CLEAN SLATE: MAKING SENSE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

IN THE “NEW” NEW ORLEANS

A Dissertation in
Curriculum and Instruction

by
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ABSTRACT

Hurricane Katrina has been called the worst natural disaster in the United States. New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region suffered tremendous loss. Levees in New Orleans breached in three places and caused 80% of the city to become engulfed with flood waters. As a result of the flooding, homes, businesses and schools were destroyed. The New Orleans public school system was no longer in existence. Through the use of critical policy analysis this study examined Rebuilding and Transforming: A Plan for Improving Public Education produced by the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee to determine the animating discourses that guided the process for brokering consensus regarding the future of public education in New Orleans. Moreover, three responses to Rebuilding and Transforming were analyzed using critical policy analysis to determine the values and discourses embedded within each document and compare them to the discourse in the BNOB committee’s final plan “Rebuilding and Transforming” and the history of New Orleans public schools. Findings revealed neoliberal values directed the process and outcome of reopening New Orleans public schools.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... vi

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................... vii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. viii

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................... 1
  New Orleans’ Poverty Revealed ......................................................................................... 4
  Political/Social Context for Rebuilding ........................................................................... 6
  Rebuilding the Public Education System ........................................................................ 7
  Overview of the Dissertation ............................................................................................ 8

Chapter 2 THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS ...................................... 10
  The Beginning Years: 1836-1862 ................................................................................... 10
  Civil War and Reconstruction ......................................................................................... 13
  1900 – 1950 .................................................................................................................. 15
  The Civil Rights Era ....................................................................................................... 17
  2000 – Hurricane Katrina ............................................................................................... 26

Chapter 3 PUTTING IT TOGETHER: METHODOLOGY .................................................... 36
  Policy Analysis ................................................................................................................ 41
  Discourses ....................................................................................................................... 41
  Data Source One: Rebuilding and Transforming .......................................................... 42
  Data Source Two: Interviews with members of the Bring New Orleans Education Committee ................................................................................................................... 43
  Data Source Three: “National Model’ or Flawed Approach? ....................................... 45
  Data Source Four: The National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans .......... 46
  Data Analysis .................................................................................................................. 46
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 50

Chapter 4 EDUCATIONAL GREENFIELD: A CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS OF PLANS TO TRANSFORM NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOLS ....................................... 52
  Historical Context .......................................................................................................... 54
  Analysis of the Education Committee Report ............................................................. 55
  Data Gathering ................................................................................................................. 60
  The Committee’s Recommendations .............................................................................. 62
  What Major Values Are the Basis of the Study? ........................................................... 64
Chapter 5 UNRAVELING THE STORIES ................................................................. 72

Section One: Inside position .............................................................................. 72
Participants ........................................................................................................ 73
Methods ............................................................................................................ 74
Differences ........................................................................................................ 88
Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 90

Section Two: ‘National Model’ or Flawed Approach? ...................................... 92
What is the policy? ............................................................................................ 93
Who are the policy makers? ............................................................................ 94
What are the main tenets of the policy? .......................................................... 94
Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 100

Section Three: “A Review and Critique of Rebuilding and Transforming: A Plan for World-Class Public Education in New Orleans” .......................... 101

Value One: Race and equality .......................................................................... 106
Governance ...................................................................................................... 108
Quality staff .................................................................................................... 108
Standards .......................................................................................................... 109
Engaged parents and communities ................................................................. 110
Choice .............................................................................................................. 110
Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 111

Chapter 6 REBUILDING AND TRANSFORMING – THE MEANING OF THE EXPERIENCE ................................................................................................... 113

Introduction .................................................................................................... 113
Data Sources ................................................................................................... 113
New Orleans is Unique .................................................................................. 115
Purpose of Education ...................................................................................... 116
Politics ............................................................................................................ 117
Business ......................................................................................................... 118
Race ............................................................................................................... 119
Moving Forward after BNOB ........................................................................ 120
Suggestions for Future Research .................................................................... 129
Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 130

REFERENCES ................................................................................................. 133

Appendix A RECRUITMENT LETTER ................................................................ 143

Appendix B INFORMED CONSENT ................................................................. 145
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1. Map of New Orleans circa 1836 ................................................................. 11
Figure 3-1. Predominant Chronotopes of Qualitative Inquiry .................................... 39
Figure 5-1. Modern Map of New Orleans ...................................................................... 80
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1. Differences Between Black and White Schools ..................................................... 17

Table 2-2. Louisiana Department of Education Multi-Year Statewide Test Results
Summary: LEAP Tests Results Spring 2003, 2004, and 2005 .................................................. 27

Table 2-3. Louisiana Department of Education Multi-Year Orleans Parish Summary:
LEAP Tests Results Spring 2003, 2004, and 2005 .............................................................. 28

Table 3-1. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis ..................................................... 43

Table 3-2. Open Codes ............................................................................................................. 48

Table 3-3. Categories ............................................................................................................... 49

Table 4-1. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis ..................................................... 53

Table 4-2. Examples of Data Collection Compiled by the BNOB Education ....................... 57

Table 4-3 Steering Committee Members of the Bring New Orleans Back Education
Committee .............................................................................................................................. 58

Table 4-4. Essential Components of a Successful Education System ..................................... 65

Table 5-1 Baker and Zachary School Districts ....................................................................... 78

Table 5-2. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis ..................................................... 93

Table 5-3. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis ..................................................... 102

Table 5-4. Committee Members: National Coalition for Quality Education in New
Orleans ..................................................................................................................................... 105

Table 6-1 First Assessment of Values and Themes from Data Sources ................................. 114

Table 6-2 Values from Rebuilding and Transforming ............................................................... 114

Table 6-3 Second Assessment of Values and Themes from Data Sources ............................. 115

Table 6-4 The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2007 ............................................. 121

Table 6-5 The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2008 ............................................. 122
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my grandfather,

who believed that anything could be accomplished through education.

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my uncle, best friend,

who believed I was talented and successful.

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“Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental...The freedom to learn...has been bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Hurricane Katrina obliterated the city of New Orleans on August 29th, 2005. Katrina was not a direct hit to New Orleans, and one can only imagine the consequences if she (hurricanes are named for men and women) had. Still, her force and fury will never be forgotten. A brief description of the topography of the city can help to understand the magnitude of this disaster. “New Orleans is a soup bowl of a city, most of it well below sea level; everyone knew a serious crevasse could fill it with 20 feet of water. . . .” (Glasser & Grunwald, 2005, p. A1). As Hurricane Katrina pounded New Orleans, levees in three areas of the city were breached, causing water from Lake Ponchartrain and surrounding canals to overflow, literally flooding 80% of the city. Over a thousand lives were lost, homes destroyed, businesses ruined, and schools decimated. Katrina dismantled an entire city, taking my home and those of family, as well as the schools in which we worked and studied. In short, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the city of New Orleans.

Katrina proved to be the elusive “big one”, the storm the city had feared for over 40 years. The last time New Orleans had been ravaged by a hurricane of similar intensity was in 1965. Hurricane Betsy, like Katrina, changed the lives of many people. I was an elementary school girl in the sixties, but I remember the whistling winds, loss of electrical power, lighted candles, and chimney bricks falling from the roof into the side alley of our house. In addition to the damage caused by the wind and rain, the Industrial Canal levee was breached on September 9th, 1965, flooding the entire lower ninth ward. Thus, Hurricane Betsy became the benchmark for New Orleanians to decide whether or not a storm is considered serious enough to warrant alarm and evacuate the city. In Katrina’s case, for the first time in modern history, a mandatory
evacuation was declared by the mayor of New Orleans and the leaders of the surrounding parishes (Russell, 2005).

I was a doctoral student at The Pennsylvania State University when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Since I was away from home for several weeks at a time, my first response upon learning of a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico was to encourage my family to evacuate immediately. Consequently, during the peak of the hurricane season, August through October (http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/tcfaq/G1.html), each time a named storm entered the Gulf of Mexico, I became anxious and paid close attention to weather updates and the predicted path of the storm. The case with Katrina was no different. From Pennsylvania, I had placed numerous phone calls to my home in New Orleans to urge my family to evacuate the city on Saturday afternoon, August 27th, 2005. However, they were reluctant to leave as they believed that I was overreacting by insisting that they leave the city. They thought like many others that this storm was not “the big one.” Much to my chagrin, they decided to watch the weather reports and defer making a decision until early Sunday morning.

I continued to monitor the progress of the storm during the night. Reports from the National Hurricane Center were far from encouraging. The radar images were a frightening sight. The diameter of the storm covered the entire Gulf of Mexico. I feel a sense of personal indebtedness to Max Mayfield, now retired director of the National Hurricane Center, for contacting Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and C. Ray Nagin, mayor of New Orleans, to inform them of the severity of the storm and the impending danger (Schleifstein, 2005). After what seemed like a million of my phone calls, combined with the mandatory evacuation order, my family agreed to join others on the crowded highways leaving the city early Sunday morning. My family was among thousands of others moving at a slow pace, searching for a safe place to spend the night. They finally secured hotel rooms in Greenwood, Mississippi.
However, until I heard from them on Tuesday morning, I wondered whether or not they were in a safe place.

Traditionally, when reports from the National Hurricane Center indicate that a hurricane may make landfall, the media networks decide how many crews to send to the area where it is expected. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the National Hurricane Center issued forecasts and warnings that Katrina was a powerful storm in which a worst-case scenario could send a wall of water over the levees protecting the city of New Orleans ("New Orleans braces for monster hurricane", 2005). The anticipation of a storm like Katrina caused media from around the world to descend upon the region in large numbers to report the event. Broadcast news became my source of information on events related to Hurricane Katrina.

In the aftermath of the storm, it quickly became apparent that Hurricane Katrina had caused major destruction in New Orleans and the Gulf region. As photos were transmitted from the area, the most poignant images were those of the thousands of people stranded at the Louisiana Superdome, the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, and on rooftops and highways across the metropolitan area. Exposed and vulnerable, “there they were, on our television screens, the storm’s most desperate victims – disproportionately poor and black, wading through muddy water, carrying children and plastic bags containing a few meager possessions” (Keyssar, 2005, B6). These men, women, and children appeared to be sending an SOS to the world.

Having a television was a blessing and a curse for me. I wanted to know what was taking place, but simultaneously, I was experiencing moments of fear and despair. As the cameras moved from one part of the city to the next, I could not believe what I was watching. Familiar landmarks, some of which held special memories for me, were engulfed in water. Though painful to watch, I couldn’t tear myself away from the television or the news streaming on my computer. The awareness that everything that I personally owned in the entire world had been destroyed created a numbing sensation. It would take some time (actually many months) to comprehend that
my possessions and my city were gone. It was also beyond my imagination to realize that most of the citizens of New Orleans would not be returning to their homes, at least, not anytime in the immediate future.

**New Orleans’ Poverty Revealed**

To make matters worse, as the news coverage continued, it became more and more apparent that those left behind were Black and poor. Michael Eric Dyson described the plight of the evacuees in his book *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (2006). In his book, Dyson explains that the evacuees, all citizens of the United States of America, were being “dissed [disrespected or dismissed] by the government.” He stated that it was difficult to imagine the level of suffering that was taking place among the evacuees. What's more, Dyson found it incredulous that "the richest and most powerful nation on the globe [was] leaving some of its poorest citizens to fend for themselves" (p. 2).

Hurricane Katrina revealed the high rate of poverty and the poor living conditions of African Americans in New Orleans. At the time of the hurricane, approximately 68% of the total population of New Orleans was Black. The city’s poverty rate was 33%, the highest among 15 cities with majority African American populations. About one of every three people who lived in areas hardest hit by the hurricane were African American. In contrast, one of every eight people in the nation is African American (Fussell, 2006; Herring, 2006; Sherman & Shapiro, 2005).

Why were so many of these people left behind during this enormous disaster? The following statistics compiled by the Center for Social Inclusion helps to explain the dilemma of those left behind:

- Almost one third (28%) of New Orleanians were poor before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast.
• Many New Orleanians had disabilities: 10.3% of 5 to 20-year-olds, 6% of 21 to 64-year-olds and 50.1% of those age 65 and older had disabilities.

• Over 11% of New Orleanians were elderly.

More than 105,000 city dwellers did not have a car during the evacuation associated with Hurricane Katrina. Nearly two thirds (32.7%) of Black New Orleanians had no car to help them get out of harm’s way compared to less than 10% of Whites. (McNeil, 2006). In essence, it took the worst natural disaster in United States history to make the high rate of poverty and poor social conditions of African Americans in New Orleans visible to the world.

CNN’s Anderson Cooper dared to address the “race issue” and began questioning elected officials as to why those New Orleanians in trouble were not receiving help. Once this “issue” was revealed, other network anchors followed his lead. As rescue operations continued, the brown and black hues of the survivors became clear. Hence, the question of race and poverty became the focus of news reports on the effects of the hurricane. Some went so far as to say that the poor themselves were to blame for not leaving soon enough (Pelz, 2005).

In the weeks following Hurricane Katrina’s landfall, New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin invited civic leaders, businessmen and women, philanthropists, and educators to become part of the city’s rebuilding effort called Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB). The purpose of this newly formed commission was to develop ideas and plans to restore and rebuild the city of New Orleans. Mayor Nagin appointed a steering committee, as well as sub-committees in education, urban planning, land use, infrastructure, culture, economic development, government effectiveness, health, and social services. Clearly, the committee’s task was political as they were charged with deciding which models, theories, and ideas would be used in constructing the “new” New Orleans.
Political/Social Context for Rebuilding

The rebuilding of the city of New Orleans is taking place within a unique political and social context. The study of politics is the investigation of power within particular contexts. Power circulates through discourses among various groups who make use of and are used by values and language to participate in on-going events (e.g., Foucault, 1980; Gonick, 2003; Peet, 2007). These discourses and uses of discourse set parameters, influence actions, and position participants within events. Those who wield power in some contexts are powerless in others as negotiations push and pull participants in ways of their own making, but not entirely within their control. Gee (2001) defines “discourse” as a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network” (p. 1). Gee uses the metaphor of acting in order to make his point. Each discourse comes with instructions, motivations, and values on how to become an actor within its group. The actors learn their script, perform it, and convincingly present their character to the audience, who suspends their disbelief and accepts them as a legitimate member of the troupe. In order to make a living, however, each actor must perform in many plays, and therefore, learn many roles, which they prioritize according to their immediate circumstances. Accordingly, individuals acquire many discourses across contexts, ingesting the values, language, and habits of each. Their discourses do not always align, creating possible personal tensions and contradictions to be resolved (p.1).

For my study, I examine the time period immediately following Hurricane Katrina. This was a critical time for New Orleans and its citizens. Conflicting views arose regarding how to rebuild the city. Specifically, what could and should the “new” New Orleans” look like. Reestablishing the education system was among the urgent priorities. I seek to understand the beginning stages and social context of the Bring New Orleans Back Education committee
process. Mayor Nagin chose the members of the committee based on his discourse-based assessment of their likely contributions. Each participant brought their many discourses to the table in order to negotiate the plans for the recovery the New Orleans schools. That variation among members was expected to ensure a variety of discourses represented in the process of the committee, if not the final product, an outcome appropriate for a pluralistic city and a political policy statement. Because the committee work had such high stakes for New Orleans and the country, the competition among discourses to explain the past, present, and future were extremely intense. Competing discourses would point schools, children, and therefore New Orleans in different directions for the future. Tracking the discourses throughout the committee work and back to the social, cultural and political values of their origins should provide educators with a better understanding of how power works within education policy.

Rebuilding the Public Education System

The “washing away” of much of the city of New Orleans presented an unusual dilemma for the city’s public education system. As Paul Hill explains, “In the case of post hurricane New Orleans, American school planners will be as close as they have ever come to a ‘greenfield’ opportunity: A large public education system will need to be built from scratch” (p. 1). According to The Concise Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘greenfield’ is defined as “relating to or denoting a previously undeveloped site for commercial development (p. 624) The term “greenfield” may also be considered a project that lacks any constraints based on prior work. New Orleans’ quandary or opportunity regarding the redevelopment of its public education system certainly fits Hill’s description. The use of the term “greenfield” in this context seems to belong to Hill, whereas Capochino 2005, Dingerson 2006, Leonard 2007, Robelen 2005 and Tillotson,
2006 use descriptors such as a fresh start, a clean educational slate, building from scratch, and an opportunity of a lifetime.

Many questions arise when considering this “greenfield” opportunity in public education. In my case, what were the animating discourses that directed the BNOB process for brokering consensus regarding the educational plans for New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina? The storm changed the ongoing discussion about New Orleans public schools, altering the previous power hierarchies among competing educational discourses. To address this question, I have surveyed the public record of the BNOB Education Committee, analyzed the final plan, interviewed members of the BNOB educational committee, and compared my analysis with that of a commissioned group of scholars and the local teachers union. I believe that leaders and citizens had an exceptional opportunity to take the “high road” and consider the consequences of all possible alternatives for the newly redesigned school system and choose one that best fit the needs and goals of the New Orleans community. Examining the rebuilding of public education in New Orleans is noteworthy because of these unique circumstances. Many see New Orleans’ reformation of public schools to be a blueprint for other metropolitan areas in the United States.

Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I have introduced the events and reasons for this study. Chapter 2 provides a background of the New Orleans public schools prior to Hurricane Katrina. Chapter 3 represents my plan of action for the study. I will use policy analysis, interviews, and close reading in order to identify the discourses in play and those that prove persuasive at the conception of new schools for New Orleans. Chapter 4 offers a systematic critical policy analysis of Rebuilding and Transforming: A Plan for Improving Public Education in New Orleans, (hereafter Rebuilding and Transforming) the final recommendation of the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee.
Chapter 5 analyzes three alternative interpretations of the BNOB process and “Rebuilding and Transforming” document. First, I interview three participants of the BNOB Education Committee to consider the process. Second, I consider the teacher union’s written report pertaining to “Rebuilding and Transforming”. Third, I examine an external commissioned appraisal of the plan. Chapter 6 compares the four perspectives on the BNOB report and comments on the outcomes by examining the official annual reports and newspaper accounts of the new school system(s) in New Orleans.

My life and career as an educator before and after Hurricane Katrina are intertwined in my dissertation. This doctoral study represents a small contribution to Language, Culture and Society, my focus area in curriculum and instruction. On a personal level, I am committed to both restoring my home and making a contribution to the public education system in the city I love. This is a serious undertaking, one I do not take lightly. In my case, a disaster led to a unique research opportunity, particularly in the area of critical policy study and discourse analysis.
Chapter 2

THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans was one of the first cities in the United States to provide public education for its citizens. This chapter describes the evolution of public education in New Orleans in four phases. First, I describe the inception of public education in New Orleans under its founder Joshua Baldwin. Second, I explain the challenges of the school district from Reconstruction to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Then, I provide an account of the New Orleans School Board’s resistance to adhere to the Supreme Court’s decision in the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. Specifically, I explicate the first year of desegregation in New Orleans and its impact on the community. Finally, I draw attention to significant events that occurred in the New Orleans Public School District from the 1960s to the “washing away” of the school district by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. New Orleans faces challenges as do all urban school districts, but it should be remembered for some successes.

The Beginning Years: 1836-1862

The city’s public education began in 1836. The city of New Orleans had been divided into three sections called municipalities. Each municipality had its own government. Joshua Baldwin, the recorder for the second municipality, conceived the idea of bringing public education to New Orleans. Baldwin contacted Horace Mann, State Secretary of Education in Massachusetts and leading authority on public education in the United States, for direction in this endeavor. After conferring with Mann, Baldwin presented his public education proposal to the Louisiana State Legislature. On February 21, 1841, the State Legislature passed a law authorizing
each municipality and the New Orleans suburb of Lafayette to establish a school system governed by its own board of directors (see figure 2-1). Prior to this act, public education had never taken hold in New Orleans or any other city in Louisiana (Devore & Logsdon, 1991).

![Figure 2-1. Map of New Orleans circa 1836](image)

Once the Legislature approved the establishment of public schools in New Orleans, Baldwin returned to Horace Mann for advice on personnel, curriculum, and supplies. In conjunction with conferring with Mann, Baldwin presented a proposal to the New Orleans municipal council. After hearing Baldwin’s presentation, the municipality endorsed his plan on March 15, 1841. A board of directors was appointed and assembled to oversee the new school district on May 15, 1841. As the excitement of public education in New Orleans reached a fever
pitch, a major issue looming over the city and council was the matter of slavery. How could public education be implemented and simultaneously maintain order among the slaves? Mann urged Baldwin and the board of directors to avoid racial questions and abolitionism. Horace Mann recommended John Angier Shaw of Bridgewater, Connecticut, to become the city’s first superintendent of education. Shaw’s initial responsibility was to organize the new system. To facilitate a smooth beginning, Shaw, a pro-abolitionist, followed Horace Mann’s advice to keep his opinion regarding slavery to himself in order to take the New Orleans job.

The first New Orleans public school opened on January 3, 1842. Shaw’s idea was to model New Orleans’ schools after the education system of the New England states. Shaw instituted evening schools, provided free textbooks for students, and established the city’s first public library. Moreover, he created two high schools, one for girls and one for boys.

Soon after the first schools opened, the first and third municipalities adopted ideas from the Baldwin plan and began schools in their areas.

Due to the many ethnic divisions (e.g., French and Creole) within the New Orleans population, the first and third municipalities encountered political conflicts over education. For instance, the French Creole community wanted the French language to be taught in the schools. To this end, 25 bilingual teachers were hired in the first municipality. Another clash occurred when American leaders took over the Louisiana Legislature from the Creoles. An additional argument involved Catholic and Jewish immigrants opposing the use of Protestant prayers in the schools. In the midst of this sea of conflict free Blacks and slaves were denied access to the
public schools. John Shaw left New Orleans at the end of the 1851-1852 school year as politics and religion became major obstacles that he felt were interfered with the inner workings of the school district.

