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**Political Contestation and Discursive Argumentation:
Revising Minnesota's School Integration Revenue Statute**

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Abstract: The integration of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in public schools has been an issue of educational policy concern for several decades. Most school desegregation programs implemented in the United States post-*Brown* that relied on student busing and race-based school assignment were discontinued by the 1990s. In Minnesota, these were replaced with an approach that encouraged voluntary school integration efforts, supported with funding provided through State Statute 124D.86 to districts with racially identifiable schools or whose schools were racially isolated relative to neighboring communities. A legislatively mandated Integration Revenue Replacement Advisory Task Force was convened from November 2011 to February 2012 to frame the role of the state's schools in addressing racial inequities and to recommend changes to existing policy. This article applies Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) analytic framework of *political discourse as argumentation* to examine the revision of this statute as a site of ideological contestation. The appointed members of this task force included professional educators, former legislators, faith

leaders, and lawyers, and presented distinct epistemological beliefs regarding the purposes and roles of schools and of policy. Two competing claims for action were identified, summarized as “Bipartisan Compromise” and “Conservative Dissent.” This analysis reveals the effect of underlying values on developing particular claims for action made by Task Force members, and connects these values to divergent understandings of the purpose of state educational funding and the outcomes that public schooling should achieve.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; practical argumentation; school integration and desegregation; democratic deliberation; Minnesota

Contestación política y discursos sienten: Revisar el estado de ingresos integración escolar de Minnesota

Resumen: La integración de los estudiantes de diversos orígenes raciales y étnicos en las escuelas públicas ha sido un motivo de preocupación política educativa desde hace varias décadas. La mayoría de los programas de integración de las escuelas post-Brown que dependían de transporte escolar del estudiante y la asignación de la escuela basada en la raza se interrumpieron por la década de 1990. En Minnesota, que fueron reemplazados con un enfoque que alienta los esfuerzos de integración voluntaria de la escuela apoyado con fondos proporcionados por el Estado Estatuto 124D.86 para los distritos con escuelas racialmente identificables o cuyas escuelas fueron racialmente aislada de las comunidades de los alrededores. Un reemplazo de Integración de Impuestos Asesor Grupo de Trabajo se reunió del 11 2011 hasta febrero 2012 para enmarcar el papel de las escuelas del estado para hacer frente a las desigualdades raciales y recomendar cambios en la política existente. Este artículo se aplica un marco analítico del discurso político como argumentación (Fairlough y Fairlough, 2012) para examinar la revisión de esta ley como un lugar de cuestionamiento ideológico. Los miembros nombrados este grupo de trabajo incluyó educadores profesionales, ex legisladores, líderes religiosos y abogados, y presentan diferentes creencias epistemológicas en relación con los propósitos y funciones de las escuelas y la política. Se identificaron dos demandas que compiten por acción, que se resumen como “acuerdo bipartidista” y “desacuerdo conservadora”. Este análisis muestra el efecto de los valores que subyace en el desarrollo de las reclamaciones de acción específicos realizados por los miembros del Grupo de Trabajo, y estos valores se conecta a las diferentes ideas de la finalidad de la financiación educativa del estado y los resultados que la educación pública debe lograr.

Palabras clave: Análisis del discurso; razonamiento práctico; la integración escolar y la desintegración; deliberación democrática; Minnesota

Contestação política e discursos de sentido: Revisão escola receita integração estatuto de Minnesota

Resumo: A integração de estudantes de diversas origens raciais e étnicas nas escolas públicas tem sido um assunto de preocupação política educacional por várias décadas. A maioria dos programas de integração das escolas pós-Brown dependia estudante busing e alocação de escola baseada em raça foram interrompidos na década de 1990. Em Minnesota, estes foram substituídos com uma abordagem que incentivou os esforços de integração escolar voluntária, apoiada com financiamento fornecido através de Estado Estatuto 124D.86 para os distritos com as escolas racialmente identificáveis ou cujas escolas eram racialmente isolado em relação a comunidades vizinhas. Un reemplazo de Integración de Impuestos Asesor Grupo de Trabajo se reunió del 11 2011 hasta febrero 2012 para enmarcar el papel de las escuelas del estado para hacer frente a las desigualdades raciales y recomendar cambios en la política existente. Este artigo apresenta uma estrutura analítica do discurso político e argumentação (Fairlough e Fairlough, 2012) aplica-se a discutir a revisão desta lei como um lugar de questionamento ideológico. Os membros nomeados desta força-tarefa incluiu

