Graduate School of Development Studies

Education Policy and Frame Conflict:
Student Assignment in the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina

A Research Paper presented by:

Dylan Samuel Eyre
(United States of America)

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialization:
Public Policy and Management
(PPM)

Members of the examining committee:
Prof. Dr Des Gasper
Dr Barbara Lehmbruch

The Hague, The Netherlands
November, 2010

Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

Research papers are not made available for circulation outside of the Institute.

Inquiries:

Postal address:	Institute of Social Studies
	P.O. Box 29776
	2502 LT The Hague
	The Netherlands
Location:	Kortenaerkade 12
	2518 AX The Hague
	The Netherlands
Telephone:	+31 70 426 0460
Fax:	+31 70 426 0799

Acknowledgements

I would like to give special thanks to everyone who helped me along in this research process.

To my amazing wife Tanita, for your beautiful heart, for your unwavering support, for brightening each and every day, for changing my world, for being you. Te amo mucho!

To my parents John and Lucyann and my brother Ian, for always being there, for your encouragement and love. I couldn't have done this without you. To my family-in-law in El Salvador, Betty, Raul, Natalia, Julius, and Jesse, for your love and support.

To my incredible supervisor Prof. Dr Des Gasper, for your encouragement, guidance, motivation, and advice. I've learned so much from you. To my second reader Dr Barbara Lehmbruch, for your advice, questions, and insights. Thank you.

To everyone who took time out of their busy schedules to be interviewed for this research: Dr Carolyn Morrison, Dr Anne McLaurin, Kevin Hill, John Tedesco, Chris Hill, Rob Schofield, Tim Simmons, Christine Kuchner, Kristen Stocking, and Keith Sutton.

To Dr Dvora Yanow and Dr Ronald Schmidt for taking time to share your insights and experience with me in this process.

To Lenin, Nicole, and David, for your hard work in my seminars.

To all of my colleagues in Public Policy and Management, I will always treasure your friendship and our times together. Thank you for sharing your worlds with me. You've taught me more than you'll ever know.

To all of the wonderful professors in PPM and at ISS, for the engaging and challenging courses and experiences.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Acronyms

FRL   Free and Reduced Lunch
IC: Interpretive Community
NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NC: North Carolina
SES: Socio-economic Status
WCPSS: Wake County Public School System

Abstract

This research explores frame conflict in the context of education policy. It centers on the public discourse surrounding the retraction of a student assignment policy aimed at socio-economic diversity in the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina, USA. It argues that the controversy and community division resulting from this retraction represent a case of frame conflict. The community has been split into two distinct interpretive communities, each developing and using respective frames as they interact with the policy issue. These frames rest on fundamental ideas, values, and beliefs regarding history, fairness, race, class, diversity, and individualism. Through interpretive policy analysis and value-critical policy analysis methods this research explores the conflict between the two frames while keeping an eye on possible next steps moving forward.

Relevance to Development Studies

Development Studies is thankfully moving beyond the ideas of the "developed" world and the "developing" or worse "undeveloped" world. This research is written with the belief that no human society should ever be declared a finished product and that, if we are to continue to use the Development Discourse, it would be most apt to apply to all societies, the label of "developing." Along these lines, this research in Development Studies examines a local government policy in a particular developing country, the United States of America. It engages with public and policy discourse, aiming to uncover the roots of conflict, but also shedding light on possibilities towards reconciliation.

Keywords

Public policy, interpretive policy analysis, value-critical policy analysis, framing, discourse analysis, frame conflict, education, diversity, fairness, equality, race, class

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1   A Community Divided

In 2009-10 the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina in the USA instituted a fundamental change that has polarized the community, politicized a School Board, and fueled a charged public debate that still continues as this paper is being written. The issue is how students should be assigned to schools within the system. More specifically, it concerns whether the socio-economic status of a student should be used as one of the criteria in determining to which school a student is assigned, in an attempt to maintain balance throughout the system. This seemingly benign, almost technical piece of education policy has sparked political and racial tensions, charges of racism and segregation, and clashes over the meanings and implications of fairness, equality, and freedom. It has challenged the nature of a school system that has been award winning in the not too distant past, but has most recently been waning in its student achievement.

Through a School Board election in October 2009, four new members were elected to the 9 seat board, aligning with one already seated member to form a majority caucus on a variety of issues, not least the use of socio-economic status in school assignment. In the first School Board meeting, and minutes after they were sworn in to office, this new majority deleted socio-economic status from the list of criteria used in school assignment in a 5-4 vote. Opponents and even supporters were shocked at the speed and bluntness of the action. Part of the shock was due to the fact that the school system had been using socio-economic status as a criterion for a decade. This was a more nuanced assignment criterion than race, which had been used from 1976 to maintain a diversity in the system's schools.

The intensity of the public discourse came from both sides. Reverend William Barber, head of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP and one of the leading advocates for keeping diversity in the system gives us an example. Shortly before the School Board election, at a rally to get out the vote he said:

> "First, the use of code words like 'neighborhood schools' and 'busing' is the old "N-word" politics cleaned up with euphemisms taken directly out of Richard Nixon's southern strategy play book. Stir up old racial fears. I would have more respect of the opponents of diversity if they would just openly say they want segregated schools. They don't want their children around certain other children based on race or class. Put it out there straight, rather than using code words."

This biting criticism of his political opponents was matched by the most vocal member of the new school board majority, John Tedesco, at a Tea Party rally shortly after the election.

"This has caused great controversy here in Wake County... across the system of social engineers and bureaucrats who wanted to, for a generation, control the hearts and minds of our children, because they know that that is where the fight begins."

The discursive battle lines were drawn between, allegedly, racist segregationists and social engineers aiming to brainwash children.

What had been heated public discussion quickly turned into organized protests and threats of legal action against the new board majority's decision. Four outspoken civil rights and religious leaders were arrested for "public disturbance" at a School Board meeting in the early summer of 2010. In late July of the same year nineteen people were arrested after engaging in a sit-in protest during the public comment section of a School Board meeting. Those arrested ranged from high school students to elderly long time Wake County residents, to religious leaders from around the state of North Carolina. The civil rights anthems and chants harkened back to an earlier era of struggle.

In this heated climate, the new School Board majority has worked to put together a new school assignment policy and vision for the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS). The form and the specifics of this new plan are still in the planning stages and will deeply impact the educational experience of all students in Wake County from Kindergarten through High School.

1.2 Research Goals and Core Questions

The objective of this research is to identify, fairly articulate, and investigate the core arguments used on both sides of this very public policy debate. The research will focus on the values, meanings, and beliefs upon which the arguments are based, both explicitly and implicitly. These fundamental aspects form conflicting discursive frames that include and exclude certain elements of the policy issue and the social context. This study aims to identify and then to analyze and evaluate the frame conflict in this policy debate with an eye towards "next steps" that will be able to garner more sustainable public support.

My central question is: how can an analysis of the discursive frame conflict in this policy debate help to guide future actions in designing a new student assignment plan that is effective and sustainable?

The associated questions that I tackle, leading up to this central one, are:

1. Who are interpretive communities in this policy debate and what are their motivations?

2. What are the core arguments presented by the various interpretive communities in support of their position on the use of socio-economic status as a school assignment criterion?

3. How do the arguments come together as frames (systems of perception and analysis) and at what points do the opposing frames conflict?

4. At the points where the frames conflict, what are key elements that are being excluded in the respective frames and how does this affect the policy discussion?

1.3   Theoretical Foundations for Interpretive Policy Analysis and Frame Analysis

This research draws on post-empiricist, discursive, and interpretive approaches to policy as well as on their foundations in social constructionism. The work of Martin Rein, Dvora Yanow, Frank Fischer, and John Forester provide the nucleus of the theoretical approach.

1.3.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism considers the varying ways in which social realities of the world are shaped and perceived (Gergen, 1999). It leads one to "an inquiry into the ways objects are seen through different mental structures or world views, how they are interpreted in different social circumstances and understood during different historical periods" (Fischer, 2003: 53). This opens up the idea of multiple interpretations of the world, and for the purposes of public policy, multiple interpretations of a policy itself. These various interpretations of a policy are largely built through discourse. The discursive approach "sees the medium of language as constituting the very meanings upon which ideas are constructed" (Fischer, 2003: 41). Through language, meanings are assigned and values are expressed.

1.3.2 Policy and Policy Analysis

In value-critical policy analysis, policy is seen as inherently intertwined with values. Martin Rein states that social policy is "above all, concerned with choice among competing values" (Rein, 1976: 140). Taking this point further, policy is seen here as an expression and validation of public values (Yanow, 1996: 22). Yanow writes, "Policies are seen not only as instrumentally rational, goal-oriented statements, but also as expressive statements" (Yanow, 1996:22). Through policy, communities express how they believe society should be structured and how it should function.

Policy analysis can and has taken many forms. Conventional policy analysis often relies on positivist science. The idea being that one can and should *objectively* collect facts to gain knowledge about a certain policy situation. A problem can be *objectively* defined, followed by an *objective* goal of solving the

11

problem by using tools which are chosen *objectively*, and finally evaluated using *objective* research. Rein rejects this approach "not because it is wrong, but because it is incomplete" (Rein, 1976:71). At every stage of the policy process, whether in defining a problem, setting a goal, choosing a policy instrument, or evaluating a policy, choices must be made. These choices are based on particular interpretations of a particular context and are always, to some extent, subjective.

Interpretive Policy Analysis (IPA) attempts to deal with this more complex view of policy. As articulated by Yanow, IPA assumes that "all actors in a policy situation interpret issue data as they seek to make sense of the policy. Furthermore, human artifacts and actions, including policy documents, legislation, and implementation, are understood here to be not only instrumentally rational, but also expressive of meaning(s), including at times individual and collective identity" (2000:6).

IPA focuses on "the [differing] meanings that policies have for a broad range of policy-relevant publics" (Yanow, 2000: 8). Through interaction, respective groups in a community begin to develop particular world views, engage in similar actions, and form group-particular discourses, or ways of interpreting, and acting, and speaking (Yanow, 2000: 10). These groups have been termed *Interpretive Communities*. Interpretive Communities(ICs) develop and share a set of values, beliefs, and feelings, reinforced by cognitive, linguistic, and cultural practices that reinforce each other. When these ICs approach a policy, they share a way of speaking, thinking, interpreting, and acting regarding the said policy (Yanow, 2000:10).

1.3.3   Frames and Values

Schőn and Rein "see policy positions as resting on underlying structures of belief, perception, and appreciation, which they call 'frames'" (1994: 23). They see conflicts between frames as the cause of many policy disputes. These situations cannot be resolved merely by appealing to facts or persuasive arguments because "conflicting frames determine what counts as a fact and what arguments are taken to be relevant and compelling" (Schőn and Rein, 1994:23). Complicating the issue is that the "frames that shape policy positions and underlie controversy are usually tacit, which means that they are exempt from conscious attention and reasoning" (Schoen, 1994: 23).

"Frames direct attention toward some elements while simultaneously diverting attention from other elements" (Yanow, 2000: 11). Building upon this, Yanow explains, "Frame conflict occurs not only because different interpretive communities focus cognitively and rationally on different elements of a policy issue, but because they value different elements differently. The different frames reflect groups' values contending for public recognition and validation" (Yanow, 2000: 11). Analysis of the stories/arguments developed by the different interpretive communities can bring to light their policy frames and the values upon which they are built (Fischer, 2003: 144).

1.3.4   How this theoretical framework helps

The school assignment policy in the Wake County School System is perhaps the most hotly contested local policy in years. This theoretical framework sheds some light on why that may be the case. The current dispute seems to be a case of a frame conflict. The opposing interpretive communities both have well articulated arguments and facts. However, neither side is convinced by the other and the schism between them seems to be widening. Is it the case that one side is right and the other wrong? Conventional policy analysis rooted in the positivist scientific tradition would offer little help in this situation. Taking an interpretive analytical approach may however, prove helpful. Examining what this policy means for the relevant interpretive communities and investigating the values upon which their frames are based could provide meaningful clues for moving toward resolution or at least greater understanding. The recommendations that conclude this study speak to this last point. They are grounded in the work of John Forester concerning the theory and practice of building agreeable solutions in the face of seemingly insurmountable public policy differences.

