consisting of 2013 cohort, which are students who began high school together four years ago. The purpose of postsecondary readiness is to provide a measure of how well prepared public high students are to entering the workforce, job training programs, or the military. Table 3.2 offers a breakdown of the four indicators that combine to create the postsecondary readiness score.

Table 3-2 Calculation of Index 4 Score (Post Secondary Readiness)

Index 4 Component	Component Score	Multiply by	Weight of	Total Points	Component Meaning
STAAR Postsecondary Readiness Score	30.3 (example score)	X	25%	7.6	Percentage of students with STAAR test results at or above the final Level II performance standard on two or more subject areas.
Graduation Rate Score	78.1 (example score)	X	25%	19.5	Class of 2013 cohort graduation rate from grade 9-12 (2009-10). Excluding students who dropout or earn GED. Students are grouped by race/ethnicity, ELL, and special education, for the four-year graduation rate.
Graduation Plan Score	81.4 (example score)	X	25%	20.4	Class of 2013 longitudinal cohort of students who graduate under the Recommended High School Plan or Distinguished Achievement Program (RHSP/DAP).
Postsecondary Indicator Score	80.3 (example score)	X	25%	20.1	Based on college-ready graduates meeting or exceeding Texas Success Initiative (TSI) criteria in both the reading/English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exit-level test, SAT, ACT or AP/IB test.
Index 4: Score				68	
				Target Score:55	

Note Adapted from: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2014/manual/index.html>

Economic Disadvantage (EconDis)

Economic Disadvantage (EconDis) is defined as the percentage of economically disadvantaged calculated as the sum of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Economic disadvantage is a statistic compiled by The Texas Education Agency, that includes: students from families with annual incomes below the official poverty line; students eligible free or reduced lunch; students eligible for benefits under the Food Stamp Act of 1977.

Public Value

To test the difference in magnet and traditional schools regarding public values, the variable PublicValue was created. The PublicValue variable was created using an aggregate score designed to determine if a school employed critical thinking with a non-market driven focus. It was composed of state University Interscholastic League (UIL) scores for the years of 2012, as well as, 2013. It also included if the schools contained in this study supported the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. University Interscholastic League was chosen to represent critical thinking because UIL academic competitions chief purpose is to:

“Provide activities, which exist to complement the academic curriculum, are designed to motivate students as they acquire higher levels of knowledge, to challenge students to confront issues of importance, and to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of specific skills. Students are challenged to think critically and creatively, exhibiting much more than knowledge and comprehension” (UIL, 2015)

AVID was chosen as part of the composite score to represent non-market focus because it is a global nonprofit organization that is concerned with closing the achievement gap for students. AVID is a program rooted in a set of principles and practices to prepare

students for success in high school, college and future endeavors for “students traditionally underrepresented” (Center, 2015).

Schools were scored on a four-point scale that included the following categories:

1. Weak (No UIL wins, no AVID support)
2. Somewhat Strong (One UIL Win or AVID support)
3. Strong (UIL 2012 and UIL 2013 or UIL one year and AVID)
4. Very Strong (UIL 2012 and UIL 2013 and AVID)

Mission Statements

Mission statements are a message used to communicate the overall purpose of school to all stakeholders. Examined thematically in concern to critical education elements such as citizenship, critical thought, and global awareness.

Sample and Data Sources

This dissertation used a mixed methods approach to attempt to get a multidimensional understanding of testing if magnet schools (neo-Marxian) yielded greater student academic achievement. I gathered data from secondary sources to provide data for quantitative analysis. Data collected for the quantitative section of this study was obtained by the Texas Educational Agency for the year 2013, University Interscholastic League (UIL) for the years of 2011 and 2012 state results, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and the National Center for Educational Statistics. For the qualitative selection, data was collected from traditional, as well as, the magnet school websites.

Sample Texas high schools were chosen using the following criteria:

1. Schools had only grades nine through twelve
2. IB Schools classified as IB World

3. Full Magnet schools (i.e. not schools within schools)

Texas high schools were selected that were (a) Texas International Baccalaureate World High School's (IB); (b) Texas high school with a traditional curriculum; (c) magnet Texas high schools. Texas high schools that met the International Baccalaureate World status consisted of a total of fifty-one high schools. Magnet schools that met the criteria consisted of a total of sixty. There were over a thousand traditional schools that met the criteria.

The IB schools were then combined with the magnet schools to make a list of eighty schools that met the requirements of economic similarity, which was an average of 55 percent economic disadvantage. The primary interest of this study was comparing schools that were analogous, to yield results that could be considered comparable to magnet and traditional schools. To achieve this goal this study used the campus comparison database that was created by the Texas Education Agency as a starting point for school selection. Thus, the eighty-magnet/IB schools were entered into the Texas Education Agency comparison system. The comparison system matches schools in the state with forty other public schools (from anywhere in the state) that match using user selected factors. In the case of this study, the factor that was used was percent economically disadvantaged. The comparison system automatically divides schools up for grade served. After the eighty-magnet/IB schools had been matched with their traditional school counterpart, there were eighty traditional schools. In totality, the research dataset was composed of one hundred sixty schools as a sample set of Texas high schools.

Data Analysis

All collected data was coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) research program. SPSS is a statistical analysis program that provides quantitative data analysis. The quantitative methods employed the usage of independent samples t-test in conjunction with Mann-Whitney U Test. The independent samples t-test was used to compare means while the latter, Mann-Whitney U Test is a test of distribution of two groups. The qualitative portion of this study used the program Evernote to tag, sort and categorized the presence of missions statements of both magnet and traditional schools.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine if magnet schools, which share many critical education characteristics, translate to greater student achievement when compared to their traditional school counterparts while controlling for economic disparity. In addition to determining if magnet schools have higher student achievement, magnet and traditional schools were examined for the characteristics of critical education theory. Critical education theory tenants include a rejection of neoliberal policies that place trust in the free market. Instead, public schools are viewed as agents of the public good that make decisions not for profit but rather for the improvement of students and democratic society. Critical education theory sees teachers as autonomous professionals who can guide students independent of generic instruction by leveraging their years as teachers and accumulated professional development time. The cohesiveness of the school should be exemplified by the school's mission statement, which provides a directive of what the school hopes to accomplish.

To gain an empirical understanding of the factors that relate to student achievement, multiple tests were conducted. This study first used a quantitative methodology in the form of independent samples T-tests in conjunction with a Mann-Whitney U test. The quantitative tests were used to establish if there were any academic achievement differences between magnet and traditional schools as well as if elements of critical education theory could be found quantitatively. To illuminate what quantitative analysis could not, qualitative research was performed.

Further qualitative examination was done to attempt to uncover if the cause of the differences, if any exist, could be attributed to the adoption of critical education theory's philosophy. The qualitative method was accomplished by performing a thematic narrative analysis on the one hundred and sixty schools mission statements. In addition to the thematic narrative analysis, an autoethnography was shown to provide a unique perspective of magnet programs. The following findings are delineated between the five research hypotheses:

Preliminary Statistical Hypothesis

For this study, it is hypothesized that the Texas Education Agency's, campus comparison group database has correctly matched schools regarding economic disparity.

Hypothesis One

For this study, it is hypothesized that the implementation of magnet school policy, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serves students better than the traditional school model regarding Post-Secondary Readiness. Post-Secondary Readiness, which is coded as a variable postsecondary, is a composite score. Post-Secondary Readiness consists of the number of students who graduate with consideration of their diploma plans. It also considers the four-year longitudinal graduation rate for a cohort. All factors are evaluated regarding race/ethnicity and then scored on a scale of zero to a hundred with a high school target score of at least fifty-seven, which is a score set each year by the Texas Education Agency.

Hypothesis Two

For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will have greater teacher autonomy than that of traditional schools. Calculating the years of experience of teachers

employed at traditional and magnet schools measured teacher autonomy, which is coded as the variable TeacherEXP.

Hypothesis Three

For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will demonstrate greater public value than that of traditional schools. Public value is a composite score that consists of University Interscholastic League (UIL) results and whether schools are Advancement Via Individual Determination schools (AVID).

Hypothesis Four

For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will exhibit more elements of critical education theory, i.e. citizenship, critical thought, and global awareness, than those of traditional schools. Elements of critical education were examined using the mission statements of both magnet and traditional schools. On the following page, Table 4.1 provides a summation of the methods utilized in this study.

Table 4-1 Variable Names, Purpose, Coding and Test Type

Variable Name	Purpose	Coding	Test Type
Schooltype (School Type)		0=Traditional 1=Magnet	
PostReady (Postsecondary Score)	Test for difference in student achievement.	Percentage	Independent samples t-test
EconDis (Economic Disadvantage)	Test determine if there is a difference in economics among magnet and traditional schools. (Bowles and Gintis)	Percentage	Independent samples t-test
TeacherEXP (Teacher Autonomy)	Test to determine if teacher experience is greater among magnet schools versus that of traditional schools.	Percentage	Independent samples t-test
PublicValue (UIL + AVID)	Test to determine if magnet or traditional schools are more dedicated to providing of free non-market driven public goods.	1=WEAK 2=SOMEWHAT STRONG 3=STRONG 4=VERY STRONG	Mann-Whitney U test
Mission Statements	Test to determine which schools, magnet or traditional have a clearer focus, and if the focus translates into elements of critical education theory.	Citizenship Critical Thought Global Awareness	Thematic Narrative Analysis
High School IB Magnet Program	Provide a school level inside look at a magnet program and uncover critical elements.	Citizenship Critical Thought Global Awareness	Autoethnography

Independent Samples T-Test

Regarding the independent samples t-test, it first needs to be verified that the first three assumptions of the independent samples t-test had been met, mainly that the dependent variable was continuous, as well as, the independent variable was categorical dichotomous, magnet and traditional, and there was independence of observation. SPSS was used to explore for outliers using boxplots; also, a visual inspection of the Normal Q-Q Plots test was used to check for normal distribution of the independent variable. Homogeneity was tested using Levene's test for equal variance. Normal Q-Q was selected over that of the Shapiro-Wilks test due to the fact the sample size was greater than fifty. The Shapiro-Wilks has a tendency to flag even minor deviations as significant given larger samples.

Economic Disadvantage

In accordance to Bowles and Gintis (1976), it is important to recognize that many differences in economic situations among the student body can change overall educational outlook (p.127). Thus, a key to this study was the matching of schools that were of similar economic status. This study used the variable economic disadvantage to capture the economic status of the different types of schools. Proper economic match was accomplished first by picking schools using the Texas Education Agencies campus comparison database, and then by verifying that traditional and magnet schools had similar economic disparity using independent sample t-test. Findings indicate that there exist no significant difference between magnet and traditional schools regarding economic disadvantage. There were no outliers in the data regarding economic

disadvantage, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot for values greater than 1.5 box-lengths from the edge of the box, as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

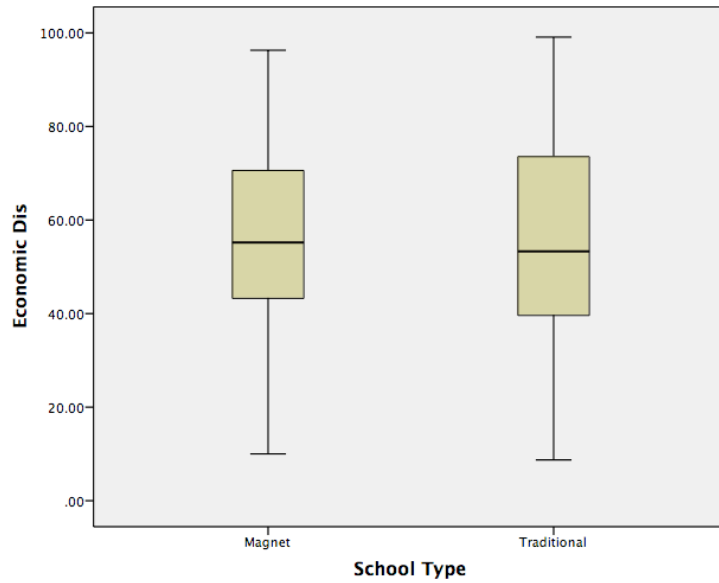


Figure 4-1 Economic Disadvantage Box Plot

The economic disadvantage score was normally distributed for both traditional and magnet schools, as assessed by visual inspection of Normal Q-Q Plots, as can be seen in Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3.