After Shaw’s departure, instead of school governance by each municipality, the city was divided into school districts. Each district was designed to service White children regardless of race, class, and religious affiliation (Devore & Logsdon, 1991, p. 40). Louisiana law forbade the formal education of slaves who lived in the city in 1860. Therefore, Blacks were denied public education. In the meantime, some Blacks, actually light skinned Creoles, began to pass for White in order to attend school. During this period, the free Black community organized its own public and private schools (Fischer, 1969). Marie C. Couvent, a free African woman left a bequest with a Catholic Church to create a school for free Black boys and girls (Devore & Logsdon, 1991). The school was known as an orphan’s school. Occasionally school administrators were able to secure state funds by emphasizing the indigent and orphaned status of its students. The directors were able to justify their petition for funds based on the fact that Black property owners paid taxes but had no access to public education. The Couvent School challenged racial injustices that existed in Louisiana. The school also produced graduates of high accomplishment.

**Civil War and Reconstruction**

The Civil War era brought new changes in New Orleans schools. New Orleans surrendered to the Union in 1862 and the schools operated under military rule. General Benjamin Butler was the first Union leader assigned to the New Orleans area. General Butler took over city government and became responsible for running the school system. Butler made two important decisions immediately following the takeover. First, he abolished the existing school districts and school boards. He reorganized the schools into one unit under the leadership of one school
superintendent for the entire city. The second decision involved the use of language in the schools. Butler declared that the French language would no longer be a part of the school curriculum. All classes would be taught in English. James Butler Carter was appointed to administer the school system. The new superintendent implemented four changes during his tenure in New Orleans. First, he established uniform rules throughout the city. Next, he required standard textbooks be used in every classroom. Then, he initiated a single salary scale for all teachers. Lastly, he began the process of consolidating eight high schools into three.

During this era public schools operated under the Union troops. The Union regime created a school system for free Blacks. For two years following the Civil War, separate schools were run in tandem for Blacks and Whites. In 1868, the Louisiana constitutional convention adopted a resolution that required schools be established on a common basis without segregation or race. Lawmakers and parents resisted the implementation of the resolution for as long as possible.

Thomas W. Conway was the radical state superintendent and prime mover of New Orleans’ desegregation process. Louis Harlan (1962) describes Conway’s idyllic notion of mixed schools. Conway believed that left alone Black and White children would be kind to one another in the classroom, on the playground, and in neighborhoods. Whites outnumbered Blacks in New Orleans nearly three to one. New Orleans city officials and the school board attempted to sabotage Conway’s efforts of desegregating the schools. Harlan (1962) explains:

The city’s newspapers meanwhile undertook to create an atmosphere of resistance and fear, advocating desertion of the schools en masse by the whites, establishment of public schools, and refusal to pay school taxes, and predicting the destruction of public schools and race war . . . . Finally the sands of delay ran out; a court decision of December 1870 was acknowledged by all parties to be decisive, and desegregation began within a month. (p. 665)
The integrated schools were located in the second and third municipalities. These areas were located below Canal Street, or the downtown area, away from the affluent uptown garden district. They were home to the descendents of the original French and Spanish, as well as Irish, German, and Italian immigrants. Accurate records regarding the number of Black and White students attending school together from that time are not available. Official reports did not separate the number of students enrolled by race. It was impossible to get an accurate number by race due to the various hues of Black children; some were thought to be White.

1900 – 1950

After reconstruction and Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896, the Supreme Court ruling that upheld school segregation as constitutional and separate but equal was the norm for New Orleans Schools. As the city’s population and school enrollment increased, new schools were needed to accommodate the growing number of children attending public school. The city of New Orleans benefited from the generosity of John McDonogh, a wealthy trader and slave holder who left funds from his estate for the construction of schools in New Orleans and Baltimore, Maryland. McDonogh stipulated that the schools would serve poor children – specifically White and free Blacks (Atherton, 1941). McDonogh’s bequest facilitated the construction of over 30 schools. Most of the schools were named McDonogh followed by a number (e.g. McDonogh 35). For many years the school district celebrated John McDonogh Day or Founders Day on the first Friday in May. Public school children representing every school in the district in the city placed flowers at the McDonogh monument in New Orleans’ Lafayette Square. I remember what an honor it was to be selected to go to the monument. Girls were dressed in white dresses and boys wore white shirts with ties and blue slacks. Flowers were taken from neighborhood gardens and
wrapped in damp paper towels and aluminum foil to preserve their freshness until they reached the monument.

The decades from 1900 until the late 1950s saw the New Orleans school district operate as two separate school systems – one for Blacks and one for Whites. School facilities for white students were well equipped, had better physical plants, and were well financed. The exact opposite was the case for Black schools. Students studied with inadequate materials, overcrowded classrooms, and deplorable conditions. In many instances, students sat two to a desk. Small items were purchased for the schools through neighborhood fund-raising campaigns by mothers and parent clubs (Devore & Logsdon, 1991).

Two pivotal events impacted Black students and their communities during this time. First, a new school was built for Black children. The Valena C. Jones Elementary School was built in 1929. Jones was a neighborhood school located in the seventh ward of New Orleans. A large open house and dedication ceremony was held to commemorate the school’s opening. Dignitaries from across the city gathered for the occasion. Miss Fannie C. Williams, school principal, proudly conducted a tour of the building once the speeches had been completed. She was especially proud of the radio in the school auditorium and the up-to-date home economics room, which reflected modern equipment during that era. Jones Elementary was considered a stellar elementary school in New Orleans well into the 1970’s.

The second event involved McDonogh 35 Senior High School which opened in 1917. The primary goal of the school was to meet the educational needs of Black students. The school’s curriculum was college preparatory and won acclaim for its academic performance. Required and elected courses at McDonogh 35 included English, Latin, history, science, music, mathematics and physical education. McDonogh 35 was one of the first selective admission schools for Blacks in New Orleans. The school quickly became known as the premier high school
for Black students. McDonogh 35 was the only Black high school in New Orleans until Booker T. Washington High School was built in 1942. I am a graduate of McDonogh 35 High School.

The following information from the Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives housed at Tulane University in New Orleans illustrates some of the differences between Black and White schools:

Table 2-1. Differences Between Black and White Schools

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
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<tr>
<td>1939-1940 Average state expenditure on education per child:</td>
<td>$62.99 per White child</td>
<td>$17.17 per Black child</td>
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<td>1937-1938 Average annual salary paid to Louisiana teachers:</td>
<td>$1,193 per White teachers</td>
<td>$504 per Black teachers</td>
</tr>
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<td>1937-1938 Average number of students enrolled per teacher in Louisiana:</td>
<td>27.5 White schools:</td>
<td>41.8 Black schools:</td>
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<td>1939-1940 Value of school plant in Orleans parish per pupil:</td>
<td>$297 per pupil White schools:</td>
<td>$78 per pupil Black schools:</td>
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Source: [www.tulane.edu/cowen_institute/documents/NewOrleansSchoolHistory.doc](http://www.tulane.edu/cowen_institute/documents/NewOrleansSchoolHistory.doc)

The Civil Rights Era

The dawn of the Civil Rights Movement saw Black Americans seeking fairness and equality in education. The Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* on May 17, 1954, was a day of celebration in the Black community. The Supreme Court’s decision represented numerous victories. For example, it was indicative of the courage of the plaintiffs to remain steadfast in their beliefs that justice and change was a reasonable goal, a job well done by the litigators, a shining star of hope for the future (Bell, 2004).

The *Brown* decision reversed the “separate but equal” clause in the Fourteenth Amendment which was designed to eradicate the policy that governed public schools. As Chief Justice Earl Warren rendered the Court’s decision, he and the other justices “acknowledged that
separate was inherently unequal, because it reduced individuals to their racial identity while conveying the message that some groups were better than other groups” (Fischer, 1969). This was a joyous day for Black Americans. There was no way to know how the decision would ultimately affect Black America, particularly in the South.

According to legal scholar and civil rights attorney Derrick Bell (2004), Black schoolteachers provided quality education for Black students in spite of inequitable building structures, indoor facilities, and materials. In keeping with the values instilled by their ancestors, Blacks continued to hold education in high esteem. Though Blacks had suffered many years of unjust treatment by Whites, the spirit of the Black community could not be destroyed. In other words, though the infrastructure of the Black schools was different, namely a limited curriculum, hand-me-down books, and inadequate school facilities, the importance of education in Black communities remained a constant (Fairclough, 2004).

Resistance to implementing the Brown decision by Blacks and Whites occurred throughout the South. Even though the law had been changed, the ideologies of White America regarding race relations and public schooling had not. Government officials, from high school principals and local education boards, to governors and United States senators, began an open campaign of massive resistance. The years immediately following the Brown v. Board decision created chaos in public education across the United States. School boards wrestled with the dilemma of implementing the Supreme Court decision. School boards, particularly those in the South, refused to consider developing any sort of desegregation plan for public schools. Instead they sought to undermine the Brown decision by interpreting the language of the law to suit their needs. For instance, “New Orleans school-board officials saw no cause for alarm, stating that they expected several years to elapse before any school mixing would occur” (Devore & Logsdon, 1991; , "The New Orleans School Crisis", 1961)). The Brown decision and a concerted effort by
lawmakers to defy the law resulted in a stress-filled time in the South, particularly in the city of New Orleans.

A group called the Louisiana State Advisory Committee was commissioned by the federal government to compile a report on New Orleans public schools to be presented to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. The commission was created as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and required every state of the union to have a state advisory committee. The purpose of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights was to serve as the vehicle of the federal and state government to examine and resolve issues related to race. More recently, its involvement has expanded to ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation.

http://www.law.umaryland.edu/Marshall/usccr/index.html In Louisiana’s case, the State Advisory Committee’s report was prepared by a subcommittee on education. The report, entitled “The New Orleans School Crisis” provides a chronological narrative of the events that occurred during the initial implementation of desegregation in New Orleans.

The New Orleans School Crisis report begins by stating that “the battle raging in Louisiana over school desegregation cannot be fully understood without a brief description of the political situation in Louisiana . . .” (p 4). A clear explanation of the definitions of racial segregation, desegregation and racial integration is necessary to understand the dynamics associated with the era. The Definitions taken from the Historical Dictionary of School Segregation and Desegregation: the American Experience (Raffel, 1998) are as follows:

**Racial segregation:** the separation of people by race. In the field of education, racial segregation refers to the isolation of students by race due to either segregation by law (de jure segregation) or segregation from actions for which the government is not directly responsible (de facto segregation) (p. 235).

**Desegregation:** The removal of systematic barriers such as laws, customs or
practices that separate, seclude, or isolate a group of persons from the general mass on the basis of race or other factors in public facilities, neighborhoods, organization, or in other arenas; in school desegregation, the removal of barriers to the attendance of children of all racial-ethnic groups in the same schools (p. 81).

**Racial integration:** Qualitative concept based on the goal of social integration as opposed to a quantitative concept of physical inclusion. In an integrated school or school district the social situation reflects mutual respect and equal dignity across the races in attendance (p. 131).

Louisiana’s state legislature sought to evade desegregation by creating a Joint Legislative Committee of Segregation. The purpose of the committee was to retain segregation through massive resistance. The committee was chaired by State Senator William Rainach, one of Louisiana’s most passionate White supremacists (Muller, 1976, p. 71).” Moreover, in 1959, the state of Louisiana was involved in a gubernatorial election. The general election pitted New Orleans Mayor deLesseps S. Morrison against former Governor of Louisiana Jimmie H. Davis. Both men ran as segregationists during this election. One of the more contentious issues was that of school desegregation. Prior to this election, the elected school board of New Orleans did not endorse or actively campaign in local or state elections. Throughout the campaign, Emile Wagner, Jr., a staunch segregationist pledged to voters that if Jimmie Davis were elected he would enjoin the school board not to carry out the pending desegregation order. Wagner’s position was that he would see the public schools closed before allowing desegregation. Conversely, New Orleans School Board President Lloyd J. Rittner, also a segregationist, favored desegregation as opposed to closing the schools. In the end, Wagner presented a convincing case to voters and Jimmie H. Davis won reelection.
The New Orleans School Board was under orders to submit a desegregation plan to Judge J. Skelly Wright by May 16, 1960 (Wieder, 1987). Louisiana lawmakers used the vagueness of the court order of “all deliberate speed” creatively to develop organized resistance against desegregation. Rittner and New Orleans School Board members studied the state laws to determine whether or not they were required to submit a plan to Judge Wright. The Board decided that they were not free to submit such a plan.

This development prompted the school board to poll the citizens of New Orleans to ascertain their feelings about desegregating the schools. Mary Lee Muller (1976) describes the opinion poll:

In April 1960 the board polled parents of public school children as to whether or not they wanted the school closed if open schools meant integration on a token basis. Tabulations of the ballot showed a majority of parents in favor of open schools. But of this majority eighty-one percent were black; only nineteen percent were white. In announcing the results, the board chose to stress the racial distinction and further exacerbated the situation by stating it would disregard the Negro vote. (p. 76)

Judge Wright did not receive the requested order from the New Orleans School Board. Consequently, he submitted his own proposal requiring that New Orleans schools integrate one grade level one year at a time. Wright’s plan was scheduled to begin in September 1960. This led to a terrible dilemma for the school board. They were conflicted as to whether or not they should follow federal orders as opposed to complying with the wishes of Governor Davis and the State Legislature. Court actions continued to dictate the future of public education in New Orleans. On June, 26, 1960, the U. S. Fifth District Court of Appeals refused a request for a stay of the desegregation order. The following two actions were taken by the federal court:
August 27, 1960 – The federal court issued orders restraining Governor Davis or any state official from interfering with the operation of the New Orleans public schools.

August 30, 1960 – The date for implementing the desegregating order was moved to November 14, 1960. (New Orleans School Crisis, 1961, p. 9)

Subsequently, the New Orleans School Board ordered Dr. James Redmond to develop a plan that combined desegregating the schools one grade a year with pupil assignment transfers. The plan entailed having Black students (initially 136 children) apply for transfer to one of the White schools. Students were evaluated by the school board which required that 21 indicators be satisfied for acceptance to transfer (Wieder, 1987). Five students were eligible to transfer to a white school under these criteria.

Governor Davis continued to ignore court orders regarding desegregation by calling a special session of the Legislature 24 hours before desegregation was scheduled to begin. He tried to pass legislation that would have allowed the state to facilitate a takeover of the New Orleans School Board. Segregationists, the school board, businessmen, and the local public were at odds with one another, each group attempting to conduct public education from their own ideology.

The Times Picayune and the States Item, local newspapers, published editorials in favor of maintaining public education in the face of desegregation. Judge J. Skelly Wright issued an order restraining the Louisiana Legislature’s school committee and other state and local officials from interfering with the operation of the New Orleans School Board. The legislature responded by removing four school board members and firing Dr. James Redmond, superintendent of schools. Redmond was removed because he refused to give the names of the Black girls and the schools that they would attend.

November 14, 1960, was the dawn of a new era for the New Orleans public schools. The first day of desegregation in New Orleans catapulted the city into national attention. The event was broadcast nationally and internationally through television networks, newspapers, and
magazines. Louisiana lawmakers seemed baffled as to why the event was newsworthy. They accused the news media of creating chaos and unrest (Wieder, 1987). Four first grade Black girls were enrolled in two White schools. The fifth girl eligible for transfer withdrew from the process. William J. Frantz and McDonogh 19 Elementary Schools located in the ninth ward of the city were the schools chosen for this beginning of desegregation of the New Orleans schools.

The young girl who received the most attention was Ruby Bridges. Ruby was the lone Black student who desegregated William J. Frantz Elementary on November 14th, 1960. Ruby and the other girls were accompanied to and from school each day by United States federal marshals. Six-year-old Ruby was subjected to verbal abuse by protesters assembled outside the school on a daily basis. Integration was costly for Ruby’s family. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People supported her parents for several years because Mr. and Mrs. Bridges lost their jobs when Ruby made headlines. The Bridges family safety was also threatened. As a result, friends in their all-Black neighborhood took turns guarding their home (Bridges, 1999; Coles, 1995; , "Trailblazer in desegregation gives up on public education ", 1982). The majority of parents removed their children from Frantz Elementary. During the 1960 – 1961 year school year attendance at Frantz Elementary fluctuated between three and ten children. Ruby was in a class by herself, taught the entire school year by Mrs. Barbara Henry. The Conner family was among those who allowed their three children to remain at Frantz. In an interview with Alan Wieder Mrs. Conner explained that the family lived a half block from the school and the children were attending public school because they could no longer afford Catholic school tuition. She did not consider herself a crusader and could never understand everybody’s excitement about one little girl (p. 195).

It is important to note that Frantz and McDonogh 19 Elementary schools were located in the ninth ward of the city. At the time, the ninth ward was populated by poor Blacks and Whites and surrounded by two housing projects made the area appealing to school board members. The
residents of this area did not have the social capital to fight city hall. Furthermore, the area was located a great distance from the downtown business district and the affluent homes in the garden district (Landphair, 1999; Muller, 1976; Spain, 1979). In turn, the residents in the area developed their own means of protest. The segregationists used scare tactics to influence White parents to keep their children home from school. Plaquemine Parish Leander Perez gave a rebel-rousing speech on November 15, 1960, before a supremacist group called the White Citizens Council. He admonished the parents by saying, “Don’t wait for your daughter to be raped by these Congolese. Don’t wait until the burrheads are forced into your schools. Do something about it now” (Landphair, 1999, Wells, 2004, Wieder, 1987, p. 123). Perez used his wealth and influence to get parents to send their children to schools in nearby St. Bernard Parish. Approximately 600 children attended various schools in St. Bernard and about 300 children did not attend school at all (Muller, 1976; , "The New Orleans School Crisis", 1961; Wieder, 1987). To this day Plaquemine Parish is known as one of the most racist areas in southeastern Louisiana (Wells, 2004).

By the late 1960’s African-American public students outnumbered Whites students 2 to 1. Derrick Bell (2004) explains that this racial shift in school enrollment and demographics was primarily due to fear and resistance among White parents about having their children attend segregated schools. During the 1960s and beyond, White families moved out of New Orleans and other southern cities, into the surrounding parishes (counties are referred to as parishes in Louisiana) that had majority White populations. In addition to moving to White suburban neighborhoods, many families transferred their children from public to private and parochial schools. The New Orleans area has a large Catholic population and children’s enrollment in parochial schools was not unusual. Thus, White parents were able to legitimize their choice of predominantly White schools by using religion or school location as the reason for their children’s enrollment. On the other hand, only middle-class or well-to-do Blacks could exercise
the choice of parochial or private education, using the same rationale as Whites in selecting their children’s school.

Desegregating the schools in New Orleans was not isolated to the children. The Orleans Parish School Board was remiss in implementing faculty integration as defined by the court. According to Mark Cortez (1996), the New Orleans school faculties were technically desegregated in the fall of 1966 when three Black teachers transferred to a previously all-White staffed school (p. 405). The Orleans Parish School Board did not announce its intent to fully integrate faculties until the summer of 1972. One reason that prompted this action was the loss of federal funds from the Emergency School Assistance Program (Cortez, 1996, p. 416). I recall as a novice teacher entering the teacher’s lounge at my school and the Black teachers were sitting together. Many were bitter about the forced integration of teachers. For me, this brings to mind the issue of racial identity development in “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” by Beverly Daniel Tatum (Tatum, 1997). Were we sitting together to preserve our racial identity or was it resistance to being assigned to a predominately white school? Tatum focuses on how adolescents engage with and handle racial issues in their lives, but it appears the concept on impacts adults as well.

The local teachers union vacillated between disapproval and support of the school board plan. The union was in its infancy, actually just one month old when the desegregation plan was being implemented. However, both the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers’ Union (AFT) in New Orleans pushed the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) for the right to bargain collectively. Strikes were held in 1966 and 1969, both unsuccessful. In 1972, the AFT and NEA affiliates in New Orleans agreed to merge and form the United Teachers of New Orleans. The union became the first integrated education union in the South. Nat LaCour, a Black teacher was elected the union’s first president.
In 1978, the union struck again to win collective bargaining, and this time was successful. With White teachers finally participating in the strike, nearly 3,500 of the school district’s 5,000 educators walked out and two-thirds of the city’s children were affected. UTNO had prepared for the strike by working closely with parents and community activists this time and soon parents began joining the picket line and protesting as well. The strike lasted 12 days before the district agreed to recognize the union and sign a collective bargaining agreement, giving the union a 7% pay hike and better health insurance [www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/United-Teachers-of-New-Orleans](http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/United-Teachers-of-New-Orleans).

2000 – Hurricane Katrina

Throughout its history the New Orleans Public Schools it has been known as “one of the most segregated and stratified systems you can see in America” (Tillotson, 2006). The demise of the school system did not begin with Hurricane Katrina; it began decades earlier. Ralph Adamo explains:

Lacking aggressive oversight and consistent leadership, the administration of the public schools seemed unable to do its job on many levels. (And one would have to return to the bad faith, racist politics, and failures of sense and civility that surrounded the racial integration of the schools in the 1960’s to begin the story of their demise (Adamo, 2007b).