1.4   Methodology

The methodology develops from the hypothesis that the controversy in the Wake County Public School System is what Rein and Schon termed a "Frame Conflict." The question then becomes, "What are the frames of the opposing sides' arguments?". To answer this question I have relied on Dvora Yanow's methodology as explained in her book *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*. The primary step in her method is what she calls "accessing local knowledge" by immersing oneself in the local context. For this research, I engaged with newspaper articles[1], documentaries, editorials, and websites to get an idea of the public discourse around this policy. I also attended a number of school board meetings which featured a space for public comments. I attended community meetings as well, where relevant community groups were discussing the policy and its implications.

Beyond the immersion into the local context, I conducted a series of roughly two hour interviews with policy relevant actors. These included five members of the Wake County School Board (though interview requests were made to all), representatives from community and parent organizations, representatives from NGOs involved in the public discourse, and the head of the local teachers organization[2]. I requested interviews with people who were directly involved with the policy issue, identified mostly through media

---

[1] Most newspaper articles and editorials used in this research were printed in the *News and Observer*, the major newspaper of Wake County. Articles printed on CNN and NY Times websites were also used.

[2] The complete list of interview requests and interviews conducted is located in Appendix A, Figure A2.

coverage and recommendations by interviewees. Interview requests were made not only based on relevance to the issue, but also with an aim to ensure that individuals and organizations on both sides of the policy issue were involved in a balanced way. These interviews were semi-structured and were designed to deepen my understanding of the policy issue as well as the discourse around it. My intent was to learn how the various interviewees spoke about the policy. What did they emphasize? How did they explain their own position and that of their policy opponents? What was their motivation for being involved with the policy? How did they envision the impact of the policy on the community and how did they view the policy in a historical perspective? Though this research could have been conducted from abroad through text and document analysis alone, it would have lacked a depth of understanding, especially of the motivations of the stakeholders involved.

Through a combination of engaging with documents and the interviews I was able to gain a multi-layered understanding of the positions on both sides of the issue. From this point I proceeded with the methods laid out by Ronald Schmidt in his essay *Value-Critical Policy Analysis* as well as his book *Language Policy and Identity Politics in the United States*. He provides a step by step articulation of how he conducted his research on language policy in the United States. His first step is similar to Yanow's concerning accessing local knowledge. What he then proposes is to find common threads and patterns that form the core arguments around the policy. This, I have done in Chapter 3 where I articulate the core arguments made around the policy. Through the interviews and document and text analysis, I began to find the same arguments being used over and over by the various actors. After preparing a draft of the arguments both for and against the policy, I had them reviewed by the people that I had interviewed. This was to make sure that I was giving a "fair hearing" to the respective arguments (Schmidt, 2006:310).

After getting feedback on my articulation of the various arguments, the next step was to analyze how the arguments function to form a common frame and the values, ideas, and beliefs upon which the frames are built. For this, I used a variety of discourse analysis methods including argument analysis and frame analysis.

I originally intended to use Yanow's methodology throughout the research, but I found that the more robust my knowledge of the situation became, the more unsatisfied I was with any particular "artifacts" such as newspaper articles and documents. The number of arguments, both for and against, are numerous which is why I give so much attention to them in Chapter 3. My search for a "golden goose" artifact(s) that would comprehensively and fairly represent the arguments of either side was unsuccessful. In this situation, I turned to Schmidt's methodology of composing a summary of core arguments and then conducting the analysis through this summary. This allowed me to move from a myriad of unconnected articles, documents, and interviews to a cohesive set of "data" to analyse. Getting this argument reviewed by the actors involved was an essential step as it imbued my articulation of the arguments with legitimacy. This legitimacy gave me the confidence to conduct the further analysis in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.5 Situating the Policy Analyst

In policy analysis, "It is not possible for an analyst to stand outside of the policy issue being studied, free of its values and meanings and of the analyst's own values, beliefs, and feelings" (Yanow, 2000: 6). As the researcher, it is important to situate myself in the policy issue. Because knowledge is acquired through the interpretation of events, actions, language, and data, it is necessarily subjective (Yanow, 2000:6). The idea here is that who the researcher is, just like all of the actors in a policy issue, affects how the situation is described and analyzed.

I approached this research not as a clean slate, but as a former student and teacher in the WCPSS, firmly committed to improving public education and to closing the achievement gap that exists. Before writing a word of this I knew the structure of the school system, the basic reasoning behind the student assignment policy, and the concrete experience of teaching in a low-income majority African American magnet school in the WCPSS. I had a favorable opinion of the student assignment policy based on my own interpretation of my own experiences with it. The challenge for me was making sure that this research did not simply become a justification for my prior interpretation. I confronted this challenge in two ways. First, I had to acknowledge that my own experience was helpful, but limited. For example I have never experienced the student assignment policy as a parent, as a low-income student, or as an administrator. This called for frequent self-reflection. Second, instead of separating myself from the policy situation in a search for objectivity, I invited criticism from all relevant actors (and still do) to check for bias and misrepresentation in my work[3]. In these ways, any prejudices on my own side could be counteracted.

---

[3] This important concept of inviting criticism and engaging with all actors to avoid misrepresentation is important for Ronald Schmidt's *Value-Critical Policy Analyis* and is also clear in John Forester's *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice.*

Chapter 2 The Dispute and its Context

In this chapter I discuss the core policy issue and the historical context in which this policy issue has arisen and is being debated. The historical context is discussed in separate sections on the national stage and local stage respectively.

2.1 Core Policy Issue

In following the 2009 Wake County School Board elections and the accompanying public debate, it is hard to not be struck by clearly defined choices being presented to voters. A number of binaries were entrenched in the public discourse: Resegregation vs. Neighborhoood Schools; Diversity vs. Forced Bussing; Individual Freedom vs. Government Control; Stability vs. Uncertainty; Balance vs. Isolation, etc. These perceived oppositions are all generated from one policy element, a particular school assignment criterion. This seemingly banal and boring detail of a student assignment policy became the fault line in a politically and emotionally charged public debate. The question is, "Should the school system use the socio-economic status (SES) of students as one criterion among others to determine to which schools students are assigned?" In answering this question the community was divided in a way that had not been seen in a generation.

How did using SES as a school assignment criterion become such a divisive issue? How did it become the fault line? The answer to this lies in a better understanding of over a century of school assignment policies. It also requires an investigation of the parties involved and of the different meanings that they assign to this particular criterion, in light of the historical context.

2.2 National Historical Context

National history is vital to an understanding of the current debate because the WCPSS does not operate in isolation from the rest of the state or nation. National trends and issues feed into and can be affected by local and state level realities. This section engages with national trends regarding school assignment via a look into more than a century of relevant U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

2.2.1 Plessy v. Ferguson 1896

After the Civil War ended in 1865, slavery was outlawed via the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The 14th Amendment guaranteed equal treatment under the law for all citizens. Though slavery was ended, people were still segregated by race in most aspects of public life. Homer Plessy was an African American who challenged segregation on trains. The Supreme Court ruled that his 14th Amendment right to equal treatment was not being violated due to the principle of "separate but equal"; as long as facilities are equal, there is no problem in racially segregating people.   This court case

allowed racial segregation into the law. Following this, "laws requiring racial segregation in education and other social and political domains were enacted throughout the South" (Orfield & Eaton, 1996: xxi).

2.2.2 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas 1954

After a half century of "separate but equal" segregation in the U.S., the concept was defeated. In the Brown decision, the Supreme Court unanimously concluded that state-imposed segregated schools were inherently unequal and must be abolished. The court found that even if facilities are deemed to be equal, segregation by race mistreats those in the racial minority. The court's decision reads:

> "Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system" (Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al, 1954).

2.2.3 Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education 1971

Despite the toppling of "Separate but Equal" in Brown v. Board 1954, many states in the South moved deliberately slowly in implementing the changes. Brown v. Board did not spell out exactly how desegregation was to be achieved, nor did it set a deadline for it to be done. The Swann case in 1971 outlawed the Charlotte-Mecklenberg schools district's plan to institute "racially-blind" assignment. This would simply not take race into consideration, but instead assign students based on where they lived. This was judged to not be enough of an effort due to the fact that segregation in schools was simply reproduced due to the existing housing patterns that were a result of generations of segregation. Furthermore, this decision approved using busing as a means of achieving desegregation (Orfield & Eaton, 1996:xxii). This allowed desegregation through busing between urban Charlotte, NC and the surrounding Mecklenburg County.

2.2.4 Milliken v. Bradley 1974; Milliken II

Three years after Swann promoted the use of busing between urban and suburban Charlotte, NC, "a more Conservative Supreme Court shaped by President Nixon blocked the same remedy for northern cities" (Grant, 2009:35). "After the Second World War, the pattern of white suburbanization in Northern cities intensified; many districts were left with too few white students to achieve full and lasting desegregation" (Orfield & Eaton, 1996:10). With urban centers becoming more and more islands of poor racial minorities, urban districts like Detroit moved to use suburban-urban busing as a tool to desegregate their schools. The Milliken decision struck this plan down. The court judged that in order for urban-suburban busing to be used, it would first have to be proven that the suburbs or the state had taken actions that directly led to segregation in urban areas. "It had been easy to find school districts in

the South guilty of segregation, the question of guilt in the North was always more ambiguous. The South had overt segregation laws requiring separate schools; reading the state laws was enough to prove that government had imposed segregation. Northern segregation was compounded by many complex school policies such as the drawing of attendance zones or the construction of schools serving residentially segregated areas" (Orfield & Eaton, 1996: 14-15). It was incredibly difficult to prove malicious intentions in cases of de facto segregation. The Milliken case took away the most obvious tool, urban-suburban busing, except in areas where segregation had been de jure, by law[4].

In 1977, without the option of using urban-suburban busing, Detroit still needed a way of dealing with a racially segregated, poor school district while complying with the 14th Amendment of equal treatment. Termed Milliken II, the Court judged that a "court could order a state to pay for educational programs to repair the harm caused by segregation" (Orfield & Eaton, 1996: xxiii). These compensatory programs are meant to offset the damage that segregation had caused and still causes. Though "Separate but Equal" was still illegal, de facto segregation accompanied by extra funding was deemed to fulfill constitutional requirements.

2.2.5 Declaration of Unitary Status

Starting in the mid 1980s a number of court cases dealt with the idea of "Unitary Status." If a school district was deemed unitary, or no longer segregated, by a court, then it would be allowed to cease desegregation plans. This was challenged in 1991 when, after being labeled as unitary, the Oklahoma City school district school board voted to return to neigborhood schools despite the possibility of de facto segregation. The Supreme Court ruled in Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell that being unitary released the district from having to maintain desegregation (Orfield & Eaton, 1996:xxiii). This is important because it set a precedent for other school districts to use unitary status as a label signifying an end of the need for desegregation efforts. Following Milliken, this makes it increasingly difficult to prove the need for desegregation plans if school districts resegregate after being termed unitary. It would need to be proven that the state or the district was intentionally resegregating schools. "Many of the very same actions that were illegal prior to a unitary status declaration become perfectly legal afterward" (Orfield & Eaton, 1996:20). "A study of 38 districts that had been declared unitary showed that in fact significant resegregation had occurred in most districts" (Grant, 2009:165).

---

[4] De jure segregation is segregation mandated by law. De facto segregation is when it occurs without a mandate.

2.2.6 Voluntary Desgregtion

Even after being declared unitary, many school districts decided to put into place voluntary desegregation plans to maintain racial balance. In 2007, a Supreme Court case involving both the Louisville and Seattle school districts challenged and fundamentally changed how desegregation plans could look. Both districts used race as a factor in how they assigned students to schools. The Supreme Court ruled that "assignment by race was unconstitutional now that Louisville and Jefferson County had eliminated their previous race-based school systems" (Grant, 2009:165). The grand effect of this case is that it outlawed the use of race in school assignment. It did allow for a limited use of race in such things as deciding where to build new schools and for allocating extra funds for programs. It effectively put an end to desegregation plans that were based on race (Grant, 2009).