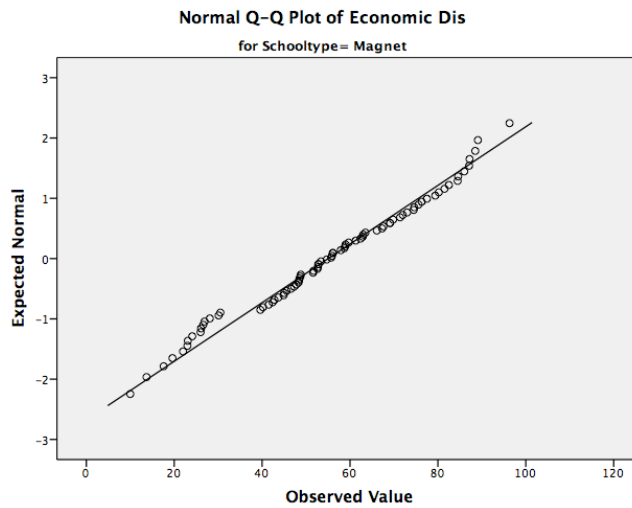


Figure 4-2 Normal Q-Q Plot Magnet Schools

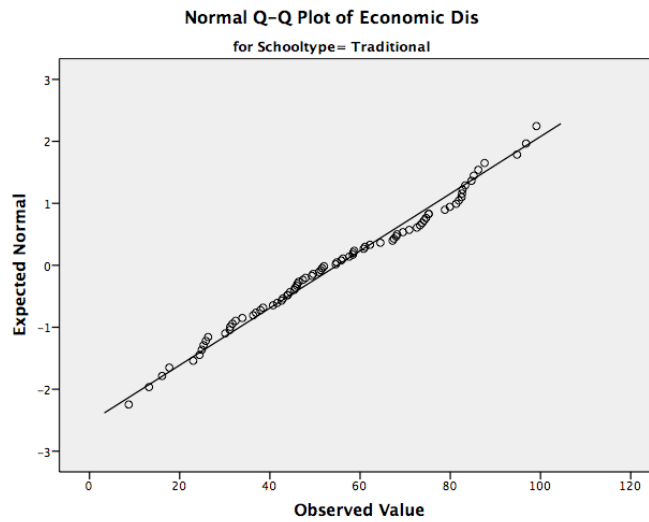


Figure 4-3 Normal Q-Q Plot Traditional

Quantitative Analysis

The following hypothesis are the findings of the quantitative techniques that were used in this dissertation. The quantitative techniques include independent samples t-test, as well as, Mann-Whitney U test.

Preliminary Statistical Hypothesis

For this study, it is hypothesized that the Texas Education Agency's, campus comparison group database has correctly matched schools regarding economic disparity.

It, therefore, is postulated that:

H0: There will be not difference magnet schools and that of traditional schools in the concern of economic disparity (i.e. $\mu_1 = \mu_2$).

HA: There will be difference between magnet schools and that of traditional schools in the concern of economic disparity (i.e. $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$).

Magnet schools economic disadvantage was (M = 55.94, SD =21.67), in relation to traditional schools (M = 54.94, SD =20.55). Economic disadvantage is illustrated in Table 4.2 below. There was homogeneity of variances for economic disadvantage for magnet and traditional schools, as demonstrated by the Levene's test for equality variance ($p = .410$). Magnet school means economic disadvantage score was .08, 95%CI [6.67 to 6.52] higher than traditional schools means engagement score. However, there was not a significant difference in the mean economic disadvantage scores between magnet and traditional schools, $t(158) = .022, p = .982$. Overall as can be ascertained from Table 4.2 below, means for both magnet, and traditional schools were closely

matched. Regarding economic disadvantage, there was a failure to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant difference in respect to economic disadvantage between magnet and traditional schools. The sample for both magnet and traditional represent a demographic that has more than half economically disadvantaged students, which is more than 10% greater than Texas schools in general.

Table 4-2 t-test Results

Results of t-tests and Descriptive Statistics Postsecondary, Teacher Autonomy, and Economic Disadvantage by School Type

Outcome	Group						95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	Magnet			Traditional					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n			
Postsecondary	75.30	10.91	80	67.58	6.64	80	4.89, 10.54	5.40*	130.54
Teacher Autonomy	12.09	2.67	80	11.99	2.15	80	-0.66, 0.86	0.25	158
Economic Disadvantage	55.02	20.55	80	54.95	21.67	80	-6.52, 6.67	0.41	158

* p < .05.

Hypothesis One

For this study, it is hypothesized that the implementation of magnet school policy, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serves students better than the traditional school model regarding Post-Secondary Readiness. Postsecondary readiness, which is coded as variable postsecondary, is a composite score.

Postsecondary readiness consists of the amount of students who graduate with consideration of their diploma plan. It also considers the four-year longitudinal graduation rate for a cohort. All factors are evaluated about race/ethnicity and then scored on a scale of zero to hundred, with a high school target score of at least fifty-seven.

It, therefore, is postulated that:

H₀: There will be not difference between magnet schools and that of traditional schools in the concern to the means of postsecondary readiness (i.e. $\mu_1 = \mu_2$).

H_A: There will be difference between magnet schools and that of traditional schools in the concern to the means of postsecondary readiness (i.e. $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$).

Post-Secondary Readiness

Although the boxplot for Post-Secondary Readiness does reveal some outliers, none is greater than 1.5 box-lengths from the edge of the box. Thus, there are no extreme outliers present in the dataset as evident from Figure 4.4.

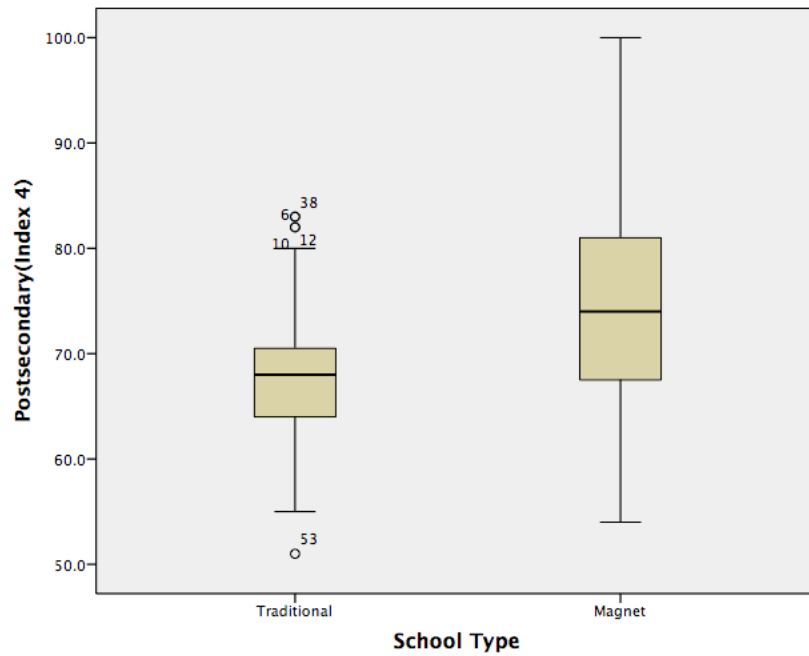


Figure 4-4 Postsecondary Box Plot

The postsecondary score was normally distributed for both traditional and magnet schools, as assessed by visual inspection of Normal Q-Q Plots, as can be seen below in Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6.

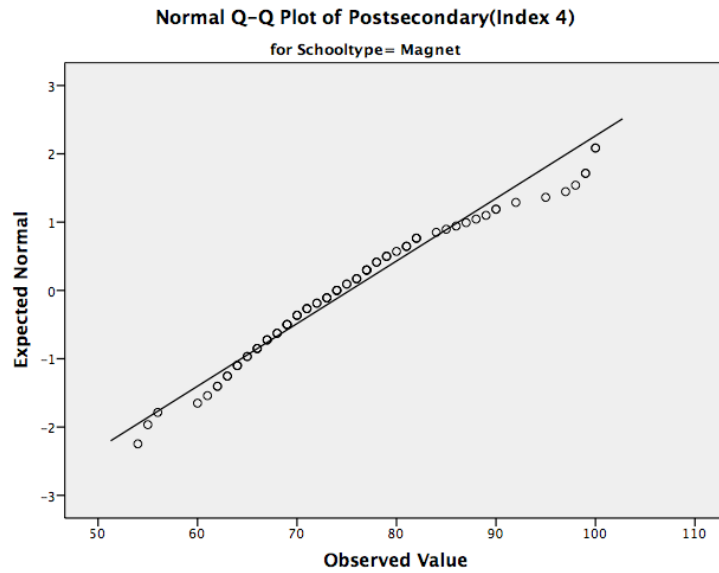


Figure 4-5 Postsecondary Magnet Normal Q-Q Plot

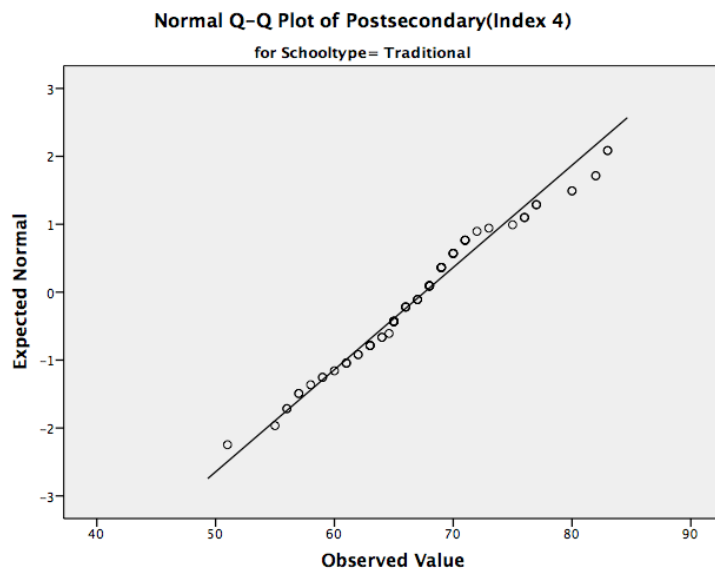


Figure 4-6 Postsecondary Traditional Normal Q-Q Plot

The assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by the Levene's test for postsecondary readiness for magnet and traditional schools ($p = .000$). Thus, results were interpreted from a modified t-test produced by SPSS or Welch t-test. Post-Secondary Readiness was greater in that of magnet schools ($M = 75.30$, $SD = 10.91$) than that of traditional schools ($M = 67.58$, $SD = 6.64$) as can be seen from Table 4.2. Magnet schools mean postsecondary readiness score was 7.72, 95% CI [10.54 to 4.89] higher than that of traditional schools. There was a statistically significant difference in postsecondary readiness scores between magnet and traditional schools, $t(5.402) = 130.514$, $p = .000$. There was a statistically significant difference between means ($p < .05$), and therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Evidence of the disparity of means in concern to postsecondary readiness is illustrated in Figure 4.7. It can be recalled that postsecondary readiness is a measure of how prepared public school students are for college, professional training or work after high school. It is a composite score that includes STAAR testing, four-year cohort graduation rate, the amount of students who graduate meeting the requirements of advanced high school graduation plan, as well as, students who scored high enough on advanced test. Therefore, it can be understood that magnet schools have higher graduation rates with students who or better prepared for life after high school.