In addition to race and social issues the school district had been plagued by low scores on the state accountability test, mismanagement of funds, and corruption. In spring 2005, over half of the students taking the high-stakes standardized tests did not reach “basic” competence (Newmark & DeRugy, 2006).
Table 2-2. Louisiana Department of Education Multi-Year Statewide Test Results Summary: LEAP Tests Results Spring 2003, 2004, and 2005

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Source: Louisiana Department of Education: [http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/saa/1337.html](http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/saa/1337.html)
Table 2-3. Louisiana Department of Education Multi-Year Orleans Parish Summary: LEAP Tests Results Spring 2003, 2004, and 2005

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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2004</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2005</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Louisiana Department of Education: [http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/saa/1337.html](http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/saa/1337.html)
Delpit and Payne (2007) analyzed the racial population of New Orleans schools and discuss how the system has always worked for the few White students who stayed in it. Like Newmark and DeRugy, Delpit and Payne used standardized test scores to illustrate their point: “While Black students in New Orleans ranked at the very bottom in state scores, White students’ scores were the highest in Louisiana (p. 20). “

Louisiana politics and politicians are known to operate under the umbrella of corruption. Sadly, federal indictments of public officials tend not to raise an eyebrow among Louisianians. My fellow Louisianians tend to have short memories and are forgiving when politicians are involved in “improprieties”. United States Attorney Jim Letten of the Eastern District of Louisiana and the Federal Bureau of Investigation led an investigation to ascertain whether or not fraud was taking place in the New Orleans Public School System, opening an office in the central administration building of the Orleans Parish School Board in 2004. Their charge was to account for the hiring practices and school expenses because local newspapers had published a series of articles questioning financial dealings (Newmark & DeRugy, 2006). Initial indictments involved fraud and payroll kickbacks where teachers, secretaries and para-educators received funds in the forms of false travel reimbursements, stipend payments and paychecks for an employee who had left the school system.

Jim Letten and his team were unrelenting in their investigation. A high profile former school board member admitted to taking $140,000 in bribes from a lobbyist who was the brother of a former Louisiana United States Congressman. Reportedly the company paid $900,000 in lobbying fees to promote math teaching software. The school board member was indicted and is awaiting trial for accepting bribe money to promote the acceptance of a contracted firm’s bid to provide software to the school district (Adamo, 2007a). Though this action did not involve district funds it added to the contentious atmosphere within the school district. Another egregious act
concerned a payroll clerk stealing approximately $250,000 from the school system in a series of checks made out to herself under her maiden name. Each of these individuals pleaded guilty for their actions. (Federal Charges Filed Against 10 Individuals for Extortion and Theft from New Orleans School System, 2004)

Many inconsistencies of race and class existed within the school district. By 2005, more than 80% of students attending public schools in New Orleans were African-American, and many schools had student populations that were 100% African-American (Rasheed, 2006, pp. 4-5). Ann Carrns of The Wall Street Journal (2006) reported these inequalities in New Orleans public schools:

In recent years, African-Americans, many from the city’s poorest areas, largely attended public schools. The New Orleans population was about 67% black and 28% white, while the public schools were 93% black and 4% white. Almost three-quarters of all public-school students were eligible for free lunch. (p. B1)

New Orleans was a school system mired in trouble from all directions. When Hurricane Katrina occurred on August 29, 2005 a dreadful situation became worse. School buildings, buses, and official records were immersed in floodwaters. The school district’s most pressing issue was to decide what should happen next. In the beginning, Interim School Superintendent Ora Watson announced that New Orleans public schools would not open for the 2005-2006 school year. A few weeks after Watson's announcement, meetings began to take place among members of the New Orleans School Board, Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco’s office, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and State Superintendent of Education Cecil Picard, since deceased and replaced by Paul Pastorek (Adamo, 2007a; Dingerson, 2006). The primary goal of these meetings was to determine whether or not or how to reopen schools in New Orleans.

Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco called a special session of the Louisiana legislature in November 2005 three months after the storm. The goal of the legislative session was to deal
with the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Hurricane Rita struck southeastern Louisiana one month after Katrina), with education as a top priority. Prior to the beginning of the special session, Governor Blanco held a press conference to discuss what she hoped to accomplish during the special session. Blanco emphasized that it was time to act and turn the failing school system into a model for the nation (Robelen, 2005a).

The governor proposed a state takeover of schools in New Orleans using the following criteria. Those school districts labeled in academic crisis (schools whose school performance scores fell below the state average), in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 would enter the state’s recovery district. The New Orleans School District was designated in “academic crisis” in 2004, and therefore was subject to state takeover.

The terms “academic crisis” and “academically unacceptable” are independent of one another and their relationship to state accountability. Academic crisis refers to the school district as a whole. “Academically unacceptable is a rating given to any public school that falls below a minimum score of state performance measures” (‘National Model’ or Flawed Approach?, 2006, p. 3).

Under the Governor’s plan, the state takeover of New Orleans public schools would be automatic contingent upon the approval of the Louisiana State Legislature. Implementing the Governor’s plan would circumvent the existing state law which allowed for a state takeover of schools, but required action from the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education before the transfer of schools to the Recovery School District could be enforced. It must be noted that in 2003, the Louisiana State Legislature created the Recovery School District (RSD) for schools labeled academically unacceptable. It stipulated that a failing school could be transferred to the RSD only if a private organization agreed to assume management of the school and turn it into a charter school. During the first two years, 2003 and 2004, only five New Orleans public
schools had been transferred to the RSD www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/United-Teachers-of-New-Orleans.

The Louisiana Legislature granted Governor Blanco’s request during the special session. The new criteria for takeover as mandated by the State Legislature required that all schools with a school performance score below the state average of 60 be transferred to the state’s Recovery School District for a minimum of five years. This action allowed the state to take over 102 out of 118 schools. The new law transferred governance of the takeover schools from the elected school board in New Orleans to the auspices of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. As a result of this legislation New Orleans public schools are operating schools under two authorities, the state BESE’s Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board (Capochino, 2005a; Carrns, 2006).

New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz. The melodious sound produced by jazz musicians is subject to the interpretation of the musician. If one listens carefully, two musicians (i.e., clarinetists) playing the same song will not sound the same. Resembling jazz, many discourses were in play in the history of public education prior to Hurricane Katrina. Discourses are defined by Gubrium and Holstein (2000) as “working attitudes, modes of address, and terms of reference and courses of action suffused into social practices (p.490)” Gubrium and Holstein’s definition overlaps that of James Gee’s who states that different frameworks and sets of values that compete for control. Furthermore, people exhibit multiple identities that depend on the state of affairs being addressed. The following list describes some of the discourses that emerge in the history of New Orleans public education:
New Orleans is a unique place.

Many reasons contribute to the uniqueness of New Orleans in the United States and around the world. Among them is its recognition as the first urban school district in the United States. It is also known for its cuisine. I speak to this as a native New Orleanian. Seafood gumbo, stuffed bell peppers, turtle soup and bread pudding with whiskey sauce are amongst the delectable delights associated with the city.

Education is the state’s responsibility

According to the 10th amendment of the constitution powers not granted to federal government are reserved by the state. In Louisiana there is an obvious antagonism or tension between state and local lawmakers regarding education. This discord involved members of the State Legislature, Louisiana Department of Education, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the New Orleans City Council and School Board. Historically, lawmakers would argue over the amount of funding provided to New Orleans as opposed to rural communities during sessions of the state legislature. The New Orleans school district’s financial problem existed long before Hurricane Katrina. As teachers and principals prepared to open schools before the storm they spent personal money on items such as cleaning supplies. The state was not forthcoming with financial assistance. Instead they decided to appoint a fiscal administrator for the district, the firm of Alvarez and Marsal (Cowen, 2006, ‘National Model or Flawed approach?: The post-Katrina New Orleans Public Schools”, 2006. p.10).
Racism is alive and well.

The discourses of race, power and dominance circulate throughout the city and the school district. For example, the school district had been led by Blacks since the mid 1980’s. Anthony Amato, a Hispanic, was the superintendent prior to Hurricane Katrina. He was a “school reformer” hired by the board in January 2003. His appointment enraged members of the community “who declared that black students need, as a matter of principle, a black superintendent to guide them (DeBerry, 2005, p.1).” Amato’s tenure did not last very long with the New Orleans school district. He resigned on April 11, 2005 calling it a “mutually agreeable separation (Alpert, 2005)”. The board had lost confidence with Amato due to his authoritative style, seeking political support from the state when the board tried to fire him in 2004 and leading the school district into financial ruin (Alpert, 2005; DeBerry, 2005). His deputy superintendent, Ora Watson, a Black woman was named interim superintendent of the school district. Watson left the district in December 2006. Today the school district is being led by Darryl C. Kilbert, a veteran of the school system. Kilbert was a teacher, principal and worked in several administrative positions prior to his appointment (Ritea, 2006). Darryl is a McDonogh 35 graduate and a fellow member of my graduating class.

The New Orleans Public Schools have gone full circle with school segregation within the past 40 years: desegregation and resegregation for Black children. At different points in New Orleans school history, Black children, me included have lived through having separate schools; endured hateful racial slurs and humiliations while trying to get school officials to uphold the law, co-existed in integrated schools, and now are learning what it means to be separate and not equal once again.
Leaving all children behind.

There is a concern regarding the achievement gap in New Orleans public schools. This alarm is not isolated to the city of New Orleans. The widening of the achievement gap is a cause of unease in educators across the nation. As a whole, the state of Louisiana does not have an outstanding record in state accountability examinations administered to school children. Many people point to New Orleans and say that the city is not doing a good job of educating children. Let us, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education take over. Additionally, the United States Department of Education offers Louisiana the incentive to take over schools in a similar fashion to the Philadelphia Public School District. Philadelphia public schools were under the leadership of Paul Vallas. During his tenure schools began to privatize through the implementation of private and charter schools.

The New Orleans School District was showing poor academic achievement as evidenced by low test scores; a system riddled with scandal and fraud by its employees and the challenge of serving thousands of children in crumbling school facilities, test scores that showed that student achievement had fluctuated over the years. The aforementioned realities of the school district are the challenges that faced those responsible for recreating public education in a post-Katrina era.
Chapter 3

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the discourses prominent during the negotiations of the Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) Education Committee that resulted in publication of *Rebuilding and Transforming*, the final document of the committee’s work. I recognize that these negotiations did and will continue to play a prominent role in the reconstruction of New Orleans public schools. As the rebuilding of New Orleans serves as a model for urban development, BNOB’s negotiations about education foreshadow educational policies in other places. Furthermore, the conversations and decisions of the committee affect me on a personal level because of my relationship with the school district.

In order to follow those discourses, I use five sources of data. In Chapter Two, I presented a history of public education in New Orleans. Second, I engaged in a close reading and analysis of *Rebuilding and Transforming*. Third, I conducted a series of interviews with three members of the BNOB Education Committee in order to let the negotiations speak for themselves. Fourth, I analyzed ‘National Model’ or Flawed Approach?, a response to *Rebuilding and Transforming* prepared by The United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), the local teachers union. Finally, I examined “A Review and Critique of *Rebuilding and Transforming*: A Plan for World-Class Public Education in New Orleans” conducted by The National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans (NCQENO). NCQENO is an ad hoc group of educators that was commissioned by the Louisiana Congressional Black Caucus to write a response.

Each of the five data sources (re)present a different perspective into the possibilities for New Orleans schools. I recognized that in order to create a credible study I needed to triangulate resources beyond my reading of the negotiations. Using this variety of data sources offers
improved trustworthiness and reliability of my conclusions regarding New Orleans public education. Moreover, the perspectives demonstrate that the close examination of data policy and its meaning(s) are socially constructed and not developed from an objective point of view. The study of social construction of reality and meaning is called qualitative research.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) portray qualitative work as founded in a set of philosophical and theoretical traditions. They explain that traditions associated with this type of research involve four dimensions: epistemologies, theories, approaches and strategies. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis explain:

qualitative theory attempts to understand, interpret and explain complex and highly contextualized social phenomena such as classroom cultures, avid readers, or peer group development and maintenance. In this regard, it tends to be motivated by “how” and “why” questions as much as, if not more than “what” questions (p. 17).

Epistemologies are concerned with knowledge and how people come to have knowledge. Two major worldviews, objectivism and constructivism, come from an epistemological background. The objectivist position states that we live in a meaningful world where laws and truths can be identified with certainty. On the other hand, constructivists agree that objectivism does exist in the world. However, constructivists differ from objectivists when it comes to inherent meaning. Constructivists deem that meaning is not discovered, but constituted by interaction with objective reality (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Individuals and groups negotiate and construct meaning and social reality. I am a constructivist.

Theories are a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research to explain why something happens (Bogdon and Bilken, 2007). They are used to interpret and on occasion explain procedures and formations. According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, theories are not value free or universal. Rather, theories operate as a starting point for the researcher to begin study on a particular phenomenon. We develop social
theories regularly in our everyday lives in order to make sense of the world around us. Theorizing then is a survival skill. I had theories about New Orleans’ schools and their workings before I began this study. My current theories are more sophisticated than before, but are not different in kind. I use theory to make sense of the present and likely future of those schools after Katrina and BNOB.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) use the terms approaches and methodology interchangeably. Approaches describe the social formations that provide structure for designed research. In this case, political factions, the elite class and the working poor of the city of New Orleans are among the social formations involved in this study. An approach to research suggests the social theories we develop operate from conception to conclusions to implications. I began with a poststructural approach in which I assume that knowledge and theory are not disinterested, neutral, and objective or value free; rather they are connected with relations of power. The knowledge and theories used with the BNOB negotiations are therefore connected to social forces larger than the opinions and biographies of the individuals involved.

Strategies and methods are often considered synonymous. They are a plan or road map for exploring a phenomenon of interest. They explicate how researchers collect and analyze data and report their findings. As the researcher develops strategies for a study he/she must examine whether or not they are efficient, adequate and ethical. Methods used by qualitative research may include but are not limited to surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis. The primary methods used in this study were interviews, critical policy analysis and document analysis.

My study is an interpretive qualitative inquiry which is situated within Kamberelis and Dimitriadis’ genealogy of four philosophical approaches to qualitative research. They use the term chronotopes, which means “time-space” to connote specific ways to understand context and
the actions, agents, events and practices that constitute those approaches (p. 25). The figure below (see figure 3.1) illustrates the four chronotopes and their characteristics.

**Chronotope I: Objectivism & Representation**
- Knowledge is a “mirror of nature.”
- Correspondence theory of truth.
- Subjects and objects are separate and non-constitutive
- Language is neutral vehicle of thought.

**Chronotope II: Reading and Interpretation**
- Knowledge is socially constructed but value neutral.
- Consensus theory of truth
- Subjects and objects are separate but mutually constitutive.
- Language is constitutive of thought but not value neutral.

**Chronotope III: Skepticism, Conscientization, & Praxis**
- Knowledge socially constructive and inextricably linked to power relations.
- Truth is produced through dialogue written to “ideal speech situation.”
- Subjects and objects are separate but mutually constitutive.

**Chronotope IV: Power/Knowledge & Defamiliarization**
- Knowledge is an effect of existent power relations.
- Truth is an effect of power/knowledge
- Subjects and objects are both produced within existent relations of power.
- Language is a force among other forces that produce the real

Figure 3-1. Predominant Chronotopes of Qualitative Inquiry
The use of chronotopes in qualitative inquiry index durable historical realities that constitute what is common, natural, and expected by collectives of social scientists who conduct particular types of qualitative research (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 25).” Every time-space has been rationalized and theorized by philosophers before me. Depending on the philosophical stance of the researcher these chronotopes may operate in isolation, overlap or intersect with one another. My study seems to be situated in the intersection of chronotopes III and IV. My work supports these chronotopes because I believe:

- Knowledge is socially constructed and inextricably linked to power relations.
- Knowledge is an effect on existent power relations.
- Truth is an effect of power and knowledge.
- Subjects and objects are both produced within existent relations of power.
- Language is a force among other forces that produce the real (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 29).

Similarly, Lincoln and Denzin (2003) approach qualitative theory as a series of seven historical moments. The following list comprises the seven moments and their time periods:

- Traditional – 1900 – 1950
- Modernist or golden age – 1950 – 1970
- Crisis of representation – 1986 – 1990
- Postmodern, a period of experimental and new ethnographies 1990 – 1995
- The future (which is now) – 2000 – present

According to Denzin and Lincoln, we are experiencing the 7th moment (2000 – now) which deals with moral discourses and the development of sacred textualities. The 7th moment
urges the social sciences to become sites for critical conversation about democracy, race, gender, class, globalization, freedom and community (p.3). This supports my engagement with the historical aspect of qualitative inquiry and critical theory in my study as they reflect the times we live in.

Policy Analysis

I adapted the methods of critical policy analysis (Ball, 1994; Edmondson, 2004; Prunty, 1985) to analyze the BNOB Education Committee report. Critical policy analysis is an approach to policy studies that assumes that policy is historically and socially situated and replete with the values of its authors. Moreover, Ball (as cited by Edmondson, 2004, p. 14) describes policymaking as an authoritative allocation of values. Through the use of critical policy analysis, the reader discovers the mechanism through which policy is made and determines the values that are embedded within the policy.

Discourses

The world is organized around different frameworks or sets of values that compete for control in different situations. As human beings, when we act and interact in a given context others recognize the person as acting as a certain “kind of person” or multiple kinds of persons at once. This refers to the person’s identity or identities (Gee, 2000-2001, p 99). These multiple identities and discourses exist in our world and they are ordered differently for every individual (Gee, 2001). For example, my discourses for this study emanate from multiple roles. They include being a researcher, New Orleanian, student, teacher, friend, colleague and family member. The order of discourse is dependent on my location and the circumstance (p. 2). This
aligns with Michel Foucault’s poststructural position where the researcher is always filtering through the lens of language, social class, race and ethnicity.

Furthermore, using a discursive framework meant that I could use each of the data sources as text and determine the major themes or tenets that evolve from each source. For instance, I could have interviewed any of the members of the BNOB Education Committee, analyze the interview transcripts and describe the meaning each person made of their experience. This would have been possible because the discourses that emerged through committee discussions are reflective of the individuals at the table and the social world beyond (Gee, 2000-2001). Case in point, a businessman’s primary discourse would revolve around how a business organization operates: the BNOB Education Committee and its plan *Rebuilding and Transforming* would provide goods and services to consumers. In this case, the consumers are the parents and children of New Orleans. Also, business representatives bring knowledge and values associated with the race, social class, gender and political views. All committee members represented their discourse group memberships mediated by their personal biographies into distinct hierarchies during their times together.

**Data Source One: Rebuilding and Transforming**

Applying critical analysis to understand *Rebuilding and Transforming* is most appropriate for three reasons. First, a functionalist approach to analyzing policy would not be useful because while it may be considered an efficient way of examining policy, it does not look beyond the surface for the hidden values that lie within the policy (Stevens, 2003). Second, due to the impact of Hurricane Katrina as it relates to the future of the city, I believe it is necessary to discern who the decision makers were, how and why they arrived at the choices they did, and
which lenses were used to guide their decisions. Third, how would the committee’s plan ultimately impact the education of the children of New Orleans?

Such analyses pose questions that examine the social, political, historical, and economic realities that define and shape policy in particular contexts (Edmondson, p. 8). In order to identify the values and assumptions within the dominant discourses of the final report, this study is organized according to Edmondson’s four critical analysis questions. The following are her questions in relation to the BNOB Education Committee’s plan Rebuilding and Transforming, which is examined in this study.

Table 3-1. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the policy?</td>
<td>Defines policy analysis in order to determine whether or not the final document is a policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the policy makers</td>
<td>Identifies the individuals and areas of expertise selected by the mayor of New Orleans to serve on the BNOB Education Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the major tenets of the policy?</td>
<td>Explains the main ideas and the values embedded within the final document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the likely consequences of the policy?</td>
<td>Indicates what might happen to public education in New Orleans as a result of this document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Edmondson, 2004, p.5)

Data Source Two: Interviews with members of the Bring New Orleans Education Committee

In-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1996, p.7). Steinar Kvale (1996) defines an interview as literally an "inter view", a conversation or an exchange of views about a topic of mutual interest (p. 14). Moreover, Fontana and Frey (2003) describe interviewing as a common and powerful way to understand human beings. Interviewing enables the researcher to understand
the lived experience of the subject from the subject’s own perspective. I posit the data emerging from the interviews will allow me to understand the discourses, interpret how consensus was achieved and explicate the proposed course of direction for public education in New Orleans in a post Katrina setting.

Seidman refers to this process as "in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing (p.15). Likewise, Seidman (2006) writes that "when people tell stories, they select details of their experience from the stream of consciousness (p .7)." Mishler (1986) notes that “telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning (p.67)” . Denzin and Lincoln (2003) support this point of view by stating, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p.5)".

Interviewing can be structured, semi-structured, informal or surveys with preset questions (Byrne, 2001). Seidman’s method utilizes open-ended questions. It provides the interviewee the opportunity to expound on their responses. Seidman supports a “three series” set of interviews. This means interviews are conducted with a person on three separate occasions. Seidman suggests that each interview should not exceed 90 minutes. During the first interview, the interviewer asks the informant to tell as much about their selves in relationship to the topic up to the present time. The second interview concentrates on the informant’s current or lived experience. The final interview asks the informant to reflect on the meaning of their experience. In order to insure that the interviews included basic relevant information I asked the following open ended questions during each of the interviews.

**First Interview:**

- Tell me about your experiences in New Orleans public school education prior to Hurricane Katrina.
Tell me about your Katrina experience. Did you evacuate? Where did you relocate? For how long?

**Second Interview:**

- Tell me about your current experience in New Orleans public education.
- Tell me about your experience with the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee.

**Third Interview:**

- How do you visualize the future of public education in New Orleans?
- How do you think the recommendations of the BNOB Education Committee will impact the future of public education in New Orleans?
- What meaning did you make of this experience?

Upon completion of the each interview I transcribed the audio recording into written text.