educadores profissionais, ex-legisladores, líderes religiosos e advogados, e apresentou crenças epistemológicas distintas em relação às finalidades e papéis de escolas e da política. Foram identificadas duas reivindicações concorrentes para a ação, resumido como "acordo bipartidário" e "Dissent conservador." Esta análise mostra o efeito dos valores subjacentes ao desenvolvimento dos pedidos de ação específica realizada pelos membros do Grupo de Trabalho, e estes valores estão ligados às idéias diferentes de efeitos de financiamento educacional do estado e os resultados a educação pública deve alcançar.

Palavras-chave: Análise do discurso; argumentação prática; integração escolar e desagregação; deliberação democrática; Minnesota

Introduction

Policies that address school desegregation (defined as responses to *de jure* separation of students in public educational settings by race or ethnicity) and integration (defined as the encouragement of schools to voluntarily and deliberately develop diverse learning environments) remain contentious more than fifty years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision. Over roughly the same period, “party sorting” as one facet of political polarization has become more pronounced (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008), and divisions between Democrats and Republicans have been studied as a key element of decision-making on social policy issues (see e.g., Fisher, Waggle & Leifeld’s 2012 study of climate change debates). In debates over the use of state funds for particular educational purposes legislators tend to fall into a typical “left-right” continuum (Dar, 2012). This article investigates debates over school integration policy in the state of Minnesota as a site of ideological contestation.

Most school desegregation programs that were implemented in the United States post-*Brown* that relied on student busing and race-based school assignment were discontinued by the 1990s. In Minnesota, these were replaced with an approach that encouraged voluntary school integration efforts, supported with funding provided through a state statute. Following several calls from Republican lawmakers to repeal or rewrite the statute in the first decade of the 21st century, a legislatively mandated Integration Revenue Replacement Advisory Task Force convened from November 2011 to February 2012 to frame the role of schools in addressing racial inequities and to recommend changes to existing policy. The text of the “charge” issued during a legislative special session in 2011 is presented in Figure 1.

The appointed members of this task force included professional educators, former legislators, faith leaders, and lawyers, who presented distinct epistemological beliefs regarding the purposes and roles of schools, and of policy. This article applies Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) analytic framework of *political discourse as argumentation* to examine the revision of the Integration Revenue Statute as a power-driven deliberative process. In so doing I expand on previous work (Mattheis, 2016) that examined the iterations of specific statute language using a combined framework of critical discourse analysis and policy tools. These previous analyses focused on how including the troublesome mandate that “achievement gaps” be addressed by integration efforts (language added to the statute in 2010) represents an ahistoric erasure of decades of systemic racial discrimination. Here, I focus specifically on how such political goals are debated, explicated, and compromised at the state level through bipartisan processes of drafting and writing policy language that is later interpreted and implemented in local school districts in supposedly neutral ways.

In this article I first contextualize the study with literature examining the implementation of school desegregation efforts and the role of race and diversity in educational policy, explain the mode of critical discourse analysis employed in the analytic framework, and describe the Minnesota

context. I then present two competing claims for action that emerged, and describe how partisan political affiliations and different ideological understandings contributed to their development through Task Force deliberations. Implications for policy language and related practical implementation of new legislative Statute language are discussed in the concluding sections. Examining where policy language originates identifies another source of intervention for stakeholders interested in understanding—and disrupting—the implementation of inequitable educational policies.

Sec. 49. INTEGRATION REVENUE REPLACEMENT ADVISORY TASK FORCE.