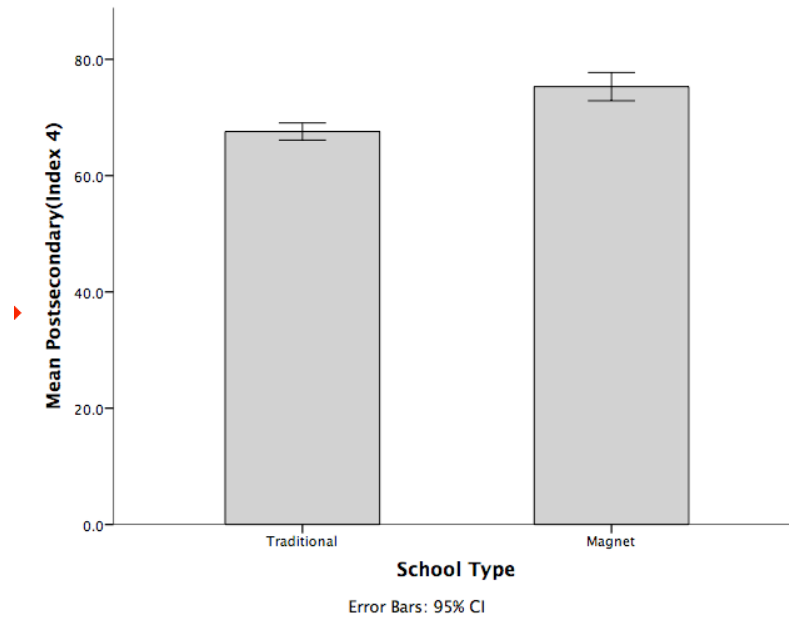


Figure 4-7 Postsecondary Mean Comparison

Hypothesis Two

For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will have greater teacher autonomy than that of traditional schools. Calculating the years of experience of teachers employed at traditional and magnet schools measured teacher autonomy, which is coded as the variable TeacherEXP.

It, therefore, is postulated that:

H0: There will be not difference between magnet schools and that of traditional schools in the means of teacher experience (i.e. $\mu_1 = \mu_2$).

HA: There will be difference between magnet schools and that of traditional schools in the means of teacher experience (i.e. $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$).

Teacher Autonomy

Although the boxplot for teacher experience does reveal some outliers, none is greater than 1.5 box-lengths from the edge of the box. Thus, there are no extreme outliers present in the dataset as evident from Figure 4.8.

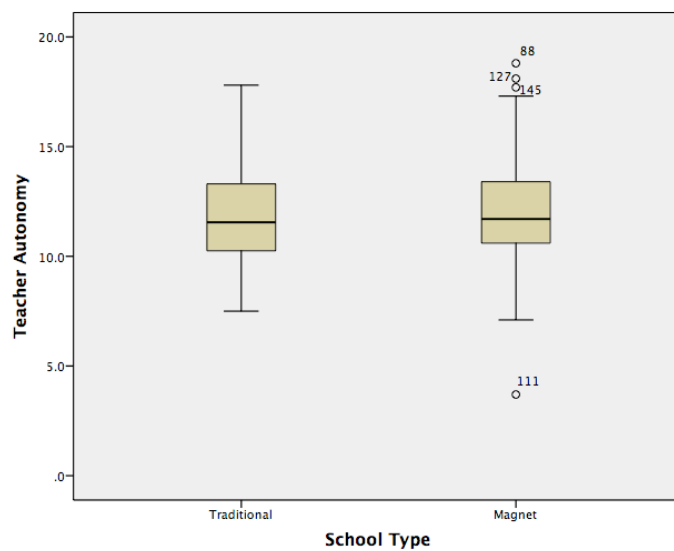


Figure 4-8 Teacher Autonomy Box Plot

Teacher autonomy score was normally distributed for both traditional and magnet schools, as assessed by visual inspection of Normal Q-Q Plots, as can be seen below in Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10.

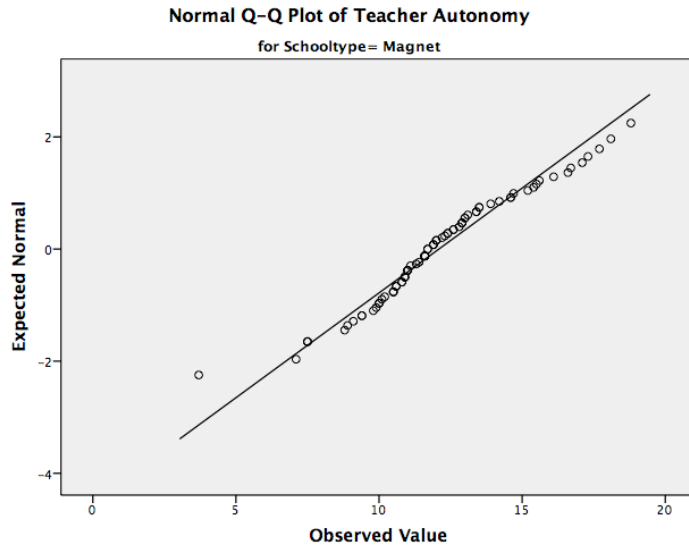


Figure 4-9 Teacher Autonomy Magnet Normal Q-Q Plot

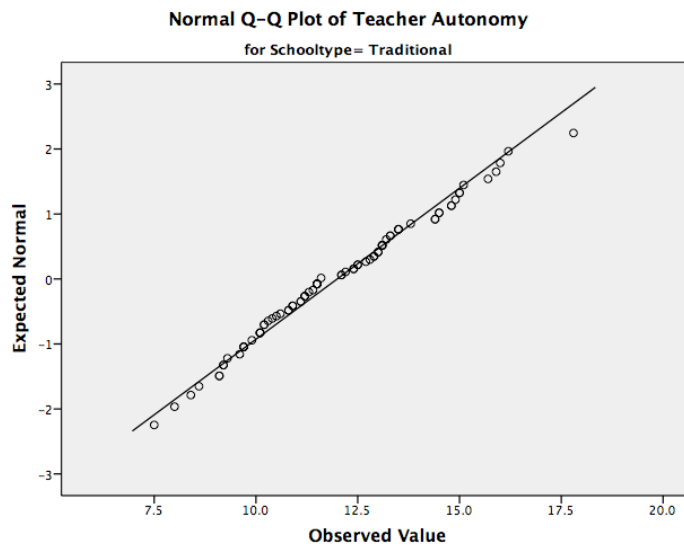


Figure 4-10 Teacher Autonomy Traditional Normal Q-Q Plot

There was homogeneity of variances for teacher experience for magnet and traditional schools, as demonstrated by the Levene's test for equality variance ($p = .365$). There was little difference in mean in terms of teacher experience, magnet schools ($M = 12.09$, $SD = 2.67$), while traditional schools had ($M = 11.995$, $SD = 2.15$). The teacher experience mean score was .097, 95%CI [.86 to .66] higher than traditional schools. A summation of the findings can be found in Table 4.2. There was not a significant difference in mean scores between magnet and traditional schools with respect to teacher experience, $t(158) = .254$, $p = .800$. Regarding teacher experience, there was a failure to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. Thus, teacher experience does not appear to be greater at magnet schools.

Hypothesis Three

For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will demonstrate greater public value than that of traditional schools. Public value is a composite score; that consist of University Interscholastic League (UIL) results and if schools are Advancement Via Individual Determination schools (AVID).

It, therefore, is postulated that:

H0: The distribution scores of magnet schools and that of traditional schools in public value are equal.

HA: The distribution scores of magnet schools and that of traditional schools in public value are not equal.

Public Value

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in public values score between magnet and public schools. Distribution of the public values score for magnet, and traditional schools were similar as assessed by visual inspection, which can be seen in figure 4.11.

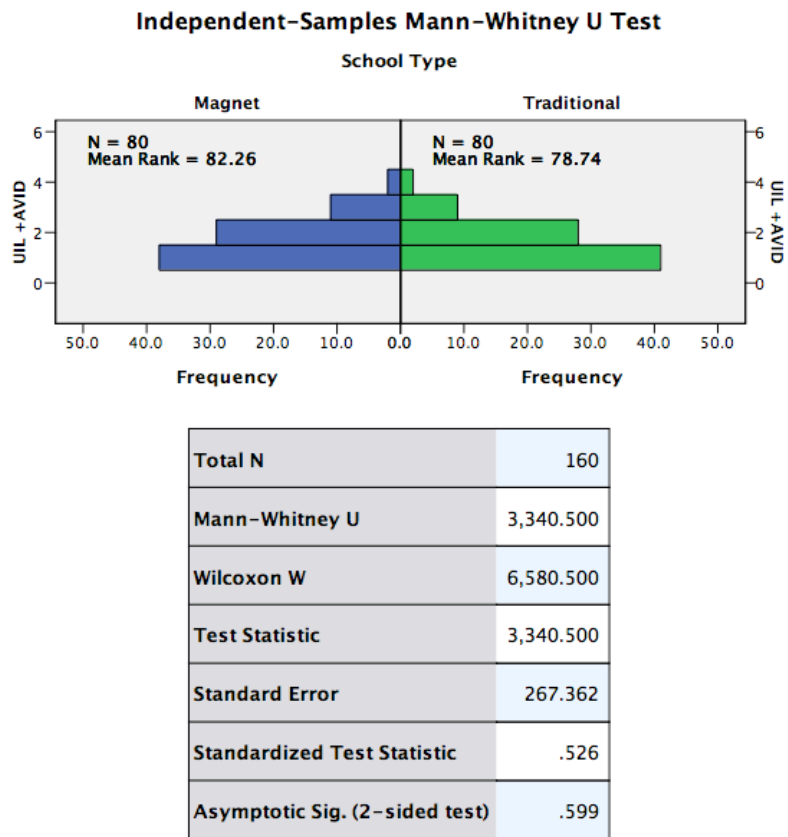


Figure 4-11 Mann-Whitney U Results

Median public values score was not statistically significantly different between magnet (Mdn = 2.00) and traditional schools (Mdn = 1.00), U = 3,340.5, p=.599. Magnet schools do not appear to have a greater concern for public value as accessed by the testing of this study.

A summation of quantitative findings is provided below in Table 4.3.

Table 4-3 Quantitative Findings Summary

Hypothesis	Significance	Conclusion
1 For this study, it is hypothesized that the Texas Education Agency's, campus comparison group database has correctly matched schools regarding economic disparity.	Not Significant	Magnet and traditional schools are matched properly in terms of economic disadvantaged as defined by the campus comparison group database.
2 For this study, it is hypothesized that the implementation of magnet school policy, which could be considered a more neo-Marxian alternative, serves students better than the traditional school model regarding Post-Secondary Readiness.	Significant	There is a significant difference between magnet and traditional schools in terms of Post-Secondary Readiness. Magnet schools have almost 10% greater Post-Secondary Readiness.
3 For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will have greater teacher autonomy than that of traditional schools. Calculating the years of experience of teachers employed at traditional and magnet schools measured teacher autonomy, which is coded as the variable TeacherEXP.	Not Significant	Teacher autonomy as assessed by years of teacher experience demonstrate little or no statistical difference between magnet and traditional schools.
4 For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will demonstrate greater public value than that of traditional schools. Public value is a composite score; that consist of University Interscholastic League (UIL) results and if schools are Advancement Via Individual Determination schools (AVID).	Not Significant	Public value a composite score, composed of UIL placement and AVID demonstration status, demonstrate little or no statistical difference. Magnet and traditional schools placed similarly in UIL, in conjunction with the adoption of AVID.

Qualitative Analysis

The following hypothesis is related to the qualitative techniques that were explored in this dissertation. The techniques include narrative analysis in conjunction with autoethnography.

Hypothesis Four

For this study, it is hypothesized that magnet schools will exhibit more elements of critical education theory, i.e. citizenship, critical thought and global awareness than that of traditional school. Elements of critical education were examined using the mission statements of both magnet and traditional schools.

Mission Statements: Thematic Narrative Analysis

A total of 160 websites were searched, of which 85 schools were found to have a mission statement present. Of the school websites, 36% (29 out of 80) of traditional schools had a website mission statement, while 70% (56 out of 80) of magnet schools had mission statement representation. When segregated for meeting the criteria of critical education theory, 52% (15 out of 29) of traditional schools were left for further examination. Regarding magnet schools, 82% (46 out of 56) met the criteria for critical education theory. Figure 4.12 provides a summary of the thematic finding of magnet and traditional schools.