**Data Source Three: “National Model’ or Flawed Approach?**

The United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), the local teachers union, in conjunction with the Louisiana Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers produced a written response to *Rebuilding and Transforming*. Their purpose was to engage in a dialogue regarding the report from a labor perspective. The union’s document presented a brief history of New Orleans public education that included state accountability reports as well as reactions from teachers, parents and community members. UTNO scrutinized the final recommendations of the BNOB Education Committee and expressed their concerns in relation to each one. Finally, they explicate their beliefs regarding the future of public education for the children of New Orleans.
Data Source Four: The National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans

The National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans (NCQENO) conducted A Review and Critique of Rebuilding and Transformation: a Plan for World-Class Public Education in New Orleans. NCQENO was commissioned by the Louisiana Legislature Black Caucus to produce the report. Similar to the UTNO document, NCQENO’s concerns addressed the well being of New Orleans public school students and the transparency of implementing the recommendations proposed by Rebuilding and Transforming. I conducted a close examination of each response using the same questions that guided my policy analysis in new data source two.

Data Analysis

All forms of data were treated as texts in order to identify the social forces (discourses) within them. Each (re)presents the BNOB Education Committee process and product but from different perspectives. I used Miles and Huberman (1994) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) to manage the themes signified in the statements. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain data collection as a selective process. It is impossible to use each line, phrase or thought from transcripts and published documents when moving toward data analysis (p. 56). Therefore, I followed their methodology for reducing the ideas into themes.

To begin, codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the transcripts compiled during the study. The researcher attaches a label to a word, phrase, paragraph or group of words (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56). This process is called “open coding” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, 1987). Open coding provides the researcher the opportunity to brainstorm and sift through the data. During this period the researcher designates a word or phrase to correspond with a piece of labeled information. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain that the
The following is an excerpt from an interview.

R: I know that there was some talk from the politicians in Algiers about creating a Charter school district, a district by itself, which in my opinion and I don’t have any evidence to back this up, was perhaps the start of Algiers pulling away from New Orleans. Much like Zachary did in Baton Rouge or Baker did in Baton Rouge or you know that kind of stuff.

R: And, and so when educators and everybody else started looking around they realized the Algiers schools were a viable choice. Well we had this proposal going. Let’s hurry up and get this proposal done. Everybody agreed that they’re just going to let it sail through without a lot of commotion so we can get schools up and running.

M: So that was the BESE board and . . .

R: BESE Board, Orleans Parish school board, the legislature, the governor’s office, the state superintendent, everybody.

M: Everybody agreed, okay.

R: And what’s said is Orleans didn’t have to go back on their word and open schools because Algiers opened schools. You know that kind of thing. I think with all that cooperation we started on a really solid footing.

Table 3.2 presents an example of the open coding process.
Table 3-2. Open Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHRASES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>some talk from the politicians in Algiers about creating a Charter school district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like Zachary did in Baton Rouge or Baker did in Baton Rouge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when educators and everybody else started looking around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>let’s hurry up and get this proposal done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let it sail through without a lot of commotion so we can get schools up and running.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESE Board, Orleans Parish school board, the legislature, the governor’s office, the state superintendent, everybody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s said is Orleans didn’t have to go back on their word and open schools because Algiers opened schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think with all that cooperation we started on a really solid footing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anselm Strauss (1987) suggests that the first step in the coding process is to ask a set of questions of the data (p. 30). Strauss believes this is necessary to determine the relevancy of data to the research question? The following questions represent a sample used to determine relevance:

- Does the response fall in a particular category? (e.g. politics)
- What elements related directly to quality education?
- What elements related to directly personal experience?
- What elements related to the future of New Orleans public schools?

Question: What sample of phrases (codes) are related to politics or education (or both)?
The phrases listed above fell into the following categories:

Table 3.3. Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLITICS</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>some talk from the politicians in Algiers about creating a Charter school district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like Zachary did in Baton Rouge or Baker did in Baton Rouge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when educators and everybody else started looking around</td>
<td>when educators and everybody else started looking around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let’s hurry up and get this proposal done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let it sail through without a lot of commotion so we can get schools up and running.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESE Board, Orleans Parish school board, the legislature, the governor’s office, the state superintendent, everybody.</td>
<td>BESE Board, Orleans Parish school board, the legislature, the governor’s office, the state superintendent, everybody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>what’s said is Orleans didn’t have to go back on their word and open schools because Algiers opened schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think with all that cooperation we started on a really solid footing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The open coding process yields a multiple of categories from the data. In my case open coding data yielded 51 codes. Attempting to manipulate 51 codes into themes or categories is an unrealistic expectation. The next step of coding is called “axial coding” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Axial coding required (see Table 3.3) relating the codes to one another. This exercise required that I constantly read and reread my transcripts. At this point, I began to compare code against code looking for similarities and differences among them, reducing the number of codes in the process.
Conclusion

In conclusion, I use four data sources to answer my resource question, what were the animating discourses that directed the BNOB process for brokering consensus concerning the educational plans for New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina? The first data source is the final publication of the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee “Rebuilding and Transforming.” I perform a close reading and analysis of Rebuilding and Transforming using the framework of established by Jacqueline Edmondson in Understanding and applying critical policy study: reading educators advocating for change (2004). I carefully chose the Rebuilding and Transforming publication as a data choice because it serves as the foundation of the study. The report provides the benchmark to understanding my research questions. Moreover, I will be comparing the values found in Rebuilding and Transforming with other documents explained in subsequent paragraphs.

The second data source details interviews with three informants who served on the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee. The transcription of the interviews allows me to delve into rich descriptions presented by past, present and future interactions of the informants with public education and their experience with the BNOB Education Committee. Furthermore, I analyze the data using methodology developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), Strauss and Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Strauss (1987) to determine what values and themes emerge from the interview process.

‘National Model’ or Flawed Approach, a report prepared by the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) the local teacher’s union and their state affiliates provide the third data source of my study. UTNO was the largest teacher’s union in the state of Louisiana. The union’s response to Rebuilding and Transforming allows me to view the report through the eyes of the labor perspective. Finally, A Review and Critique of Rebuilding and Transforming: a Plan for World-
Class Education in New Orleans created by the National Coalition of Quality Education in New Orleans offers another opinion regarding of *Rebuilding and Transforming* and its possibilities. As with data source one, Critical policy analysis by Edmondson (2004) and the coding process advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994), Strauss and Corbin (2008) and Strauss (1987) were used to analyze data sources three and four. The rich data within each document provides the opportunity to analyze each document singularly and compare them collectively. This process also lends itself to the validity and trustworthiness of the study. The data will speak for itself and not represent my single voice and opinion.
Chapter 4

EDUCATIONAL GREENFIELD: A CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS OF PLANS TO TRANSFORM NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Imagine this scenario: a gray landscape caked with mud, slivers of wood that were once homes, automobiles toppled over, schools closed and business at a standstill. This was New Orleans’ reality in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. How does a city cope with such loss? New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin recognized that rebuilding the city of New Orleans would be a daunting task; one he believed would require commitment from every level of government as well as contributions from the private sector. In the weeks and months following Katrina, Nagin invited civic leaders, businessmen, philanthropists and educators to become part of the rebuilding effort called Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) and created the BNOB Commission. Its charge was to develop ideas and plans to restore and rebuild the city. Mayor Nagin appointed an overall steering committee and designated subcommittees for education, urban planning, land use, culture, economic development, government effectiveness and health and social services. Clearly the concerns of these subcommittees overlapped and Commission members were appointed to multiple subcommittees in order to develop continuity in planning. This chapter examines the work of the BNOB Education Committee with particular attention to its plan, *Rebuilding and Transforming*, providing a close analysis of ideas and values inscribed in the plan.

I adapted the methods of critical policy analysis (Ball, 1994; Edmondson, 2004; Prunty, 1985) to analyze *Rebuilding and Transforming*. Critical policy analysis is an approach to policy studies that assumes that policy is historically and socially situated and replete with the values of its authors. Moreover, Ball (as cited by Edmondson, 2004, p. 14) describes policymaking as an authoritative allocation of values. Through the use of critical policy analysis, the reader discovers
the mechanism through which policy is made and determines the values that are embedded within the policy. Applying critical analysis to understand *Rebuilding and Transforming* is most appropriate for three reasons. First, a functionalist approach to analyzing policy would not be useful because, while it may be considered an efficient way of examining policy, it does not look beyond the surface for the hidden values that lie within the policy (Stevens, 2003). Second, due to the impact of Hurricane Katrina as it relates to the future of the city, I believe it is necessary to discern who the decision makers were, how and why arrived at the choices they did, and which lenses were used to guide their decisions. Third, how would the committee’s plan ultimately impact the education of the children of New Orleans?

Such analyses pose questions that examine the social, political, historical, and economic realities that define and shape policy in particular contexts (Edmondson, p. 8). In order to identify the values and assumptions within the dominant discourses within the final report, this study is situated according to Edmondson’s four critical analysis questions. Table 4.1 provides the four questions and definitions associated with each one.

Table 4-1. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the policy?</td>
<td>Defines policy analysis in order to determine whether or not the final document is a policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the policy makers?</td>
<td>Identifies the individuals and areas of expertise selected by the mayor of New Orleans to serve on the BNOB Education Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the major tenets of the policy?</td>
<td>Explains the main ideas and the values embedded within the final document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the likely consequences of the policy?</td>
<td>Indicates what might happen to public education in New Orleans as a result of this document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Edmondson, 2004, p.5)
Toward that end, I set a brief historical context for the Committee’s work, provide a close reading of the report and identify seven themes. As a result of Hurricane Katrina’s devastation, New Orleans’ citizens not only have an opportunity to physically rebuild many of its schools, but also the opportunity to restructure their school district and address its longstanding, deep-rooted problems – segregation, achievement gaps, and corruption. The choices this community makes and those made for them offer more than an opportunity to change the ways public schools are conducted in the New Orleans area. Because of the national and international attention New Orleans attracted during and after the storm, and the slow and apparently racist response of the federal government to its victims needs, the choices being made for the rebuilding of the city’s schools have far reaching implications for public schooling in this country and around the globe.

**Historical Context**

Many educators, reporters, and political pundits agreed with Governor Blanco that New Orleans has the opportunity to develop a state-of-the-art school system and to create a model for the United States (Capochoino, 2006; Dingerson, 2006; P. Hill & Hannaway, 2006; Leonard, 2007; Robelen, 2005b; Tillotson, 2006). According to Paul Hill (2005) in the case of post hurricane New Orleans, American school planners will be as close as they have ever come to having a ‘greenfield’ opportunity: a large public school system will need to be built from scratch” (p. 1). Greenfield is an economic term that denotes a previously undeveloped site for commercial development. By using this term, Hill implied that the project lacks any constraint based on prior work or history. Although this project is exciting to educators in New Orleans, it might also appeal to school reformers outside of public education. They, too, may consider this once-in-a-lifetime chance to encourage a city-wide business approach, and advocate for privatization of the schools.
Analysis of the Education Committee Report

To begin this analysis, I read *Rebuilding and Transforming* in its entirety to develop a strategy for evaluating the document. This required reading the document many times before deciding whether or not to view it as a plan or policy. I chose to read the document as a policy because of the possibility that the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BSE pronounced Bessie) would adopt the plan as a policy.

What is the Committee Policy?

The BNOB Education Committee met for the first time in October 2005, gathered data from over 1,500 scattered New Orleans citizens, interviewed over 40 experts, and wrote a detailed 46-page report four months later ([http://education.tulane.edu/documents/FINALReport](http://education.tulane.edu/documents/FINALReport)). The Boston Consulting Group assisted Committee members in gathering and summarizing the data (see Table 4.2).

The Education Committee’s report *Rebuilding and Transforming* was much more about transforming than rebuilding. The plan focused on what public education in New Orleans should be or could be in the long run rather than what needed to take place to rebuild the school system immediately. The difference between these concepts is apparent in the focus of the Educational Network Model. The model has four key components: (1) learning and achievement for all students, preparing them for college and lifelong learning; (2) empowering schools with equitable time, money, and talented people and then holding them accountable, (3) establishing an administrative network of public, charter and private schools with a lean central control, and (4) making schools community centers with social services and recreation. “To succeed, our committee, the Orleans Parish School Board, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary
Education, and the Louisiana Recovery Authority will all need to work together. It is critical that we endorse one single plan . . .” (p. 5).
### Table 4-2. Examples of Data Collection Compiled by the BNOB Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF DATA</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION</th>
<th># OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Discussion</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Houston, TX, Baton Rouge, LA, St. John the Baptist Parish, LA</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Houston, TX, Baton Rouge, LA, St. John the Baptist Parish, LA</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey conducted</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA, New Orleans, LA</td>
<td>≥ 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at town meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Survey</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>≥ 370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference calls</td>
<td>Leadership of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>United Teachers of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*representing ≥ 25</td>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Survey</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*representing ≥ 80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference calls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online – Paper Survey</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: final report – *Rebuilding and Transforming*

**Who Are the Policy Makers?**

If policy is an authoritative allocation of values, then the backgrounds of persons on the Education Committee should provide some insight into the discourses that dominated the discussions about the New Orleans schools. Mayor Nagin appointed the following 18 members to the BNOB Education Committee, announcing Tulane University President Scott Cowen as chair. Cowen was a member of the BNOB Steering Committee as well. Cowen is a professor of economics and business, and under his leadership as President, Tulane increased its endowment...
significantly as well as closed its teacher education program. He serves on the boards of directors of Newell Rubbermaid, American Greeting Corporation, Jo-Ann Stores, and Forest Enterprises.

Table 4-3 Steering Committee Members of the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scott Cowen</td>
<td>President – Tulane University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Forman</td>
<td>President and Chief Executive Officer of the Audubon Nature Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason Granger</td>
<td>President and General Manager of the local NBC television affiliate WDSU-TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Roberti</td>
<td>Managing director – Alvarez and Marsal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Garton</td>
<td>Executive Director – Teach for America of Greater New Orleans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Waller</td>
<td>Global Telecom Solution Executive for IBM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Hall</td>
<td>Chief Operative Officer – Broad Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Shelton</td>
<td>Education Program Director - Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neari Warner</td>
<td>Past President of Grambling State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Johnson</td>
<td>Chancellor of Delgado Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil Picard</td>
<td>Superintendent of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Wallin</td>
<td>Deputy Superintendent – Louisiana Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Johnson</td>
<td>Member – Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie Jacobs</td>
<td>Member - Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis Landrieu</td>
<td>President - Orleans Parish School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Laurie</td>
<td>Principal - O. Perry Walker Charter High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Recasner</td>
<td>Director - New Orleans Charter School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father William Maestri</td>
<td>Superintendent of Schools - Archdiocese of New Orleans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) was contracted by the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee to record the minutes of both committee and community meetings, gather and analyze data, and produce a document that reflected the data. The BCG describes themselves as “agents of change.” Their mission statement includes the following commitment to their clients:

...
Creating competitive advantage through unique solutions

Building capabilities and mobilizing organizations

Driving sustainable impact

Providing unparalleled opportunities for personal growth

Succeeding together with passion and trust

The BCG asks clients to think of them as “the partner of choice to transform business and society (www.bcg.com).” The BCG website presents the company as a change agent for business. The Boston Consulting Group recently conducted an annual survey of top executives to provide the foundation of Business Week’s 25 most innovative companies (www.businessweek.com). There is nothing on the organization's website that indicated the group ever had any interaction with public education.

A 27-member advisory council supported the Education Committee’s work. Nine members comprised a panel for expert testimony from Rand Education, Cambridge Education, and the Norfolk, VA, Oakland, CA, and Philadelphia, PA, public school systems. Thomas Luce, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning and Evaluation of the U. S. Department of Education represented the federal government on the Committee. Since the report was published, Mr. Luce has left public service to work for the Broad Foundation. Also, Mason Granger has left New Orleans to become program director of grants for the Hearst Foundations in New York City, and Alex Johnson has moved to Pittsburgh to become president of the Community College of Allegheny County.

In total, the composition of the Education Committee appears to be a balance of private and public, business and education, local and national, with a slight imbalance of race and gender. More than half are White (New Orleans had nearly a 70% African American population before Katrina) and two thirds were male (to plan the future of a school system in a profession that is overwhelmingly female).
Data Gathering

To begin their work, the Committee developed a vision statement and wrote a set of beliefs. The basic rationale for reorganization of the school district was to attract people and businesses back to New Orleans. In order to accomplish this goal, the schools would be recreated as learner-centered environments that care for the academic, emotional, and social needs of all students, directing each toward post-secondary education and inculcating the principles of lifelong learning. There would be an immediate reorganization to include best practices by the top teachers available, leading to a dramatic improvement within three years, and a complete overhaul by 2025. During this period, New Orleans students would score within the top 10% among schools in America through a clear and dedicated system of school accountability. This is clearly the language of American school reform beginning with the A Nation at Risk report from 1983. The statement is well “within the box” of current school reform driving the vision of nearly every school district in the country. Such plans lean heavily on the functional outcomes of schooling – postsecondary and lifelong learning – in order to be attractive to businesses.

The process for acting on this vision statement required consultation with stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, and administrators) and educational experts; urban schools performing well on standardized tests, and researchers being familiar with the performance of New Orleans school prior to Katrina. With this information, the Committee would develop an educational network model that would drive redevelopment of the New Orleans schools. Some of the consultations presented substantial problems and others required the Committee to make value judgments before these data were collected. For example, many New Orleans citizens were widely dispersed across the Southeast because their homes and jobs had been destroyed in the storm, and their financial resources did not enable them to return to the city quickly. The Committee conducted a series of open meetings at New Orleans schools, held town meetings in
Houston and Baton Rouge, and distributed digital and paper surveys to available identified citizens. In all, the report shows that more than 1,500 stakeholders participated in this consultation process in some form or fashion. The Boston Consulting Group collected and consolidated these data into “six aspirations voiced by all stakeholders”: top quality schools in every neighborhood, qualified teachers, supportive environments for teaching and learning, safe schools, involvement of the community and representations of the spirit of New Orleans. To support these aspirations or conclusions, the report includes quotations from the stakeholders’ responses. The following statements are a sampling of those responses:

Schools should treat all children as having unlimited potential and should set high expectations. Kids know when they are expected to fail and often meet these expectations. – Parent

I would like to see teachers supported at an extraordinary level with regard to professional development with real, solid, day-to-day support on a consistent basis. – Administrator

I want a school where the teachers are in control of the students, not the students in control of the teacher. – Student

We have got to stop waiting for parents to show up. We have got to get out there and bring the school to the parents. – Teacher

The report offers little explanation concerning how the high-performing schools were selected for review. Two decisions seemed to drive the selection process. First, test scores were to be the primary data for consideration; and second, schools experiencing reform aligned closely
with the Committee’s vision statement. Although these are not surprising criteria, they do not constitute a wide survey of alternative ways in which schools serve communities and students. Rather the Committee choices confirmed their vision as correct without evidence – standards; high accountability, standardization, and efficiency were “must haves.” Again, the Boston Consulting Group compiled these data and display examples from “highly successful schools” within not so successful school districts and school districts experimenting with such school reform.

The Committee’s Recommendations

From consultations with stakeholders, high performing schools, and educational experts, the Committee created 10 key design principles for reorganizing and rebuilding the New Orleans school system. (Apparently, the experts confirmed the data from the other two groups because expert input is not represented explicitly in the report.) In this report, a Parthenon-like visual representation of these principles conveys the Committee’s values nicely, with the contextual features (the distinctiveness of New Orleans) shown above the principles. Safety is the foundation and standards are the pinnacle. Columns of support include access, talent, alignment, parent involvement, and efficiency, with a header of decentralized governance and high accountability. In a short paragraph following the enumeration of the 10 principles, the report considers New Orleans’ “cultural distinctiveness”, which it characterizes as arts and music in the curriculum and the chance to prepare for non-traditional educational opportunities in the immediate New Orleans region, e.g., trade and culinary schools.

To deliver on the 10 principles, the Committee proposes an educational network model, which encompasses smaller collectives of “charter, contract, and system run schools” in a loosely organized centralized district. To make its case for the network model, the Committee compares it
with “command and control” and “all single charter” models, arguing that the former stifles innovation and the latter lacks the means for maintaining accountability. Without data or even testimonial, the report concludes that the network model is best for New Orleans because it provides for a lean administration while ensuring accountability, provides economy of scale, fosters troubleshooting, is customer centric, and provides for student mobility. After giving this rationale for using the network model, the report asserts that a network offers the flexibility to handle the unknowns of the repopulation of New Orleans both immediately and over time. The Committee predicts that the proposed network model will transform the look and feel of New Orleans Public Schools as follows:

- From students that underachieve to the top 10 percent in achievement of standards, graduation rates, and college and workforce readiness;
- From different treatment of “haves” and “have nots” to equal opportunity for all students;
- From schools below safety and maintenance standards to safe, well appointed and maintained schools;
- From inequitable and inadequate funding to equitable funding highly competitive with other urban districts;
- From “command and control” organization to networks that work;
- From corruption to fact-based strategies.

The report ends with 10 steps to ensure these transformations. To begin, all stakeholders must endorse the Committee’s plan and develop a six-month schedule of operation. Legal matters must be altered in order to build the networks around charter schools and to reduce the central control. Various levels of oversight must be established, including the transformation of the Committee into a monitoring body, the appointment of a national advisory council, and an
aligned school board. Finally, internal and external communications must be centralized and active.

What Major Values Are the Basis of the Study?