2.2.7 Pendulum in Action

In using Supreme Court cases relevant to student assignment one can see the massive changes that have been instituted on a national scale. From legalized segregation under Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896 on one extreme, to a complete rejection of it in 1954 with Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Ka., sweeping changes affected the entire nation. As time progressed, though, those changes were chipped away incrementally beginning in the 1970's. As recently as 2007, the national conversation changed drastically. In the midst of such changes, local school districts have had to plan and adjust accordingly. The following section will look at the Wake County Public School System and its attempt to traverse such a bumpy, imperfect, and changing path.

2.3   The Case of the Wake County Public School System

2.3.1 Pre-1976

The period of "Separate but Equal" from 1896-1954 operated in much the same way in Wake County as it did in the rest of the Southern U.S. People were segregated by race in most aspects of public life, including in schools. After the Brown v. Board decision in 1954, Wake County moved deliberately slowly to integrate their school district. It was not until 1960 that the first black student was admitted to a formerly all white school in Raleigh, the largest city in Wake County and in 1965, only 1 percent of Raleigh's black students were attending formerly white schools (Grant, 2009:87). As the federal government pushed harder for greater speed, the threat of cutting off federal funds became a catalyst for more movement towards integration. One of the effects of this was that white people in the urban center of the county, Raleigh, began to leave for the suburbs. "Between 1968 and 1976, the white population of Raleigh dropped 11 percent" (Grant, 2009:88). Fears that Raleigh would become a rotting core spurred the city into action, including business owners who feared their downtown businesses were in danger. "A coalition of business, civic, and political leaders of both races grew more concerned as

19

Raleigh's classrooms began to empty and the system moved slowly toward higher concentrations of poor and black pupils" (Grant, 2009:89)

2.3.2 The 1976 Merger

The active business and political leaders in Raleigh sought to save their city's schools by merging the Raleigh school district with the larger Wake County school district. They envisioned something similar to what had occurred in Charlotte as a result of the 1971 Swann case that called for suburban-urban busing as a means to achieve integration. The pro-merger coalition eventually won this fight and the two school districts merged in 1976, creating the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) that exists today. Substantial integration really began in the 1980s just as the county was beginning a cycle of massive growth.

2.3.3 Magnet Schools

In the midst of rapid growth, WCPSS instituted an ambitiously sized magnet schools program aimed at integrating the district's schools. Magnet schools work in the following way. Predominantly low-income and racial minority schools, most of which were operating under capacity, in downtown Raleigh were given enhanced enrichment programs. These programs would attract, or act as a magnet for, students from the suburbs. If there was no space for these suburban students, some urban students would be bused to predominantly white schools in the suburbs. The magnet schools could be chosen by families and applied for. In effect, it created a system of 2-way busing that allowed Wake County to grow (41% in the 1980's) while still working towards integration (Grant, 2009:97).

2.3.4 High Achievement and National Recognition

In the 1990's the WCPSS made nationally recognized strides in educational achievement. Much of the success centers around the superintendent Bill McNeal. Under his watch percentages of students passing state math and reading tests rose rapidly (from 71% in 1994 to 91% in 2003 for third graders (Grant, 2009:104)) and the achievement gap lessened considerably. Scores for both white and black students rose, but most marked was the rise of scores for black students. From 1994 to 2003 the share of black students in grades 3-8 who passed the state math test rose from 57% to 81%. The achievement gap slimmed from 37 points to 17 points between black and white students and from 28 points to 11 points between Hispanic and white students(Grant, 2009:104). In 2004 Bill McNeal was named the National Superintendent of the Year by the Association of American School Administrators. WCPSS students were outcompeting their peers on national tests such as the SAT and the SAT writing test (Grant, 2009:105). McNeal points to the integration of the schools across the entire district as the principal reason for the success because of its effect of "breaking down the wall between affluent suburbs and impoverished inner cities to create a healthy balance of rich and poor in every classroom" (Grant, 2009:105).

20

2.3.5 From Race to SES

As noted in 2.2.6, in 2007 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that deciding school assignment based on a student's race was unconstitutional. This deeply affected many school districts around the country, especially in the South who were using race as an assignment criterion in their voluntary desegregation plans. The WCPSS was not deeply affected by the ruling. Years before, in 2000, the WCPSS school board had already modified their desegregation plan. Its focus was on using the socio-economic status (SES) of students as a way of measuring integration in schools. It was the first metropolitan school district in the U.S. to move from racial balance to socio-economic balance as a measure of a school's diversity (Grant, 2009:105). This switch was based on a large body of existing research that made clear a strong relationship between a student's academic achievement and the SES of the school's student body. This research is vast and goes back to the 1966 Coleman report. Richard Kahlenberg's book "All Together Now" provides a comprehensive summary of a number of reports whose data make this connection conclusive. The main idea that this research supports is that poor students attending majority middle class schools see an increase in their performance and the performance of middle class students is either slightly improved or stays the same. Kahlenberg drives home his point: "David Armor, a fierce busing opponent wrote in 1995 that 'virtually all studies of desegregation and achievement have found little or no change in achievement or other educational outcomes for white students'" (Kahlenberg, 2001:39). He points out that there is no magic number beyond which level the middle class presence has a positive effect on the poor students' achievement. He writes, "Most researchers, however, have converged around the 50% mark" (Kahlenberg, 2001:39).

In Wake County a school was considered out of socio-economic balance if more than 40% of its student body was considered poor. The 40% threshold was based on a complilation of research studies showing negative effects for schools and students when it was crossed[5]. Poverty was measured by enrollment in the Free and Reduced Lunch program. As mentioned above, use of SES as a way of maintaining balance in the school district was making impressive headway. That was up until 2004.

2.3.6 Demographic and Statistical Trends[6]

The growth in Wake County has been astounding since 1985, mostly fueled by people moving to the area from states in the North. In 1985 the population of the county was around 360,000 (Office of Growth Management, 2005). Twenty years later in 2005 the population had growth to 720,000, doubling in size. The growth became even more extreme from 2005-2009. In that short

---

[5] The rationale for the 40% threshold is explained in detail on the WCPSS website at http://www.wcpss.net/evaluation-research/reports/1999/9920_poverty.pdf.
[6] See Appendix B for a detailed demographic breakdown of WCPSS.

span of time, the population grew to almost 900,000 (State and County Quick Facts, 2010). Though this growth appeared to slow in 2010, it has taken a toll on the WCPSS. The WCPSS had 114,000 students in the 2004-05 school year. In 2010, that number is hovering around 143,000. Much of this growth has been seen in suburban areas, causing overcrowding there. Adding roughly 30,000 students in 5 years necesitated the construction of new schools. In 2006, a major bond was passed to provide money for the new schools. As new schools have opened, having students reassigned to new, unexpected schools has become quite commonplace, much to the chagrin and irritation of families throughout the county.

Another side effect of the population explosion was that it became more and more difficult to manage the socio-economic diversity goal of no more than 40% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students in any given school. The constant influx of people complicated the long term planning and maintaining of socio-economic balance. The number of schools in the WCPSS traversing this threshold increased to 54 out of 159 in the 2009-10 school year (Free and Reduced Lunch Program, 2010).

Simultaneously, the ability of the WCPSS and the State of North Carolina in general to monitor graduation rates greatly increased. Though it may seem simple on the surface, it was not until 2002-03 that the WCPSS was able to accurately measure graduation rates in cohorts. This measures the percent of students entering 9th grade for the first time in 2002-03 who receive their high school diploma 4 years later, in the 2005-06 school year (Haynie & McMillen, 2007). The results of this new measurement are seen in figure 1.

Figure 1 Recent graduation rates in WCPSS

School year	Graduation Rate in Wake County
2005-06	82.6%
2006-07	79.3%
2007-08	78.8%
2008-09	78.4%

Source: WCPSS

The falling graduation rate, though not a perfect measurement of achievement by any means, does not point to a school system moving in the right direction. More troubling for many in the system are the graduation rates for certain subgroups within the system. Rates for white students have stayed relatively steady at around 89% , but from 2006-2009 the graduation rate for black students has fallen from 69.9% to 63.4%, for Hispanic students from

22

57.7% to 51.1%, and for Free and Reduced Lunch students from 59.7% to 54.2% (Haynie, 2009). Given the plethora and variety of data involved in measuring education, schools, teachers, and students, it is not hard to find data that matches up with arguments for or against what a system is doing. Also due to this, it can be hard to sift through it all to get a good idea of how students, on the whole are doing. Graduation rates are seemingly the most straightforward and easy to comprehend data set for the public at large so they became a common talking point for those wanting to make significant changes to the system.

2.3.7 2009 School Board Election

In October of 2009, the WCPSS held an election for four of the nine seats on the Wake County School Board. The School Board decides on education policy for the entire system. The election became extremely heated and divisive. The political climate in the months leading up to the election was polarized into two camps. One was arguing that "forced busing" for diversity should no longer be a part of Wake County's school assignment plan. The other camp was arguing in defense of keeping socio-economic balance within the school system as a goal of school assignment.

The four seats were all won by candidates arguing against what they deemed "forced busing for diversity." This created a 5-4 majority on the school board in favor of ousting the socio-economic diversity goal for the county's schools. It was clear that the new members: John Tedesco, Debra Goldman, Chris Malone, and Deborah Prickett were going to bring change with them.

2.3.8 Striking Through SES and its Aftermath

On December 1st, 2009 the new School Board members were officially sworn in to their office. Their first order of business was to replace the current School Board Chair Kevin Hill with Ron Margiotta, the only member of the previous school board who sided with the new majority regarding diversity in the school assignment plan. Following this, the agenda for the meeting was amended, the most controversial addition called for immediate changes in Wake County's school assignment plan.

Changing the school assignment plan (policy 6200) was literally an exercise in cutting and pasting. Certain words, phrases, and sentences were cut out and replaced by others. Taken out was the goal of "Creating and maintaining a diverse student body" and put in was "Promoting neighborhood schools with proximity to home consideration" and "Providing choice in calendar and programs"(Christmas, 2009:12). The following vital paragraph was also altered. It had previously read:

"Maintaining *diverse* student populations in each Wake County school is *critical* to ensuring academic success of all students. *This is supported by research.* The School system will also consider other factors that impact communities, families, and costs" (Christmas, 2009:13)

The paragraph was changed to:

23

"Maintaining *stable* student populations in each Wake County School is imporant to ensuring academic success for all students. Assignment policies will recognize the impact of student assignment on students, families, and communities, and the costs involved. The promotion of neighborhood schools will increase stability, encourage parental involvement, support and strengthen the community and place emphasis on the education of every student" (Christmas, 2009:13).

Other changes were also made regarding reassignment of students only in the face of overcrowding or new school openings and again emphasis was placed on proximity of a school to one's home (Christmas, 2009).

The new board majority voted for these changes with a 5-4 vote. The abruptness and the severity of the changes added to the division in the community. Even some supporters were shocked at the process of the change. Defenders of the diversity component in student assignment were now even more entrenched in their own position and found a renewed energy to oppose the new majority. In the months following this first board meeting, rarely does a School Board meeting proceed without scathing public commentary. The head of the North Carolina NAACP was arrested and barred from the meetings due to his protests, along with local progressive church leaders. High school and university students have been arrested, sometimes with their parents sitting in attendance.

The policy issue under examination here, the use of SES as an assignment criterion in Wake County, cannot be delinked from the historical context in which it is embedded. Understanding the national context as well as the local history regarding school assignment policies allows us to see this current policy in a clear light. The next chapter will delve into the differenct actors involved with the policy in Wake County, as well as their positions.