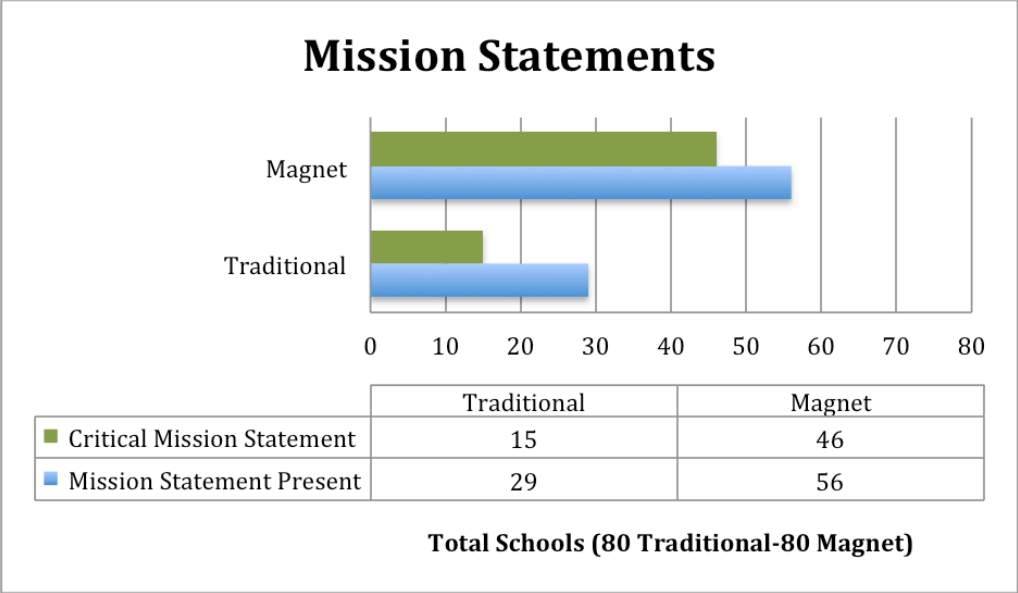


Figure 4-12 Total Mission Statements

Magnet Schools

Magnet schools referenced citizenship in 67% (31 out of 46) of school mission statements. Critical thought was mentioned in 57% (26 out of 46) of magnet mission statements. A global perspective was mentioned in 33% (15 out of 46) of mission statements. An illustration of the finding can be seen below in Table 4.3.

Traditional Schools

Traditional Schools Detailed analysis of traditional school mission statements reveals that citizenship was mentioned in 73% (11 out of 25) of mission statements. Elements of critical thought were present in 40% (6 out of 15) of traditional mission statements. Global perspective elements were mentioned in 27% (4 out of 15) of mission

statements. Global perspective elements were mentioned in 27% (4 out of 15) mission statements. An illustration of the finding can be seen in Table 4.4.

Table 4-4 Mission Statement Results

	Mission Statement Present	Critical Elements	Citizenship	Critical Thought	Global
Traditional	36%	52%	73%	40%	27%
Magnet	70%	82%	67%	57%	33%

Thematic Themes

The themes identified in the thematic analysis of school mission statements were *Citizenship*, *Critical Thought*, and *Global Perspective*. The themes are elaborated upon in the following sections.

Citizenship

School mission statements divulged that citizenship was the most likely theme to be mentioned in any school type mission statement. The words *citizen* was consistently used to reference the school's dedication to creating student citizenship. In some mission statements, the words *society* were used to represent citizenship. The third delineation of citizenship could be found in mission statements that used the words *community*.

Many of the mission statements described citizenship as an active action that students should strive for every day. Further analysis of the themes of citizenship is represented as, responsible citizenship, productive citizenship and expressing citizenship through contributions to society.

Responsible Citizenship

Responsible citizenship is represented as the following:

“Our district empowers students to become ... committed to responsible citizenship and service to others.” (Natalia, 2015)

Productive Citizenship

Productive citizenship is represented as the following:

“To graduate active and productive citizens...” (Lee, 2015)

“Provide the environment, motivation, and comprehensive educational opportunities that acknowledge the diversity of students' academic, career and social needs in preparation for individual fulfillment, productive citizenship and the world of work.” (Bowie, 2015)

Contribute to Society

Productive citizenship is represented as the following:

“All students will progress academically and intellectually, and will graduate prepared for personal success and inspired to contribute to society.” (Akins, 2015)

“Developing responsible citizens ... that make meaningful contributions to society.”
(Magnolia, 2015)

Critical Thought

Critical thought was the second most likely theme to be mentioned in any school type mission statement. The words *critical* were consistently used to expound a schools' mission to enrich students learning. In some mission statements, the words *problem* was used to signify creating students who have the ability to think critically through problem-solving. The final words used to demonstrate critical thought were the words *growth* in conjunction with the word *mindset*.

Thematically regarding critical thought the themes of critical thinking, problem solving and growth mindset emerged in mission statements in relation to critical thought.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is represented as the following:

“Developing responsible citizens who have a passion for life-long learning and possess critical thinking skills that enable them to make meaningful contributions to society.” (Magnolia, 2015)

“Our mission ... is to meet the needs of culturally diverse students who will be equipped to become productive citizens and critical thinkers in a global society.” (MacArthur, 2015)

Problem Solving

Problem solving is represented as the following:

“Life-long learners are creative in their approach to solving problems; they rely on a vast array of background knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines and creatively combine that knowledge to generate new and productive outcomes.” (International, 2015)

“Encourage, support and challenge each individual to achieve the highest level of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and character.” (Mcneil, 2015)

“Critical thinking and problem-solving today are necessary for students to be equipped for future challenges.” (Lewisville, 2015)

“Our remarkable staff, involved parents and committed students come together to make Westside a wonderful place to be challenged intellectually, grow socially, and develop as independent thinkers and problem solvers.” (Westside, 2015)

Growth Mindset

Growth mindset is represented as the following:

“To be a challenging and high-spirited college and career preparatory high school that models the acts of continuous learning and the values of a growth mindset by providing challenging and exciting opportunities for self-empowerment to all stakeholders.” (Grady, 2015)

“The mission is to ensure that each student has the growth mindset to be a critical thinker, resilient learner, and innovative leader.” (Irving, 2015)

Global Perspective

Mission statements that related to global perspective purpose were to promote an understanding student growth beyond their surroundings. Most of the schools that had a global perspective were IB schools. Foremost, the global perspective was denoted by the words global and the world.

Global themes were represented as global competition, as well as, global awareness.

Global Competition

Global competition is expressed as the following:

“...compete in a global economy and serve as successful citizens in their community.” (Veterans, 2015)

“We will respect every learner’s unique potential by fostering a compassionate and cooperative environment that builds character, citizenship, and the capacity to compete in a global community.” (Crandall, 2015)

“Empowering all students to succeed in a global society.” (Irving, 2015)

“We expect our students to push themselves academically, intellectually, and socially in preparation for leadership in an ever-changing global society.” (Carnegie, 2015)

Global Awareness

Global awareness is represented as the following:

“... rigorous study of traditional discipline and educating the whole person so that students become life-long learners, self-aware and compassionate thinkers, and informed participants in both local and world affairs.” (Woodrow, 2015)

“...establish values that allow them to act with humanity in order to create a better world through knowledge, intercultural understanding, and respect.” (Bowie, 2015)

Thematic Analysis Conclusion

Overall, it can be concluded that magnet school were more than twice as likely to have implemented mission statements, compared to traditional schools. Magnet school mission statements were also more likely to involve critical elements, such as critical thought with a global perspective. According to previous studies the presence of mission statements translated into a more focused school (Keeling, 2013). The benefits of mission statements go beyond the mission statement itself; the collective effort needed to craft a mission statement can galvanize a school uniting the school for a unified purpose (Keeling, 2013).

Autoethnography

Overview

As mentioned in the previous sections of this study, dropout is a prevalent problem among the economically disadvantaged, a group primarily composed of minorities who are more reliant on public goods. Traditionally, these students have scored lower on standardized tests, such as state-based tests and college admission tests. The problem of providing educational opportunities that are properly aligned to the student population is not a new reality. This study centers around Texas public schools due to the fact that Texas is in a transitional phase. With a growing urban population, Texas is at sixty percent economically disadvantaged with thirteen percent African American and over fifty percent Hispanic. It is believed that investment in magnet schools, specifically International Baccalaureate magnet schools, holds the key to lowering dropout and increasing college readiness. It would make sense to explore possible solutions implemented by other states of similar composition to Texas.

One such state is Illinois, which overall has less low-income students at about 54 percent lower than that of Texas. Yet, it has cities such as Chicago that have above state average economic disadvantage with a disproportionate minority population. Chicago is composed of over 85 percent minority students with almost 90 percent being economically disadvantaged. The city has searched for ways to meet the demands of the student population; the solution came in the form of International Baccalaureate schools. Success came in the form of Lincoln Park High school, a highly awarded IB school composed of talented students (Coca et al., 2012).

In 1997, Chicago decided to move even more funds toward the creation of thirteen new IB schools (Coca et al., 2012), all created to provide a higher quality education in urban Chicago neighborhoods. There was a degree of criticism as to how

well IB schools fit with urban students. A study was conducted to test how well the IB Chicago experiment performed. The study looked at the 2003-2007 cohort, examining the overall college-readiness high school performance of the students. Although there have been many IB studies in the past, this Chicago IB study placed a focus on low-income, racial/ethnic minorities who were also first-generation college students. The findings of the study found that the students fared very well regarding college preparation (Coca et al., 2012).

The following autoethnography hopes to provide a more detailed understanding of the implications of magnet schools in urban environments, specifically school environments that are composed of lower economic minority students, that have the highest probability of dropout. Although this autoethnography produces fewer positivist data, it is believed that it goes beyond the numbers, bestowing real insight with respect to the effect of magnet/IB schools' correlation to high school dropout and college readiness. In the following autoethnography, I use my experiences as a certified International Baccalaureate high school teacher to explore the inner working of the International Baccalaureate program at the high school level. This study is based on critical education theory tenants, i.e., teacher autonomy, students as citizens, and the importance of critical thought. The primary questions are the following:

- Are magnet schools, specifically IB schools, representative of critical education theory?
- Do magnet schools prepare students to have greater college readiness and, therefore, less dropout?

This study began with the following questions: Are the elements of critical education theory present in International Baccalaureate schools? How do the

International Baccalaureate schools translate into greater student achievement? The data collected provides a window into these questions in addition to providing educational decision makers more consideration for educational alternatives.

Autoethnography Findings

The data generated from this autoethnography came in the form of personal narrative accounts bolstered by artifacts. As mentioned above, artifacts come in the form of further documentation, such as official documents or photographs that provide support beyond the researcher. After data had been collected, it was then sorted using a thematic narrative approach. Four key categories emerged from the data: International Baccalaureate indoctrination; teachers as trained professionals; beyond the classroom; and critical thought as normal, not the exception.

International Baccalaureate Indoctrination

The International Baccalaureate program has experienced a dramatic increase in the course of the last ten years, offered in more than 130 countries with nearly a million students worldwide (International Baccalaureate, 2015). Universities now give priority to IB graduates over that of traditional high school graduates; employers are excited by the prospect of internationally-minded employees (International Baccalaureate, 2015). The International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which began as a way to standardize education across the span of multiple countries for children of diplomats, now has a different calling (Coca et al., 2012). Today, IB schools are being asked to bolster public school education by adding a rich, culturally aware curriculum (Coca et al., 2012). It is not surprising that IB schools are being championed as the answer to gaps left by traditional public education.

It was at the conclusion of my second year teaching Audio Video Production in the spring of 2013 when I was approached by the high school International

Baccalaureate coordinator. International Baccalaureate coordinators act as proxy principals in high schools, ensuring all elements of the IB program are aligned. I was surprised by her visit due to the fact I was unaware that the IB program had a film component. She explained that she was looking for a teacher who could move the IB program forward by offering new advanced elective classes such as film. Upon realizing her intent, I was dismayed at the thought of creating and implementing a new curriculum and course offering at the high school. The year prior, I found myself in a parallel situation; I was asked by the school principal to figure out how to add Audio Video production to the campus. The task was rigorous and involved several meetings all over the district, culminating in me planning from scratch all aspects of the program. I felt stretched beyond the role of a teacher; I would eventually draw out room blueprints and wiring diagrams for the formulation of an audio video classroom. I even had to make subsequent visits throughout the summer to check progress on the construction of the space, not to mention the task of formulating a curriculum that met Texas educational standards. So, it was not hard to see how the prospect of being at the forefront of yet another new program was not met with enthusiasm.