The composition of the Education Committee, the process of its development of a plan, and the report of the plan reveal a set of values at work in the design of new public schools for New Orleans. Rather than being outside the box as Governor Blanco suggested ("Highlights of the Louisiana Legislature, Special Session", 2005), the Committee appointments, procedures, and outcome are well within the parameters of school reform rhetoric of the last 25 years. The language of the Rebuilding and Transforming report echoes phrases from the federal government’s reform efforts (A Nation at Risk, Goals 2000, America Reads; America 2000; and No Child Left Behind), philanthropists (Gates – small schools; Walton – vouchers and privatization; Broad – incentives for test scores), and business (the Business Roundtable). In fact, the Committee’s plan for New Orleans is nearly identical to the Business Roundtable’s nine essential elements of successful schools: standards, performance assessment, school accountability, school autonomy, professional development for teachers and administrators based on standards, learning readiness, parent involvement, technology, and safety.
Table 4-4. Essential Components of a Successful Education System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee</th>
<th>Business Roundtable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clear goal of preparing students for success at the post-secondary level</td>
<td>Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal access to high quality schools for every student in every community</td>
<td>Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School autonomy coupled with equitable allocation of school resources</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent, data-driven measurement and accountability</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong leadership at the school level</td>
<td>School Autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-performing teachers who are fully committed to educating students</td>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development and mentorship programs aligned with school goals</td>
<td>Learning Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and communities engaged to support student success</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective and efficient services supporting each school’s mission</td>
<td>Safety and Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and orderly facilities designed for learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because there is little variance from this one size fits all business approach or the Committee’s initial 10 principles, these organizational principles appear to have been established before any data were gathered. The contents of the report, then, contradict the Committee’s declaration that “this plan was developed by New Orleanians for New Orleans” (p. 6). Beneath this broad “what’s good for business is good for America” value lie at least seven specific values as described below: (1) schools as a business, (2) new is better than old, (3) private is better than public, (4) money talks, (5) outside experts know more than local citizens, (6) White is better than Black, and (7) flexibility is key.

Value 1: Schools as a business.

Not only does the Committee wish to adopt business goals, but they also wish to employ business methods for organizing the schools. First, the Committee report suggests that New Orleans schools should “commit to a fact-based process” (p. 4), relying on bottom line data (test scores, efficiencies in expenses, and capacity building) to make decisions. Second, the Committee chose to “benchmark” (p. 6) New Orleans schools against school systems that would show New Orleans schools lacking in desired areas. Third, the report rationalized the need for high educational standards based upon business claims for the increased demands of a global economy – “numerous economists have pointed out; we’ve reached a point where knowledge and skill requirements for further education, work, and citizenship have converged” (p. 16). Each of these examples implies that before Katrina, the New Orleans schools ran on fictions, isolation, and neglect, using only local knowledge and history as their guides. Although facts, comparison, and conflation of private and public goals are classic market-based criteria, they are not necessarily
the way that business works in the United States in order to gain market advantage, particularly during the George W. Bush administration.

Value 2: New is better than old.

In fact, the Committee projects the value that everything new is better than old. Granted, before Katrina, the New Orleans schools faced many challenges, but the Rebuilding and Transforming report scarcely has a kind word to say about the past. Committee members act as if the citizens of New Orleans (including several of the panel members) had nothing to do with the prior state of distress within the school district. Rather they imply that only the storm could have provided the opportunity for intervention. The report makes the “new is better” value explicit when it explains that the anticipated fundamental transformation of the schools from “disaster to nirvana” will result from its plan. Were there no previous local successes to report? No benchmarks to emulate? Were all the schools completely unrepresentative of New Orleans’ history, culture, and society?

Value 3: Private is better than public.

Private solutions are valued over public according to the report. Perhaps the most obvious representation of this value is the continuous reference to New Orleans charter schools as fundamental to any solution. Although funded by public taxes, charter schools are not required to have the same public transparency as public schools. Charter schools are designed to be alternatives to public schools, a uniqueness that is used to legitimize their existence. Rebuilding and Transforming would still permit local citizens and private contractors to apply for such charters. According to Dingerson (2006), even these modest rules were relaxed in the New
Orleans schools after Katrina. Of course, this direction could be anticipated from Mayor Nagin’s selection of the membership for the Committee. Mary Garton’s Teach for America program bypasses public certification for teachers, and the Rev. Maestri directs the city’s largest system of private schools. Linking private solutions with business, the report recommends subcontracting many vital school services, including maintenance, safety, teacher development, and even school administration.

**Value 4: Money talks.**

The adage “**money talks**” is evident in the Committee’s plan. From the outset, Mayor Nagin announced that the rebuilding of New Orleans would be a public and private undertaking. Federal and state funds would not be sufficient to make the city attractive to business and repopulation. Various organizations approached New Orleans’ leaders in order to offer financial assistance and the new entrepreneurs of disaster applied for contracts in order to provide services that New Orleans civic and public servants could no longer manage due to loss of tax revenue and previous efforts to privatize such services. Each funding agency, public or private, stipulated how their donations could be used. For example, $21 million in federal funding was allocated to Louisiana for New Orleans schools, but was earmarked only for charter schools. New Orleans public school board vice president Lourdes Moran channeled some of these federal funds into turning 13 city schools (which received minimal damage) into charter status, with the Algiers Charter School Association as the governing body. Donations from the Gates and Broad Foundations also required that the funds be directed to charter schools (Capochino, 2005a; Dingerson, 2006; Tonn, 2006).
Value 5: Outside experts know more than local citizens.

With its representation of the selection of BNOB members, the gathering of information, and the decision making, *Rebuilding and Transforming* conveys the value that **outside experts know more about how to renew New Orleans than its local citizens.** Corporate presidents, executive directors, chancellors, and executives outnumber the public school personnel 16 to 1 on the Committee. None of the Committee members represents the service workers who enable the tourist industry to flourish and whose children populate the public school system. Efforts to gather concerns from the dispossessed in New Orleans were meager, and they were handled by The Boston Consulting Group, a diverse, global consulting firm designed to develop competitive strategies in order to attract new business to a region. In the Group’s hands, the data suggest that the public concerns mimicked those of business and experts. If this were true, then the local experts and business representatives were not needed. If this were not true, then the locals were silenced or had words put in their mouths. As the Committee report suggests, New Orleans citizens know little about education and schooling because the panel of nine education experts included only one from New Orleans, a child psychologist from Tulane University. The remaining members were from other parts of the country.

Value 6: White is better than Black.

The report makes a fetish of the organizational structure for the “new” New Orleans School District, with the Committee working hard to make its point that **public/private organizations are more flexible and capable than completely public ones.** The authors devoted 10 of the 46 pages to a discussion of this structure – “one single plan” (p. 5; p. 38). Although the report calls for the schools to be directed based on research and data, rather than on
history and tradition, it justifies its proposed administrative model without reference to any research or data. Rather it makes bold claims borrowed from business models (“lean systems allow,” “can facilitate the sharing,” and “customer centric shared service model”), and then rationalizes the decision to adopt its model based on “the current reality of New Orleans” (p. 32). The current reality of New Orleans in 2006 was anyone’s guess, and its future was (is) yet to be determined. The uncertain future could be used to justify any system, particularly if the data are not required. Derrick Bell (2004) argues that such flexibility in school systems has thwarted efforts to enforce Brown v. the Board of Education rulings across the country, enabling the resegregation of the schools and inequity in schooling.

**Value 7: Flexibility is key.**

According to the Education Committee report, the **historical legacy of racism and classism in New Orleans and its public school system can be easily overcome by creating a flexible structure**. The authors make five explicit references (pp. 5, 6, 12, 26, 34) to race and class within the 46 page document. In contrast, the authors refer to charter schools over 100 times. All of the references to race and class are included in calls for equal opportunities to learn from the past and to close the gap between Whites and Blacks and middle class and poor. The strongest statement is ascribed to a “teacher” during the interviews – “the most important thing to me is that all children, regardless of race, economic background, religion, etc., receive the same education and access to resources” (italics original p. 12). Throughout the report, the authors make statements about inequities and previous problems, but they do not explain why and how these inequities and problems arose in the first place or why they persisted for decades. Perhaps the most explicit example is labeled Exhibit 18: The New Model Will Fundamentally Transform the Look and Feel of New Orleans Public Schools. The descriptive column of the current school
system lists underachievement, different treatment, unsafe schools, inequitable funding, command and control approach, and ineffective leadership. In other parts of the report, the student population is called “highly mobile,” “reluctant,” and “poorly informed.” Little explanation is given for these conditions, or for the problems that plagued the New Orleans schools before the hurricane flooded much of the city. All that is offered is a declaration that high standards, a recommendation for more charter schools, and a commitment to a network model will bring marked progress within three years and complete transformation by 2025.

*Rebuilding and Transforming* is a crucial element in the course of this dissertation study. It represents the foundation for the discussion that took place regarding the rebuilding and reopening of New Orleans Public Schools after Hurricane Katrina. The committee members do not reflect New Orleans’s population before or after Katrina. Is it fair to allow certain voices to be privileged over others? *Rebuilding and Transforming* chronicles the conceptualization, development and final production of the BNOB Education Committee’s work. This final product serves as the best artifact to discover the discourses emanating from this study.
Chapter 5

UNRAVELING THE STORIES

In order to triangulate a reading of *Rebuilding and Transforming*, I gathered and analyzed three other readings of the document. First, I interviewed three members of the BNOB education committee in order to obtain an insider’s representation. Second, I read closely the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) response (National Model or Flawed Approach?) to the public release of *Rebuilding and Transforming*. Third, I conducted a critical policy analysis of the National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans (NCQENO) commissioned report on *Rebuilding and Transforming*. I present these analyses separately in this chapter with the intention of comparing all with the historical analyses of chapter two and my analysis of chapter four within the final chapter of the study.

Section One: Inside position

The purpose of the interviews was to consider an insider position on the process and product of the BNOB education committee. I theorized that in participants’ narratives, I would find both themes and animating discourses of their work. While the emphases placed on those themes and discourses might vary among committee members, I assumed that the social discourses of all would blend with the personally persuasive discourses of the individuals. In order to assure the local New Orleans discourses would be considered in these narratives I selected participants for interviews who were “from” New Orleans and connected to regional, state and national groups. My lifetime in New Orleans schools positioned me as a knowledgeable audience enabling participants to refer to the history and present circumstances without detailed explanation.
Participants

The three participants of this study were invited to serve on the BNOB education committee because they were well respected as educators and outstanding members of the community.

Dr. Riedlinger had been a successful principal at two award-winning schools while an employee of the Orleans Parish School Board. He spearheaded The School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans which places a strong emphases on giving principals and others the skills and resources needed to become effective leaders who thoughtfully improve teaching and learning in their schools http://www.slc-gno/aboutus.html.

Mrs. Laurie had an outstanding record as an administrator in both the central office of the Orleans Parish school district and at the school site. In particular, during her leadership at Carter G. Woodson Middle School test scores increased and the school was earmarked to remain a middle school as the district moved toward restructuring school in a Kindergarten through 8th grade configuration.

Dr. Johnson was a member of several boards on the city, state and national among them The Louisiana Recovery Authority, American Council on Education, American Association for Community Colleges and The School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans ("Gov. Blanco appoints three to Louisiana Recovery Authority Board", 2007)
Methods

I chose Irving Seidman’s interviews as a qualitative research model because I sought to invite participants’ comments on the past, present and future of New Orleans schools. I theorized that separate interviews on each period would enable me to track changes in local and national discourses across time. For example, I imagined that the interviews about the past would elicit commentary on desegregation, the present would shift to recovery, and the future would envision anticipated directions of development. Seidman considers interviewing an approach to understanding the lived experiences of people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1996, p.7) from the subjects own perspective. Seidman refers to this process as "in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing (p.15).” He posits that "when people tell stories, they select details of their experience from the stream of consciousness (p .7)." Seidman’s method utilizes open-ended questions. It permits the interviewee the opportunity to expound on their responses. Seidman supports a “three series” set of interviews. This means interviews are conducted with a person on three separate occasions. My interviews approximated Seidman’s conditions.

First Interview:

Tell me about your experiences in New Orleans public school education prior to Hurricane Katrina.

Tell me about your Katrina experience. Did you evacuate? Where did you relocate?

How long where you away from the city?

Second Interview:

Tell me about your current experience in New Orleans public education.

Tell me about your experience with the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee.
Third Interview:

How do you visualize the future of public education in New Orleans?

How do you think the recommendations of the BNOB Education Committee will impact the future of public education in New Orleans?

What meaning did you make of this experience?

The following codes are used to identify each interview:

- BR for Dr. Brian Riedlinger
- ML for Mrs. Mary Laurie
- AJ for Dr. Alex Johnson
- I – PA (past) for the first interview
- II – PR (present) for the second interview
- III – F (future) for the third interview

Conducting the interviews was a positive experience for me. In each case, the interviews were like an intimate conversation between two friends in a comfortable environment talking about a topic of shared interest. I met with each person in their office and we sat around a table drinking coffee or water. Daily routine activities were taking place outside the office. There were few, if any, interruptions during the interviews. I asked the same questions of each person and listened to their responses. If I needed to have a point clarified, I asked additional questions.

My field notes revealed an observation consistent throughout the first session of each interview. During the first ten to fifteen minutes with each informant their responses seemed to be carefully worded; similar to those that might be given to a newspaper or magazine reporter. I did not question the level of comfort, but I did notice a shift in voice intonation and body language. The change in voice intonation was also evident to me when I listened to the
recordings of those first interviews. In other words, as the informant's comfort level increased, the environment became more relaxed.

After a careful review of interview transcripts I engaged in the coding processes used by (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1999). Three themes emerged as participants recounted their Bring New Orleans Back education committee experiences: (1) politics governs human action; (2) schools operate as businesses and (3) bureaucratic voices are used by leaders. The participants disagreed in their feelings about what was accomplished at the conclusion of the committee’s work, the role of teachers unions and collective bargaining in New Orleans schools.

**Theme One: Politics govern human action**

Each participant spoke at length about ways in which power circulated among people advocated for local and national agendas in New Orleans before Katrina and during the BNOB education committee process. For example:

- Protocols were suspended to expedite the approval of charter school applications
- Securing funds from the federal government
- Budget cuts for community colleges
- Soliciting and receiving funds from philanthropic organizations to open charter schools in New Orleans
- Small group meetings with Algiers politicians and select community members

I use two examples to illustrate my point. Although each informant spoke about these issues I work from the statements of one participant in order to demonstrate how the power involved relied on both local and national discourses.
I know that there was some talk from the politicians in Algiers about creating a charter school district, a district by itself. I don’t have any evidence to back this up. But in my opinion it was perhaps the start of Algiers pulling away from New Orleans. Much like Zachary did in Baton Rouge or Baker in Baton Rouge.

(BR, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

To grasp the political importance of this remark requires explanation because Dr. Riedlinger spoke to me as someone knowledgeable about New Orleans during our second interview. This example demonstrated how politics and power cut across scales linking the local to the nation (perhaps, even international). Zachary and Baker, Louisiana school districts seceded from the East Baton Rouge Parish School District. Zachary and Baker, Louisiana are both towns and school districts in the suburbs of the city of Baton Rouge, the state capital of Louisiana. Zachary is a growing, affluent suburb. As of the census of 2000, there were 11,275 people. At the time the racial makeup of the city was 69.76% White, 28.72% African American, 0.19% Native American, 0.46%, Asian 0.32% from other races and 0.55% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 0.72% of the population. Much of this growth is attributed to its high ranking by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education as the top school district in the state since 2005. Zachary became an independent school district from the East Baton Rouge Parish school district in 2003. The district is run by the Zachary Community School Board.

Like Zachary, Baker is a town in East Baton Rouge Parish in Louisiana. Its residents are zoned to the City of Baker School System. In Baker’s case there are more African Americans than Whites living in the community. According to the 2000 census there were 13,793 people, 4,971 households, and 3,782 families residing in the city. The racial composition of the town...
was 45.97% White, 52.36% African American, 0.28% Native American, 0.22% Asian, 0.17%, 0.01% Pacific Islander, 0.17% from other races, and 0.99% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 0.86% of the population. It became an independent school district of Baton Rouge in 2003 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baker,_Louisiana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baker,_Louisiana). It is run by the City of Baker School Board. The following is a brief comparison of the two school districts.

Table 5-1 Baker and Zachary School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Free and Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>% of non-white students</th>
<th>2009 District School Performance Score</th>
<th>School Performance Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAKER</td>
<td>2008/2009</td>
<td>1,962</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>1 Star Minimal Academic Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZACHARY</td>
<td>2008/2009</td>
<td>4,925</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>116.8</td>
<td>3 Stars Exemplary Academic Growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

State Average School Performance Score: 91.0
School Performance Designation: Two Stars – Recognized Academic Growth
Source: Louisiana Department of Education – [http://www.doe.state.la.us/dag/default.aspx](http://www.doe.state.la.us/dag/default.aspx)

The communities of Baker and Zachary also differ in the correlation between race, test and test scores. Baker which is a majority African American community had significantly lower test scores and a higher percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. On the other hand, Zachary had the highest test scores in the state and a lower number of students receiving
free lunch and African American students receiving lower test scores. This disparity affirms research conducted by Delpit and Payne (2007) which stated the Louisiana public school system has always worked for White children and Black children do not receive the same advantages.

Dr. Riedlinger’s comparison of the development of a charter district in Algiers with the Zachary Community School District and the City of Baker School District is significant to note due to the geographical position of Algiers to New Orleans. The two areas (east bank and west bank) and is separated by the Mississippi River and Algiers is part of New Orleans. (See figure 5.1) For example, the development of the Algiers Charter School Association (ASCA) was influenced by a small group of people located on the west bank of New Orleans. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, plans were being developed for Algiers to secede from the city of New Orleans and form their own municipality (Dingerson, 2006; Thevenot, 2005). The decision to develop a charter system separate from New Orleans spoke to politics on all levels of government. Hurricane Katrina provided the opportunity for groups to “jump aboard” the charter bandwagon since all protocols had been suspended to grant charters. The state was assisted by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers in approving charters in an expeditious manner (Richmond, 2007).
Moreover, the federal government and philanthropic organizations were able to
pour money into the city and state with caveats attached to advance charter schools. In
doing so, it supported the Bush administration mandate of No Child Left Behind. The
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Broad Foundation and the Doris and Donald Fisher
Fund donated a combined $17.5 million to support the creation of new public charter
schools and pay for teacher and principal recruitment training. The monies were
distributed among New Schools for New Orleans, Teach for America and New Leaders
for New Schools. These organizations were local affiliates of national organizations
(Simon, 2007; Toppo, 2007).

Another example of politics governing human actions occurred during the first
school board meeting held in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. At the time of the
meeting few people had returned to the city. The focal point of discussion was when and how to reopen schools in New Orleans. The president of United Teachers of New Orleans (Dr. Brenda Mitchell) was one of the speakers during the meeting. Dr. Mitchell’s role was to represent members of the union and assure the binding contractual agreement between OPSB and UTNO was not violated. One clause in the contract between UTNO and OPSB guaranteed employment of teachers and staff based on seniority (Capochino, 2005b). The focal part of Dr. Mitchell’s presentation was to emphasize that seniority should rule the day as schools reopened.

A small number of parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders attended the school board meeting. The meeting was led by school board members to clarify contradicting reports on whether or not schools would reopen. Moreover, it was a venue to allow speakers to ask questions and share concerns before the board. As the meeting progressed conversations and heated exchanges took place among board and community members. Mrs. Laurie recollected her experience at the board meeting. Most of the audience had left the meeting at the conclusion of Dr. Mitchell’s presentation and the question and answer period. Mrs. Laurie attended the meeting because she was a school site administrator. School principals typically attended board meetings, especially when issues directly impacted their school buildings. She had been asked by Dr. Ora Watson, acting superintendent of NOPS to open O. Perry Walker High School. Mrs. Laurie recounts one segment of the meeting that occurred after most of the audience (mainly teachers) had left the meeting:
We’d already come here, getting staff back on board, etc. and then in a split second those dynamics shifted. Over the course of probably a 15 minute time span [during the board meeting] the Algiers Charter Schools Association officially came into existence. I just remember the few people in the audience that were looking and saying what just happened? What’s going on? The next day Alvarez and Marsal said schools [the west bank schools] are now in the Algiers Association. So cease and desist [opening schools under NOPS].

(ML, I – PA, Interview 8/08)

Side stepping a state takeover, Alvarez and Marsal, a New York accounting firm had been hired by the state to repair the financial disarray of the Orleans Parish school district. The firm was known as a “fix-it” whose hallmark was downsizing failing businesses and sometimes “saving” them money at expense of their product quality (Adamo, 2007b). The aforementioned group had been credited with cleaning up the St. Louis, Missouri school district a few years earlier by shutting down schools, laying off staff and cutting what they considered to be waste (Miniter, 2005). William “Bill” Roberti, a lead partner of the Alvarez and Marsal was named “de facto” superintendent of the New Orleans public schools because he did not meet the state requirements to be officially appointed.

The establishment of the Algiers Charter School Association left teachers stunned. Teachers who had been called back to reopen schools were left without employment. After the school board’s decision to move the west bank school to ACSA
teachers and staff were told to reapply without guarantee of reappointment to former positions. The seniority clause of the UTNO contract was considered null and void. In plain and simple terms, the union had been busted.

For Delgado Community College, politics governing human action took place on state and federal levels of government. Like other Louisiana institutions of higher learning, Delgado lost millions of dollars due to the loss of tuition fees. In the aftermath of the storm, the college lost $6 million dollars from the school’s funding allotment.

We were able to secure $13 million dollars plus from the federal government. That money allowed us to balance our budget in part and do some things we needed to do in order to open Delgado in January 2006. We also received money from the Bush/Clinton Katrina fund totaling about $12.5 million.

(AJ, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

Moreover, the college received funds through the Department of Labor and foreign government disseminated through diplomatic corps.

Theme Two: Schools operate as businesses.