Chapter 3
The Interpretive Communities and Their Arguments

This chapter attempts to answer two main questions. The first is "Who are the interpretive communities involved in the student assignment policy in Wake County?" This will look at the various groups involved and their motivations. Secondly, "What are the arguments made concerning school assignment by each interpretive community?" In answering this second question, this section aims to fairly articulate the arguments made on both sides of the issue. It is not intended to critique or analyze the arguments being made. That will come in later chapters.

It is important to consider how I can claim that my interpretation of the arguments is valid? Schmidt recommends that in order to give the various arguments and their proponents a fair hearing, the researcher's interpretations should be checked with the various actors in the policy arena (Schmidt, 2006: 310). This step has been taken with stakeholder feedback further informing the arguments below. Another issue of validity has to do with *completeness*. The validity of any discourse analysis is dependent on whether or not the specific discourse has been fully identified. "The analysis is complete when it reveals no further contents and formally new findings" (Jager, 2001:51).

3.1   Interpretive Communities

One of the pillars of interpretive policy analysis is the idea of multiple interpretations: that an action, a situation, or a policy can mean different things for different groups of people. The difference is a result of varying world views, values, beliefs, and ideas. Where policy is concerned, groups approaching a policy from similar world views, values, and beliefs begin, though interaction with each other, to share a particular discourse and a particular way of interpreting language, information, and actions around the policy (Yanow, 1996). These groups are called Interpretive Communities (ICs).

In researching this policy situation I have identified two ICs. Each IC is heterogenous, made up of multiple groups and individuals who may sometimes disagree.[7] What the varying groups within each IC do share is a common approach to student assignment policy resulting from their shared position either for or against the use of socio-economic status (SES) in assigning

---

[7] For detailed information on the groups constituting the ICs refer to Figure A1 in Appendix A for their respective websites.

students to schools. The individuals and groups within each IC share a similar way of speaking about the use of SES. They emphasize similar aspects of the policy situation, identify similar causes and similar solutions, and point to similar facts to support their arguments. I have, for the purposes of this research only, dubbed the two IC's *SES Yes* and *SES No*.

3.1.1 SES No

3.1.1.1 General Policy Position

Groups and individuals in the SES No IC are against the use of SES as an assignment criterion in the WCPSS. Furthermore, they do not believe that the school system as a whole should strive to maintain diversity of any kind in individual schools, be it economic, racial, or ethnic diversity.

3.1.1.2 Groups and Individuals

Ron Margiotta, the board chair, John Tedesco, Debra Goldman, Chris Malone, and Deborah Prickett constitute the new board majority concering the use of SES. John Tedesco has become the most vocal in articulating the approach of this IC to the public, going on CNN and NC Spin[8] in counterpoint to Rev. Barber of the NAACP. During the lead up to the elections a number of organizations became involved with this policy issue. The Wake Schools Community Alliance is the main organization that formed in support of the SES No position. This all-volunteer group helped to organize the campaigns of the new school board members. They are made up mostly of parents, especially in the suburbs surrounding Raleigh. It would be unfair to say that they were entirely made up of suburban parents, though. The Wake County GOP (Republican Party) also helped to organize and support the electoral campaigns, headed by Claude Pope. Deborah Prickett thanked the Republican party and Mr. Pope for helping to get her elected as she was being sworn into office.[9] The John Locke Foundation, a conservative Raleigh based think tank, has also weighed in repeatedly on this issue, including going on NC Spin. Americans for Prosperity, a Conservative organization helped with the organizing of support leading up to and after the election.

---

[8] NC Spin is a weekly show on public television that hosts discussions of current events and issues in North Carolina.
[9] This was despite the fact that School Board is supposed to be a non-partisan government body. In a similar vein, Claude Pope's Civitas Institute, a conservative policy organization, was hired to train the new school board members. This has resulted in heavy criticism from opponents of the new majority.

Wake Schools Call to Action

Dear Friends,

As you know a new majority has won control of the Wake County School Board. The candidates that were sworn in on Tuesday, have quickly moved to deliver on their promises to stop wasteful spending, listen to parents, stop mandatory year around assignments and most importantly end the destructive race based busing system ridiculously disguised as bussing for socio economic diversity.

3.1.1.3 Motivations

Uniting the SES No group are some shared motivational factors. SES No, like SES Yes, is motivated by high student achievement. The issue of family stability is also key for them. They were rejecting what they saw as an out of touch system that was not friendly to families. Long bus rides and constant school reassignments for their children motivated them into organizing a campaign to change the system. They want a school system that treats every student and family in a fair manner and one that provides choices to families concerning school assignment.

3.1.2 SES YES

3.1.2.1 General Policy Position

Those within the SES Yes IC agree that the WCPSS should continue to use the socio-economic status of students as one of the criteria taken into consideration when assigning students to schools. They believe that it is important for Wake County as a school system to aim to maintain socio-economic diversity in all of its schools.

3.1.2.2 Groups and Individuals

SES Yes is made up of a wide variety of groups and individuals. To begin, there are the four minority School Board members: Keith Sutton, Kevin Hill, Dr. Carolyn Morrison, and Dr. Anne McLaurin. A number of community groups have become active around this policy. Great Schools in Wake is an organization of parents and concerned citizens. They have been very active in setting up discussions and community information meetings. The Coalition of Concerned Citizens for African American Children (CCCAAC) has played a similar role. The North Carolina Chapter of the NAACP and its president Rev. William Barber have been the most vocal and contentious in this IC.

27

They have organized rallies and protests to challenge the new school board majority. Rev. Barber has made television appearances on CNN and NC Spin. Progressive local churches and inter-faith coalitions have joined with the NAACP in many of their rallies and protests. The Wake Education Partnership is an organization driven by the idea that the economic health of Wake County is aided by excellent public schools and are funded mostly by corporate and individual donors. They aim to to provide information for the public about education issues and to be a link between the school system, the business community, and government. The Wake County chapter of the North Carolina Association of Educators is the main teachers organization. Some members of the business community placed a full page advertisement in the Raleigh News and Observer, the largest newspaper in the county. The Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce is part of this group. The progressive organization NC Justice Center and NC Policy Watch have focused a lot of energy towards driving the public discourse around this issue and in organizing along with the NAACP. NC HEAT is an organization of youths in the Wake County area that has been vocal at rallies and during the public comment portion of School Board meetings.

Such a wide variety of members makes this group far from cohesive and it should not be assumed that, being part of the same IC implies that they work and strategize together. Though this may occur, these groups often act separately and may even, at times, try to distance themselves from each other.

Figure 3: Excerpt from the NC HEAT website (NC HEAT, 2010)

We are a united multicultural group of youth from different aspects of life seeking a common purpose. We organize and advocate for civil rights and justice in our community for ourselves and for future generations in the Wake County Public School System… The new School Board members are currently on a mission to destroy WCPSS schools by taking away the diversity policy and reverting to neighborhood schools. This essentially will mean *SEGREGATED SCHOOLS*. Because socioeconomic status will no longer be a factor in school assignment, many schools will be poor while other schools will be wealthy. Whether we like to admit it or not, race and socioeconomic status are tied together. Ever since March of 2010 when the board effectively dismantled the nationally recognized diversity policy and proposed their new socio-economic segregation plan, Wake County students, parents, teachers, and citizens have been outraged.

3.1.2.3 Motivations

All are ultimately motivated by a desire to enable high student achievement for all. Alongside this is a belief that socio-economic balance within schools creates an environment where high student achievement is possible throughout the WCPSS. There is also a concern over islands of poverty being created by the new policy and that these islands would also be isolations of racial minorities. The fear of schools becoming resegregated is very real as many of the older members of the community still remember going to segregated schools as children. From the business angle, socio-economic balance throughout school system is considered to be an important factor in

28

preventing urban decay in the Raleigh downtown area by ensuring that downtown residents are not faced with poverty stricken schools.

3.2 SES No Arguments

This section will describe a summary of the various arguments that have been made in support of discontinuing the use of SES as an assignment criterion in the WCPSS, from the SES No perspective.   Some arguments are more elaborated than others, but this reflects the findings of my research through document, radio, and TV analysis as well as conversational interviews with relevant stakeholders. The arguments, though presented separately here, are often made in tandem, borrowing elements when deemed necessary.

3.2.1 Post-Racial Country

> Using SES as an assignment criterion is a relic of a sad past when racism and segregation were concrete realities that had to be dealt with. The Civil Rights Movement was successful in fighting legal segregation. The victories of the Civil Rights Movement should be celebrated. We live in a very different and much improved country thanks to the Civil Rights Movement and people like Martin Luther King Jr. Wake County has become a very diverse community both racially and economically. We also have our first African American President. We are increasingly moving in the direction of being a post-racial country, meaning that race is becoming less and less of a defining characteristic of a person. We have grown up to fullfil the dream of Martin Luther King Jr. We should not be labelling people by race or income because that label often times limits their abilities and the expectations that others put on them. We should not tell a child that because he is black and poor, we have to bus him to a far away school because he'll fail if we let him go to school in his neighbourhood. "There comes a point when we have to actually start living the 'Dream' rather than just reminiscing about it. We can't fight the challenges of today, including poverty, which is increasingly color blind with the battle plans from fifty years ago" (Tedesco, 2010).

3.2.2 Race and Class Don't Determine Student Achievement

> The use of SES wrongly assumes that the demographic makeup of a school will determine the achievement of individual students.   It wrongly assumes that a school in a wealthy white neighbourhood will be full of successful students and that a low income largely racial minority school will be full of failing students. The reality is much more complicated. The statistics show in Wake County that a poor child who is forcibly bused to a wealthy area for school is not achieving there, anyway. We need to concentrate less on manufacturing diversity and more on making sure that all kids, no matter where they go to

school, are able to achieve. There are great examples from the Harlem Children's Zone and the KIPP schools that show that all students, no matter what race or class, can achieve. What matters most is having the right leadership and the right commitment from principals, teachers, and parents. We need to concentrate on how to do this, rather than busing kids around. If the commitment of the principals and teachers is not there, then we need to find new principals and teachers who are willing to do the job that taxpayers are paying them for.

3.2.3 Instability for Families

The use of SES as an assignment criterion causes great instability for families in Wake County. In an attempt to manufacture diversity students are constantly being reassigned to different schools. A family and a student never know from one year to the next what school they will be a part of. Even greater instability is suffered by families in Wake County that have multiple children in the system. A parent may have an elementary student going to a school far from their home (in order to maintain diversity), and then a middle school student going to a different school that is near neither their home nor the elementary child's school. This makes it increasingly difficult for families to be involved with their schools or even to plan their weeks[10]. The instability inhibits the development of a real sense of community. The use of SES is an assault on family life and reveals a system that is unsympathetic to the new realities of the 21st century family. Very few families have the ability to have a parent stay at home. Working families and single parent households can't cope with the use of SES as an assignment criterion.

3.2.4 Forced Busing and Fairness

The use of SES as an assignment criterion interacts with the Wake County family in the form of forced busing. This busing is not only unnecessary (see argument 3.2.2 above), but is also inherently unfair and treats people unequally. Forced diversity busing runs two ways through the magnet program. The magnet program locates enrichment educational programs such as Gifted and Talented, International Baccalaureate, and A+ Arts in predominantly low income, mostly racial minority, and urban areas of the county. These specialized programs act as "magnets" to attract more affluent students to these schools, in an attempt at creating diversity there. Students can choose to apply for

---

[10] This is further complicated by the fact that families also may be dealing with children on different school calendars (Year-round, traditional or modified year-round).

these programs. Those who are accepted, fill up part[11] of the school that would normally have gone to the surrounding area students. In order to make space for the affluent children, poor children are forcibly bused (there is no application process for them) to suburban schools, helping to create diversity there as well. These forced bus rides can be quite long and can lead to the instability and hardship for families referred to in 3.2.3. Forced busing is unfair for a number of reasons. Affluent students are forced to take a long bus ride away from their homes just to access enriching educational programs. What is worse is that low income, mostly minority students, don't even get a choice and, in some cases don't get access to the magnet programs. So, forced busing disproportionately negatively affects the very kids that using SES is designed to help. Furthermore, only some students of a given status get bused. Families should not be labelled and then treated differently based on where they live, what they look like, or how much money they have. A better use of planning would be to look for ways to make schools in all areas of the county more desirable.