The IB coordinator explained the virtues of the program and implored me to be open-minded and told me to explore the literature that was available concerning IB in general. Her primary selling point was the support of the program by the school principal. She expounded her argument by describing in detail the amount of time the principal spent overseeing the program. On several occasions, the principal rejected the commonly accepted precedents in favor of IB support. Support came in the form of the creation of classes that had fewer students so that the multiple levels of IB were not confined to a single class. I was not surprised by the principal's support of the program; I was aware that his daughter was a member of the IB program at the school. I would

eventually recognize that the principal modeled the mission and vision statements of the school from the tenants of the IB program. This understanding would come after carefully examining as much IB literature as I could ingest. The principal devoted much of the daily school announcements to expounding the virtues of critical thinking, personal reflection, having an open mind, and being principled. In subsequent years, he would galvanize his thoughts on the subject in the form of his personal manifesto. I was abashed when the principal cold-opened the daily announcements with the reading of his essay "Being Conscientious", which he conjointly released on Twitter. I watched my class be transfixed by the message, each student quietly listening to the essay in its entirety. Perhaps the best summary is provided by the opening sentences, "We have a choice in how we regard the world around us. We can be passive recipients, reacting without much consideration for how or why we react the way we do. We can also be thoughtful and contemplative of how we interact with others, seeking first to understand before trying to make sure the world understands our point of view" (Hagman, 2015). A segment of the post can be seen on the following page in Figure 4.13.



Lamar High @LamarHigh · May 29

"Being Conscientious" -

docs.google.com/document/d/1sa...

Google Docs

Thankfully, the number of people who are consistently not conscientious is fairly small, but you can think of a number of scenarios in your own past where people have not been conscientious: you or a friend have been discriminated against because of ethnicity, a girl has been humiliated because of her weight, a student has disrespected a substitute teacher who spoke broken English, a school staff member allowed a group of students to break a rule while enforcing the rule with others, or you chose to cheat instead of doing the work yourself, etc. The lack of conscientiousness *felt* bad, whether you were the perpetrator or you simply witnessed it. The good news, though, is that conscientiousness is a choice for every person. We can all be more meticulous in how we communicate and interact with one another, if we choose to do so. Instead of making a derisive comment or crude joke about a gay classmate, we can first consider how making the comment will make the gay student feel, how others might negatively interpret the comment, and how others will consider us for making the comment. When we take a moment to make those considerations (being conscientious, in other words), more often than not we will choose our words and actions wisely.

We will all fall short periodically, but when we establish a track record of consistent conscientiousness, we earn the benefit of the doubt and those close to you will likely forgive you. People are willing (and often eager) to share their bruised feelings in a direct but considerate manner when they know that they are with a typically conscientious person. Consider your best friend; you'll share your thoughts and feelings with him or her when there's a misunderstanding because many more times than not, he or she is going to empathize with you and try to see things from your point of view. The key is to build an earned reputation for being conscientious, and that takes deliberate effort and evidence over time.

Institutions, such as schools, can be conscientious or insensitive, too. When the individuals that attend or work in the institution are consistently mindful and considerate, and when they work together to establish and support conscientious expectations for everyone, the culture becomes one of support and value. **This is one of my goals for Lamar High School.** I want every individual associated with our

Being Conscientious

Being Conscientious We have a choice in how we regard the world around us. We can be passive recipients, reacting without much consideration for how or why we react the way we do. We can also be...

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RETWEETS

8

FAVORITES

9



5:47 AM - 29 May 2015 · Details



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Figure 4-13 Being Conscientious

Clearly, the principal would be a vital resource if I became involved with the IB film program. Even with the level of support from the principal, I was still not sold on the merits of the program. After all, I figured that much like the advanced placement classes,

the primary student demographic would be successful students. It was the conclusion of the 2013 school year, and I had yet to give any response regarding the IB Film course. During my conference period, I was once again visited by the IB coordinator. She came with a simple request that I dedicate a few minutes of my time to attending an IB class. I yielded to her request and found myself inside a Theories of Knowledge (TOK) class. I was surprised by what I saw. There were students of every demographic, conversing about fringe subjects seldom talked about in typical classrooms. Projected on the board was the following prompt:

To what extent do you agree with André Gide's view that, —L'illogisme irrite. Trop de logique ennue. La vie échappe à la logique, et tout ce que la seule logique construit reste artificiel et contraint. Donc est un mot que doit ignorer le poète, et qui n'existe que dans l'esprit. Il [Lack of logic annoys. Too much logic is boring. Life escapes logic, and everything built on logic alone is artificial and limited. Therefore, is a word that the poet must ignore, that exists only in the mind.]?

Apparently, a level of critical thought exists in this magnet program beyond the traditional public school curriculum. I was excited at the prospect of classes that existed that demanded students think critically regardless of their socio-economic status or ethnicity. Indubitably, I accepted the challenge to be a part of the IB program; not only that, I would act as an ambassador for the program.

Teachers as Trained Professionals: A Step Toward Autonomy

One of the primary aspects of education involves teachers engaging in professional development of various types. Research shows that professional development has a direct correlation to student success. It is part of the process of being a lifelong learner who can motivate students to learn (Mizell, 2010). The caveat is that the teacher must feel free to navigate the educational sphere without the restrictions of overstandardization. As Freire (2000) would say, men and women often fall victim to the

equation of freedom with the work of furthering the status quo. However, properly trained teachers can become autonomous agents who truly influence learning. Unfortunately, public education suffers from a failure to view teachers as qualified professionals capable of taking control of the learning environment (Giroux, 2015). This mistrust is often manifested in professional development; instead of providing tools for teachers, schools view them as culprits for poor student performance (Mizell, 2010).

The summer ahead of the 2013–14 school year is starting, and I am en route to Miami to become certified as an IB educator. I should preface the following discussion by saying I have been to many professional development training sessions over the years. My first year as a teacher, I was required to log over eighty hours in professional development over the course of two weeks to become a certified Project Lead The Way (PLTW) teacher. This was followed by another eighty hours to be certified as a digital electronics PLTW teacher. All the training sessions mentioned above are in conjunction to the required Texas Education Agency certifications that allow me to be certified to teach.

When I arrived, I was told that all of the members of the IB teachers would be staying at a single location over the course of the week. I was handed an itinerary that consisted of the week's planned professional development activities. It included periods of time in which you would be separated depending on the course taught as well as time periods in which you would be with the entire group. I awoke two hours early for the first day of training. I was eager to see if the unique nature of IB would permeate into the training. The training was at a large resort located on South Beach; I paced around looking for my assigned room. I found it and walked in; I was the only one present, but I was happy to be there early. Over the course of thirty minutes, the entire room was filled with over forty teachers, from all over the world. The only linking factor was the subject of

IB taught and a comprehension of English. In the training sessions I had attended, seeing a person from outside your school or district was a rarity. Now I was conversing with teachers from all parts of the United States, as well as teachers from Candida, Mexico, France and many other places. It was an oddity; that gave me a chance to gain perspectives that could be used not just in my IB course but in all my teaching. Teachers were happy to share their entire curriculum, which I gladly stored on my portable hard-drive. The teachers gave teaching advice, they shared practices that worked, and even dared tell of their failures.

That night as I went to bed, I pondered what forces allowed this training to be so dynamic. The answer soon became apparent: we were allowed to be "trained professionals." This did not mean that there was no structure provided during training. We rarely deviated from the topics in the original plan. The difference was that the instructors approached us with information, then allowed us to figure out solutions. In regular training, each element of the training would be dictated to the attendees, with little or no improvisation. In fact, we were instructed what topics we needed to cover as IB Film teachers but never expressly told how the task should be accomplished. Instead, teachers who had success in the past shared their winning strategies. Ideas flowed quickly, leaving little time to write down all of the information. The instructors soon adopted an ideas wall, which was a large sheet of white construction paper that ideas could be shared on. On the next page is Figure 4.14, which is a photo I took of the ideas wall.

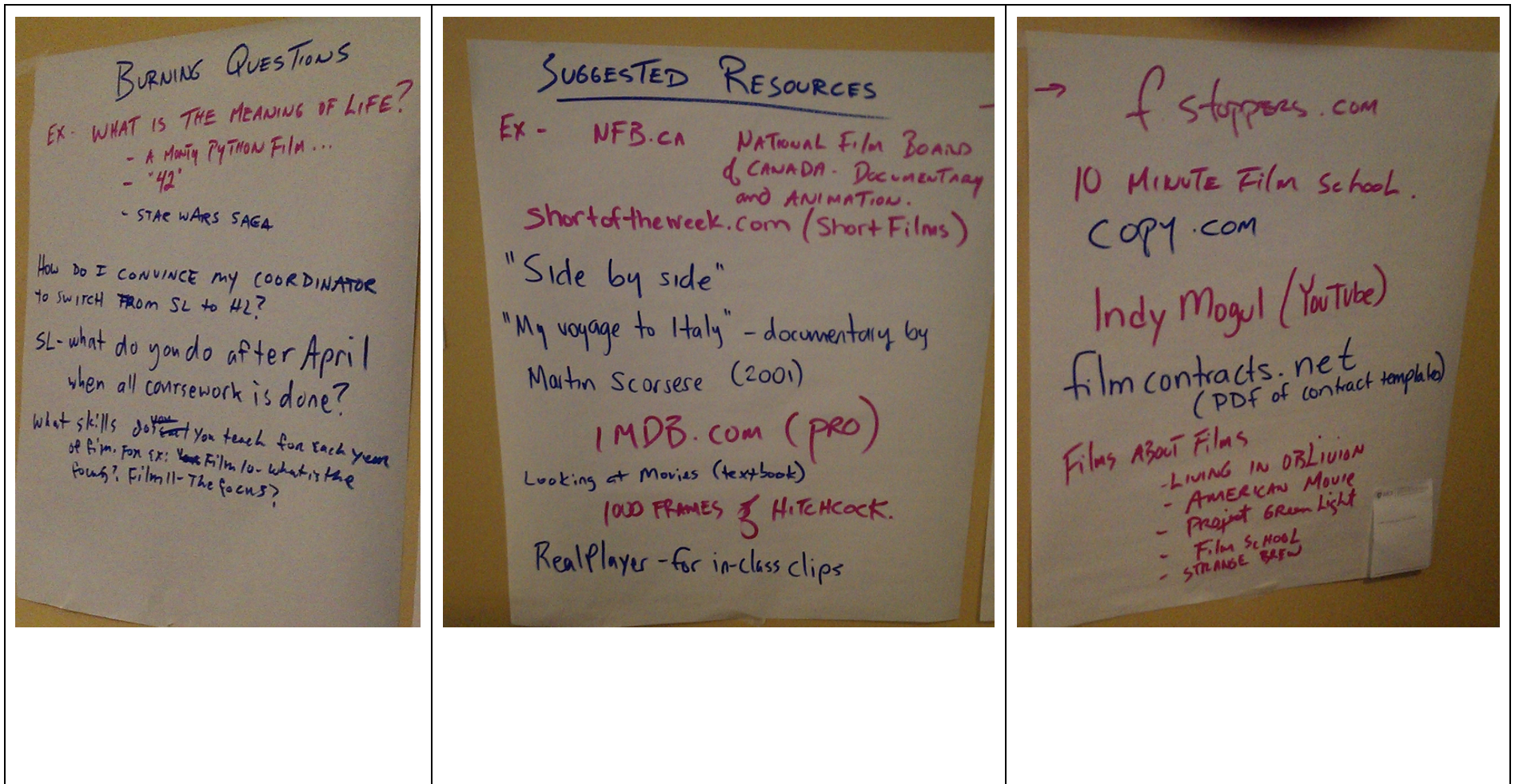


Figure 4-14 Ideal Wall

When I made it back from Miami, I told the IB coordinator, ardently, "This is the best training I have ever been part of." Since then I have attended other IB trainings and had similar experiences. What I learned at the professional development trainings had a direct effect on my instructional methods in the classroom. When I began my first year teaching IB, I felt free to explore multiple methods of instruction. This was coupled with a strong professional learning community of all the teachers I met at the training sessions, who made themselves always available. Teacher autonomy is possible when teachers are given proper reverence.

Beyond the Classroom: Citizenship

The cornerstone of any educational vision includes a dedication to helping students become better citizens. The initial attempts to create public education included Jefferson touting the importance of the cultivation of an educated populous as the primary goal of education (Densford, 1961). Without proper education, true citizenship could never be achieved (Giroux, 2013). Giroux takes the idea of citizenship and education further by condemning neoliberal education that produces consumers, not citizens. Giroux calls upon the work of Marxist theoreticians like Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci pioneered what he called "cultural hegemony" to describe how states create repressive systems to maintain power in capitalist societies (Giroux, 2013). It is the recognition of the restrictive nature of the public educational system that is the cornerstone of raising one's consciousness of freedom through the critical education process (Giroux, 2011). In today's technology-dense society, students must be able to use social media, magazines, and/or film "to create alternative public spheres actively engaged in shaping what Gramsci referred to as a new oppositional culture" (Giroux, 2011, p. 56). This culture can inform and shape society.

