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## **THE PARADOXES, PERILS, AND POSSIBILITIES OF TEACHER RESISTANCE IN A RIGHT-TO-WORK STATE**

**ABSTRACT:** Based on an ethnographic study, this article provides an account of teacher resistance to neoliberal assaults on public education in a right-to-work state. Specifically, teachers in this study appropriated the strong charter legislation in Arizona as a “contested cultural resource” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 3) to achieve progressive educational change given the specific strategies of a neoliberal rationality in that context. In so doing, this study documents: 1) how teachers produce resistance to neoliberal assaults on public education when more recognizable pathways are not available, and 2) the significance of individual property rights to a neoliberal rationality and public education in a right-to-work state. Consequently, this study highlights the “perils” involved in partial representations of teacher resistance that fail to recognize resistance in all forms and in all places, including public non-profit charter schools. In so doing, this article offers an alternative representation of the “possibilities” involved in “paradoxical” forms of teacher resistance.

### **Introduction**

Charter schools are often seen to embody neoliberalism. This is because certain features of charter schools parallel certain features of neoliberalism. For example, neoliberalism promotes an economic and political rationality that favors free market enterprise over social welfare through deregulation (Brown, 2006; Harvey, 2005). Charter schools grant schools greater autonomy from many of the rules and regulations that traditional public schools are required to follow (Miron & Nelson, 2002). As another example, neoliberalism undercuts the democratic value of a public good by defining citizenship in terms of individual and private property rights over public institutions (Brown, 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007). Charter schools advance individual interest over social welfare and a public good by using market principles like competition to restructure public education (Fabricant & Fine, 2012). One representation of how features of charter schools are linked to features of neoliberalism taken from *The Atlantic Monthly* states, “corporate education reform,” which includes, “market-like competitive pressures (through the spread of charter schools and vouchers)” provide huge benefits to corporate self-interests and profit motives while they work to dismantle teacher unions, disempower teachers and de-fund public education (Tierney, 2013, pp. 1-2).

Given the parallels between neoliberalism and charter schools, it makes sense that resistance to neoliberal assaults on public education would invoke these representations. The *Grassroots Education Movement* (GEM) is a New York based coalition of parents, teachers, students and community members committed to resisting the corporate takeover of public education. As creators of the documentary, *The Inconvenient*

*Truth Behind Waiting for Superman* (a response to the Hollywood film, *Waiting for Superman* that promotes charter schools by vilifying teachers, teacher unions and public education), GEM states on their website that “charter schools allow entry only by lottery, and are not truly public schools. They do not serve our most needy students, and they frequently divide communities, sparking intense competition over resources. While charter schools are publically financed in part, they operate under complete private control” (Grassroots Education Movement, n.d.). In their resistance work, GEM represents charter schools as an embodiment of neoliberalism.

But what happens to agency, resistance and collaborative action for a public good if everything labeled, “charter school” is automatically assumed to parallel or contain neoliberal features? In this article, I argue that when we fail to recognize resistance in all forms and in all places, including charter schools, different forms of teacher agency are made invisible or erased. This is something I learned from the teachers and administrators who participated in my three-year ethnographic study on school choice in Sundale City (pseudonym), Arizona.

Prior to the study, my understandings of school choice were limited to representations of charter schools that embodied neoliberalism. As a consequence, many of my initial interview questions reflected assumptions informed by the circulation of broader conversations that automatically inferred a relationship between charter schools and neoliberalism. For example, at the primary research site, Midtown High School (MHS), a public non-profit charter high school in Sundale City, I would frequently ask teachers and administrators to explain how they understood the role of charter schools, *their charter school*, relative to the marketization and privatization of public education. In response to this line of inquiry, teachers and administrators expressed sincere concern about the impact of a neoliberal rationality on the expansion of charter schools and anti-union campaigns in places like New York. At the same, teacher and administrator participants also informed me that what was happening in Sundale City, Arizona did not reflect what was portrayed in either *Waiting for Superman* or *The Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman*. In explaining to me how they understood the differences between the expansion of charter schools in places like New York versus what was happening in Sundale City, Arizona, teacher and administrator participants articulated three primary discourses.

In the first discourse, teachers and administrators pointed to the fact that Arizona is a right-to-work state, which means that teachers have never had the same protections afforded their counterparts in states with union representation. In the second discourse, which I refer to as the “whole-school reform” discourse in this article, participants talked about contextually specific constraints to progressive educational change. In the third discourse, “relationships over grades,” teacher and administrator participants presented a less recognized form of teacher resistance to a neoliberal rationality.