Figure 4: Excerpt from the WCSA website

We believe every family, regardless of their income level, should have a voice in their child's education. Currently, some children take long bus rides by choice; others are forced.

Source: Wake Schools Community Alliance, 2010

3.2.5 Diversity and Education

Using SES as an assignment criterion is wrong because it puts too much emphasis on the manufacturing of diversity instead of focusing on high student achievement. That is the primary product of schools, principals, and teachers. Though not perfect indicators, our best tools for measuring student achievement are test scores and graduation rates. These have been dropping in Wake County for the past 5 years. This has especially been the case for low income and minority students. Using SES is not working, especially for those it is supposed to be helping. That said, diversity is important. It is a diverse world and students need to be able to learn about it. There are lots of ways to value diversity without trying to artificially create it. We can celebrate diversity through curriculum changes, special training, extra resources, and special events, etc. "Diversity is critical, but should we reassign

---

[11] The amount of students taking part in magnet programs varies depending on the magnet school. Some magnet schools are mostly attended by students who have applied for the enrichment program. Others are mostly attended by students living near the school.

students for it? No" (Tedesco, 2010). Focusing on diversity takes our eye off our core product which is student achievement.

3.2.6 Role of Government: Freedom and Choice

Using SES as an assignment criterion is a prime example of social engineering. When government engages in social engineering it is using its power in a misguided way. The government's function is to provide fair choices and to treat everyone equally. Individuals and individual families are best placed to make important decisions about their lives. The government should simply ensure that they are free to do so. In doing this, social inequalities can be addressed, not by mandate, but by the free actions of people. Poverty can affect students and families in a host of negative ways. One of the best ways to combat poverty is by providing families with stability, so that they, along with their communities can find solutions for the issues confronting them. Using SES takes this stability away and doesn't allow for that sense of community. Government should "do the least harm." When it must get involved, it should allow decisions to be made as close as possible to the individual level. Locally customized efforts are best able to work with families to deal with societal inequalities.

The government is most misguided when it treats communities as aggregates instead of as individuals. This is seen with the SES criterion. An arbitrary goal of having no more than 40% of students receiving Free and Reduced lunch in any given school was instituted. This number is grounded in no significant scientific research. There is no magic number, but 40% was instituted as if it was magic. To make matters worse, more and more schools in the past 5 years have crossed that 40% threshold. Furthermore, the number of people qualifying for Free and Reduced lunch fluctuates with the economy. It is not an effective assignment tool. These kinds of things go wrong when a government engages in social engineering.

3.3 SES Yes Arguments

This section will lay out a summary of the arguments used to support the use of SES in the WCPSS, from the SES Yes perspective. As with SES No, the arguments are often made alongside each other as well as in an interrelated way.

3.3.1 Resegregation

Using SES as an assignment criterion, because of the high correlation between class and race, keeps not only an economic balance, but also a racial balance. This argument harkens back to the days of 'separate but equal' education, which was made illegal in the U.S. in 1954 through

32

the Brown case. As Rob Schofield at the NC Justice Center said in our interview, "This is simply round 15 of the same fight that goes back 50 years." This argument takes on a moral character as well as a legal one, though. The idea being that segregation was wrong then and it is still wrong now. Whether it is de jure segregation or de facto segregation doesn't matter. Racial segregation is damaging for the children and the community as a whole which grows up instead as two mutually isolated communities living in starkly different realities. The SES criterion is seen not just as an effective policy instrument, but also a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement. It is a concrete attempt in Wake County to stay true to the ideals of the Civil Rights Movement and to continue to progress as a unified community. Racism and racial discrimination still exist today and are reflected in graduation rates, suspension rates, incarceration rates, income levels, unemployment, health care, etc. These are not relics of a past age, but an everyday reality. Taking Socio-economic diversity away as policy goal is a step back towards a darker time in this country.

Figure 5: NC NAACP Flyer

Source: www.naacpnc.org

3.3.2 Role of Government

The government has a strong role to play in minimizing societal/systemic inequalities. The government's role is to organize and implement the goals and priorities expressed by the community. Government efforts can effectively lessen the extent of systemic inequalities. Systemic inequalities such as poverty, unemployment, and incarceration rates do affect the education of a child. Moreover, the

government at the federal and state level instituted slavery and segregation for generations which created long lasting inequalities in society. The government should pro-actively assign students to schools in such a way that systemic inequalities are lessened, including using SES.

3.3.3 Instability

The cause of instability in student assignments is due mostly to the explosive growth rate in the suburban areas of Wake County, not due to the use of SES in school assignment. Only a small percentage of students are bused to maintain Socio-economic diversity. Wake County has been a victim of its own success. Due in no small part to the nationally recognized school system in Wake County, the population has boomed. New schools have to be built constantly to keep up with this growth. Every new school needs to be filled, which causes a cascading effect of school assignment changes. Instability would exist with or without the use of SES as a criterion for school assignment. Socio-economic diversity is unfairly targeted as the cause for instability.

3.3.4 Middle Class Core

One of the main tenets of using SES as an assignment criterion is that it gives all students the opportunity to attend a school with a middle class core. Having a middle class core helps a school in a variety of ways. Mostly, this has to do with middle class parental support for the school relative to that of their lower income counterparts. Generally, middle class parents are more likely to have or make available the extra time necessary to volunteer, hold fundraisers, and be active in Parent Teacher Associations (PTA's). Similarly middle class parents are more likely to have the disposable income to actually be able to donate to school fundraisers. Middle class parents are more likely to hold the school accountable for performance in the classroom and on standardized tests. This is due, in large part to the likeliness of having extra time and higher education levels themselves. Not maintaining a middle class core at a school makes it less likely for the preceding scenarios to occur. This heavily impacts the overall educational experience both inside the classroom and out. Because of this, SES should be used as an assignment criterion.

3.3.5 High Student Achievement – Teachers and Principals

Using SES as an assignment criterion is important because it creates an environment capable of sustaining high achievement for all students.

The SES criterion prevents high concentrations of poverty within schools. This is important because research shows that schools with high concentrations of poverty find it incredibly difficult to retain experienced teachers and principals[12]. This is due mostly to the strenuous extra time and effort that is necessary to teach students who are themselves dealing with all of the real world effects of poverty. In such a situation, schools full of students with the highest obstacles to their educations have the least experienced teachers and principals. This does not give these students an equal opportunity to achieve. Because it can aid in the retention of experienced teachers and principals in all schools, SES should be used as an assignment criterion.

3.3.6 Economic Development

Diverse high-quality schools are a key factor in economic development. The WCPSS has developed a solid reputation that has aided the economic development of the county. The use of SES as an assignment criterion and the socio-economic balance it provides attract businesses and workers to all sections of the county, urban or suburban. The same goes for attracting the most talented workers. Migrants to the area don't have to live in a certain neighbourhood to have access to high quality schools. The rapid growth of the area both economically and demographically is a sign of this. Similarly, students coming through the Wake school system have both the hard and soft skills necessary to get into good colleges and pursue promising careers. This provides businesses with a talented base population.

So many cities in the U.S. such as Detroit, Baltimore, and Hartford among others have rotting urban centers, isolated poverty surround by affluent suburbs. The schools that serve these urban centers are failing as a result. This is not the case in Raleigh. The SES assignment criterion that links urban Raleigh with the surrounding suburbs has allowed the City of Raleigh to stay vibrant and attractive for businesses, workers, and families.

3.3.7 The argument for Diversity as Education

Diversity is a key foundation or bedrock of a child's education. The world, the country, and the county are all diverse racially, economically, ethnically, religiously, etc. Diversity is most effectively learned through experience. Working and learning in a diverse environment builds soft skills, notably the ability to work comfortably with and even to celebrate difference. These skills can't be taught from a distance and they will give people who have them a better chance to succeed in life

---

[12] This is discussed in depth by Richard Kahlenberg in his book *All Together Now* (2001). This book was often referred to by supporters of the use of SES.

and careers as adults. Similarly, research has shown that students who go to segregated high schools are more likely to segregate by choice at the university level (Tobin, 2010: 6). This is counter to the mission of many of the most prestigious universities in the U.S. who strive to create diverse educational environments, precisely to build upon the soft skills mentioned above. The government should use the SES of students to maintain diversity within schools in Wake County.

Chapter 4
Frame Analysis and Frame Conflict

Now that the core arguments have been established and confirmed by their protagonists, this chapter will identify how each set of arguments links together in a frame that is shared by the interpretive community which espouses it. The analysis will use the definition put forward by Schön and Rein: A frame is the underlying structure of belief, perception, and appreciation upon which a policy position rests (Schön & Rein, 1994). The aim will be to find where the opposing frames actually meet and conflict, and to then analyze those points.

4.1 Findings

The frames used by the interpretive communities SES Yes and SES No come into conflict at four interrelated points outlined in figure 2 below. The conflicts at each of these points of the respective frames leads to much of the divisiveness in the discourse on the use of SES as a school assignment criterion. They determine how each side interprets the policy issue, what is considered useful information, what is the correct context, and upon which values the new system should be based, etc.

Figure 6 Frame Conflict: SES-Yes versus SES-No
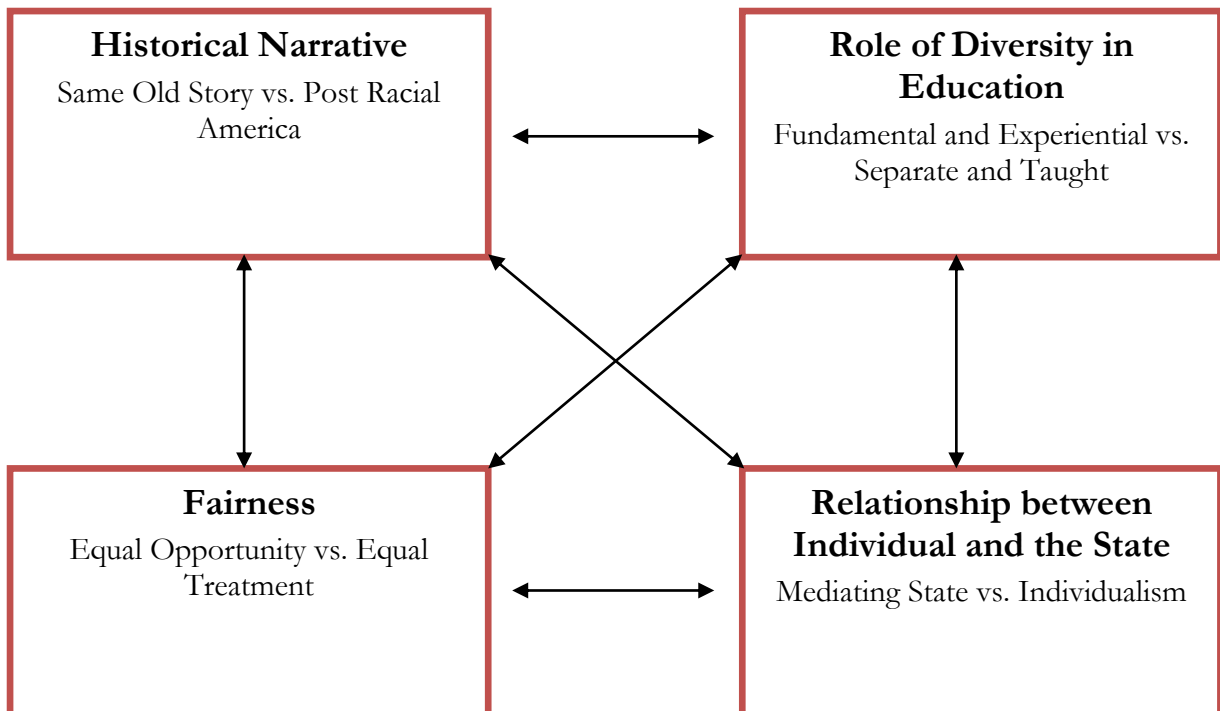
Source: Own construction

4.2   Historical Narrative

As a starting point for the comparison we take the differing interpretations of history and where the U.S. is as a society today in relation to that history. A "historical narrative" is a common piece of any frame. It is used to set the stage for the respective arguments. Of course, no historical narrative can include every piece of history so, inevitably, some pieces are included and others are excluded. The opposing historical narratives help to build a temporal frame for the rest of the arguments.