It is now the second semester of my first year teaching the IB film class. My students were thrilled to be able to take my film class as a departure from the theory-only classes that they have been enrolled in. What is even more important, the students recognize the power of leveraging film to promote a message. Conceivably, a positive aspect of the youth consuming social media at such an alarming rate is their recognition of the usage of social media beyond entertainment and consumerism. After class, some of my students approached me about using the film lab to work on other projects. I typically discourage after-class-time lab usage, but the students explained that it was for the service element of their CAS hours. There are three segments of CAS in the IB program: the "C" represents creativity, the "A" represents activity, and the "S" represents service. The creativity aspect requires that students demonstrate creative thinking, the activity portion of CAS calls for a manifestation of physical activity, and the service aspect requires students to show their commitment to citizenship through service to the community. To receive their IB diploma, each student must demonstrate advancement in and mastery of each category. The students wanted to work as a film production team to create films that would provide service to the school and the community. I was unable to hide how impressed I was with their level of organization and commitment. They provided me with an itinerary complete with Gantt charts detailing the projects they wanted to tackle as well as how long it would take to complete each project. They produced several films over the course of the year that addressed a broad range of topics from bullying, youth, and concussions to the promotion of a mentoring group; screencaps can be seen in Figure 4.15 on page 109.

Throughout the year, students would use IB film as a vehicle for positive social promotion. As the year progressed, my IB students' projects became larger in scope; soon, the IB students asked me about a school-wide culture project. The students wanted

to create a weekly school show that tackled tough school issues, i.e., drug use, dropping out, and cultural sensitivity. I knew that this project would not be trivial. I explained to the students that this would take dedication and time outside of regular school hours; they assured me of their commitment. Two months passed, and the students came to be with a rough-cut of the show. Although I instructed them of how the show could be polished, overall, it was quite impressive. The students met with the principal and created a watching schedule for the school; that was every Friday morning. A screencap can be seen in Figure 4.15.

It was remarkable the IB students embracing all of the usages of technology to provide a positive service to the school. Not only did they influence the school culture, but they also entertained and educated their fellow peers, thus creating more informed citizens.



Conclusions PSA



Youth Mentoring Organization



Bullying PSA



If you want Team Berserker to cover your club, team(organization) or have a segment idea please email at: lbserserker@gmail.com or tweet: [@lamarberserker](https://twitter.com/lamarberserker).



Weekly Announcements Show

Figure 4-15 Film Screenshots

Critical Thought as Normal

Perhaps, the element that is most applicable to critical education is critical thought. As a direct retort to neoliberalism, which is rooted in market principles, there is the promotion of critical thought. Instead of only training students, they are asked to participate in critical thinking and analysis. In conjunction, Freire wanted an emphasis to not only be placed on the interpretative dimension of learning but also be an integral part of pedagogical relationships that are complete with open dialogues that question the status-quo. The classroom is not derivative of students echoing the thoughts of the teacher, but rather creating environments that allow critical thought. In conjunction with the critical pedagogy, the teacher must accept the role of a guide that helps expose the hidden assumptions that are part of the learning process. Upon accepting the mantle of the guide, the teacher removes the layers of abstraction created by reliance on positivism. A summation of the role of the teacher is captured by Maxine Greene (1978):

It is not that teachers consciously mystify or deliberately concoct the positive images that deflect critical thought. It is not even that they themselves are necessarily sanguine about the health of the society. Often submerged in the bureaucracies for which they work, they simply accede to what is taken-for-granted. Identifying themselves as spokespersons for or representatives of the system in its local manifestations, they avoid interrogation and critique. They transmit, often tacitly, benign or neutral versions of the social reality. They may, deliberately or not, adopt these to accommodate to what they perceive to be class origins or the capacities of their students, but, whether they are moving those young people towards the world around as given, probably unchanged and predefined. (p. 56)

Enter the "banking concept of knowledge "created by Freire that equates student minds to that of banks. In most schools, the teacher or "depositor" merely acts to fill the student mind, judging success as the complete filling of the student's mind. In this concept, the mind is more malleable if there is little resistance, regarding critique. The student's only role is to adduce information supplied by the teacher. As Freire (2000) states, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless,

impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p.31). Regarding the banking concept of knowledge, the student lacks any knowledge; the teacher is the primary means of enlightenment. The banking concept of knowledge is in direct conflict with critical education, which empowers students and teachers to engage in critique. The neoliberal form of education is threatened by educational learning experiments that involve creativity and critical self-reflection; it is this type of education that can lead to change. In the traditional neoliberal, market-driven education, change equates to changing the mentality of the oppressed, not the circumstances of their oppression. The oppressed are marginalized as examples of deviants from the traditional social norm; with a critical education, the emphasis is placed on the individual, not the collective.

Unfortunately, the traditional education system is plagued by over-standardization. As Freire (2011) defined critical thinking, it is a chance not to recreate simply what is, but rather a means to look at what could be. Freire (2011) championed the cultivation of imagination, critical thinking, and social responsibility over standardized market-based training. The critical pedagogy, as well as critical education theory, require that all parties involved in the education process recognize the inequality present in the human condition. Beyond recognition, informed citizens should become agents unafraid of becoming change agents as part of the informed citizenry.

Many organizations recognize the importance of critical thought in education. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a national advocacy organization, includes critical thought as an integral part of their framework. The organization recognizes the importance of core subjects but places emphases on critical thought, backed by case study research from all over the United States (Rumberger, 2011). Clearly, critical thought is an important element of public education.

So, what does learning built upon the tenets of critical thought look like in action? I would soon learn about the power of critical thought my first year as an IB film teacher. I knew that IB students were expected to complete a more rigorous curriculum than that of their traditional peers as evident from the excerpt of a traditional high school film class curriculum, shown in Figure 4.1, compared to that of IB film. In the traditional film class, the students are expected to analyze films but only within the confines a worksheet that carefully guides them throughout the process. In contrast, the IB curriculum is full of student-led challenges, such as philosophical chairs and a learning activity that lets students debate each other. The IB film curriculum anchors itself firmly within the confines of theory, challenging the student to make connections between theory and application. I initially thought that there would be little difference between the two curricula in actual practice; I was wrong. The IB curriculum challenged the students at every step of the learning process. The students became immersed in learning from a critical perspective of film viewing. They transitioned from being film watchers to movie critics.

FOLLOW THIS FORMAT ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER.

Film Analysis

Name of Film: _____

(**UNDERLINE** the film title wherever you use it in your analysis; you may also abbreviate it just as long as you underline it. For example, first time used: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, second time used: ESOTSM)

USE www.imdb.com FOR THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

Year of Original Release: _____ Studio: _____ Length in Minutes: _____

Director: _____ Screenwriter(s): _____

Main Character Names	Actor/Actress Names
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

Introductory Notes/What to Look For (I will give these beforehand)

Discuss your overall opinion of the film. Begin this section by giving a **BRIEF** synopsis (summary) of the plot without giving away any "twists." What did you notice that you would like to share? What stood out in your view? These could be positives, negatives, or both. Provide specific examples

Discuss the guiding questions outlined in your notes for the film. These questions may address story/screenplay, theme(s), characterization, conflict, directing, cinematography, editing, structure, symbolism/irony, production design, music, etc...

Your rating: _____

- XV. Identity Construction
 - a. Talk about Identity, self, society
 - b. Intro to Maori Culture
 - c. Watch *Whale Rider*
 - d. Scene Chart – revisit scenes
 - e. Philosophical Chairs + Questions
- XVI. NeoRealism/French New Wave
 - a. Italian NeoRealism Packet – read for homework
 - b. *La Strada, Bicycle Thief*
 - c. NeoRealism Test
 - d. French New Wave/Left Bank packet – read for homework
 - e. *Breathless, The 400 Blows*; Look at clip Czech New Wave (*Closely Watched Trains*)
 - f. French New Wave Test
- XVII. Theory Script
 - a. In groups, write script on a fable/fairy tale through that theory lens assigned
 - b. Realism, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Masculinity, Race and Ethnicity

Traditional Film Class

IB Film

Figure 4-16 Film Curriculum Comparison

A core aspect of the IB program is the Theory of Knowledge (TOK), which all students are required to take. In this class, the students learn to question what we assume is knowledge. The theory of knowledge course is a course based upon teaching students to think critically as well as learn how others construct knowledge. The students are asked to look inward and determine how their beliefs and assumptions can lead to enrichment and personal fulfillment. All IB courses must have a TOK component that explores the nature of knowledge about the course subject. Many of the IB students find the TOK to be their most enriching IB experience; some students believe that they see the world around them differently.

Critical thought, for IB students, was not limited to the classroom. The school district implemented a new behavioral management system (PBIS), designed to provide specific steps for student discipline. The high school that I teach at decided that they would explain the new rules to the students using a series of videos. The videos reminded the students of the proper way to behave, using humor as a means of gaining student interest. Most of the students at the school either found the films to be entertaining or were annoyed. The students watched the films, accepting the underlying message of behaving and the consequences of failing to behave. However, some students saw a hidden message in the movies. The next morning, after the films were shown to the students, all the school restroom doors had signs posted on them. At first glance, I thought that the signs were school sponsored until I read the message: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view - until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." A version of the note is presented in Figure 4-17 on the next page. I knew that this quote was from the book, "To Kill A Mockingbird," but I was unsure of the reason that the quotes were being shown throughout the school.

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.

To Kill A Mockingbird
Harper Lee

Figure 4-17 Bathroom Door Notes

I asked my IB class about the notes, and they admitted that their fellow IB cohorts had placed the signs, all over the school, in protest to the behavioral films that had been shown on the previous day. I asked them what was wrong with the films, and they explained that many of the children that were used to demonstrate improper behavior were minorities while good behavior was modeled by Caucasian students. I never really gave attention to it until they mentioned it, and, then, I began to realize what they had meant. My students explained that the music, used in the films, had also placed an unfair bias for certain students. Rap music was used in situations in which the wrong behaviors were shown; in contrast, rock and pop music were used to enact the proper behaviors. The students took their grievances to the school newspaper as shown in Figure 4-18; they garnered the support of others while some people perceived the films to be harmless.

PBIS video raises questions, Students portrayed as wild animals

By Lauren Stratton, *staff writer*

In January 2015, administration and teachers began discussions with students regarding showing Lamar PRIDE. Videos were shown which focused on correct behavior in the hallway, cafeteria, promenade areas and on district buses.

Although the videos ended with the catch phrase, "Have some pie," none of

the videos produced by the Theater Arts department were viewed as inappropriate. This year's videos, however, have raised some issues among students and staff.

"They were offensive because there were only black kids in the OCS scene of the safari (library) video, freshman Ciara Minter said.

Students were shown videos in September which demonstrated proper conduct in the library, parking lot, restroom,

pep rallies, and assemblies. Blue Curtain students wrote, directed, and starred in the segments.

"We had no intention of making these videos racist and offensive in any way," theater arts teacher Ira Steck said. "The kids in the OCS scene were actual kids in OCS."

Students found the library video racist and thought it was inappropriate to

See *PBIS* on page 3.

Figure 4-18 School Newspaper

I understood, later, what critical thinking looked like beyond the confines of classroom assignments. These students took it upon themselves to bring awareness to an issue that they believed was being overlooked. They did not accept the message that was being marked to them; they truly thought from a critical perspective. The power of critical thought should never be questioned; these types of students will make the citizens that Jefferson espoused.

Autoethnography Reflection

Although my IB journey began with trepidation on my part, I quickly became enamored with the IB magnet program. In a time when education is becoming standardized to the point of monotonous application, magnet programs such as the IB program show what public education can be. Teachers are not at the nucleus of the learning system. Instead, they are asked to be professional guides to help the students along their educational journey. Back is the original intent of the public education system: a vehicle that demands critical thought to create informed citizens who can make

decisions with knowledge beyond the creator's indoctrination. It is truly inspiring to see nascent minds perceive the world in a new way, especially when you know they will forever be vigilant of false truths.