Drawing from these teacher and administrator discourses, I demonstrate how these three significant differences constitute a situated logic of teacher resistance to neoliberal assaults on public education. In so doing, I present forms of teacher agency that are not being recognized but that portray what teachers do to resist neoliberal assaults on public education when more recognizable pathways are not available.

## Literature Review

Current educational reforms are frequently identified as beginning with *A Nation at Risk* (1983). This report, developed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education during the Reagan administration, signaled a need to create initiatives that would redress the “failure” of schools to prepare a competitive workforce. Following, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, *The Report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession* (1986) constituted a second wave of educational reform reports that focused on the development of educational skills and abilities needed to achieve economic progress. In 2001, *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), formalized high-stakes testing as the centerpiece of a series of educational reforms aimed at closing the achievement gap using a market rationality, e.g. accountability, merit, efficiency. Most recently, *Race to the Top*, originally an educational component to

the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*, used a contest to encourage states to compete for much needed funds through “innovative” reform proposals.

In total, these federal initiatives constitute a series of educational reforms that promote educational restructuring based on an inherently neoliberal rationality due to the fact that they are “dominated by market concerns” and are “organized by market rationality” (Brown, 2006, p. 694). And thus, what is understood by “educational reform” is increasingly attributable to a neoliberal rationality that promotes individual and private interest over a commitment to the public good. For example, federal and corporate initiatives to develop charter schools apply market logics to concepts like choice to restructure education. According to this framework, charter schools improve public education by competing to attract and retain consumers who will choose their school over another school (Smith, 2001).

On another level, the increasingly taken-for-granted representations of “educational reform” attributed to a neoliberal rationality serve to erase alternate approaches to educational reform, in particular progressive whole-school reform. One example of this type of whole-school reform related to the present study is the *Coalition for Essential Schools* (CES). Specifically, CES is a “network of schools, centers, organizations, and individuals working together to create and sustain schools characterized by personalization, democracy, equity, intellectual vitality and excellence” (Coalition for Essential Schools, n.d.).

In 1984, following a five-year research study of more than 40 large comprehensive high schools in the United States, Ted Sizer (then, a professor of education at Brown University) with a team of his colleagues created CES based on ten common principles. Unlike top-down approaches to educational reform outlined in federal initiatives, the *Ten Common Principles* represent a set of ideas informed by progressive educational philosophies that can be adopted and modified to meet the needs of a given community. Of particular significance to this study, the tenth common principle, *democracy and equity* advocates for whole-school reform based on inclusive policies, programs and pedagogies that model democratic practices involving all individuals directly affected by the school and which, directly challenge all forms of inequity (Coalition for Essential Schools, n.d.).

Deborah Meier, founder of one of the first and most prominent coalition schools, *Central Park East Secondary School in East Harlem* (1985), reinforces the significance of school reform to a democratic polity, when she states that “the way we organize schooling will contribute to or negate the development of such inclinations” (2003a, p. 19). In particular, she argues that small schools, where the “will to focus on relationship exists” (2003b, p. 19) represent an intentional community best suited to cultivate an active citizenry committed to the habits of democracy through the exchange of ideas, making shared decisions and building trust.

She further claims that choice is a critically important component to progressive whole-school reform since “choice is an inevitable aspect of acknowledging that there is more than one legitimate way to think about democratic imperatives” (2003b, p. 19). Additionally, based on her experiences as a progressive school reformer, she posits, “choice may offer the only way to create schools that can experiment with radically new pedagogical practices being wisely recommended by educators” (Meier, 1995, p. 10). Not surprisingly, Meier, who is a union advocate, supported the *original* idea of charter schools.

The original rationale for the development of charters is based on the idea of innovation, albeit in a different sense than entrepreneurial innovation invoked through federal and corporate educational reform initiatives. In 1988, Ray Budde, a public school teacher, administrator, and instructor of educational leadership, proposed to grant charters to teachers that would exempt them from many state and local regulations so they would have the freedom and autonomy to create innovative programs. In this framework, charter schools represent a means to progressive whole-school reforms that “shape the concept of choice into a consciously equitable instrument for restructuring public education” (Meier, 1995, p. 99).