The historical narrative with which the SES Yes IC builds its frame extends back to the days of slavery and then to segregation. It includes these time periods and even emphasizes them to direct attention to the struggles of the past. It then points to Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 as a watershed moment and the beginning of what is generally considered the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights movement was against a vision of society and a government that divided the country along racial lines. Segregation harmed both African Americans and White Americans, leaving scars on each. Racism still exists today, but is much more nuanced. While forced segregation is not legal, thanks to Brown vs. Board of Education, de facto segregation still exists. There is a quality of life gap that extends through all aspects of life in terms of education, incarceration, income levels, health care, etc and these gaps are a direct result of the still open wounds suffered in the past.

Not long after Brown vs. Board was actually put into action (in the 1970s) it began to be challenged in various court cases. These have continued through the decades, most recently in 2007. Each one has moved us, as a society, a little further from the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement and of the Brown vs. Board decision. While most of the nation has allowed de facto segregation to exist, despite the research supporting how damaging it is to children, Wake County has taken direct action to prevent it. The use of SES in assigning students to schools is a way to balance schools both economically, but also racially. The retraction of this socio-economic balance as a goal is simply the next round in the same fight that has been going on since Brown vs. Board was realized. The code words such as "Forced Busing" and "Neighborhood Schools" are the same ones that have been used since the 1970's to try to end the integration of schools. The struggle today is a continuation of the struggle of the past.

The historical narrative offered by the SES No IC extends back to the 1950s-60s Civil Rights movment, not before. The Civil Rights Movement was successful and should be celebrated. Forced segregation is a thing of the past. Segregation was essentially bad because it treated people differently. Today, the country is a better place thanks to the Civil Rights Movement. We are increasingly moving towards an integrated and post-racial country. We have realized Martin Luther King's dream in such a way that one's race or class does not determine one's life. This is a fundamentally different time than that of the Civil Rights Movement. While there is still poverty, it is increasingly color blind. Using SES as a tool in school assignment was a relic of the past.

4.3 Role of Diversity in Education

Each IC builds their argument around conflicting views on the role of diversity in education. So, what is diversity? There is acknowledgement on both sides that diversity in student assignment concerns income explicitly, and this was clearly stated in the policy 6200 before 2009. There is also a shared acknowledgement that socio-economic diversity produces, as a side effect, de facto racial diversity. This is due to the high correlation between race/ethnicity and income in the county, and in the country. The rate of diversity has been counted by the percentage of students in a given school that are on the Free and Reduced lunch program which is based on a measure of family income. If a school has socio-economic diversity, most likely it will be racially and ethnically diverse as well. So, diversity is socio-economic by law, but also produces a diversity that is racial/ethnic.

The SES Yes IC sees diversity as both fundamental and requiring experiential exposure. It is fundamental to the education of a child in two ways. First, it sets the table for high achievement for all by making it easier to attract and retain teachers and principals in all schools and brings the middle class core benefits to all schools. Secondly, it is fundamental to a child's education because it builds soft skills that allow a student to develop awareness, comfort, confidence, and enjoyment in dealing with people who are experiencing life differently whether due to economic status, race, ethnicity, culture or in other ways. These soft skills are seen as essential because the world is becoming more and more diverse and globalized. The jobs and societal life of the future will require these soft skills, so they must be ingrained in a child's education. Further, addressing diversity in education must be of an experiential nature. By being in classes with and working in groups with students from different walks of life, these soft skills are developed. There is no substitute for learning within diversity.

The SES No IC has a different approach. Learning about the diverse world is important for the future of students within the school system. Diversity should be celebrated and integrated into the curriculum. However, "rubbing elbows" with students who are different does not help with anyone's education. The main goal of education is high student achievement for all. That is measured through the best tools we currently have such as tests scores and graduation rates. Our focus should be on these. Classrooms themselves don't need to be diverse, but students do need to and can learn about the wide diversity of the world.

4.4 Different Conceptions of Fairness

As a cornerstone of each frame is a particular conceptualization of of fairness. Jenny Stewart discusses fairness in her book *Public Policy Values*. She writes that "Fairness, while we might feel we know it when we see it, means different things to different people" (Stewart, 2009:48). She points to three different conceptions of fairness. The first is defining fairness as the acknowledgement, preservation, or even promotion of certain rights. Unfairness in this case would be the disregard for these rights. The second fairness is that of process.

If the process is fair then the outcomes are deemed to be fair. The third fairness deals with fairness in outcomes regarding the extent to which inequalities are rectified (Stewart, 2009:48). A great deal of the frame conflict in the policy argument over the use of SES revolves around the use of different conceptions of fairness by the opposing IC's.

Interestingly, we do find a bit of frame agreement regarding the third fairness, dealing with outcomes. Both IC's agree that the system as it is working now treats the poor and racial minorities unfairly, due to the achievement gap in test scores and graduation rates. The agreement ends quickly however because each IC has a different view of SES's role in the existing and historical achievement gap. The SES Yes group argues that the achievement gap is due not to the use of SES, but to an entire social system that negatively impacts racial minorities and the poor. So the achievement gap exists despite the goal of socio-economic balance. In fact they argue that the increase in the achievement gap in the last five years may be due to not maintaining that balance in the face of massive growth. The SES No group argues that the use of SES and its failure to impact the achievement gap shows that it is not a useful policy tool. This failure is made worse by the number of other side effects caused by the use of SES.

The SES Yes IC conceptualizes fairness in the same vein as Stewart's first dimension, that of the acknowledgement, preservation, and promotion of certain rights. It implies adherence with the NC Constitution that guarantees the "right to a sound and basic education" for all children. If the school system is to be fair, it will do everything within its power towards protecting that right. In this vein of fairness we can place the arguments concerning access to experienced teachers and administrators as well as the need for a middle class core in all schools. Fairness in these arguments is about "setting the table" so that all students have an equal opportunity to highly achieve. They point to research showing the negative effects on learning and teacher retention that high concentrations of poverty create and that socio-economic balance within schools can mitigate. They point to the importance of middle class parental support as well as the high expectations that middle class parents bring to a school. With all of this in the mind of a policy maker, to ignore its effect on the right of all students to a sound and basic education would be unfair.

In contrast, the SES No IC conceptualizes fairness mostly in terms of process. In the SES No frame, fairness means treating everyone equally. Forced busing is unfair because some have a choice and while others (predominantly low income students) do not. Some students can choose magnet schools with enriching programs at the end of a long bus ride, while others are not given a choice. So, they argue that fair choice or fair access to choice is essential, and that is being denied when students are assigned using SES as a criterion. Furthermore, the unfair process of SES violates an important right for SES No: *parental choice*. Parents know what is best for their child and should have a voice in their education. The use of SES is also unfair because it labels students and families, makes judgements about them, and

treats them differently based on their income. This unequal treatment is an unfair process[13] making the use of SES inherently unfair.

4.5 Individual and the State

The final element of frame conflict occurs due to different perceptions of the proper relationship between the individual and the State. This is not a new argument and fundamentally shapes much of the politics in the U.S. and around the world. The different frames used by the opposing ICs in this case paint vastly different pictures of the individual, the State, and the proper relationship between them in dealing with systemic inequalities.

In the SES Yes frame, individuals can achieve. However, individuals do not exist in a vaccuum. They experience and act in a society that has inequalities that are not of their making. To some extent, individual livelihoods are affected by these systemic inequalities. This is true of children attending school. The governent has the ability and the duty to mitigate the effects of these inequalities. The ability comes from the fact that it is the only institution large enough to truly affect change in systemic issues and that is accountable to the people. The duty comes from the fact that the government itself, instituted systems of slavery and segregation that have, in large part, developed the inequalities that exist in society today.

In the SES No IC the individual and the family are seen as the best decision makers about their own lives. What they need more than anything is fair access to choices and to be treated equally[14]. They understand their situations better than any institution ever could. In this frame, the issue of stability is vital. A policy that shakes the foundations of the family is automatically a failure. There is an emphasis on the agency of the individual and the ability to succeed no matter the circumstances. This is seen in how SES-No-ers point to charter schools in tough circumstances that have found success as inspiration. The freedom of individuals to be treated equally and to choose freely is paramount. How does the government fit? First, the government's role is to simply guarantee equal treatment and to allow families and individuals fair choices. The fairness of process discussed above goes hand in hand with this. By providing a fair process, the government allows individuals and families to make the best decisions for themselves. This will eventually lessen inequalities on a systemic level. If it does not, then at least the process was fair, shifting accountablity to individuals. The worst thing a government could do is to try to control and manipulate society, as it inevitably

---

[13] Douglas Rae's book *Equalities* (1981) provides an extensive look into how different groups emphasize different rights and even different types of equalities. Further research could be aimed at applying Rae's conceptions of equalities to the discourse around the use of SES. Examining "narrow equality"or "broad equality" as well as "equal liberty" or "equal life in society" could be helpful.
[14] Meaning fair process

leads to treating people as aggregates, not individuals. The attempt to manufacture diversity in schools in Wake County is a prime example of this kind of social engineering.

Chapter 5
Conclusions, Reflections, Moving Forward

Two very different frames exist and are espoused by two different interpretive communities: SES Yes and SES No. These frames are always incomplete, as frames both include some aspects and exclude others, emphasize some and downplay others (Yanow, 1996). This chapter will look at the points of frame conflict outlined in chapter 4 with a critical eye towards the exclusionary aspects of the frames. Do excluded aspects, if included, fundamentally affect the effectiveness and validity of the respective frames? I will posit that a more narrowly defined or more exclusionary frame is not automatically worse or disingenuous, but that it leaves room for improvement and an opportunity for dialogue.

The idea here is not to identify a winner and a loser at each point of frame conflict. The idea is to contribute to an ongoing discussion. As the Wake County Public School System is currently engaging in the design of a new student assignment policy, this study hopes to act as a call and aide for self reflection by all parties involved.

5.1 Historical Narrative

The historical narrative is vitally important to the overall frame of each IC, as it feeds directly into and, at points, organizes the logic of the cornerstones of the frame. It presents a setting for the other three points of frame conflict to act within.

The SES No historical narrative is much more exclusionary than the SES Yes historical narrative. It extends back in time no farther than the Civil Rights Movement, while the SES Yes narrative goes back to the time of slavery as well as segregation. The SES No narrative largely excludes these eras of oppression. This is not simply a side note, but a cornerstone of the entire SES No frame. It includes figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and his "I Have a Dream" speech. It includes the ideals that he was calling for. However, it excludes the struggle and hardship that made a figure like King necessary. It excludes the story of generations of people who were enslaved and later bore the brunt of segregation as second class citizens in all aspects of public life. Because of this exclusion, this frame draws no ties or links back to these times.

Instead, it presupposes that we are in a uniquely different and new time. It is unburdened by hundreds of years of unequal treatment and so the inequalities today are largely left unexplained and without roots. This disembedding of today from yesterday sets a stage upon which the other elements of the frame are able to make sense and to be persuasive. The starting point for the SES No frame is one of a new age, moving ever closer to a diverse and integrated society where all can live with equal rights, all can live out King's dream. It minimizes the role of historically inherited problems in

recreating disadvantage in the current social context. In this frame it makes sense that the argument about fair process, for example, is so key. This frame tells us not to label people and to treat everyone equally[15].