One of the values that emerged in the interviews among the informants was that schools or higher institutions of learning operated as businesses. For instance, the organizations provided payroll checks, set the tone or climate in the environment, balanced budgets and interacted with consumers (students, parents, guardians and boards). Dr. Johnson’s role as chancellor of Delgado Community College kept him in constant communication with his boss; Dr. Walter Bumphus president for the Louisiana Community College and Technical College System. Dr. Bumphus and Dr. Johnson agreed that he (Dr. Johnson) should return to the New Orleans area as
soon as possible. Thanks to the hospitality of a friend, Dr. Johnson was able to live and establish a satellite office in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He explicates:

At first there were probably about three of us [Delgado employees]. The first thing we knew was to get people paid – keep them on the payroll and get them paid. A week or so after the hurricane we had checks cut for everybody at the college.

(AJ, I – PA, Interview 8/08)

The establishment of the Baton Rouge satellite office demonstrated the need for organizations to keep running in times of crisis. Dr. Johnson confirmed Delgado’s commitment to their employees during time period of need. Employees were treated like human beings instead of just a “number”(Warner, 2005).

Another example of higher institutions operating as a business occurred in the months following Katrina. Colleges and universities across the country opened their doors to students who were displaced as a result of the storm. Dr. Johnson explained that while the federal government provided aid to the hurricane affected institutions some host schools wanted reimbursement.

The federal government sent money to hurricane affected institutions…that money was designed to allow them to stay open, pay faculty and staff and recover. Some institutions in Louisiana wanted a share of that because they felt that since they had taken in those students they ought to share in the pot. The federal government decided that in Mississippi and Louisiana they would use 10% of the congressional allocation and allow those schools that took in students in those states to benefit from it.

(AJ, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

In the end, the financial aspect of business overtook acts of philanthropy.
Dr. Riedlinger expressed how schools operate a business from his perspective as the Chief Executive Officer of the Algiers Charter School Association. The following excerpts express financial angst with state government and the day to day operations at the school site. The speaker of the state legislature is Jim Tucker from Algiers. I had lunch with him one day and he said ‘what can we do to help you?’ I said give us one master. We had two different financial reports to make…it made our job harder.

It took them [principals] a year and a half to get the fact that there is not pot of money.

I don’t give you [principals] advice often, but I’m going to give you advice right now. A security officer is $15,000 well spent. Now if you don’t want to have this, it’s your money….but if somebody walks into your building and you don’t have anybody to watch them…let’s think about what they could do. [The presence of a security guard says] This is a school. We’re holding school. If you can’t tell us who you are and what your business here, you can’t come in here.

(BR, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

Principals had to learn to make sound financial budget decisions and use funds effectively especially when staffing school positions.

Mrs. Laurie portrayed how schools operated as businesses on a humanistic level. She felt as a school prepared to reopen the charge was twofold. Additionally, she believed that students needed a place to be and something to do.

We actually had school. We actually had school (emphasis mine). Not just here but in all the schools of the association. It was business. It was teaching and learning with a twist to it, a tweak to it.

(ML, II – PR, Interview 8/08)
Furthermore, Mrs. Laurie explicitly defined how she viewed school as business. I share all the time …this is a business. That’s another area we struggled with… realizing that education is a business, and looking at it from a business perspective. We get paid to deliver quality; especially now that we have more and more charters. Charters come down to will people send their children here? Therefore, from a business perspective they [parents] send their children here for us [schools] to serve and deliver eight hours of quality experience young people. It’s non-negotiable to do otherwise.

(ML, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

The predominant impact of corporate influence on education manifests itself with charter schools. The organizational structure of a charter school is designed to mirror that of corporations. When charter schools were established in the 1990’s advocates believed the key to success was to remove barriers such as state regulators, union contracts and district bureaucracies. They believed that charters would excel in a free market of competition (Richmond, 2007).

Theme Three: Leaders speak using bureaucratic voices.

Leaders of businesses and corporations tend to engage in conversations that are reflective of their unique positions. The talk is often safe, reserved and reflective of the mission of the organization. This became apparent as the series of interview took place. Mrs. Laurie is an advocate for children. She emphasized the importance of black children’s rights throughout the interview. The following statements are reflective of her convictions:

I don’t apologize for the fact that I believe in all my being in the rights of young people because we are all citizens in this country. I believe the rights that have been granted us in public education. I’m sure the word quality may not be there, but I don’t think
anybody said you have a right to an educational experience that’s not of quality, not of worth, not of value.

(ML, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

I remember the first day apologizing to them. I apologized for the fact that for many, many years we the adults in this city hadn’t done right by our children in that we had not provided quality experiences for all of our children. It’s just real and true.

(ML, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

Furthermore, Mrs. Laurie advocated for the rights of children in the manner that she communicated with her faculty. The following statement is her expectation of teachers:

My commitment, my first and primary commitment and final commitment is to these children. And so we’re going to make allowances and accommodations. I’m going to do it based on the needs of children first. We’ll work with you. I don’t think they’ll find a better place to work. I believe in shared governance. I believe in giving voices. But please understand with that comes responsibilities—responsibilities that all voices need to speak for what’s best for children.

(ML, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

Mrs. Laurie is very explicit in her discussion of race. She spoke from her reality as a black woman, one who engaged with school children and issues of race as a part of everyday life. On the other hand, Dr. Riedlinger’s conversation revolved around excellence in schools. It is interesting to note he did not use the term race in the interviews. Moreover, Dr. Johnson did not address the issue of race or the rights of children. Both gentlemen spoke using “politically correct” language that emanated from their unique positions as a community college president and the chief executive officer of a school association.
Differences

Dissimilarity existed among the participants regarding role of teachers unions and collective bargaining in New Orleans schools and what was accomplished at the conclusion of the committee’s work. Dr. Johnson did not speak of teacher unions in his interviews. I posit the lack of discussion in this area was due to the fact that his experiences as a chancellor did not involve teacher unions. However, engagement in collective bargaining in the pre Katrina era are similar between Dr. Riedlinger and Mrs. Laurie. As school principals both Dr. Riedlinger and Mrs. Laurie respected the collective bargaining agreement between union members and the school board. Each implemented shared governance with their faculties and gave staff members a voice in the decision making process. They both felt that operating schools through the use of shared governance prevented grievances in their respective schools. Dr. Riedlinger is expressed his pride that throughout his years as a school principal not one grievance was filed against him.

I’m very proud of the fact that I think I did some good stuff in the schools I was in. I had a union the entire time I was there and never had a grievance. I did some unusual stuff but the teachers were involved in it. If we decided to do something a little out of the ordinary; maybe even in violation of the contract it was the teachers’ decision to do it. If that happens then there is no violation because it’s what the teachers have decided to do.

(BR, I – PA, Interview 8/08)

Conversely, Mrs. Laurie had a dual perspective on the issue of unions. She was a member of the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) prior to moving into administration. She participated in the last teachers strike before moving into administration ranks. Mrs. Laurie believed in unions as a teacher and as an administrator. She comments:
I’m a believer in unions and marched in that last strike (1990). I really believe again that a lot of where we find ourselves as minorities, in my case African American female, came about because of unions. I think it was all in interpretation of the contract and so on. Regretfully, some folk have a tendency to interpret things so literally that they miss the big opportunity. Some of my first training on shared governance and team building I got via UTNO. Didn’t violate anything except for saying this [education] is good and quality.

(ML, I – PT, Interview 8/08).

Working with unions and collective bargaining changed for Mrs. Laurie and Dr. Riedlinger after Hurricane Katrina. The teachers and staff members that belonged to Algiers Charter School Association did not have collective bargaining rights. Dr. Riedlinger explains the salary process and how one teacher approached him regarding salaries and percentage increase for employees.

Principals select for their teachers a zero step raise, a one step raise or a two-step raise. And so once we got out a year or two, I mean teachers were all over, you know, there, there was no step. You know a sixth year teacher could be making more than a 10th year teacher. Because the 10th year teacher got two zero raises while the sixth year teacher got two, two-step raises. And I’ll still have teachers say well what percentage raise are you going to give us? We don’t give you a percentage raise. We give you raises based on your effort. I was at Walker and one of the teachers who had been there forever, a guy that I know and like said you know how do we get raises and the board . . . and I said Mr. Brady the board doesn’t give you raises.

(BR, II – PR, Interview 8/08)
Mrs. Laurie described her feelings about collective bargaining in the context of her BNOB education committee experience. She stated:

You still have the contingency of folk who wanted to hold on to the old way. But you know I personally very much believe in unions. I think some next steps were made. They were not the best next steps. I think that’s why there’s no union right now. This is me speaking personally.

(ML, II – PR, Interview 8/08)

Lack of a contract was a difficult concept for teachers and staff to comprehend. Raises were determined by principal evaluation. A few teachers approached Dr. Riedlinger, CEO of ASCA and inquired what percentage would they receive that in raises that year. Dr. Riedlinger informed them that teachers would not receive increments in salary based on years of experience, principals would evaluate them to determine whether they would receive a one step, two step or no step raise and if these terms were unacceptable maybe they needed to move on to another place of employment.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the interviews revealed themes and animated discourses that informed their personal engagement with education as well as experiences on the Bring New Orleans Back education committee. The idea that politics govern human actions, schools operate as business and bureaucratic voices are permeated through the voices of each participant. Each person expressed their hope and visions for New Orleans in the following ways.

Dr. Johnson stated that parents should be involved in their child’s school and advocated that schools should be established based on the Cowen model. He considered
the Algiers Charter School Association the beginning of implementing the recommendations of *Rebuilding and Transforming* final document. Conversely, Dr. Riedlinger felt that ACSA created its own model and *Rebuilding and Transforming* just happened to be the same concept as theirs. Dr. Riedlinger believed that the Algiers Charter School Association is the model for the future of New Orleans. He believed that the small group of schools similar to the networks described in *Rebuilding and Transforming* provided principals with a built in support systems. Principals were able to share ideas for professional development, organizational management and strategies for improving test scores. This concept is opposed to independent charters that work in isolation. Mrs. Laurie hoped that parents understand choice and that quality education exists for every child in every school. She believed that good things came out of Katrina that would provide good and right things for children in New Orleans. Mrs. Laurie also believed that neighborhood schools needed to become a reality.

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) took input from the committee, surveys and public meetings and created the final document for the committee. Opinions varied about the effectiveness of the group. Dr. Riedlinger felt the BCG knew what they were going to produce prior to the inception of the BNOB education committee process. Yet, Dr. Johnson felt the BCG took the input from all data and created a document workable and efficient system for education. Mrs. Laurie did not make any comment.

One major difference existed between the participants’ comments and data I presented in my analysis of *Rebuilding and Transforming* in chapter four. I stated the committee did not have a representative number of parents respond to the survey to express the needs and concerns of the reconstruction of the New Orleans public school district. On the other hand, all three participants felt that parents were included on the committee and participated in community
forums. I posit that individuals attending community meetings had multiple roles (e.g. politician and parent) and their position as a parent was not indicated on the committee roster. The participants did not feel the racial composition of the committee determined the final outcome of *Rebuilding and Transforming*. In particular, Mrs. Laurie explicitly expressed her feelings that everyone brought different voices to the table independent of race.

Finally, the neoliberal values associated with privatization and charter schools are reflected in each participant’s narrative. They are expressed in statements that support the business ideology of education – all children should be educated to develop work skills and compete in this knowledge based economy. In other words, decrease or diminish the gap between the skills students have between high school and the workforce. Also, the lack of collective bargaining (unions) for teachers affirms this ideology.

**Section Two: ‘National Model’ or Flawed Approach?**

‘National Model’ or Flawed Approach? (hereafter National Model) is a report produced by the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) in concert with its state and national affiliates approximately ten months after Hurricane Katrina. UTNO is a labor union representing teachers and school employees in New Orleans. It is an affiliate of the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO. UTNO was the first integrated teachers’ union in Louisiana and the first to win a collective bargaining agreement in the state without the protection of a state employee’s collective bargaining law ([http://la.aft.org/utno/index.cfm?action=article&articleID](http://la.aft.org/utno/index.cfm?action=article&articleID)). National Model was not written as a direct response to *Rebuilding and Transforming*. However, it does reveal the union’s belief that the proposed redesigned school system would not provide New Orleans public school children the high quality education they deserve. They state:
The time for finger-pointing and political grandstanding is over. A thoughtful reappraisal of the reconfigured school system is essential if state and local officials are to learn lessons, make necessary changes and create a high-quality school system (p.4).

I analyze this report as a critical policy analysis utilizing the same criteria developed by Jacqueline Edmondson (2004) and used in chapter four. Critical policy analysis is an approach to policy studies that assumes that policy is historically and socially situated and complete with the values of its authors. The following questions guide the process:

Table 5-2. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the policy?</td>
<td>Redefines policy analysis in order to determine whether or not the report is policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the policy makers?</td>
<td>Union leadership and union members on a state, local and national level created this policy based on their expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the major tenets of the policy?</td>
<td>Explains the main ideas and values embedded within the completed report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the likely consequences of the policy?</td>
<td>Indicates what might happen to public education in New Orleans as a result of this report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Edmondson, 2004, p.5)

What is the policy?

National Model is a report produced by union members on local, state and national levels that addressed the challenge of rebuilding post-Katrina New Orleans public schools. The report is arranged in the following manner. First, National Model chronicled the history of the New Orleans public schools before Katrina. Second, it explained actions that impacted teachers immediately following Katrina, namely a takeover of school by the Louisiana State Legislature and the firing of all teachers and staff members. Lastly, the report posed a series of questions
that informed the past and made recommendations on how to build a high quality reconstructed school system.

Who are the policy makers?

The report does not designate any one person or group of people as author of the report. National Labor represents the labor point of view regarding post Katrina New Orleans. Many voices are heard throughout the body of the report. The voices of teachers, parents, union leadership, and the executive director of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and the president of the New Orleans branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) are heard in the body of the report.

What are the main tenets of the policy?

National Model revealed a set of values that would have a direct effect on the New Orleans community and its relationship with public education. Throughout the report UTNO leaders and representatives indicated its desire to be included at the discussion table. The teacher’s union wanted to be a part of the decision making process in the development of an educational plan for New Orleans. National Model revealed a set of values that would have an impact on the community, children, teachers and support staff of the New Orleans public schools. The following values permeate throughout the report: (1) evidence of past and present racism, (2) tensions existed between all government levels (3) politics govern human actions and (3) transparency is key.
Value 1: Evidence of past and present racism.

New Orleans was one of the most stratified school districts in the country. Racial issues data back to the pre-Brown era (Tillotson, 2006). National Model explained that while some schools were thriving, others were falling short. The following examples illustrate my point. First, 90% of the student population at Ben Franklin Elementary Magnet School scored at or above basic on the state’s language arts examination. On the other hand, students at Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School (a neighborhood school) barely half scored at or above basic in the same subject area (p. 11). The test scores at Ben Franklin Elementary reflected its status as a magnet school, active parental engagement and financial support beyond allocations from the school district (Delpit & Payne, 2007).

Second, the Louisiana State Legislature approved Act 35, a law designed to expand the state’s authority to take over failing schools. The Louisiana Board of Secondary and Elementary Education (BESE) an authorizer and overseer of charter schools became a direct operator for regular schools. State and local officials were unable to predict how many schools to reopen after Hurricane Katrina because only a small percentage of residents had returned to the city. Those parents with jobs (e.g. at Tulane University) quickly secured places for their children, Lusher Charter Elementary School in particular (Dingerson, 2007). Once schools opened they quickly reached their enrollment caps. Consequently, as the student population and need for schools increased parents were told to enroll their children in Recovery School District schools which were becoming known as “the schools of last resort (Adamo, 2007a; Quigley, 2007).” Enrolling students in school became difficult due to the lack of capacity for student enrollment. Children were “wait listed” as the RSD scrambled to open schools (Maxwell, 2007). This action was indicative of lack of concern for neighborhood schools and the children they served. Schools were being opened in the most affluent areas, far from people of color (p. 21).
Third, students enrolled in the Recovery School District schools were more likely to be from low income homes than those in New Orleans Public Schools (p.17). National Model questioned the reasoning for the slow pace of reopening schools in African American neighborhoods. They point to a comment made by Paul Hill, a policy analyst who advised Louisiana officials on the takeover plan. Hill co-wrote an article which urged the state to “not invest in [school] buildings in the wrong places” (p.22). Moreover, Dingerson (2006) affirmed racial issues existed by stating the dual system of Recovery District Schools and Orleans Parish schools would further segregate schools (p. 18). Finally, parents were denied school choice because they were unable to transport their children to desired schools.

**Value 2: Tensions exist between all governmental levels:**

In addition to the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education becoming the direct operator of the majority of New Orleans’ public schools, charter schools became a major issue on all governmental levels. President Bush used the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to advance his agenda of charter schools and vouchers. During post-Katrina visits to New Orleans the president often used charter schools as a backdrop to announce progress in the area. For example:

President Bush appeared in the city [New Orleans] and declared, “A more hopeful New Orleans means replacing a school system that didn’t work with one that will. …I’m excited for you about the innovative charter school system you have put in place. I applaud you for thinking differently [emphasis added] (p. 14)”.

Protocols were waived to expedite the opening of charter schools. Federal funds in excess of $45 million were funneled to the state of Louisiana to “plan, expand, repair or create charter schools (p.15). Though much of the chartering agenda was instigated from outside of
Louisiana there was also an inside push as well. At the time of this report Paul Pastorek, a former BESE member and future State Superintendent of Education in Louisiana stated “there were many people who got involved in the politics post-Katrina who had not been energized or hopeful enough before” the hurricane (p. 16-17).

**Value: 3 Politics govern human action.**

Political tensions between state and local government existed for a number of reasons. The relationship between the state legislature and New Orleans was tenuous. Most notably, dissension existed between legislators from rural parishes and the metropolitan New Orleans area over the distribution of state funds. These political tensions also extended to the national arena. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in Washington, D. C. urged Congress to promote “new educational options,” including charter schools, as well as private and religious schools. The foundation advocated for a plan that would have provided an educational reimbursement to displaced Katrina parents regardless where the children attended school (p. 16.) The proposal stalled in the House Education and Workforce Committee where Democrats and four Republicans voted against the plan (Lips, 2005).

The Orleans Parish School Board was known for its divisiveness, in-fighting and political struggles. The first school board held in Baton Rouge on September 15, 2005 was no exception. The devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the urgency to reopen schools did not change the behavior of the board members. An example of board “antics” occurred at the first school board meeting after the storm. Board member Phyllis Landrieu offered a resolution to hire former U. S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige as chief academic officer, install William Roberti of Alvarez and Marsal as acting superintendent and keep interim superintendent Ora Watson on payroll with duties to be assigned by Paige. Considering Rod Paige for the post
caused a roar of disapproval from teachers, principals and other school employees and heightened racial tensions at a time when race had become as turbulent an issue as the storm ("Area schools update", 2005; Finch, 2005; Newmark & DeRugy, 2006).

UTNO was pleased with actions taken by the board during that first meeting; teachers were placed on disaster leave (no pay – no benefits) but given the assurance they would receive the same pay when they returned. One admonition was teachers may not be reassigned to their pre-Katrina school. Good feelings among were short-lived. The following issues formed the volatile political climate during the first two months after Hurricane Katrina. Each had a direct impact on teachers and the union:

- State takeover of schools
- Reopening public schools in Orleans parish
- Submission of a charter school proposal
- Negotiations to determine who would be hired back to staff opening schools
- Legal actions filed against school board regarding charter proposal

Secret meetings were held with Algiers politicians and selected community members to discuss the charter application and process of reopening schools. One of the stipulations in the charter application stated that charter school employees would not be union members or employees of the Orleans Parish School Board (Gewertz, 2005; Ritea, 2005a, , 2005b). The stipulations included in the charter application resulted in chaos at the October 7th board meeting, resulted in an uproar for a number of reasons. First, Dr. Mitchell presented a plan that would allow teachers with seniority to staff the reopening schools. Teachers, parents and staff left the meeting after the presentation because they thought a core group of Algiers schools would begin the reopening process and the staffing matter was settled. Second, after the majority of the audience had left the meeting, Lourdes Moran, vice president of the board, proposed that
the west bank schools be transferred to the Algiers Charter School Association. Moran’s proposal surprised members of the board. Newmark and DeRugy (2006) explicate:

Moran, who admitted that she had purposely kept her colleagues in the dark about the proposal, was amicable in victory. “I’m not saying that I want to do this because I want to change governance,” she explained. “I am interested in making sure we access all the resources necessary to have a quality education.”

Third, teachers and staff hired to open the west bank schools were fired.

Value 4: Transparency is necessary

An open dialogue among parents and politicians was lacking from the outset of the decision making process to reopen schools. Parents were not included in the discussion regarding what would be the best actions taken for children prior to opening schools (p.4). They became confused and frustrated because there was not a centralized location for them to receive information in the new “two-district” configuration (p.5). The school takeover was politically motivated and parents were not included in the discussion (p.6). Parents were baffled by the varying enrollment applications, school requirements and the opening dates of schools (p. 19). Most of the charter schools operated under enrollment policies specific to their schools. For example, some charters required parents to volunteer a certain number of hours per school year; while others required parents to pay a student activity fee (for each child enrolled) to supplement state and local funding to the schools.
Conclusion

National Model presented a historical view of the New Orleans public schools in conjunction with labor opinions as to how the school system needs to be restructured. It recognized flaws that existed in New Orleans public schools before Katrina. But, it also highlighted successes that were taking place prior to Katrina. The report cited the improvement of nearly 80% of New Orleans public scores improving their scores on the state’s School Performance Score (p. 11).