In spite of the fact that the significance of choice to progressive whole-school reform differs radically from the use of choice for economic ends, a neoliberal co-option of educational reform concepts has eclipsed the meanings and instantiations of progressive representations. About this Alfie Kohn (2015,

January 31) blogged the following, “the practice of “co-opting” potentially transformative movements in education is nothing new. Neither, however, is it just a historical artifact. A number of labels that originally signified progressive ideas continue to be (mis)appropriated, their radical potential drained away, with the result that they’re now invoked by supporters of “bunch o’ facts” teaching or a corporate-styled, standards-and-testing model of school reform” (Alfie Kohn, n.d.). Consequently, I argue that representations of teacher resistance need to provide for progressive accounts of reform efforts (and concepts) rather than allow a corporate educational reform agenda to completely co-opt these concepts for their own ends. For example, in this study, teachers resisted neoliberal assaults on public education using school choice as one of the only available means to achieve progressive whole-school reform given specific contextual constraints.

Furthermore, I contend that partial representations of teacher resistance to neoliberal assaults that automatically link public non-profit charter schools to neoliberalism fail to consider how “privatization as a value and practice penetrates deep into the culture and the citizen-subject” (Brown, 2006, p. 704). Representations that overgeneralize the parallels between charter schools and neoliberalism often overlook the multiple and diverse ways in which “neoliberalism is articulated through contextually specific strategies” (Brenner & Theodore, 2005, p. 102). For example, in the present study, affluent parents at a public district high school invoked their “private property rights” as a contextually specific strategy to dismantle progressive whole-school reform.

In order to understand how the three teacher and administrator discourses—teaching in a right-to-work state, whole-school reform, and relationships over grades—at the primary research site, MHS represented a form of teacher resistance to neoliberal assaults on public education, I use an anthropology of policy. According to an anthropology of policy, policies and reforms are not a *fait accompli* but rather an assemblage of practices open to constant re-negotiation and re-formation through the everyday practices of social actors and institutional life (Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Wright, 2011). More specifically, in this article, an anthropology of policy provides an alternate conceptual framework to understand how teachers appropriated charter school legislation as a “contested cultural resource” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 3) to produce resistance in a right-to-work state. Such efforts to represent the diverse ways in which teachers produce resistance to neoliberal assaults are not based on preconceived notions of resistance. Rather, an anthropology of policy supports my argument that robust representations of teacher resistance derive from “exploring how the small details of everyday life are part of larger processes of social and political transformations” (Wright, 2011, p. 30). Such an approach requires the labor intensive and time-consuming work involved in conducting in-depth, situated and particularistic ethnographic research.

## Methodology

With a central focus on practice and context, ethnography is a critically important, yet less well-developed approach to examining the relationships between neoliberalism, current educational reforms and teacher resistance. Specifically, ethnography is a systematic approach to understanding social reality(ies) based on extensive observations and deep descriptions of social actors situated, everyday practices and the meaning they make of those practices (Wolcott, 2008). Moreover, ethnography is a “practice of cultural interpretation” that can “help[s] us to ‘see’ the ways policy works as cultural practice” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 4). The present example taken from a larger ethnographic study offers an in-depth, contextualized, and particularistic portrayal of teacher resistance inscribed in broader socioeconomic and political shifts. The guiding research question was: *how do teachers in a right-to-work state assert their agency to respond and engage with broader economic and educational reforms within the contexts of their own specific and local constraints?*

In 2007, I began volunteering at MHS by providing homework assistance and participating in school field trips. Because of the place-based curriculum at MHS, students were frequently out in the surrounding community learning from and with adults affiliated with local community-based organizations like, museums, 4-H programs, health clinics and so on. Likewise, adults from outside community-based

organizations were frequently invited into the school to talk about their organization or their work in the community. Due to the regular contact with a range of known and unknown adults, my introduction to students as a researcher from a nearby university who was conducting research on school choice was notably unremarkable. In addition, as a White, female public educator committed to social justice, I shared similar progressive pedagogical leanings with a majority of the teachers and administrators at MHS. At the start of this study, although I had a solid understanding of why charter schools were hotly contested in many states and cities across the U.S., I knew very little about the local meaning of charter schools.

From January 2008 through February 2010, I conducted participant observations two to four times a week in a variety of contexts inside and outside of the school, including classrooms, multiple fieldtrips, open house meetings, student showcases, lunch, hallways, whole school meetings, and student performances. Observations, which occurred during regular school hours, after hours and on some weekends, lasted anywhere from two hours to seven hours.