(a) The commissioner of education must convene a 12-member advisory task force to develop recommendations for repurposing integration revenue funds to create and sustain opportunities for students to achieve improved educational outcomes. The advisory task force, among other things, must consider how districts may effectively narrow and close the academic achievement gap and foster academic success for students by:

- (1) pursuing specific academic achievement goals premised on continuous adapting of best teaching practices and efficient use of resources; and
- (2) identifying variables to show annual progress toward achieving student, school, and district goals for student's academic success.

(b) The funding allocation for the new program should ensure funding stability for districts between the current integration program and the new program. The money shall be used for the purposes recommended and forwarded by the task force and approved and appropriated by the legislature.

(c) The advisory task force is composed of: six members appointed by the commissioner of education, three members appointed by the speaker of the house, and three members appointed by the Subcommittee on Committees of the Committee on Rules and Administration. The commissioner must convene the first meeting of the task force and offer assistance to the task force upon request. Task force members must seek input from organizations and individuals whose expertise can help inform the work of the task force and must develop recommendations to improve the academic achievement of students.

(d) The commissioner, on behalf of the task force, must submit a report to the legislature by February 15, 2012, recommending how best to allocate funds previously allocated under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.86, to achieve improved educational outcomes for students.

Figure 1: Legislative Charge to Create Task Force (S.F. No. 11, 2011)

Literature Review

The political and social dynamics of school desegregation have been topics of debate and scholarly research for several decades. In this section I position this study in sociocultural policy studies literature, and then briefly summarize how changes in discursive focus from “desegregation” to “diversity” in educational practice have obscured racial equity goals in much of U.S. public schooling.

Educational Policy Development in Sociocultural Contexts

Shore and Wright (1997) have posited that anthropology offers a way to examine how government policies work (or don't) as instruments of governance, and how political discourse

constructs meaning around particular subjects (p. 3). They have further related policy studies and anthropology by connecting a focus in both areas on issues of “norms and institutions, ideology and consciousness, knowledge and power, rhetoric and discourse, meaning and interpretation, the global and the local,” (Shore & Wright, 1997) and define policy as a concept or cultural phenomenon that can serve as an object of study. Educational policy research can also explain the mechanisms by which power is distributed, wielded, and maintained; sociocultural approaches can expose how hidden cultural assumptions drive the development of legislative mandates and their implementation. To understand the policy milieu in which local policies are deliberated and enacted, analysts must also attend to larger national shifts. DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) traced changes in federal political climates before and after the *No Child Left Behind* era, and noted that the contemporary education policy landscape has become increasingly complex. Previously identifiable ideological standpoints relative to educational policy have been disrupted, meaning that “interest groups and organizations can no longer afford not to put forward innovative proposals, forge coalitions, and actively communicate with members” (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 39). It is within such a context that the appointed members of the Task Force—themselves representatives of various stakeholder groups with particular stances—were tasked with deliberating over the purpose of a state policy with pluralistic implications.

Frameworks more traditional to the realm of political science have also been used to identify the particular actors and issues that are at the heart of educational policy development processes. In the case discussed in this article, Mazzoni’s (1991) construction of an arena model to bound the sites in which political interactions occur and decisions are made, for example, was useful in examining how power was exerted among Task Force members relative to school integration. Kingdon (1995) described three process streams that can be influenced by stakeholders interested in influencing social change through governmental means: problems, policy, and politics, and noted that “problem recognition is critical to agenda setting” (p. 198). This approach to examining processes distinguished between different types of influence exerted by actors in the policy stream; these actors include those in official decision-making positions, visible experts called upon to contribute to problem-definition dialogues, and hidden participants who are impacted by policy but whose voices are often unheard (Kingdon, 1995). In an application of Kingdon’s model to an analysis of the role of state governors in agenda-setting for reading policies, Young, Shepley and Song (2010) identified within-government conditions that influence the political stream, including “turnover in positions, shifts in state and national mood, and organized political forces from both inside and outside of the government, including those with different political affiliations” (p. 9). The partisan tensions evident in Minnesota’s state government at the time the Task Force was convened are therefore significant in examining the political context in which its charge was issued.