This historically exclusive element of the frame is vital to consider, because it is not just excluding a long forgotten time period. Within Wake County, the real life memory of segregation lives on in those who experienced it, and who definitely do attribute many of the inequalities of today to the long lasting residue of segregation. It would be hard to argue (though it would be interesting to hear someone attempt it), given the strong correlation between race and income in the U.S. in 2010, and given that there has been no time since the end of segregation when this correlation did not exist, that the two time periods were not related. But, since in the SES No frame a relatively equal starting line is presumed, the most important thing is simply to treat everyone equally in this post-racial society.

If the SES No frame included a discussion of slavery and segregation as institutions implemented by individuals and by the government, that have had lasting effects on a systemic level, would an argument that what we need is blanket fair treatment suffice? Metaphorically speaking, if the starting line is not equal for two runners in a race, is it enough to make sure that they both have had an equal breakfast? It would seem that even giving the backed-up runner a bigger breakfast would not suffice.

5.2   The Role of Diversity in Education

Both IC's point to the importance of diversity, but the SES Yes IC envisions it as something fundamental to education and truly understood only through experience. The SES No IC sees diversity as something that can be taught effectively without experience, as was discussed in Chapter 4. Both IC's exclude important aspects from their frame.

The SES Yes IC sees diversity as fundamental because it builds soft skills through experience. In a diverse world the adults of tomorrow will need to be able to cooperate and work with people who are different from them. What is excluded here is that using the SES criterion works toward socio-economic balance at the school level. It does not necessarily work towards socio-economic balance at the classroom level. If diversity is to help to build those important soft skills through experience, that implies constant and normalized interaction with people who are different. Under the recently retracted student assignment system, was this always the case? SES No points to some magnet schools that operate as "schools within schools," meaning that

---

[15] This brings to mind a particularly apt hypothetical situation regarding equal treatment. To treat a blind man the same as a sighted one is equal in one way and unequal in another.

within a school patterns of segregation may persist.   Did SES influence the building of soft skills?

SES No sees diversity less as a fundamental part of education, than as an important course to be taught. They use the same characterization as SES Yes in that diversity can help to prepare students for jobs and life in a diverse world. SES No sees this preparation as being able to be taught without direct exposure. While this may be true in a limited sense, through cultural activities at school, no one would seriously argue that understanding gained from a classroom teacher and understanding gained from lived experience are the same or equal understandings. Obviously, being an exchange student in Buenos Aires for two years develops a deeper understanding than taking high school Spanish and world history for two years. Similarly, there is a great difference between spending seven hours a day with students from a wide spectrum of classes and income levels and simply learning the latest data on income disparity in the U.S. What could be reflected on is whether or not SES No believes that soft skills that come from diversity are truly important or if their position here is simply a defensive part of the frame in order to not be labeled "anti-diversity."

5.3   Conceptions of Fairness

As explained in Chapter 4, SES Yes uses a conception of fairness adhering to the acknowledgement, protection, and promotion of the right to a sound and basic education for all. SES No conceptualizes fairness in terms mostly of process or equal treatment.

SES Yes supports using SES because maintaining of socio-economic balance in all schools is seen as the best way to "set the table" so that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Essentially, SES Yes justifies a type of "unequal treatment" because it moves the sytem towards equal education rights for all. The major point excluded in this frame is that the economic balance that had once existed had turned into an unbalanced system. Almost one-third of the schools in Wake County have crossed the 40% threshold that was supposed to indicate imbalance in schools, with the number continuing to grow. In the face of massive growth, WCPSS did not hold to the 40% goal that was implemented to protect the educational rights of all students. This does not negate the research that backs the positive effects of socio-economically balanced schools (in fact it could support it due to the falling test scores and graduation rates during the same period that the threshold was being trampled over). It does, however necessitate a serious conversation about the system used to achieve that goal. Was redesigning the system inevitable in order to sustain fairness as conceptualized by SES Yes itself? Were equal education rights being achieved given the growing socio-economic imbalance in many of Wake County's schools? If not, would it still be possible to justify the "unequal treatment" focused on by SES No?

On the other side, SES No frames fairness as a fair process, one in which everyone is treated as an equal individual. SES No opposes using SES because it is inherently unfair and treats people differently. However, this

claim rests on an exclusionary historical narrative. Furthermore, this claim allows SES No to completely sidestep the research that supports the "setting the table" argument developed by SES Yes. This research is left untouched and unmentioned by SES No. It is replaced by a phrases such as, "rubbing elbows with rich kids is not going improve the education of poor kids." For reflection, if the research supporting the educational benefits of socio-economically balanced schools was included in the SES No frame (as it should be, unless the findings are proven wrong), would that affect the validity of the SES No conception of fairness, as well as the SES No frame itself?

5.4   Individual and the State

The proper relationship between the individual and the State is an old topic. The two IC's have very different approaches to it, increasing the extent of the frame conflict at a very fundamental level.

SES Yes espouses what I described as the "mitigating state" that can and should step in to pro-actively lessen the effects of societal inequalities on individuals. What is absent from this view is the issue of the extent to which the State should be pro-active. When is it reasonable to say that the State has done enough to "set the table" for success and now it is up to the individual student, family, and teacher? Also, to what extent is the State truly capable of lessening the effects of societal inequalities? As we have seen, the State was unable or unwilling to maintain the 40% threshold for many of the schools in the system. SES Yes needs to address why this was the case. The frame at this point is incomplete because it does not deal with the feasibility or the scope of the State's involvement.

SES No leans more towards the agency of the individual, the need of individual freedom and the ability of the individual/family to make the best decisions regarding their future. It builds smoothly from the exclusionary historical narrative described earlier. The message of self reliance and the ablity to "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" fits nicely with the idea of an equal starting point, but not so well when the starting point is shown to be unequal. SES No is marked by repeated references to the Harlem Children's Zone and the KIPP schools as examples of success despite the odds. These charter schools are pointed at because they show that poor children of color can achieve without needing to be seated next to middle class white children[16]. What is excluded here is critically important. The two examples above are schools that already have the "buy-in" from committed parents. The environments are more controlled than in public schools. Not surprisingly, the schools are more successful than normal. This cannot be equated with how a

---

[16] Further information regarding the educational approach and the results at Harlem Children's Zone and KIPP schools can be found on their websites: www.hcz.org and www.kipp.org.

public school system works. First, kids go to public school with or without the support of their parents. Second is the issue of scale. Wake County Public Schools hold over 140,000 students. We can learn from these charter schools what we already know: committed and talented teachers, principals, and parents can make a huge difference for a student's achievement. What we can't take away from these examples is what to do when these things do not exist in tandem for every student. Unfortunately, this is the challenge for the WCPSS.

5.5   Coming full circle

I would like to turn back to the questions that this study tries to answer, to review where this research started from and where it has reached. I will also reflect on the study's methodological approach. As they are more specific, let us first look at the sub questions and how they have been addressed.

- The first question, "Who are interpretive communities in this policy debate and what are their motivations?" has been answered in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. They have been identified and discussed as SES Yes and SES No.

- The second question regards the policy arguments used and developed by the opposing IC's as well as the framing of the arguments. These were discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The arguments were articulated in summary form and approved by individuals within the respective IC's.

- The third question dealt with the discursive frames upon which the arguments were based as well as the points of frame conflict. In Chapter 4, four points of frame conflict were seen concerning fundamental conceptions of history, fairness, diversity in education, and the relationship of individual and State.

- The fourth question, on the exclusionary aspects of the frames at the points of frame conflict, was addressed earlier in Chapter 5. It was concluded that both frames, are in need of self reflection because important necessary elements of the policy situation have been excluded. Furthermore, the inclusion of these aspects could alter the validity of the frames themselves.

Two important counter arguments to the methodology used in this research should be addressed. First, there is a concern that the study is based on what was presented by protagonists through public statements and interviews. Neither of these requires or ensures sincerity. There is a potential danger of protagonists misrepresenting themselves in public. In other words, a racist will, most likely, not admit publicly to being motivated by racist ideas. Second, because the study aims to give both sides a fair hearing, it may not give due importance to societal power relations. It may not take into account whose voice is heard the loudest and why or who feels entitled to speak and why.

Both of these are valid concerns. Each has given me reason to pause and to reflect. However, the purpose of this research has been to hopefully create a starting point for bridging the divide that currently exists in Wake County. In a larger or multi-method study both concerns could and should be investigated further. It was deemed more important though, given the study's focus, to use methods that could potentially lead to meaningful deliberation rather than to further division. The methodology chosen, though imperfect, is best equipped for the purposes of the study.

5.6 Moving Forward

In the final section of this paper, I would like to explore practical methods that can be implemented to move Wake County from a polarized and contentious situation towards a sustainable and effective student assignment plan with general support and political will. How can consensus, creativity and possibility be fostered in the midst of division and argument? I would like to present a tentative starting point for moving forward, to be taken into consideration as the new student assignment plan is being designed.

It has been a year since the 2009 School Board elections. The new student assignment committee has, in October 2010, thrown out the plan that it had been crafting due to dissent within the majority. This impasse offers the entire community the prospect of designing a school assignment plan that engages with and is embraced by all stakeholders. The central question of this research is "How can an analysis of the discursive frame conflict in this policy debate help to guide future actions in designing a new student assignment plan that is effective and sustainable?" This study contributes by shedding light on the incompleteness of both frames in this policy issue, calling for humbleness and self reflection. An acknowledgement of this incompleteness on both sides can change the approach in designing the new plan from an attempt at winning a political argument to a collaborative effort aimed at creation. What has occurred in Wake County for more than a year now has been the traditional political argument. Both sides have garnered what they consider to be facts and have interpreted causal relationships through their respective frames. They have presented their cases to the public in a format of "My plan is better because of x,y, and z. My opponents' plan is flawed because of a,b, and c." The school system is no better off and the community is more divided than ever because of it. The possibility of creating a lasting new plan based on community support in this way is hard to see. The possibility of one side actually being convinced by the other is equally minute.

So, how can Wake County and its School Board proceed? To answer this, we can turn to the work of John Forester, an expert in dealing with value conflicts in communities. His work includes two books "The Deliberative Practitioner" (1999) and "Dealing with Differences" (2009) that are particularly germane to the Wake County School Board's situation. Forester discusses how to work towards solutions in communities dealing with public value disputes. He points to three fundamental concepts: *diplomatic recognition*, *story telling*, and

49

institutional space. He does this through numerous real life community examples from the U.S. and internationally. All three principles should be taken seriously in Wake County as they proceed in designing a new school assignment plan. In concluding this paper, I will discuss their relevance for the Wake County School Board. All three are essential to creating an atmosphere of trust and creativity.

Diplomatic recognition, according to Forester, is sincerely giving your policy opponent credit. This goes beyond respect, to appreciating that they have considered seriously their circumstances and their needs (Forester, 1999). It means appreciating that they have an intelligent idea of what is best for them. Furthermore, it means "the recognition that they, and the interests they represent, are just as legitimate as the interest that I represent or that you represent" (Hirschberg in Forester, 1999:107). This does not mean that one must agree with one's opponent. It does, however, require that one must learn why the opponent thinks the way that they think. "As recognition is given and enacted, not just intended, by parties, they can create new, more deliberative working relationships, a new basis for going on practically together" (Forester, 1999:110). These new relationships can allow for exploration into the basis for certain claims and to new ways moving forward.[17] This is key for Wake County to move forward but has been glaringly absent in the public discourse from both sides.

One practical way of implementing this concept is through the work of Carl Rogers and his approach to argumentation. His is an argumentation whose goal is to "create a situation conducive to cooperation" (Young, Becker, & Pike, 1970:282). It involves showing one's understanding of the opponents position by articulating it as accurately as one can, rather than first or only stating one's own position. This articulation should be to the satisfaction of the opponent. It is followed by exploring in what contexts the opponent's position is possibly valid. This is an attempt to build trust and should entice the opposition to reciprocate. It should be followed by a statement of one's own position and the contexts in which it is valid. Finally, this leads to a discussion of how the opponent's position could benefit from elements of one's own position and vice versa, showing how they could possibly complement each other (Brent, 1996).