I conducted life history interviews with eight parents, eight teachers, and eight students. Interviews provided significant insight into the local production of school choice beyond what are often overly simplistic representations. Additionally, interviews included open-ended questions that asked participants to share their perspectives and experiences on topics like public education and school choice (including why and how individuals participate in school choice on multiple levels). Interviews, which lasted from one to three hours were audio-taped and took place in participants' homes, offices, libraries, MHS, fast-food restaurants and coffee shops.

I also conducted several semi-structured interviews (Seidman 2006) with a district superintendent, the director of the Arizona State Board for Charter School, and a news reporter for the largest local newspaper. These interviews provided insight into public perspectives about public education as well as tensions that shaped school choice in the region of study.

During an open-house event in 2009, I conducted a parent survey to cross-check findings from individual parent interviews. Of particular significance, the parent survey corroborates the key finding that parents did not deliberately exit their student from traditional district schools in order to enroll in a public charter high school but rather that "choice-making" was the result of the student being pushed-out of traditional district school(s) (Convertino, 2015). In similar fashion, I conducted focus groups with four different groups of 15 to 20 students enrolled at MHS to obtain the greatest representation of student voices possible and to corroborate findings from individual student interviews.

Lastly, I collected archival data from local and national newspapers, radio broadcasts, and school texts (including newsletters, recruiting materials, program, and curricular materials, board reports, newspaper coverage of the school, and annual board reports). I also engaged in on-going informal conversations with different community members, e.g. parents, students, business owners, and teachers who were not part of MHS or any other local charter school. These sources were invaluable in providing a broader view of the research topic.

Although this article focuses on specific findings related to participant observations, life-history and informal interviews, as well as archival data from teacher and administrator participants, it is important to understand that the presentation of teacher data is situated within the larger analysis of the ethnographic study-as-whole. I used *constructivist grounded theory* (Charmaz, 2006) as the primary analytical approach to describe, analyze and interpret the three discourses presented in this article--teaching in a right-to-work state, whole school reform, and relationships over grades.

### **The Ethnographic Context**

Arizona, which is one of 22 right-to-work states in the United States, granted its first charter in 1994 and is characterized as having very strong charter legislation. States with strong charter legislation allow for a greater number of charter schools to develop and operate independently from public school regulations (Smith, 2001). Arizona has the second highest percentage of charter school enrollment out of total public school enrollment; the District of Columbia has the highest (NCES, 2014).

In addition, Arizona recently received significant national attention for passage of Senate Bill 1070 (SB 1070) and House Bill 2281 (HB 2281) in 2010, both bills serve to penalize, and, ultimately, eliminate diversity through racial profiling and the elimination of ethnic studies in public district schools in a state where Latinos represent the fastest growing segment of the population. Within this broader context, charter school expansion is produced amidst enduring struggles that include racist legislation, underfunding, segregation, overcrowding of traditional district schools and no union representation for public school teachers.

On the more local level, the racial composition of Sundale City at the time of this study was 69.7 percent White, 41.6 percent Latino, 5 percent Black, 2.7 percent Native American, 2.9 percent Asian, .2 percent Pacific Islander, 16.9 percent other races, and 3.8 percent two or more races. The median household income was \$30,981 with a per capita income of \$16,322. Primary sources of employment included higher education, tourism and technology industry (Census Bureau, 2010).

The primary research site in this study was Midtown High School (MHS), a non-profit start-up charter school whose charter was granted in March 2003. The school opened in September 2004. MHS is not part of any school district in the region and acts as an autonomous institution. The fact that MHS is not part of a district reflects the strong charter laws in Arizona; this is often not the case in other states with weak charter schools (Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003; Smith, 2001). In addition, MHS has no admission criteria, no lottery and is open to all students regardless of residence.

At the time of this study, MHS was comprised of approximately 180 students representing all 33 zip codes in Sundale City. While small in size, it was the local charter school with the greatest student diversity (50% White; 35% Latino; 5% Black; 5% Asian American; 5% American Indian). Forty to forty-five percent of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch, a national indicator of socioeconomic status based on household income. Twenty percent of students qualified for an Individual Education Plan (IEP), in contrast to the 10-12 percent district average. (IEPs are educational plans mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1990, for individuals with disabilities that meet the federal and state regulations for special education). Male and female students were evenly distributed. Moreover, findings from this ethnographic study revealed that the majority of students enrolled at MHS did not “choose” to attend a charter school rather they were “forced to choose” as a consequence of being marginalized and ultimately, pushed out of their traditional district schools (Convertino, 2015). In contrast to the diverse student body, the faculty and staff were predominantly White and from lower middle class backgrounds, two school faculty members openly identified as gay and lesbian. The majority of teachers, administrators, and staff were career public school employees who chose to leave traditional district schools to build and develop MHS from the ground-up.