School Desegregation and Racial Integration as Persistent Sociopolitical Dilemmas

Although federal Supreme Court decisions have been highly influential in shaping desegregation and integration policies across the country, school policies remain localized in many ways. State court decisions and legislative action have a stronger immediate impact on school district practices, although the precedent-setting nature of high-profile decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (I and II, 1954 and 1955, respectively), *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (2007) should not be overlooked. A return to neighborhood schools in many districts has resulted in swift resegregation, and the fact that housing policy has for decades limited the options of certain groups of people, notably African-Americans, implies that contemporary demographic patterns are not devoid of this racist legacy (Massey, 2007). Voluntary integration strategies, such as magnet schools and other choice options, have been less

effective than court-mandated busing programs which have been systematically dismantled in communities across the country (Tatum, 2007). Additionally, magnet school programs with long-standing community support that *have* been successful are threatened by transportation budget cuts and financial crises in many districts (Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, & Frankenberg, 2010). Federal policies advanced by the Department of Education promise additional funds to support the creation of new magnet programs, with potentially positive impacts on integration, but have also heavily promoted the establishment of charter schools, which have been found to be more segregated than traditional public schools (Tefera et al., 2010).

Diem (2012) specifically examined how many contemporary voluntary choice programs have used socioeconomic status as a proxy for race. That study found that although in certain cases a move to expand student characteristics and geographic measures used in school assignment programs can increase the nuance with which integration is considered, in other instances it serves to effectively erase the goals of interracial contact and mixing fundamental to previous desegregation policy goals (Diem, 2012). Relatedly, DeBray, McDermott, Frankenberg & Blankenship (2015) identified a range of uses of federal funds designed to promote the benefits of diversity in locally specific ways; some districts implemented programs that maintained race-conscious approaches, while others shifted focus. Carlson and Cowen (2015) investigated the impact of private school vouchers as another type of voluntary choice program. They found that although students in the most socioeconomically and racially segregated parts of Milwaukee were most likely to participate in the voucher program, these students were also the most likely to leave. In an examination of jurisdictional sorting processes that impact local policies, including education, Bischoff (2008) identified relationships between residential racial segregation and political fragmentation. Although underlying mechanisms for such segregation and sorting are complex, clear connections exist between racially isolated neighborhoods, segregated schools, and political processes.

Other research has clearly tied the use of certain types of discourse to racial ideologies and interpretations of diversity in school policy. In her framing of “school desegregation as social justice,” specifically for Black students, Horsford (2016) described the issue as one that mirrors broader “competing racial views and interests regarding educational equality and opportunity” and “inherent complexity as a proxy for public opinion on race and education in America” (p. 6). Diem, Welton, Frankenberg & Holme (2016) identified how demographic changes in suburban school districts led to the adoption of racialized discourses by administrators and policymakers who utilized terms like “socioeconomic status,” and “cultural difference” in place of those specific to racial and ethnic identity. Similarly, Turner (2015) found that programs designed to improve educators’ capacity to address changing demographics in Wisconsin used a variety of terms to describe the target of their goals, including “racial inequality,” “poverty,” and “cultural difference.” In their comparison of how diversity was viewed differently in Jefferson County, Kentucky and Wake County, North Carolina in the context of changing desegregation policy contexts, Frankenberg, Diem & Cleary (2016) found that many stakeholders viewed school achievement and diversity as competing goals, rather than complementary objectives. Based on case studies of the “race-neutral” student assignment strategies employed in these two districts along with practices in Boston, Massachusetts, McDermott, Frankenberg & Diem (2015) supported Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) critique of supposed “colorblindness” as a form of reinforcing, rather than confronting, pre-existing racial exclusion. Additionally, Frankenberg et al. (2016) have shown how the failure of many decision makers to recognize the changing multiracial character of communities provides evidence of how larger social contexts impact school policies and practice. How local school districts, communities, and states respond to—or resist—these demographic changes often reflects underlying commitments to advancing equity or to maintaining advantages for White, middle class students at the expense of others.

In the next section I describe the theoretical approach used to guide this investigation of discourses of school integration policy and community diversity in Minnesota, and then situate the study in a particular local and temporal context.