Privatization as opposed to a public operated school system is reflected in the conversion to charter schools. “Financial realities – not genuine, systemic reform – prompted the Orleans Parish School Board to convert roughly a dozen of its schools to charter schools after Katrina (p. 4). Philanthropic groups (such as the Gates and Broad Foundations) offered to aid New Orleans to by providing their donations would be earmarked for charter schools. In addition to funding local and state entities expected the organizations to provide manpower to operate the schools.

The executive leadership of the United Teachers of New Orleans emphasized their exclusion at the discussion table by local and state officials (p. 5) and reiterated their desire to work with local, state and national officials to restructure and make improvements (p.8). This is expressed in the following recommendations:

- Create a central coordinating body to lessen the confusion that has reigned in recent months.
- Identify public schools that can be reopened with minimal repairs and make the reopening of these schools a top priority,
- Reaffirm the public school system’s commitment to democracy, shared decision-making and regular engagement of all stakeholders.
• Provide equal support for all public schools.

Transparency is essential on local and state government levels in order to establish high quality education in New Orleans. Officials need to recognize and understand that parents, teachers and the teacher’s union are eager to work cooperatively for the good of children in New Orleans. All stakeholders must review post-Katrina reforms and discuss the impact of those changes.

Section Three: “A Review and Critique of Rebuilding and Transforming: A Plan for World-Class Public Education in New Orleans”

The National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans (NCQENO) was an ad hoc group of national and New Orleans scholars and educators working together to help ensure that post-Katrina schooling in New Orleans provided an excellent education for all children, especially those who had been least served – those from low-income communities and communities of color. NCQENO referred to their organization as “the people’s consultants”. They believed that if rebuilt with thoughtful attention, the New Orleans school system could become a model for improving urban education in the nation (http://www.ncqeno.com/html/whatwebelieve.htm).

NCQENO believed that communities had the right and responsibility to have their voices heard at the decision making level that would determine the future of public education in New Orleans. Parents know and understand their children. They recognize and can articulate the needs of their community. A primary goal of the organization was to be responsive and supportive of what the people of New Orleans wanted for their communities. NCQENO based their work on two primary principles:
1. Communities have the right and responsibility to define and develop their educational institutions

2. Issues of equity must undergird any rebuilding effort.

(http://www.ncqeno.com/index.htm)

I use Edmondson’s (2004) approach of policy analysis is utilized to analyze NCQENO’s critique of Rebuilding and Transforming to maintain continuity of analysis. The following questions guide this process:

Table 5-3. Guiding Questions for Critical Policy Analysis

<table>
<thead>
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<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the policy?</td>
<td>Redefines policy analysis in order to determine whether or not the report is policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the policy makers?</td>
<td>National and New Orleans scholars and educators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the major tenets of the policy?</td>
<td>Explains the main ideas and values with the completed document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the likely consequences of the policy?</td>
<td>Indicates what might happen to public education as a result of this report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Edmondson, 2004, p. 5)

What is the policy?

A Review and Critique of Rebuilding and Transforming: A Plan for World-Class Education in New Orleans is the written response to Rebuilding and Transforming produced by NCQENO. National members of the organization were hosted by New Orleans members and spent several days in New Orleans in January 2006. NCQENO members interviewed parents, teachers, community workers, school administrators, central office staff, union members and local university members throughout the city. The group also met with State Representative Cedric Redmond, head of the Louisiana Black Legislative Caucus and State Representative
Avon Honey, leader of the Caucus’s education committee. Redmond and Honey requested that NCQENO review *Rebuilding and Transforming* from the perspective on NCQENO’s guiding principles. NCQENO used the data gathered during their visit to produce the final document.

**Who are the policy makers?**

Dr. Lisa Delpit, executive director and eminent scholar at the Center of Urban Education & Innovation at the Florida International University in Miami and Jim Randels, a 20+ year veteran of the New Orleans Public Schools, co-director of the Students at the Center program and member of the Executive Council of United Teachers of New Orleans (AFT Local 527) led the group. (See Table 5.4)

Members of NCQENO worked as a collaborative and cooperative group. The actual document was written by five members of the committee using input from all 17 members. Regular conference calls and emails were used to refine document. A website was developed and maintained for two years (until 2008) by Dr. Daniella Cook. It was hoped that the website would allow the dialogue to continue after each summit and provide a place where national and local group members could post work related to post Katrina education issues.

**What are the main tenets of the policy?**

Members of NCQENO closely examined *Rebuilding and Transforming* based on the guiding principles of the organization – equity and community. After NCQENO’s careful examination of *Rebuilding and Transforming* the group developed a list of concerns and issues to be addressed before any plans could be implemented in New Orleans public schools. The
values of race and equality, providing for students with special needs and community are well-established throughout the document.
Table 5-4. Committee Members: National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMITTEE MEMBER</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessie Cooper Gibbs</td>
<td>Professional Development Trainer for the Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Irving Hamer, Jr.</td>
<td>Executive Vice President Millennium Group Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merle T. Harris</td>
<td>Independent Professional Development Consultant for Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Freddye Hill</td>
<td>Vice President for Campus Life and Enrollment Management – Dillard University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Janice Ellen Jackson</td>
<td>Assistant Professor Boston College – Lynch School of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Joyce E. King</td>
<td>Professor Georgia State University – College of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Timothy F. C. Knowles</td>
<td>Executive Director of the University of Chicago Center for Urban School Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Pedro Noguera</td>
<td>Professor New York University – School of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Charles M. Payne, Jr.</td>
<td>Professor University of Chicago – School of Social Science Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Alethea Frazier Raynor</td>
<td>Principal Associate Annenburg Institute for School Reform at Brown University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Warren Simmons</td>
<td>Executive Director Annenburg Institute for School Reform at Brown University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Linda Stelly</td>
<td>Associate Director for Educational Issues for The American Federation of Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Richard Streedain</td>
<td>Professor National – Louis University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Joan Wynne</td>
<td>Professor Florida International University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Daniella Ann Cook</td>
<td>Postdoctoral Research Fellow Duke University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Value One: Race and equality

Race and equality was the primary value central to NCQENO’s work. The group believed that a redesigned educational system first and foremost it must be monitored and delivered with equity. Nationally, high percentages of Black students are enrolled in urban school systems. More often than not, children in need of the most get the least. One example of this disparity is evident in standardized testing of students. Test scores in pre-Katrina New Orleans demonstrated the achievement gap between Black and White students. Therefore, the New Orleans school system needed to assure students with specific learning needs would not be cast aside. New Orleans’ curriculum should be designed for all students, not just those who are high achievers (p. 2-3, Delpit & Payne, 2007).

Value Two: Providing for students with special needs

Student achievement is a top priority throughout Rebuilding and Transforming. The term “scientifically based practice” is based on students from mainstream populations as opposed to students from diverse groups. Diverse groups include those students who are English language learners, students with disabilities and students working below grade level. Rebuilding and Transforming does not explain how continuity will exist in curriculum among all schools in the city. Neither does it define who would monitor curriculum and assure that all students in all networks have access to high level courses, special education services, quality staff, tutoring and support services. Finally, Rebuilding and Transforming did not indicate how or when professional development and training for teachers and staff engaged with special needs
students, students from culturally diverse groups and the predominately Black population of public schools students would take place.

**Value Three: Neighborhood communities are important.**

New Orleans’ long history of racism and politics determines who gets access to power and resources. *Rebuilding and Transforming* stated that neighborhood schools were an integral part of the plan. However, the report does not specify how neighborhood schools would fit into its network of schools. *Rebuilding and Transforming* also failed to express how resources would be distributed to schools. The plan failed to recognize that families may not have the means to transport children to schools across the city or take off from their jobs to volunteer during the school day. In order to be successful NCQENO believed that the school system should be rooted in neighborhoods because they embody the rich unique culture of the city. NCQENO posited that educational reform in New Orleans is technical, political and a cultural enterprise. Finally, NCQENO believed the *Rebuilding and Transforming* failed to include community members at the discussion table where decisions were made and not just announced (p.3).

NCQENO responded to issues in *Rebuilding and Transforming* by using a question and answer format. They divided their responses into five sections: governance, quality staff, standards, engaged parents and communities and choice. I offer one example from each section to highlight NCQENO’s concerns.
Governance

The Educational Network Model (the structure designed to implement Rebuilding and Transforming) suggested that New Orleans public schools be divided into networks. NCQENO’s primary concern:

Q: How will the networks be organized?

NCQENO: Might that mean that current inequities will be institutionalized, allowing well-to do communities to supplement allocated funding, while others must survive with the allocated funding (p.4)?

NCQENO believed this lacked clarity in the following areas. First and foremost, the plan did not clearly explain how the multiple layers of administration (school site, school network, superintendent) will interact with one another. Second, if networks are divided into neighborhoods schools could be jeopardized due to the distribution of resources. There would be the possibility of exclusively rich or exclusively poor networks. Third and most important, the plan does not state who would monitor the networks to assure that equity is addressed in curriculum, access and support for all children.

Quality staff

The Educational Network Model stated an important component of the plan included recruitment and development of high quality staff. Missing from the plan is how merit pay for student performance would determine where teachers accepted teaching assignments. For instance, schools that served low income students, special needs students and English language learners might not be the choice of highly qualified teachers.
Q: How can staffing be stabilized if schools and networks are free to “steal teachers from other schools or networks with the lure of higher salaries?

NCQENO: …While NCQENO members were in New Orleans, one excellent and experienced teacher was lured from his work in a district-run New Orleans public school open to all New Orleans children to a selective charter school by the promise of a great salary (p.6).

Q: What will be the role of the teachers union in the new system?

NCQENO: Our conversations with United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) have led us to believe that this particular union is progressive and very interested in the welfare of children. …Having such an ally can make or break a reform effort (p.7, Unions are alive and well in many charter schools_ September 22, 2008.mht).

Teachers and staff are critical to the success of New Orleans schools. Mechanisms need to be in place to hire high quality staff, prevent the “creaming” of teachers and support new teachers with professional development. Since the New Orleans public school system serve a predominately Black children population, extensive workshops are needed in the area of diversity for teachers to understand children from the Black community.

Standards

Often children in underserved communities do not meet high standards and expectations. The children are usually denied the support (academically and financially) to experience success.

It is necessary to look beyond standardized tests to create standards – especially in New Orleans. The arts are a crucial element of the city’s lifeblood. And the devastation wrought by Katrina, along with its aftermath, has made citizens realize that a view of
human development limited to test scores is insufficient to rebuild not only the infrastructure of a city, but the soul of a city as well (p. 8).

**Engaged parents and communities**

NCQENO agreed with *Rebuilding and Transforming* that parents and communities should be engaged in schools and their community. A core concern was two-fold, how would parents have a voice in governance and how would parental involvement affect those with limited resources. Some of the more affluent schools required that parents sign contracts to agree to volunteer and certain number of hours during the schools year, as well as contribute a specific amount of money to school supplies and fund raising projects.

Q: How will the assigned of roles and responsibilities to parents (e.g., having parents required to pledge involvement in their children’s education) affect parents with few resources?

NCQENO: Schools must find ways that support parents with the latest resources, rather than solely “requiring” them to take on particular responsibilities. The new education system must ensure that teachers and administrators are exposed to professional development and training from individuals and agencies that have proven track records in working with low-income parents and not assume that methods appropriate for middle-class parents will suffice (p. 9).

**Choice**

NCQENO believed that school choice could be a significant improvement over school systems.
Q: Will transportation be provided for children who have no other means of accessing their schools of choice?

NCQENO: Choice is a hollow option when the means to fulfill it are absent. The “lean system center,” then, must consider how to ensure that the various school networks that emerge foster pathways that make choice a viable and high-quality option for poor families and communities, as well as privileged ones (p.9).

Providing choice could create problems in a number of ways. Some parents and children will not have real choice. Chances are they will be told they are not a good fit in certain schools. Another problem might be that individual schools do not provide for special needs students. Finally, if choice involves attending charter schools, research has not proven that charter school achievement is better than a regular public school (McElroy, 2006).

**Conclusion**

The National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans was an ad hoc group in the truest sense of the meaning. Academics and educators joined together as a social justice organizing group to represent the needs of the African American community in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. NCQENO hosted two summits in New Orleans (June 2006 and June 2007) designed to inform and empower communities. Presenters included NCQENO members and community leaders of New Orleans.

**NCQENO**’s *A Review and Critique of Rebuilding and Transforming: a Plan for World-Class Public Education in New Orleans* acknowledged that *Rebuilding and Transforming* had some laudable characteristics but failed to provide “a clear and intensive focus on issues of equity and community (p.2). They felt the plan was a useful point to begin conversation; but it
did not draw attention to excellence in the context of equity and community. NCQENO’s report was developed from the perspective of providing a voice for the disenfranchised. Their format does not resemble *Rebuilding and Transforming* but it addressed the group’s concerns in a clear and concise manner. They posited the language used throughout the document is not new and could be found in any reform literature; even that of pre-Katrina literature for the New Orleans public schools. Many of the concerns from National Model regarding race and equity are represented in this document. To conclude, NCQENO believed the plan offered little direction to actualize goals and lacked explicit statements that explain how the plan will be implemented.
Chapter 6

REBUILDING AND TRANSFORMING – THE MEANING OF THE EXPERIENCE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and conclude my study. The chapter consists of three main sections: (1) Discussion of findings, (2) Suggestions for Future Research and (3) Conclusion. The objective of my study was to identify the animating discourses that directed the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee process for brokering consensus regarding public education in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. First, I analyzed *Rebuilding and Transforming* using critical policy study as a framework and identified values that were embedded within the document. Then, I examined three other readings of *Rebuilding and Transforming* to discover the values and/or discourses within each reading. Finally, I compared my analysis of each document with the history of New Orleans public schools.

Data Sources

The following documents were examined to discover and name the values/discourses found in each:

- Rebuilding and Transforming: a Plan for Improving Public Education in New Orleans
- The History of Public Education in New Orleans
• Transcripts of Interviews with Three Members of the Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee

• ‘National Model’ or Flawed Approach?

• A Review and Critique of Rebuilding and Transforming: a Plan for World-Class Public Education in New Orleans

The following tables (Tables 6-1 and 6-2) represent the first assessment of values and themes embedded in the aforementioned documents. Each theme was constructed after completion of open coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Table 6-1 First Assessment of Values and Themes from Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HISTORY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS</th>
<th>INTERVIEW WITH BNOB COMMITTEE MEMBERS</th>
<th>UNION RESPONSE ‘ NATIONAL MODEL’ OR FLAWED APPROACH?</th>
<th>AD HOC RESPONSE A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE OF REBUILDING AND TRANSFORMING: A PLAN FOR WORLD-CLASS PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• New Orleans is a unique place.</td>
<td>• Schools operate as business.</td>
<td>• Evidence of past and present racism.</td>
<td>• Race and equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education is the state’s responsibility.</td>
<td>• Politics govern human actions.</td>
<td>• Tensions exist between all governmental levels.</td>
<td>• Providing for students with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Racism is alive and well.</td>
<td>• Leaders speak using bureaucratic voices</td>
<td>• Politics govern human action.</td>
<td>• Neighborhood communities are important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaving all children behind.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Transparency is necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-2 Values from Rebuilding and Transforming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REBUILDING AND TRANSFORMING: A PLAN FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Schools are a business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New is better than Old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Private is better that Public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Money talks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Outside experts know more than local citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• White is better than Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility is key.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Race and equality
• Providing for students with special needs
• Neighborhood communities are important
After determining the initial themes of each data source, I extended the coding process with axial coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and filtered through the values and discourses within each document to create more specific categories (See Table 6-3).

Table 6-3 Second Assessment of Values and Themes from Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUES</th>
<th>MICHELLE</th>
<th>HISTORY</th>
<th>INTERVIEWS</th>
<th>UNION</th>
<th>NCQENO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEW ORLEANS IS UNIQUE</td>
<td>Old – public</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>Elders</td>
<td>Place at discussion table - transparency</td>
<td>Neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–inside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE OF EDUCATION</td>
<td>Prepare students for entry into the workforce</td>
<td>Prepare students to become productive citizens in a democratic society</td>
<td>Prepare students for entry into the workforce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICS</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUSINESS</td>
<td>New – Private money from outside sources</td>
<td>State Control of Power</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACE</td>
<td>White over Black</td>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Orleans is Unique

All five data sources (re)present New Orleans as a unique place. First, my assessment of *Rebuilding and Transforming* revealed the pre-Katrina “old ways” of operating the city of New Orleans were no longer acceptable. Public opinion was completely ignored in planning the post-Katrina education system. Second, the history of public education uncovered that New Orleans is
unique because of her contributions to the arts, music and cuisine; qualities that distinguish New Orleans from the rest of the world. Third, the black female participant placed emphasis on the importance of the youth respecting “elders” in the black community. She defined “elders” as the older generations of citizens. Through storytelling the elders’ passed on wisdom from their life experiences (Dixson, 2010). Fourth, UTNO, the local teachers union desired to participate in the BNOB Education Committee process. Union leaders wanted to guarantee that the BNOB Education Committee process was transparent to all citizens and were denied the opportunity to do so. Finally, NCQENO emphasized that New Orleans neighborhoods possessed distinctive characteristics that represent the “flavor” of the city. Neighborhoods like the lower ninth ward have special significance to New Orleanians. Some of its residents have lived there all their lives and the neighborhood is part of their souls.

**Purpose of Education**

Joshua Baldwin was the catalyst that spearheaded public education in New Orleans. Public education in New Orleans was needed for two reasons. First, during the 1790’s a large number of northerners settled in New Orleans and assumed a major role in its economic and political life. The original northerners were joined by others attracted to the city in the late 1830’s and early 1840’s. The new migrants did not easily assimilate to the South as they were attached to their northern lifestyle. Free public education was one institution they were accustomed to having in their communities (Reinders, 1964, p 181-182). Second, Baldwin was influenced by Horace Mann’s work in Massachusetts public schools. He agreed with Mann’s philosophy that education was a natural right of every child. Also, political stability and social harmony depended on education: a basic level of literacy and the inculcation of common public ideals (<http://www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/horace/html>). Conversely, neither *Rebuilding and*...
Transforming nor participant interviews discussed education as a means of promoting good citizenship and democracy. Instead, they emphasized preparing students for college, trade schools and ultimately the workforce is the goal of public education in today’s New Orleans.

Politics

The value of politics is illuminated among the data sources in three ways. First, the notion of privatizing education was evident in the data from both my analysis and that of NCQENO. Both recognized the infiltration of outside money into city from philanthropic organizations. Outside “experts” like the Boston Consulting Group, the Gates and Broad Foundations came to New Orleans to “fix” the city. Second, existing tensions between New Orleans and state legislators are explicit in Act 35, the Louisiana legislation that resulted in the takeover of over 100 schools in New Orleans. The historical chapter on education and UTNO’s National Model response clearly document this issue. Third, lack of transparency and political decision making for reconstructing the city took place through secret meetings. An example of this practice involved a meeting that took place among an invited group of west bank political and community leaders to develop a charter school district in spite of plans in motion to reopen west bank schools with pre Katrina principals and faculty. The charter proposal was presented during the October 7th school board meeting with board members, principals and teachers unaware of what was about to take place. The Algiers Charter School Association was the end product of the meeting.

Lourdes Moran, the vice president of the Orleans Parish School Board developed a plan to create a charter association with the New Orleans public schools scheduled to open on the west bank. Moran emailed the plan to board members the night before but according
to *Education Week*, some board members and Acting Superintendent Watson said they hadn’t had a chance to read the application before the meeting.

New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin announced that he would ask the governor for help in creating a citywide charter school system. Nagin later explained that he had written a letter to Governor Kathleen Blanco on October 5: “Give me the charter schools I’ve been asking for—20 charter schools, a citywide charter school district.”

Moran, who admitted that she had purposely kept her colleagues in the dark about the proposal, was amicable in victory. “I’m not saying that I want to do this because I want to change governance,” she explained. “I am interested in making sure we access all the resources necessary to have a quality education (Newmark & DeRugy, 2006).”

The group’s proposal was motivated by money from the federal government and philanthropic groups whose donations were contingent upon the establishment of charter schools and privatization of public education.

**Business**

My assessment of the Rebuilding and Transforming revealed the clear alignment of the elements of successful schools with that of the Business Roundtable (see chapter 4). Data from interview participants placed emphasis on schools operating as business. As one participant stated “We are in the business of education.” Conversely, UTNO did not use the term “business” but related the union’s lack of presence in the process. As previously stated UTNO was not
recognized as an organization or mentioned in newspaper articles throughout the BNOB process. NCQENO cited concerns regarding outsourcing the needs of the school district. Teacher recruitment from Teach for America and New Schools for New Orleans are one example of utilizing outside sources to staff New Orleans schools.

Race

Race was a value embedded within each of the data sources. New Orleans’ population was 68% Black prior to Hurricane Katrina. The percentage of Blacks is salient when examining the configuration of the Bring New Orleans Back Education Commission. The steering committee was composed of 18 people; 12 White and 6 Black. This composition did not embody the majority population of the city or the parents, guardians and student who attending public schools. It leaned towards the dynamics expressed by the group that met with Mayor Nagin prior to the establishment of the BNOB Commission. Those community leaders/ businessmen were clear in their demands for the reconstruction of the city. They did want the “new” New Orleans tainted by the “ills” that existed in the city prior to Katrina.

Historical racism dates back to the Civil War era when blacks were denied public education. New Orleans’ school system operated two segregated school systems throughout the 1900’s – 1950’s. The school system resisted implementing desegregation orders until court ordered and integrated the first schools on November 14, 1960. UTNO’s concerns were also based on historical racism. In 2005, the student population of New Orleans public schools was 93% Black and 7% White. The majority of Whites were enrolled in selective admission schools and scored higher on state accountability tests.