Although MHS was the primary research site, Granite Heights High School (GHHS-pseudonym), also served to contextualize the local production of teacher resistance to neoliberalism in this study. At the time of the study, GHHS served 2,000 students. Approximately, 76% percent of the student body was White and 3% qualified for free and reduced lunch. In this study, GHHS was particularly significant because of its role in the creation of MHS.

The founders, who were a majority of the administrators and educators at MHS, were formerly career educators at GHHS. They were originally recruited and drawn to teach at GHHS because of its plan to be a Coalition for Essential Schools (CES) school, the only one in the region. However, due to strong opposition from GHHS parents, the GHHS district administration fired the GHHS principal and quickly restructured GHHS from a CES school to an “elite” public high school.

After the passage of charter school legislation in Arizona in 1994, some of the GHHS educators began to talk about the possibility of opening a small public school, (what would become MHS) based on progressive principles from the CES. Ultimately, a group of three GHHS teachers (Maya, Jenn and Ryan) opened MHS in 2004. Several of their GHHS colleagues also resigned from GHHS to teach at MHS.

The fact that the majority of teachers at MHS had previously taught for ten years at GHHS meant that they embodied the social and cultural capital associated with the premier high school in the region. However,

as advocates of progressive whole-school reform, no families exited GHHS to enroll their students at MHS. In fact, during an interview, Jenn, a White, female, former teacher at GHHS, and one of the three MHS founders, stated the following about the parents at GHHS: “I know that the parents that are most intent on their kids getting into really, really competitive colleges are not sending their kids to Midtown High School.” In the following section, I explain how GHHS parental opposition to whole-school reform represents a contextually specific strategy of neoliberalism against which teachers resist.

## Findings

### *Neoliberal Assaults on Whole-School Reform: Parents and Property Rights in District 27*

As previously stated, in 1992 GHHS opened as a new Coalition for Essential Schools school. However, within the first week that the school opened, GHHS parents began to express strong opposition to the CES principles. When I asked Maya (a White female GHHS teacher and later, MHS founder and administrator) to explain the parental opposition, she stated:

The idea for example of getting rid of tracking, you have your most empowered parents advocating for their honor child and you’re flying in the face of what is a usually pretty strong politically empowered group, political capital for a group like that-in a community that the parents are often in the community because of the schools and those schools are expected to be very responsive to the parent community and that kind of thing.

In places like Chicago, wealthy parents use a market-based logic to defend their individual right, “choice,” to charter schools (Lipman, 2009). In Sundale City, affluent parents appropriated a neoliberal rationality based on individual property rights to oppose progressive whole-school reforms and to defend their right to an elite public high school. In this context, private property rights represented a contextually specific strategy of a neoliberal assault on public education that devolved the public good (progressive whole-school reform) to protect and increase individual private gain. For the wealthy GHHS parents, individual property rights represented a cultural value and practice that entitled them to a public education, which served their student’s individual interest at the expense of the greater good (Kohn, 1998).

It was further explained to me by Jenn that the features of CES whole-school reform like, de-tracking, were “antithetical to what parents believed about a good American high school education (...) it freaked people out.” For GHHS parents, a good American education was based on a traditional curriculum, tracking and grades. When I asked her to help me understand why the GHHS parents were so opposed to the CES principles, she explained that parents in that community viewed education as a credentialing system to secure wealth and status (Labaree, 1997). More specifically, she explained that for the GHHS parents, a stratified educational system,

Meant a pathway to college. A good life, a house in the foothills (...) There was a lot of material success in, there is a lot of material wealth in district 27 and when you have a lot of parents that have benefited from that life, they want that for their kids and anything else just seems absurd.

While the affluent GHHS parents portrayed in this study opposed democratic and egalitarian school reform to protect their individual interests, many of the original teachers including Maya, Jenn and Ryan (the three founders of MHS) continued their professional participation with CES outside of their jobs at GHHS.

Finally, in 2002, Maya, Jenn, and Ryan realized that the only way for them to engage in democratic and equitable whole-school reform was to resign from their teaching jobs at GHHS to start their own public school: a charter school. Approximately 10 more teachers from GHHS underwent the same personal risk (quitting a full-time teaching job in a right-to-work state) in order to help the three founders build MHS from the ground up.