Conceptual Framework: Political Discourse(s) as Argumentation

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as applied to critical policy studies provides a way to focus specifically on language as a mediating practice that reveals how power imbalances persist in public institutions. In focusing on the contextualized behavior of actors in political processes, and how they are constrained or enhanced by institutional structures, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) adopt van Dijk's (1997) proposition that political discourse is focused on the reproduction and contestation of political power. Gee (1999) has defined discourse as "language-in-use" and claims that it is always "political" in the sense that people use language to express perspectives on how social goods ought to be distributed (p. 2). Fairclough (2001) has similarly defined discourse as the use of language in social contexts, and clarified the dialectic relationships between semiotic modalities and other expressions. Politics is defined by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) as "most fundamentally about making choices about how to act in response to circumstances and events and in light of certain goals and values" (p. 11). This definition echoes traditional conceptualizations of politics in education as the authoritative allocation of values (Easton, 1965) and value-based authoritative struggles (Wirt & Kirst, 1992) but with a distinct focus on the power of discursive transmissions, not only on positional authority. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) suggest that such analyses can move beyond an acceptance of the adversarial character of political deliberation and also show how institutional practices can be designed to develop cooperative decision-making (p. 21). Bacchi (2000) has challenged scholars who apply discourse analysis to policy to include explicit theorizations of power in their work in order to open space to affect social change, rather than just engage in deconstructions of language. Considered together, these authors provide useful definitions of what discourse *is*, offer ways to consider political discourse as a particular form of social communication, and emphasize that critical discourse analysis is necessarily tied to transformative goals.

In seeking a way to apply CDA to policy analysis and, in particular, political debates over policy meaning and actions, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) have proposed a focus on practical argumentation. This approach identifies five "premises" present in political discourse as the basis of any such analysis: 1) the Value premise, in which underlying priorities and concerns are identified; 2) the Goal premise, where possible and desirable alternative future states of affairs are construed; 3) the Circumstantial premise, through which existing states of affairs are represented and problematized in particular ways; 4) the Means-Goal premise, which takes a conditional form relating actions, goals, and values, and 5) the Claim premise, in which an actor advocates for the pursuit of a particular course of action (Fairclough, 2013). The first of these, the Value premise, is most clearly connected to van Dijk's (2006) conceptualization of ideology as based in collectively constructed belief systems. Political party affiliation can be seen as one expression of ideology, as can other ways that fundamental, axiomatic assumptions that "control and organize other social beliefs" are expressed as general cultural values (van Dijk, 2006, p. 116)

Ideological differences do not always imply complete opposition, however; Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) emphasize that politics as action should be "understood against the background of human institutional reality, and the possibilities it offers agents to work towards the cooperative resolution of conflict" (p. 18). The outcomes of the Task Force activities discussed in this article do not suggest that compromise can only come about when one set of ideological proponents

overpowers another; they instead emphasize how shared social experiences can result in new understandings with practical results (despite the sociocognitive stability of many ideological beliefs, per van Dijk, 2006). As Fairclough and Fairclough state:

People's arguments are based on different but often reasonable values and value hierarchies (normative priorities), which often turn out to be hard or impossible to reconcile, and political deliberation has to find ways of dealing with these differences, while democracy has to set up institutions that can accommodate them (p. 21).

A critical political discourse analysis examines how argumentation functions within deliberative democratic processes, while acknowledging that existing social inequalities mean these processes are not as truly democratic as those in power would like stakeholders to believe. Examining how these inequalities are expressed during deliberation in practice is a step in making power asymmetries identifiable, with the goal of taking "politics in a more democratic direction" (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012).