This is only one method, but one that requires a sincere attempt at engaging the opponent in a non-adversarial way as well as the humbleness of acknowledging the incompleteness of one's own position. It also requires listening, understanding, exploration and creativity and can aid in building an atmosphere of trust. It could be a fruitful exercise for stakeholders in Wake County. In following Schmidt's methodology of aiming to give a fair hearing

---

[17] Interviewees in this study were asked to characterize the other sides arguments and motivations. In almost every answer, the relatively good intentions of the other side were generally presumed. Perhaps on this, diplomatic recognition can begin to be built.

to and articulating core arguments, this study can be seen as a related exercise[18]. Furthermore, by illustrating the incompleteness of the frames on both sides of the issue, this study can perhaps illuminate the need for and possible benefits of Rogerian argument and *diplomatic regcognition*.

Along with diplomatic recognition, *story telling* can be a valuable tool in fostering understanding , trust, and ways forward. "Stories have to be told in order for reconciliation to happen" (Forester, 2009:64). Stories are particularly important when communities are divided at the value level. Through peoples' stories, we can gain insight into not just their position on the policy issue, but their priorities, their conceptions of history, their visions of the future, and the ways in which they identify themselves in relation to all of these. Questions in Wake County like, "Why are they making this school assignment issue all about race?" and "How can they not see that this is a race issue?" can be addressed through story telling and active listening. It requires a space in which emotions (pathos) and reasoning (logos) co-exist.

There are certain settings or *institutional spaces* that facilitate the effectiveness of story telling as well as many more that inhibit it. Story telling is most effective in spaces where the protagonists feel safe and secure, where they will not be interupted or interrogated. The dynamic cannot be what Forester calls "rebut mode" where people listen in order to strengthen their own arguments and to reply quickly with a "yes, but…". It requires engaged listening aimed at a deeper understanding of the viewpoints and values of others. This is a far cry from the debate format that we are so used to in politics. It is about public learning, not argumental victory. It is also a critique of a commonly used practice for community participation: public hearings. A mediator featured in Forester's book "Dealing with Differences" describes the inherent problems of public hearings. "It requires people to indulge in hyperbole: You've got two minutes to speak, and you've got to be as rash as you possibly can in order to make a point. There's no opportunity for discourse" (Forester, 2009:63). This has certainly been the case in Wake County during the public comment section of School Board Meetings where the podium, count down timer attached, has become a space for accusation and protest. Citizens rush through prepared statements as they attempt to express themselves and to affect change in a one and a half minute window. This suggestion is not a call to limit public voice, but to allow for spaces conducive to well thought out and articulated stories of experience accompanied by real listening, rather than unproductive time-limited screams.

Ineffective and fruitless institutional spaces are not limited to public hearings. Too often planning, dialogue, and argument take place in formal arenas. These are more suited to posturing and entrenchment rather than creative collaboration and exploratory problem solving. Forester points to the need for setting up more informal institutional spaces that allow participants to

---

[18] Schmidt's methodology has much in common with Rogerian argument as both are aimed at creating the possibility of resolving differences.

leave their positions and consider possibilities in a non-committal fashion (Forester, 2009, chs 3 and 4). Under the glare of television cameras when everything said is on the record, this becomes difficult and sadly rare. The Wake County School Board offers a prime case of this. The school assignment committee set up by the new board majority has held its meetings in a televised conference room with the newspaper press sitting, pen in hand. Even if the two sides wanted to engage in creative "what if" scenarios in non-committal ways, they could only go so far, for fear of publicly weakening their own positions.

As I write this conclusion, a new student assignment plan in Wake County is only a vague list of intentions among a divided community. If the School Board aims to work towards a plan that will outlast political swings right or left, the process and the product of the plan must have broad community support. This research has shown that the community has broken down into two conflicting groups espousing incomplete frames, leading to the need for an altered approach to the policy design process. As the School Board crafts this policy it will hopefully be humble while ensuring the process encourages meaningful public input, diplomatic recognition, creativity and collaboration.

"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul
than the way in which it treats its children."
-Nelson Mandela

References

Americans For Prosperity. (2009, December). Retrieved August 2010, from Wake Schools Call to Action: http://www.americansforprosperity.org/120709-wake-schools-call-action

Brent, D. (1996). Rogerian Rhetoric. In B. Emmel, P. Resch, & D. Tenney, *Argument Revisited; Argument Redefined* (pp. 73-96). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al., 347 U.S. 483 (U.S. Supreme Court May 17, 1954).

Christmas, M. (2009, December 2009). *WAKE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION.* Retrieved August 15, 2010, from Board Meeting Minutes: http://www.wcpss.net/Board/minutes/12-01-2009--minutes.pdf

Coleman, J. (1966). *Equality of Educational Opportunity.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Department, W. C. (1999, March). *The Impact Of Poverty Upon Schools E&R Report No. 99.20 March 1999.* Retrieved August 15, 2010, from Wake County Public School System: http://www.wcpss.net/evaluation-research/reports/1999/9920_poverty.pdf

Fischer, F. (2003). *Reframing Public Policy.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Forester, J. (1993). *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Forester, J. (2009). *Dealing with Differences.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Forester, J. (1999). *The Deliberative Practitioner.* Cambridge, MA: MIT PRess.

Free and Reduced Lunch Program by Schools 2009-10. (2010). Retrieved October 20, 2010, from Wake County Public School System: http://www.wcpss.net/demographics/reports/book09/VC-ABC.pdf

Gergen, K. (1999). *An Invitation to Social Construction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Grant, G. (2009). *Hope and Despair in the American City.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Haynie, G. (2009). *Measuring Up E&R Report No.09.31.* Raleigh: Wake County Public School System.

Haynie, G., & McMillen, B. (2007). *Measuring Up E&R Report No.06.16.* Raleigh: Wake County Public School System.

Jager, S. (2001). Discourse and Knowledge. In R. Wodak, & M. Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 32-62). London: Sage.

Kahlenberg, R. (2001). *All Together Now.* Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.

NC HEAT. (2010, September). Retrieved October 2010, from http://www.ncheat.org/?page_id=2

Office of Growth Management, W. C. (2005). *Wake County Demographics Growth and Diversity.* Raleigh: Wake County Public School System.

Orfield, G., & Eaton, S. (1996). *Dismantling Desegregation.* New York: The New Press.

Our Results. (2010). Retrieved October 2010, from Harlem Children's Zone: http://www.hcz.org/our-results

Rein, M. (1976). *Social Science and Public Policy.* New York: Penguin Books.

Results. (2010). Retrieved October 2010, from KIPP: http://www.kipp.org/about-kipp/results

Schmidt, R. (2000). *Language Policy and Identity Politics in the United States*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Schmidt, R. (2006). Value-Critical Policy Analysis. In D. Yanow, & P. Schwartz-Shea, *Interpretation and Method* (pp. 300-315). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Schön, D., & Rein, M. (1994). *Frame Reflection*. New York: Basic Books.

State and County Quick Facts. (2010). Retrieved September 2010 13, 2010, from U.S. Census Bureau: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37183.html

Stewart, J. (2009). *Public Policy Values*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tedesco, J. (2010, August 12). August 12th, 2010. (D. Eyre, Interviewer)

Tobin, W. (2010). Grutter Without Brown:Can Our Colleges and Universities Realize Their Missions in an Era of Increasing Racial andEconomic Isolation at K-12? *The 20th Annual Festival of Legal Learning*. Chapel Hill.

Wake County Planning, Development, and Inspections. (2009). Retrieved September 9, 2010, from http://www.wakegov.com/planning/demographic/default.htm

Wake County Public School System. (2010). Retrieved September 9, 2010, from http://www.wcpss.net/demographics/

Wake Schools Community Alliance. (2010). Retrieved October 2010, from http://www.wakesca.org/node/19

Yanow, D. (2000). *Conducting Interpretive Policy Anlaysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yanow, D. (1996). *How Does a Policy Mean*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.

Young, R., Becker, A., & Pike, K. (1970). *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World INC.

AppendicesAppendix A: Sources

Figure A1　　　News Media and Stakeholder Sources

News Media	www.newsandobserver.com	
	www.cnn.com	
	www.nytimes.com	
	www.wral.com	
	www.indyweek.com	
	www.ncspin.com/	
Stakeholder Groups	NC NCAACP	www.naacpnc.org/
	John Locke Foundation	www.johnlocke.org
	Great Schools in Wake Coalition	www.wakeupwakecounty.com/cms/greatschools
	Americans for Prosperity NC	http://americansforprosperity.org/north-carolina
	NC Justice Center	www.ncjustice.org/
	NC Policy Watch	www.ncpolicywatch.org
	Wake Education Partnership	www.wakeedpartnership.org/
	NCAE Wake County	www.wakencae.org/
	Coalition of Concerned Citizens for African American Children	www.cccaac.com/
	Wake Schools Community Alliance	www.wakesca.org/

	Civitas Institute	www.jwpcivitasinstitute.org/
	Wake Cares	www.wakecares.com/
	Wake GOP	www.wakegop.org/
	NC HEAT	www.ncheat.org

Figure A2   Interview Requests and Interviews

Name	Organization	Initial Date of Request	Interview Date
Chris Malone	School Board	7/29/10	NA
John Tedesco	School Board	7/29/10	8/12/10
Kevin Hill	School Board	7/29/10	8/3/10
Keith Sutton	School Board	7/29/10	9/10/10
Dr Anne McLaurin	School Board	7/29/10	8/3/10
Dr Carolyn Morrison	School Board	7/29/10	8/3/10
Deborah Pricket	School Board	7/29/10	NA
Ron Margiotta	School Board	7/29/10	NA
Debra Goldman	School Board	7/29/10	NA
Rev. Dr William Barber	NC NAACP	7/29/10	NA
Amina Turner	NC NAACP	7/29/10	NA
Chris Hill	NC Justice Center	7/29/10	8/4/10
Rob Schofield	NC Policy Watch	7/29/10	8/4/10
Dallas Woodhouse	Americans for Prosperity	7/29/10	NA
Kathleen Brennan	Wake Cares	7/29/10	NA
Tama Bouncer	NC Association of Educators	8/12/10	8/16/10
T. Keung Hui	News and Observer	8/9/10	NA
Kristen Stocking	Wake Schools Community Alliance	8/13/10	8/24/10
Terry Stoops	John Locke Foundation	8/9/10	NA
Tim Simmons	Wake Education Partnership	8/9/10	8/10/10
Christine Kuchner	Great Schools in Wake Coalition	8/13/10	8/17/10
Timothy Tyson	Duke University	8/5/10	NA

Appendix B: Wake County Public School System Statistics (Wake County Public School System, 2010)[19]

Figure B1   Enrollment for the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS)

Level	Membership, Month 1				Annual Increase			
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Elementary	65,680	67,508	67,790*	69,140	3,285	1,828	282*	1,350
Middle	29,975	30,921	31,584	32,742	944	946	663	1,158
High	38,347	39,277	40,225	41,407	1,701	930	948	1,182
WCPSS Total	134,002	137,706	139,599	143,289	5,930	3,704	1,893	3,690
Percent					4.63%	2.76%	1.37%	2.64%

*Note 1: 2009-10 Kindergarten enrollment was lower than prior years because of a one-year impact from the change in the age cut-off for kindergarten enrollment (from October 15 to August 31, 2009).

Figure B2   WCPSS Demographic Data 2009-10

Membership	American Indian	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Multi-Racial	White	Free and Reduced Lunch
139,599	380	8,501	36,174	16,516	6,640	71,388	43,729
Percent	0.3%	6.1%	25.9%	11.8%	4.8%	51.1%	31.2%

Figure B3   WCPSS Schools by Level

School Level	Number of Schools
Elementary	103
Middle	32
High	24
Special/Optional	4
Total	163

---

[19] Detailed demographic information can be found at
http://www.wakegov.com/planning/demographic/default.htm