Chapter 5

Implications and Recommendations

The problems associated with poor public education, such as dropouts, are not a new phenomenon. In fact, poor dropout and graduation rates among many urban communities have shown no improvement over the past four decades (Rumberger, 2011). High school dropouts represent a problem both culturally and economically for the United States. Research indicates links between failure to graduate and other troubling trends such as crime and teen pregnancy (Rumberger, 2011). The real conflict is the nature of public versus private goods. The original intent of the public education system, as cited by Thomas Jefferson, was free education that could create an informed public. Unfortunately, the creation of an informed public has become less important in conjunction with applying business practices to the public sphere.

The current problems in the public education system are best summed up in the words of Giroux (2015), who stated the following:

Individual achievement is invoked to justify education as a private rather than a public good. The discourse of empiricism and standardized testing become the ultimate measure of achievement just as pedagogical matters concerning civic responsibility, engaged citizenship, thoughtfulness, and critical thought disappear from the vocabulary of education reform. (p.13)

Critical theorists such as Giroux have been aware of the problems associated with schooling in a system heavily integrated into capitalist society. The public school system in many parts of the United States in which there is a growing urban population is searching for new methods to create a quality education. This study examines the impact of magnet schools as a representative of the tenets of critical education theory. Magnet schools were viewed as a solution to social problems in the educational system in the past. In the southern states, magnet schools implemented a passive racial integration

tool. Parents could choose to send their child to a racially integrated school to receive an educational experience beyond what was locally available. It is the belief of this study that school districts, with the dismantling of the No Child Left Behind law, have the opportunity to call upon magnet schools once again to respond to a changing demographic. The implementation of magnet schools in urban areas is not an abstract, though; IB magnet schools were added to urban Chicago many years ago. The result was a model for the IB magnet school implementation for all of the United States. The magnet schools in Chicago flourished, creating opportunities for urban students not present in their local school (Coca et al., 2012).

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to determine if magnet schools offer a solution to the dropout problem in American public high schools. In conjunction with studying dropout, this study also examined public high schools from a critical theory perspective to determine whether more elements of critical theory were present in magnet or traditional schools. It is believed that the presence of critical theory elements marks a departure from the neoliberal culture that has become prevalent in public education today.

Quantitative Findings

As discussed below, there was a great deal of difficulty in implementing variables that were close approximations of the topic studied. Postsecondary readiness proved to be the only measure that was not an approximation but rather an exact measurement. However, there are no proven methods established to capture teacher autonomy or any real consensus of what constitutes teacher autonomy; the same holds true for critical thought. There are no standardized conventions to measure what constitutes critical thought.

Postsecondary Readiness

The research suggests, that magnet schools fare better at producing students who (a) score higher in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test; (b) graduate with their cohort and do not dropout; (c) graduate as part of the recommended high school plan or distinguished achievement plan; and (d) exceed the requirements of the advanced level test, SAT, ACT or IB test. The previously mentioned categories are all part of index four labeled as postsecondary readiness of the performance index framework, that public schools are graded on in Texas. Each year, the Texas Education Agency sets a baseline composite score number, and any school that fell below the baseline score fails that index category. The baseline score, during this study, was fifty-seven. While both magnet and traditional schools had scored above the baseline, the magnet schools scored almost 10 percent higher than traditional schools yielding a significant difference.

Teacher Autonomy

Primarily, as the variables being tested became more abstract, the usefulness of the quantitative approach became a less viable option, regarding the attempt to find and compare elements of the critical education theory to that of the magnet and traditional schools, i.e., teacher autonomy and public value, which was designed to measure critical thought. It was the belief of this study that teacher autonomy could be measured by using teacher experience. Previous studies have found that teachers increase their level of independence as their years of experience increase due to more exposure in professional development. More time in teaching means that teachers feel free to deviate from the standardized teaching methods, leveraging their acquired professional skills. Thus, this study believes that magnet schools have teachers with greater experience.

However, the findings of this study indicate that, for the chosen schools, there is little or no difference in the average years of teacher experience; both magnet and traditional schools have teachers with approximately twelve years of experience. These findings could be for many reasons beyond the scope of this study, such as, once the schools selected were matched according to economics, teacher retention remained constant.

Public Value (Critical Thought)

In terms of the constructed variable public value that was designed to measure the amount of critical thought present in the public education system, results were also not insightful, yielding no significant difference between magnet and traditional schools. It was previously thought that magnet schools would be supportive of the elements of critical education theory. The indicators would seem to be a good match for demonstrating critical thought. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) is a competition designed for students to engage and express critical thinking in a variety of subject areas. Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a program adopted across America to give students critical thought tools in the classroom. Thus, it was the original position of this study that magnet schools would have placed higher in UIL competition and would have become AVID demonstration schools, yet factors beyond this study lead to magnet schools and traditional schools having little statistical difference. One problem could be that the years selected for UIL were simply not years that the selected schools did well in the competition, or schools that were not within the demographic of the studied schools placed better in competition; these could be schools that have economic disadvantage below fifty percent.

A Qualitative Turn

It was reasoned that the abstract nature of the variables being tested would not be easily captured using quantitative measures. It was decided that a complementary

qualitative set of methods would be deployed in conjunction with the quantitative measures. The qualitative methods both used narratives to uncover the underlying occurrences in public high schools.

Mission Statements

The central tenets of critical education theory are the creation of a well-informed student who thinks critically with a global awareness, coupled with teachers who have enough autonomy to make decisions. As noted from the findings of this report, the best analog for critical education theory is that of magnet schools. According to the results of this report, magnet schools, unlike traditional schools, have a clear defined focus, which is evident when the mission statements of magnet schools are compared to that of traditional schools, many of which had no apparent mission statement. While mission statements might seem to be of little consequence, research has shown that mission statements provide schools with an understanding of where the school is headed (Education World, 2011). Even if it is believed that mission statements offer little guidance, research indicates that the communal act of creating a mission statement can provide organizations guidance (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2006). Mission statements should be easy to access and readily available to the public. Thus, this study chose school websites as the means of locating and deciphering school mission statements. While seventy percent of magnet schools had mission statements that were easy to obtain from the school website, only thirty-six percent of traditional schools had a mission statement present. It reasoned that the standardized nature of traditional schools led school administrators to place little value on the display of mission statements, while magnet schools eager to demonstrate differentiation eagerly place mission statements in public view.

As mentioned in previous sections, mission statements in the public school sphere are not only wishful statements. They are a legal contract between the school and all stakeholders which indicates what services the school is providing a public good. Mission statements are not created in a vacuum; they are formed with the assistance of school administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders to arrive at a consensus in terms of what the overall purpose of the school should be. Mission statements are not fixed immutable documents; they must respond to student demand and interest. Of the mission statements found, critical elements were present in over eighty percent of magnet schools, while only fifty percent of traditional schools mentioned critical elements. It should be remembered that critical elements represent mission statements that mentioned citizenship, critical thought, and creating students with a global understanding. Of the critical element categories, critical thought showed the greatest degree of differentiation between magnet and traditional schools. Magnet schools' mission statements involved critical thought elements almost sixty percent of the time, while traditional schools' mission statements contained critical thought elements forty percent of the time. Critical thought is considered mission statements that mention a dedication to the creation of students who are problem solvers that think critically with a growth mindset. The findings indicate that magnet schools place greater value on public-facing of critical mission statements.

Autoethnography

Perhaps the most interesting element of this study was an inside look at an IB magnet school. The researcher was able to leverage his position as a professional to provide insight into the inner working of IB magnet programs. The role of the trained professional, in the case of the study of a certified IB instructor, is important to the tenants of Giroux and many other critical theorists. Autoethnography was used to see if

the critical education ideas were present in IB magnet schools. In terms of autoethnography, the role of the teacher as a trained professional, students' learning beyond the classroom, and critical thought were studied from the inside of a magnet program. The findings were promising, showing that with the right mix of ingredients, it is possible to provide a public education that has not fallen victim to standardization. This is especially true when there is a high degree of buy-in from the school principal, who is the school's primary instructional leader. Students can be treated not as empty vessels but ready participants of the educational process. Students apply learning beyond the classroom environment, applying critical thought to the world around them. Students refuse to accept what they are told. Instead, they question norms and underlying intent. The two-year study revealed that the public education system already has a viable solution if fully embraced by all public education stakeholders.

Limitations

This study was limited by the abstract nature of the variable being tested. While students' academic success was a direct measurement, the critical variables required a high degree of abstraction. The other limiting factors included that the quantitative dataset for this study came from publicly available data available from the Texas Education Agency. While this provided data that could be examined at the school level, this study could not be researched from a student level, which could be used to investigate individual students who are involved in each magnet school and learn about that student's background. The mixed methods of this study was also a limiting factor. Without knowing which method would represent the elements of critical thought best, the time was allocated to the creation of quantitative variables. After the research had been conducted, it was clear that qualitative research provided the greatest opportunity for

discovery. Dedicating more time to expanding qualitative research, as indicated in the future research section below, might have yielded even more discoveries.

The mixed methods of this study was also a limiting factor in this study. Without knowing which method would best represent the elements of critical thought the time was allocated to the creation of quantitative variables. After the research was conducted it was clear that qualitative research provided the greatest opportunity for discovery. Dedicating more time to expanding qualitative research as indicated in the future research section below might have yielded even more discovery.

Future Research

This research determined that the best course of action in studying abstract elements, such as critical education theory, is to look beyond the numbers. Qualitative approaches have the flexibility to provide greater understanding, specifically, in narrative strategies, such autoethnography. While this study examined one magnet school from the perspective of the trained professional, it would prove even more insightful to examine multiple magnet schools that were of different varieties. Technical-based magnet schools, fine arts magnet schools or even medical-based magnet schools could give an inside look at what occurs in magnet programs. It would be beneficial to examine not only a variety of schools but also multiple perspectives, i.e., school principals, students, and the community, which are all stakeholders in the public education process. Future research should be done that uses fewer levels of abstraction quantitatively to attempt to uncover underlying meaning. Multiple perspectives could be solicited from forms such as in Figure 5-1. The form is designed to gain an understanding of schools from multiple perspectives using guided open ended questions.

Tell Your Story

* Required

School Type *

- Magnet
- Traditional
- Other: _____

What is your school's mission statement ? *

Your answer _____

How easy was it to locate your school mission statement ? *

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Difficult Easy

Tell Your Story

* Required

Perspective

Are you a student ? *

Choose ▾

Are you a teacher ? *

Choose ▾

Are you an administrator ? *

Choose ▾

Teacher

What type of professional development do you attend ? *

Your answer _____

How much control do you have on what you teach ? *

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Not Much Allot

Are the assignments you give to students open-ended?

Your answer _____

BACK

SUBMIT

Figure 5-1 Mutiple Perspective Narratives

It is also hoped that the elements of critical education theory could be further operationalized through the creation of an index that assigns numerical values to the elements of critical education theory, building upon the work of Simon Anholt who created the Good Country Index, an index used to measure how much good a country provides to the world. Anholt, an independent policy advisor, hoped to provide insight into the influences of public policy. Similarly to Anholts index, each critical education element could be measured by an indicator collected from several datasets. A visual example of the proposed critical index is provided in Figure 5-2.

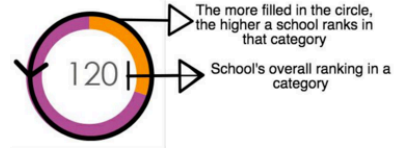
A Critical Education Index

A Critical Education Index, a new way to see public schools, beyond the traditional numbers...

The idea of the Critical School Index is pretty simple: to measure how many critical education theory values each public high school has in comparison to other schools. Using a wide range of data from data collected from multiple view points in a collaborative approach. Personal narrative data is collected and ranked on a Likert scale.