Study Context

History of Minnesota's Integration Revenue Statute

State funding for a variety of integration initiatives, ranging from student-specific programming to teacher cultural competency development, has been available through Minnesota State Statute 124D.86, titled "School Desegregation/Integration"¹ since 1997. This statute is affiliated with Minnesota Administrative Rule Chapter 3535, Equal Opportunity in Schools, and the Minnesota State Department of Education is responsible for enacting these policies. In 2010, new statute language was adopted which functioned as something of a compromise between those who felt integration funding would be better spent as additional revenue for school districts with educational improvement needs, and those who argued for the maintenance of desegregation efforts. The Rule remained unchanged. The language of the Statute when the Task Force was convened stated:

The revenue must be used for students to have increased and sustained interracial contacts and improved educational opportunities and outcomes designed to close the academic achievement gap between white students and protected students as defined in Minnesota Rules, part 3535.0110, subpart 4, through classroom experiences, staff initiatives, and other educationally related programs, consistent with subdivision 1b. (Minnesota State Statute 124D.86, 2010)

Demographics and Racial Makeup of State, Legislature, and Task Force

Population changes have a clear impact on the way social policies are developed, interpreted, and implemented; the Task Force, in fact, invited Minnesota's state demographer, to present relevant information to the group. Data from the 2010 U.S. Census show clear trends toward increasing diversity in the country as a whole. Minnesota is also diversifying (McMurry, 2001, 2009) but remains less racially and ethnically diverse overall than national comparisons—85% of state residents identify as White (U.S. Census, 2010). Gillaspay (2011) showed, however, that the school-age population of the state is significantly more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity than older groups—over 30% of the under age 4 population were classified as members of "racial/ethnic minority" groups. Some parts of the state are already more diverse than others; about 25% of

¹ Terminology used in State Statutes and Rules.

residents in the metropolitan area of Minneapolis and St. Paul are people of color, and the more rural southern part of the state has the highest number of people of color by region (MN Compass, 2015). A recently released report from the Minnesota State Demographic Center (2016) attempts to provide a clearer picture of the identities of residents typically summarized in five broad categories of race and/or ethnicity (American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, White). Using data from the American Community Survey, the authors of this report constructed 17 “cultural groups” that provide a more nuanced description of the identities of Minnesota residents: Dakota, Ojibwe, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Korean, Lao, Vietnamese, African-American, Ethiopian, Liberian, Somali, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Russian, and White.

Legislator identities are also important to consider when examining policies that explicitly address racial segregation and integration; summary data of Minnesota elected officials’ racial and ethnic identities are, however, difficult to find. Profiles of the state Senate and House of Representatives detail the gender, age, education level, and occupation of their elected members, but racial categories are notably absent (House Profile, 2012; Senator Demographics, 2016). A report sponsored by the National Council on State Legislatures and the Pew Research Center suggests that less than 35% of elected officials in Minnesota are women, and less than 5% are racial or ethnic minorities (Kurtz, 2015). Perhaps in an acknowledgment of this disparity between lawmakers and the general population, those in charge of appointing members to the Task Force made an effort to convene a diverse group of people. Of the twelve people who served on the Task Force, five were White, four were Black, two were multiracial, and one was Latino.

Methods

In this section I describe how data were collected from Task Force meetings and other relevant sources, and review the elements of Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) approach to discourse as argumentation that were used as an analytic lens. The following section presents two competing claims for action identified from the data using this approach.

As described by Fairclough (2013), “social practices ‘mediate’ the relationship between general and abstract social structures and particular and concrete social events; social fields, institutions and organizations are constituted as networks of social practices” (p. 179). Here I examine conflicting ideas expressed in school integration discourse to illustrate how education is one such institution impacted by policy practices. The political party affiliations (whether explicit or implicit) of the Task Force members referenced more abstract social structures, while their professional roles and participation in the Task Force meetings were concrete behaviors and events that can be examined.

Data Sources

Eight task force meetings were held at the Minnesota State Capitol and Department of Education main offices in December 2011 and January 2012, and included invited presentations from a range of stakeholders. As part of a larger study examining school integration policy in Minnesota, I attended four of the six meetings in which public testimony was heard by invited experts and during which discussion about the existing statute took place in person (the first meeting involved a review of the legislative charge and establishment of procedures; the final involved the presentation of the final report to be delivered to the legislature). I made audio recordings of the meetings I attended using an iPad app called AudioNote (AudioNote, 2016) that allowed for simultaneous note taking with timestamps. These were combined with ethnographic field notes to capture the physical dimensions (seating choices, facial expressions, indication of

attention/inattention) of participants' interactions with one another and attendees in an effort to capture a more holistic description of events that occurred during the meetings. Additional documentation and supplementary data were collected through meeting minutes and copies of testimony and presentations from guests (available through the MDE website), notes from individual interviews I conducted with three of the Task Force members, and observation of related hearings of educational policy and finance committees at the state legislature. This combined corpus represents a particular "text" for analysis of state level debates and discussions over the value of diverse learning environments, and the role of government in constructing particular educational opportunities.