Examples of race were illustrated in interviews with my three participants. The issue of race was silent among two of the participants. There was no mention of race during their
conversations with me. I posit this silence existed due to their positions in the educational arena. As previously identified in chapter 5, one participant was CEO of the new charter school association and school leadership center and the other was a chancellor of a local community college. However, the black female participant discussed racial discrimination as a New Orleans public school student in the 1960’s and how the same issues exist today’s New Orleans public school system.

NCQENO’s principal concern was the marginalized population – those least served and underrepresented be treated equally. The group’s chief concern was that teachers hired by Orleans Parish and the Recovery School District especially those from Teach for America and New Schools for New Orleans were sensitized to the city’s African American culture and customs. Recruitment is necessary and commendable, but it is imperative that teachers receive professional development and training to engage with New Orleans public school children. The action or lack of action taken during the BNOB process indicate that race is not only an issue common to New Orleans but in the state and national arena as well.

Moving Forward after BNOB

One of the recommendations presented in *Rebuilding and Transforming* was to create a national advisory council composed of educational transformational leaders to serve over the five years following the plan. The recommendation did not materialize under the title of “national advisory council.” Rather, the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University (named for BNOB education committee chair and Tulane University President) was created immediately following the dissolution of the BNOB Education Committee. The institute is billed as a “think tank” to create and advance solutions to the issues impeding student achievement in New Orleans and beyond [http://www.coweninstitute.com/about/](http://www.coweninstitute.com/about/). In essence, it
serves as the national advisory council suggested in *Rebuilding and Transforming*. In addition to its policy work, the Cowen Institute houses New Schools for New Orleans, New Leaders for New Schools and Teach NOLA, the local organization of the New Teacher Project. Each organization works to recruit teachers and leaders for the school district and is primarily funded by donations from philanthropic (e.g. Gates, Broad and Fisher) foundations (Toppo, 2007).

Three reports on the state of public education in New Orleans were produced by the Cowen Institute and co-sponsored by the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation and the education committee of the New Orleans City Council to provide the community with an assessment of the school years following Hurricane Katrina. The Boston Consulting Group was contracted to continue their role in the data gathering process and wrote the final report using the same format and language as *Rebuilding and Transforming*. The *State of Public Education in New Orleans 2007* report describes the current two district configuration as the new model of public education in New Orleans. The following table explains the concerns/challenges and future recommendations (see table 6-4).

Table 6-4 *The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational problems in facilities, transportation and meal service</td>
<td>Ensure adequate capacity for the 2007-2008 school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School choice is encouraging but hampered by the lack of schools, inequitable access for students and limited information.</td>
<td>Equip and empower all families to choose the best public schools for their children from a range of high-quality school options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy at school sites has increased focus on improving student achievement.</td>
<td>Strengthen the Recovery School District.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System –level coordination is currently limited</td>
<td>Attract, develop, and retain high-quality school principals, teachers and staff for all public schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support school and system level excellence for all schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create and endorse a short-term action plan and a long term-term strategic plan for public education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2007, p.3
The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2008 was produced using the same format as the 2007 report. The Boston Consulting Group again gathered data and wrote the report for this assessment. The State of Public Education 2008 report revisited the history of New Orleans public education before Hurricane Katrina, described the post-Katrina education system as the opportunity of a lifetime and portrayed the current school system as unique. Unlike the State of Public Education 2007, the 2008 report list the successes and challenges of the 2007 – 2008 school year (see table 6-5).

Table 6-5 *The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESSES</th>
<th>CHALLENGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong new leadership has emerged at the state and local levels.</td>
<td>Many teachers do not have the skills or support they need to teach a diverse school population with very high needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School buildings have been brought up to basic standards and have significantly more supplies.</td>
<td>Current levels of school spending cannot be sustained. Both the RSD and OPSB are spending more per student than they will be able to receive from regular per-pupil funding in the coming years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sufficient number of teachers were hired for the 2007-08 school year.</td>
<td>Special education and mental health services are severely lacking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community is much more involved in schools than before Katrina.</td>
<td>There is poor cooperation among schools and districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, there is a sense among students, teachers, school leaders and community members that there have been significant improvements in most schools since last school year.</td>
<td>There is a lack of timely and accessible school information for parents, students and the public.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2008*, p. 4

Public School Performance in New Orleans: a Supplement to the 2008 State of Public Education in New Orleans Report is an assessment of student performance in the New Orleans school district. Unlike the 2007 and 2008 reports, the supplemental report was prepared by a team of researchers from the Cowen Institute. The report is divided into three parts: (1) an overview of school accountability in the United States; (2) the Louisiana public school accountability system and (3) school performance in New Orleans.
The report posits that if New Orleans was still one unified district during the 2007-2008 school year the 66.4 district performance score (the score that compared academic achievement to the state performance score) increased almost 10 points from the district’s pre-Katrina score of 56.9 in the 2004-2005 school year (p.2). The report does acknowledge that it was difficult to compare data using pre and post-Katrina scores for a number of reasons. First, the school system was split into two districts. Second, the demographics varied from school to school. Third, 57% of the open schools are charter schools with varied admission requirements. Fourth, scores could not be compared between the Recovery School District with low performing schools and the Orleans Parish School District with high performing schools (p.2). Fifth, with the current two district configuration it will be hard to account for performance outcomes without more detailed information of the operational environment of each school and individual student performance. Admirably, the report does not try to hide the problems that plagued the city the first full school year after Hurricane Katrina. Yet, limited accessibility to data provided the Cowen Institute freedom and flexibility to represent information to the community according to the ideology of the organization.

**New Orleans: a Charter School District?**

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools New Orleans leads the total market share (57%) of charter schools in the country. New Orleans’ school district ranks 9th with the largest number of students enrolled in charter schools (*Top 10 charter communities by market share*, 2009). The large percentage of charters in New Orleans is disconcerting as studies performed by researchers of the Civil Right Project of UCLA report that “disadvantaged families are left to comprehend and cope individually with the complicated landscape of school choice (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2009).
Sarah Carr (2009) affirms Frankenberg and Siegel-Hawley’s work in a series of reports that describe the challenge parents face to enroll their children in school. She reported that parents hear rhetoric that claims they can choose where their child will attend school. But few feel that they have real choice (p.1). In theory, New Orleans families can choose from various types of schools. In reality, it is difficult to negotiate the complicated enrollment applications. Some schools only accept applications during designated times (e.g. 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.) which are inopportune for working parents. Other schools require interviews under the pretense of “getting to know the parent and child” only to be later informed that they [the school] have no space or the child is not a match for their school. Since charter schools receive public funding they should be equally available to all students regardless of background (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010). Parents continue to be confused and frustrated. Only those who are aware of application procedures, deadlines, flexible work hours and means of transportation appear to be succeeding in “school choice.”

Neoliberalism, arguably the dominant political discourse in the world today (Harvey, 2005; Peet, 2007), seeks to further liberal causes of liberty, justice, and equality without liberal solutions of large, centralized social programs, trade, unionism or restrictions on business. Rather, neoliberals believe that the economic marketplace when unencumbered by greed, traditions, or government regulations will eventually raise all citizens’ standard of living to bring them out of poverty, dissolving all barriers to equal opportunity and preparing them to compete successfully in a global economy. Accordingly, schooling is the engine for securing the appropriate market conditions and for preparing workers for their globalized future. These values have been articulated in reports on American schooling and federal policy since the A Nation at Risk report upset President Reagan’s conservative agenda to reduce the cost of schooling, to insert Christian practices, and to offer vouchers for private schools at public expense. The Business Roundtable’s
Educational Reform Goals of 1989 and the subsequent federal Goals 2000, America 2000 and Educate America can be read in this neoliberal light.

When Hurricane Katrina apparently swept New Orleans’ traditions into the Gulf of Mexico along with many of the houses in the Ninth Ward where I lived, a neoliberal discourse rushed in to fill the proclaimed void in order to remake the New Orleans’ (Bauman, 2004) educational system in its own image. The old was condemned without remorse, and the new was promoted without evidence. Private and public funds touted private solutions. Likeminded experts were convened to rubberstamp neoliberal values as popular consensus. This manufactured consensus was packaged by a subcontractor (The Boston Consulting Group) into an attractive report for business and moneyed citizens.

Such logic and claims are beyond optimism; rather they border on outright deception because the wealth, income, employment, educational achievement, and health care gaps between White and Black and rich and poor have increased under the values of neoliberalism across the country and around the world (Phillips, 2008).

The privatization of New Orleans schools was no accident. Had parents and students been part of the committee they (parents) might have had some sense of neoliberal views. However, neoliberalism would not have been their primary concern. I posit discussion among committee members would have been different. Those competing discourses (the elite versus plain, everyday folk) would have needed to be discussed as opposed to being informed. Before the BNOB Commission was launched, Mayor Nagin met with members of the city’s power elite in Dallas to discuss what should happen to his city and its people that had been devastated and demoralized by the storm and by the inadequate federal response. The Wall Street Journal captured the sentiment of the event as an insistence that “the remade city won’t simply restore order”. Rather, as James Reiss, a participant in the meeting, explained:

The new city must be something different, with better services and fewer poor people.

Those who want to see this city rebuilt want to see it done in a completely different way:
demographically, geographically, and politically . . . . I’m not speaking for myself here.

This way we’ve been living is not going to happen again or we’re out (Cooper, 2005).

Members of the Louisiana Congressional Delegation as well as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives commented, “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did” , and “It looks like a lot of the city could be bulldozed” (Cooper, 2005, B01). These statements seem to be more representative of the goals of the neoliberal view and the application of its agenda in New Orleans. Housing developments including those without damage were razed and replaced with homes designed for multi income residents. These speakers name a city that has or will continue to eliminate the people who are not needed in the current economy – those who cannot find work with a living wage any longer in a postindustrial environment with a limited service . Bauman (2004) describes such people as outcasts – they are understood as unnecessary for the economy to continue and their continued presence is a drain on the wealth of any city, state, and nation. They become waste within the economic system, and Bauman argues that school reforms across the postindustrial world have become the “perfect” means to identify such waste and to make the process appear beneficial for the both the individual and society (see Giroux, 2006 for a further application).

The realities of these values in other environments have been that a few get rich (whatever the measure) while most suffer increased hardships. To date, New Orleans schools seem to be headed in this direction. If public schools are to serve the New Orleans public – the one that existed before Hurricane Katrina - then those values must be challenged at every level - in neighborhoods, across the city, and throughout the nation. New Orleans is not a Greenfield without histories, traditions, and cultures that should mediate any plans for the future. It is not simply nostalgia to insist that the rebuilding keep people in mind and to ensure that profits are not valued over people. Although its schools have a checkered past, they are not a Greenfield either
to be transformed into the untested image of neoliberal pundits without much regard for the majority of New Orleans citizens.

Perhaps the place to begin these challenges is to contest the value that business models based on markets are the best system for addressing social problems. Subcontracting, small flexible organizational structures, bottom line accountability, and no regulation have not produced sustainable business or stable economies as neoliberal pundits promise. Rather businesses continue to seek advantages within markets in order to make profits predictable, cutting costs regardless of social consequences in order to attract investors. Profit and dividends are their only responsibilities. Collapses in dot.com, energy, and financial industries, crony no bid contracts, and decades of stagnant wages provide the general evidence business models are not ideal for rebuilding schools. Freedom to choose might be a useful slogan, but it has very little to do with the realities of majority of people who see their incomes and the future opportunities sinking. The inability of the federal government to respond to New Orleans’ needs during and after the storm should be sufficient evidence to question the privatization of public services. Disaster capitalism will not protect public interests (Klein, 2005). Philanthropic donations (Gates, Broad and Fisher) have come with neoliberal strings. Their money talks, but can it be made to listen as well? Is there still a public sphere in the United States? In New Orleans? In the education field?

Issues of race and class must be discussed openly rather than hidden within the word “all.” The hurricane revealed these issues to national and world audiences, who seemed somewhat surprised by the conditions of the some neighborhoods and the color of the citizens left to weather the storm themselves. But the flood did not create those conditions or determine who would suffer and who would be safe. These are historical consequences of race and class relations in New Orleans and the United States. Although reprehensible, the cynical responses that the storm improved New Orleans by reducing poverty and segregation (by eliminating parts of the
city that will probably not be rebuilt) identified poverty and segregation as social problems. They made the issues explicit in ways that the Education committee chose to avoid. Poverty and segregation by race were and are major obstacles in building and rebuilding New Orleans and its schools. A more useful educational plan for transforming New Orleans schools would face these issues squarely and acknowledge that the only period when student achievement gaps narrowed in the United States was during the 1960s War on Poverty when programs for income, housing, and health care supported new school policies (Berliner, 2006).

Public schooling requires a public that can achieve collective benefits by mediating political and economic forces bent on control and profit. Educational researchers can participate in that public by taking critical looks at the plans and practices of New Orleans schools and those engaged in standards based reform. Naming the neoliberal values and describing their consequences in terms other than test scores can inform the public about hollow rhetoric and flow of profits within such systems. We need President Obama and the US Congress to recognize these concerns. Especially since approximately one in four charter schools does not report data on low-income students. Since eligibility for receiving free lunch is proof that families cannot afford to provide it, the lack of a free lunch program at school would impose a severe economic barrier to attending a charter school (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010). But it will take louder, consistent, and critical voices to get them to listen and act. In the meantime, the citizens, youth and children of New Orleans need our help.

The uncertain future could be used to justify any system, particularly if data is not required. Derrick Bell (2004) argues that such flexibility in school systems has thwarted efforts to enforce Brown v. the Board of Education rulings across the country, enabling resegregation of schools and inequity in schooling. Researchers at the Civil Rights Project have been tracking racial demographics in schools for over twenty years and a compilation of data supports Bell’s argument that public schools are resegregating (Orfield, 1999; Orfield & Frankenberg,
What does this trend toward resegregation and inequality mean in 2010? Bell posits that “Negro” schools functioned well prior to Brown. Black school teachers provided quality education for Black students in spite of inequitable building structures, indoor facilities, and materials. In keeping with the values instilled by their ancestors, Blacks continue to hold education in high esteem. In other words, although the infrastructure of the schools was different with Black and White children being separated before the Brown decision, the importance of education in Black communities remained a constant.

Having experienced the positives and negatives to integration, my response to Bell’s argument is not a simple one. I am conflicted as a student, parent and an educator. I am reminded of my school girl experiences in elementary school where black teachers taught me how to read in a segregated school. I would like all children to have equal school facilities, equal resources, and high quality teachers. Unfortunately, we do not live in a “color-blind – color-mute” world (Dvorak, 2009; Robbins, 2005). I yearn for “utopia,” a place from which to remember our struggle for educational equity and embrace the possibilities that the definition of equality stands for. Instead the charter school movement has taken over the city of New Orleans. As a result, a number of basic civil rights for children and their families are being ignored.

Suggestions for Future Research

*Rebuilding and Transforming: a Plan for Improving Public Education in New Orleans* is a springboard for future research. Studies have been done on charter schools and urban reform, but never on reconstructing a school system from scratch. More research is imperative because the next tragedy to strike a school district might not be a “natural disaster” but a disaster nonetheless. In essence, New Orleans could become a model of educational reform for the
country and around the world. Is New Orleans a model educational reform or a model of disaster recovery?

Other questions and concerns drive further research – Mayor C. Ray Nagin has been replaced by Mitchell Landrieu, son of former mayor Maurice “Moon” Landrieu. Mayor Landrieu is the first white mayor of New Orleans since his father left office in 1978. How does the rhetoric contained in *Rebuilding and Transforming* compare with the education agenda in the new mayoral administration? What elements should be included a school curriculum that integrates New Orleans cultural heritage into the areas of language, culture and society as recommended by the National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans? Political platforms tout educational systems as being in “crisis” and propose transforming schools into independent businesses. In depth studies into New Orleans public education might enlighten politicians, philanthropists, neoliberals and communities around the world.

**Conclusion**

Children enrolled in New Orleans public schools are subjects in an experiment with results yet to be determined (Quigley, 2007). Lusher Charter School was one of the first charter schools to reopen after Hurricane Katrina with the assistance of Tulane University. In the interest of full disclaimer, my nephew attends Lusher School. Children of Tulane University and other local universities were given first preference to enroll in the school (Dingerson, 2006). Today Lusher is operated by the non-profit Advocates for Arts-Based Education Corporation. Admission to Lusher is highly competitive. The school’s administrative tier mirrors that of a business corporation led by a Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer (www.lusher.org). The Chief Executive Officer (she formerly held the title of principal) receives a salary in excess of $200,000 that includes a yearly car allowance and possible performance bonus. Among the
reasons cited for her salary was her pivotal role in fundraising which has netted about $6 million since 2005. Also, three other charter school leaders earn large salaries, ranging from $132,000 – $186,000. Their salaries were set by charter boards in a free-market exchange (Thevenot, 2009).

New Orleans public schools have been treated as a greenfield, a new entity emerging without prior constraints. However, the greenfield metaphor has not been realized. Racial, social and monetary disparities still exist among schools. Parents are resentful that they have not been included in the rebuilding process while others have trouble trying to enroll a child in school. Recreating a school system based on competition among schools, soliciting funds from foundations with private interest and determining failure or success based on test scores does not serve the children in New Orleans.

New Orleans is my home and I love it dearly. After two and a half years my sisters and their families have made their way back to New Orleans via stays in Pennsylvania and Maryland. I have completed my doctorate at Penn State University and look toward the future. Though my current path does not lead directly back to the New Orleans; my contribution to New Orleans will be what I know best – teaching and advocating for children. I plan to reestablish a personal and working relationship with my classmate and superintendent of Orleans Parish Schools Darryl C. Kilbert to determine how and where I can best serve the school district. Initially, I plan to offer my services in the area of teacher training and helping new teachers (especially those new to New Orleans) to understand the culture and children they will serve.

Damien Theodore (2010), a young writer from Students at the Center (a high school-based writing program founded in 1996 in New Orleans) expressed in poetry what I feel about my city in a poem titled “Wake Up”. The poem described his reaction to seeing the city two months after Hurricane Katrina swept New Orleans. Theodore used the metaphor of New Orleans being asleep and needing to wake up. He writes:

Then I thought about it. She can’t do it by herself.
It’s gonna take a revolution to wake her up.

If we want her up and alive again, we need to get a move on it.

She will never wake up, if we don’t get started now.

It may take me the rest of my life to wake New Orleans up,

But she will be alive and well before I die (p. 110).
REFERENCES


Ritea, S. (2005a, October 7). Algiers plan gets good grades: financially, it may be the only way to go. *The Times Picayune*, p. B01.


Appendix A

RECRUITMENT LETTER
3181 Shellers Bend #3

State College, PA 16801

April 10, 2008

My name is Michelle Early Torregano. I am a doctoral candidate in curriculum and instruction at The Pennsylvania State University. My research interests are teacher education, multicultural education and school reform.

My dissertation study will examine the rebuilding of public education in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This dilemma is the first of its kind in the United States. The objective of my study is to examine how this restructuring will take place. As a native New Orleanian and former public school educator I have a personal interest in this project.

Therefore, I am seeking your help as a research participant in this study. Over the course of three interviews participants will be asked to describe their experiences in public education in New Orleans. The duration of each interview will be 45 – 90 minutes in length.

This study is being supervised by Dr, Patrick Shannon. If you have questions or concerns, he can be reached at 814-865-0069, or by email pxs15@psu.edu. Dr. Shannon’s address is 211 Chambers Building, University Park, PA 16802.

If you are willing to participate, you may reach me by email, met165@psu.edu or by telephone, 814-234-0605 (home) or 504-710-5836 (cell).

I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Michelle Early Torregano

* This is the same letter that will be used as letter sent by U. S. mail, as an email and as a telephone script as noted in Question 40 on the application.
Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Clean Slate: Making Sense of Public Education in the “NEW” New Orleans

Principal Investigator: Michelle Early Torregano
107 Chambers Building
University Park, PA 16802
met165@psu.edu
814-234-0605

Advisor: Dr. Patrick Shannon
211 Chambers Building
University Park, PA 16802
pxs15@psu.edu
814-865-0069

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to examine the reconstruction of public education in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in a series of three interview sessions. Each session will be audio recorded.

3. Benefits: The benefits to you include gaining addition insight into your philosophy of urban public school education.

   The benefits to society include the increased awareness of the plight of public education and school reform.

4. Duration/Time:
   Each interview session will last from 45 – 90 minutes. You be asked to participate in three sessions.

5. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at 107 Chamber Building, University Park, PA in a locked and password protected file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. Your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology use. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

   Each participant will be assigned a code number and pseudonym at the beginning of the study. The principal investigator and her advisor will have access to the data and your identity.
6. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Michelle Early Torregano at 814-234-0605 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research.

7. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

_____________________________________________  _________________
Participant Signature      Date

_____________________________________________  _________________
Person Obtaining Consent     Date
VITA
MICHELLE EARLY TORREGANO
met165@psu.edu

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University
Doctor of Philosophy, December 2010

Xavier University of Louisiana
Master of Arts with Honors, December 1993

Xavier University of Louisiana
Bachelor of Arts: Elementary Education, May 1978

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2009  The Pennsylvania State University, CI295 Early Level Field Experience Instructor

2004-2008  The Pennsylvania State University, CI 495 B Middle Level Field Experience Instructor

2003-2004  The Pennsylvania State University, Graduate Assistant: LLED 400/401

PUBLICATIONS


CERTIFICATIONS

Louisiana Teaching Certification –
Teaching Certificate Number: A052287 Valid: Life
Eligibility:
Learning Disabled
Elementary Grades
Mild/Moderate (1 -12) – 11/15/1983
Elementary School Principal – 2/9/1994
Principal – 12/5/96