*Teacher Resistance: The Paradoxes of Charter Legislation as Contested Cultural Resource in a Right-to-Work State*

Representations of teacher resistance in Chicago and Seattle offer some of the most crucial examples of the ways in which charter schools embody neoliberalism (Horn, 2014). However, in some right-to-work states like Arizona, features of a neoliberal logic are more pervasive. For example, a right-to-work labor policy, strong charter laws, state-wide underfunding of public education, educational stratification based on real estate and racist legislation, represent some of the ways in which neoliberalism shapes public schooling in this context. Because of the contextually-specific constraints that mediated the possibilities for teacher resistance in Arizona, teachers in this study produced resistance in ways that differ from their counterparts in states with union protections. More specifically, for teachers in this study, the strong charter legislation in Arizona constituted a “contested cultural resource” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 3) and one of the only pathways to resist anti-egalitarian and un-democratic forms of public education. To better understand how this is a representation of teacher resistance to neoliberal assaults on public education, I turn to discuss the third teacher discourse in this study, “relationships over grades.”

*Teacher Resistance: Relationships over Grades*

In describing how her role as a teacher at GHHS (what she referred to as “accountant”) shaped her decision to leave GHHS in order to start MHS, Jenn stated:

It was all about numbers and hoops and it was very unfulfilling and very frustrating from an educator’s standpoint, to be there all day with kids and having no-I was missing something. I was missing out on all of the amazing deep and fulfilling relationships that I could be having with my kids, there wasn’t time for it (...). It was truly just a, “I’m going to show up and do my thing and take attendance,” it wasn’t like any cold factory kind of thing, we got along, they liked me, I liked them but there was no time to do anything else other than just teach the curriculum and then have arguments about grades, there was a lot of grade arguing.

In contrast to her imposed role as an “accountant” at GHHS, Jenn told me that “more than anything else MHS is a place about relationships,” due in large part to the highly personalized approach to teaching and learning attributable to progressive whole-school reform principles. In regard to the neoliberal co-option of progressive educational concepts, the data in this study pointed to an important distinction in how teachers in this study “rescued” personalization from the stronghold of market rhetoric. For the teachers at MHS, personalization was not about consumer-oriented competition and accountancy or individual choice for private gain. Rather, it was the outcome of local teacher resistance in the form of a commitment to whole school reform that embodied the “will to focus on relationships” (Meier, 2003b, p. 19) for the greater good over the primacy of schools as credentialing and sorting mechanisms to an economic end.

**Discussion**

Prior to this ethnographic study, I held a relatively simplistic either/or view that automatically linked all charter schools to neoliberalism. However, what the teachers and administrators in this study taught me is that teacher resistance to neoliberalism is significantly more complex, varied and nuanced than implied in partial representations. For example, I was often surprised to learn that many of the teachers at MHS were themselves ambivalent and in some cases even opposed to the idea of ‘charter schools’ writ large. In fact, their views on charter schools underscored the complexity involved in “defining” the meaning and intent of charter schools. As one example, Maya critiqued charter school legislation in Arizona because she thought the strong charter legislation was counterproductive to the larger purposes of public education:

Overall in the nation, it is my understanding in most states schools are chartered through their district, so there’s district oversight, charters do have some more flexibility than the district schools but they’re part of a district smorgasbord of offerings, which to me seems a more appropriate approach.



Maya's perspective represents the situated logic of teacher resistance in this context, wherein charter school legislation is the only available pathway to whole-school reform, and yet, teacher resisters were not in full support of charter school legislation in Arizona. Instead, teachers in this study saw their charter school, MHS as an embodiment of progressive school reform, rather than a part of a broader corporate educational reform agenda.

### Conclusion

In total, this study illustrates some of the paradoxes, perils, and possibilities involved in broader representations of teacher resistance to neoliberalism. In particular, these data demonstrate that partial representations of teacher resistance constitute a significant peril to saving public education from neoliberal assaults because they erase less recognizable forms of teacher resistance, a trend that also serves to splinter and isolate teacher activists from one another. In order to ensure a more robust representation of teacher resistance in all forms and in all places, I strongly recommend that we account for the important factors that differentiate the possible pathways to teacher resistance in diverse geographical contexts like right-to-work states. I also suggest that we attend to the ways in which the corporate educational agenda uses a neoliberal rationality to co-opt, and thus erase progressive reform efforts. And finally, I argue that we need to pay close attention to the contextually specific strategies that produce neoliberalism as a value and an everyday practice so that we more fully recognize, represent and support the advocacy work of teacher resisters.

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