Modes of Analysis

Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) presentation of political discourse as practical argumentation was used to analyze the data described above. In this case, the legislative charge posed to the Task Force can be framed as a mandated call to the appointed members to engage in practical argumentation. A brief explanation of the factors that make up this approach to discourse as argumentation are listed briefly below:

Values Premise: Agents identify what is of meaning or concern in a given situation;

Goal Premise: Agents' goals are viewed as future states of affairs compatible with concerns;

Circumstances Premise: basis for action that can include institutional or socially constructed facts; describes a problem to be solved

Means-Goal Premise: proposal of a relationship between an action that will presumably take Agent from Circumstances to Goals in accordance with Values.

Claim for Action: Statement of what Agents ought to do that follows from the Premises

The authors' framework for identifying and linking these five structures that comprise key elements of practical arguments (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 45) is recreated in Figure 2 (next page).

This framework was used to identify specific competing "claims for action" that resulted from the Task Force's deliberations. The final task force report, which relayed recommendations to the legislature, was analyzed to identify a consensus claim for action. A competing claim for action was identified from two minority reports, appended to the submitted recommendations. I reviewed recordings of meetings aurally and made note of specific instances in which participants made value-based statements that were linked to means-goal constructions. Field notes provided additional insight into cooperation and competition expressed among members of the group, and the presentations of invited guests were reviewed for content that aligned with ideological viewpoints expressed by particular Task Force members. I used cross-comparison of these different data sources to establish reliability in my identification of different members' points of view on particular topics, and to ensure validity in the overall examination of the discursive nature of the Task Force's activities.

As Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) describe, "practical arguments are often problem-solution arguments" and "the conclusion of a practical argument is a practical claim or judgment about what we should do, what it would be good to do, or what the right course of action is" (p. 11). In the next section I use this framework to present analysis of particular moments of argumentation that resulted in compromise and conflict among members of the Integration Revenue Replacement Task Force. By examining the elements of practical arguments explicated by Fairclough and Fairclough, I clarify the effect of underlying values on developing particular claims for action made by Task Force members relative to their understandings of the purpose of state educational funding and the outcomes that public schooling should achieve.