Key

Category Rankings



SCHOOL DATABASE

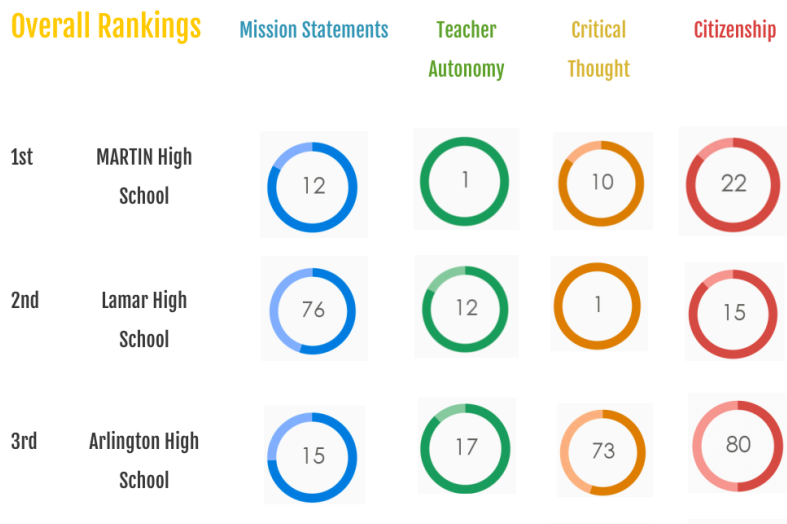


Figure 5-2 A Critical Index

Schools could then be ranked against each other to evaluate how many of the values of critical education each school has, and each school could be ranked for each indicator. The score could then be implemented as an evaluation metric to determine if the school is aligned with its mission statement.

Currently, the Texas Education Agency uses an accountability rating system that includes four indexes as shown in Figure 5-3. Index one is concerned with student achievement or STAAR test scores, index two tracks overall student progress from year to year, index three measures if schools are closing the performance gaps of the lowest achieving students and index four measures how well schools are preparing students for college. It is therefore proposed that a fifth index is created that includes the critical perspectives covered in this dissertation.

Overview of 2015 Performance Index Framework*

Shaded areas are new for 2015

	Index 1: Student Achievement	Index 2: Student Progress	Index 3: Closing Performance Gaps	Index 4: Postsecondary Readiness
Features of Index	<p>STAAR Satisfactory Performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Students Combined over All Subject Areas Credit given for meeting phase-in 1 Level II performance standard on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> STAAR Grades 3-8 English and Spanish; STAAR mathematics Grades 3-8 English and Spanish based on 2014 equivalent performance standard; EOC assessments administered in the spring and the previous fall and summer; STAAR I (linguistically accommodated) included through the ELL Progress Measure. STAAR Accommodated and STAAR Alternate 2 are included in Index 1 under the ATAC recommended option to apply a hold harmless feature to the 2015 accountability rating. <p>* Additional features, such as Required Improvement, will be considered for 2016 and beyond. ** STAAR mathematics Grades 3-8 English and Spanish based on 2014 equivalent performance standards.</p>	<p>Student Progress to Satisfactory or Advanced Performance Levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ten Student Groups Evaluated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Students Each Race/Ethnicity: African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, White Two or More Races Students with Disabilities English Language Learners (ELLs) By Subject Area (Reading and Writing for available grades) No Progress Measures for STAAR mathematics Grades 3-8 English and Spanish; Same assessments used in Index 1 where STAAR Progress, and ELL Progress measures are available. Credit based on weighted performance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One point credit given for each percentage of tests at the Met growth expectations level Two point credit given for each percentage of tests at the Exceeded growth expectations level 	<p>Achievement Gaps Measured for Satisfactory and Advanced Levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Economically Disadvantaged Students and Two Lowest Performing Racial/Ethnic Groups based on the Index 1 student achievement indicator reported in the prior year By Subject Area (Reading/ELA, Mathematics, Writing, Science, and Social Studies) Credit based on weighted performance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One point credit given for each percentage of tests meeting the phase-in 1 Level II performance standard Two point credit given for each percentage of tests meeting the final Level III Advanced performance standard STAAR mathematics Grades 3-8 English and Spanish based on 2014 equivalent performance standards; 	<p>Measures of Postsecondary Readiness</p> <p>Credit based on four postsecondary components:</p> <p>STAAR Postsecondary Readiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eight Student Groups Evaluated: All Students and each Race/Ethnicity Combined over All Subject Areas Credit given for meeting postsecondary readiness standard (final Level III)** <p>High School Graduation Rates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four-year Graduation Rate or Five-year Graduation Rate (or Annual Dropout Rate if no graduation rate) Ten Student Groups Evaluated: All Students, each Race/Ethnicity, Students with Disabilities, and ELLs <p>High School Diploma Plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percent Recommended or Distinguished Achievement (Advanced) High School Program Plan (RHSP/DAP) Graduates Eight Student Groups Evaluated: All Students and each Race/Ethnicity <p>Additional Postsecondary Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percent of Annual Graduates that are either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> College-Ready Graduates Enrolled and Completed Advanced Course/Dual Enrollment Courses Completed Career and Technical Education (CTE) coherent sequence Enrolled in TX Institution of Higher Education (IHE)
Additional Evaluations	<p>Distinction Designations for Student Progress, Closing Performance Gaps, and Postsecondary Readiness</p> <p>Districts and campuses earn distinctions for postsecondary readiness, and campuses earn distinctions for student progress and closing performance gaps.</p>	<p>Distinction Designations for Academic Achievement in Reading/ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies</p> <p>Campuses earn distinctions for outstanding academic achievement on indicators, such as SAT/ACT participation/performance, AP/IB participation/performance, and Advanced (Level III) Performance on STAAR in four subject areas.</p>	<p>System Safeguards</p> <p>Evaluate performance by individual student groups and subject areas and require interventions focused on specific areas of weak performance.</p>	

TEA Division of Performance Reporting

Index 5: Critical Application
<p>Measures of Critical Application</p> <p>Credit based on four components:</p> <p>Mission Statements *Are mission statements present *Are mission statements critical</p> <p>Teacher Autonomy *What type of trainings do teachers attend *Evaluation of how teachers rate their classroom autonomy</p> <p>Critical Thought *What type of assignments do students do ?</p> <p>Citizenship *Evaluation of student assignments *Amount of community service students perform</p>

Figure 5-3 Proposed Index 5

As previously mentioned the quantitative portion of this dissertation showed promise only when the level of abstraction was minimal. However, all the quantitative portions of this dissertation served a purpose beyond merely ascertaining data for this study. To truly account for schools that show a critical dimension the proper inputs are needed. Thus, it is now known that the best way to capture abstract measures is through narratives first. There can be statistical analysis on the backend, but only after the broader questions are asked. With an addition of "Index 5", schools could be evaluated against similar schools and performance tracked overall. Schools could have a greater insight into trends that occurring. For instance, if a school had a high teacher turnover rate, they could have a low teacher autonomy rating, or perhaps a school is receiving complaints about instruction, they could have a low overall critical thought rating. Overall, the addition of Index five could add a new dimension to school evaluation.

Conclusion

While the scope of this dissertation is limited to exploring if the elements of critical education theory are present in magnet schools in relation to student achievement, it is worth mentioning the primary steps needed to apply magnet school policy. This dissertation mentioned the importance of creating and maintaining public value in terms of public education. It thus is recommended the application of a policy implication framework that is centered around creating public value. Marty Cole and Greg Parston created a policy implementation platform centered around providing a high quality of public good called "The Public Service Value Model" (Cole & Parston, 2006). The driver of their model are citizens who work in conjunction with elected officials, public

service workers, and public-private partnerships (Cole & Parston, 2006). The private sector is held accountable by citizens who demand the maximum public value, requiring real competition in the private sector that works in conjunction with public entities. The model is driven by having clear, measurable outcomes that determine if a public service is provided at the optimal level (Cole & Parston, 2006). As can be seen in Figure 5-4, the school mission is placed as the first building block of change in conjunction with stakeholder participation.

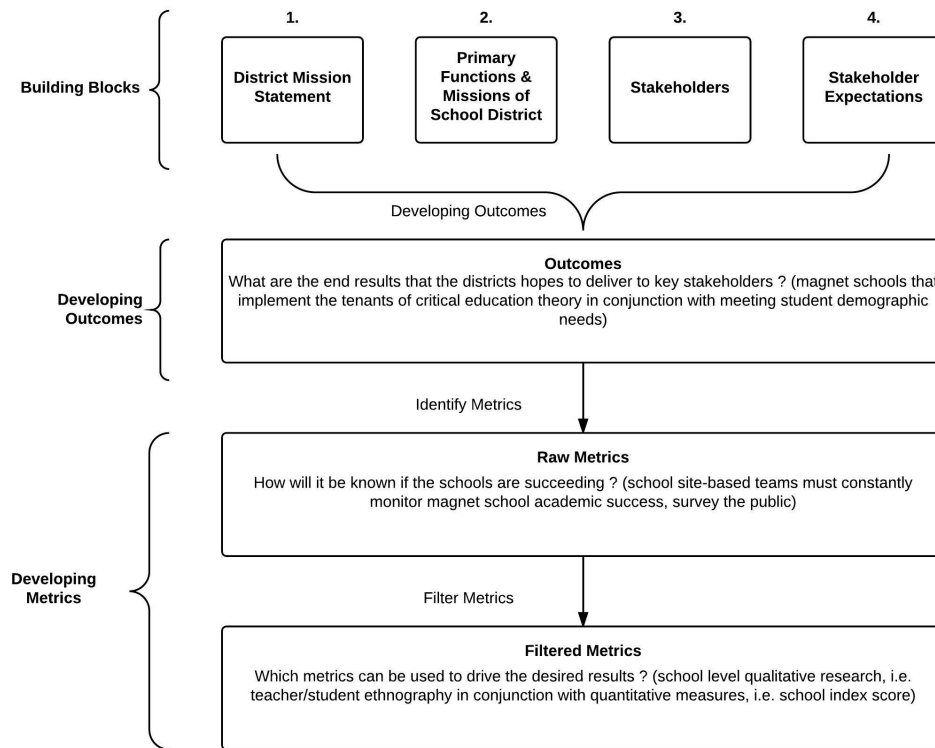


Figure 5-4 Public Service Model

It is recommended that in the climate of change, with the dismantling of No Child-Left Behind, school districts take advantage of options already available, primarily magnet schools. Magnet schools were created to break the standardized educational model. They represent the last vestige of critical thought, providing students with an opportunity to be actively involved in their educational experience. Students look to contribute society through action and critical thought. Teachers are not technicians but are treated as professionals capable of making decisions that impact learning in the classroom. Magnet schools such as Internal Bauchealaute (IB) share the vision of critical theorists such as Freire and his contemporary Giroux.

School leaders in conjunction with all stakeholders should unite to support the implementation of magnet schools. Local areas should be surveyed to attempt to measure student needs and wants; this will provide great insight into community needs. Next, in a site-based meeting, principals and public education stakeholders should create a well-crafted mission statement that addresses the needs of the student demographic. The creation of a powerful mission statement will represent the first step of the social contract of change between the public school and the community. A magnet school should be implemented that is tailored to the changing demographic. After implementation and creation, the magnet school must be then continuously evaluated to determine if the school is meeting student needs. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to improve the quality of the public education system to reduce dropouts among a changing demographic. The implementation of school choices that are critical and not neoliberal will lead to greater student involvement, with increased involvement buying increases, which will translate to fewer dropouts.

Perhaps, the most revealing aspect of this study is the new application of magnet schools. Specifically, magnet schools that were once reserved for affluent students. As in

the past, when magnet schools represented a way to passively desegregate public schools, they can now be called upon to bring students back to the classroom. Programs such as the IB program represent a new opportunity for lower income students. As evident from the policy's of Arlington Independent School District, that created a program called "AP/IB Equity and Excellence", a Google Global Impact Awards match funded program. Designed to identify at least 1,500 lower income students to join the IB program, as part of the district's strategic plan. The plan included a teacher recommendation of an underrepresented student, followed by an assembly accompanied by their parent. Each teacher personally delivered a note to the student expressing their desire for the student to be part of the magnet program. It is this type of special attention that is needed to change the scope of the dropout problem. Teachers who go beyond traditional classroom instruction and the role of a technician, to challenge students to take a chance. As revealed in this study, once in the IB program these students will be exposed to a different teaching pedagogy. Complete with a specialized instruction that is tailored to their unique needs. The real goal is exposing students to opportunities with a support structure that they did not know was available.

During the autoethnography, I was amazed at the level of dedication of my students, that were over 70% economically disadvantaged. These students were faced with unique challenges, such as balancing work with education. They did so under the guides of the IB magnet program that allowed for flexible timetables accompanied by an IB coordinator that managed each student progress in addition to school counselors. If a student were falling behind the coordinator would have a meeting with the student and ask what can be done so that they can succeed. It is these types of ground level approaches that are needed to cultivate critical thinking citizens.

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