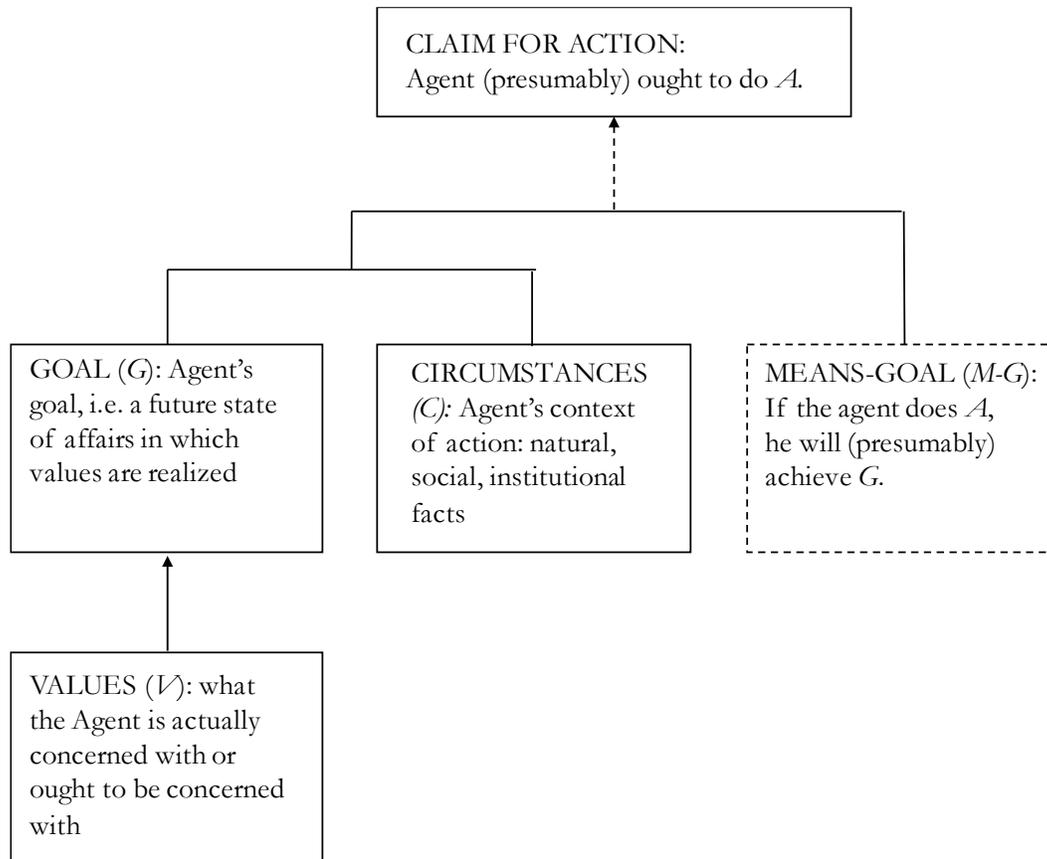


Figure 2: Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) proposal for the structure of practical arguments (from Figure 2.1, p. 45)

Task Force Outcomes

Analysis of the texts involved in the Task Force activities revealed clear distinctions and differences in perspectives relative to what participants understood to be the purpose of integration revenue specifically, and state funding for education more broadly. These divergent perspectives are fundamentally tied to differences in what is understood as integrated education, and what benefits are to be gained by learning in diverse environments. Using the framework proposed by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), two competing arguments were identified in the corpus of text reviewed. The two resulting “Claims for Action” are outlined in Figures 3 and 4 and explained in more detail in this section.

Despite an ostensible commitment to improve a failing program, the state concentrated all its activities into organizing Task Force meetings at the state capitol building in St. Paul and Minnesota Department of Education headquarters; no additional data were collected through on-site observation of school districts around the state and only a handful of practicing educators were invited to testify before the task force. This approach emphasized how the conversation and debate around school integration was clearly situated in the official decision-making realm of the political stream of the policy process (per Kingdon, 1995). From the outset, many outside observers were skeptical of the Task Force's charge—to come up with a plan that could be agreed upon by a majority of the appointees, despite their obvious differences in experience, perspectives, public roles

and in many cases, publicly promoted ideological commitments. The educational expertise of the appointees also varied greatly. The state Commissioner of Education was herself an appointee of the sitting governor, a Democrat. The people she in turn appointed to the Task Force were current or former practicing educators (a former teacher and current district equity coordinator, a retired principal, and a former superintendent) or had held elected office as either a state legislator or a school board member. All of these six participants had been directly involved in the establishment or implementation of integration policy at the state or local level. Republican leadership controlled both the state House of Representatives and Senate; these bodies' six appointees were all individuals with long-term interests in education, but varied levels of formal involvement. Although these participants included a state senator with experience serving on the Education Policy Committee and a school board member from a suburban district, there were also two appointees known for their vocal and highly public commitment to conservative points of view relative to social issues. During its first meeting, the members of the Task Force elected two chairs: one who was appointed by the Commissioner of Education and one by the House of Representatives. Although many of the participants chose not to directly link themselves to one party or the other, partisan references were frequent on the part of observers and participants during the Task Force proceedings.

Claim for Action: Bipartisan Compromise

The final "Task Force Recommendations" document lays out a four-point plan for statute revision and policy implementation, accompanied by a brief description of suggested guiding fiscal principles. This document was approved by 10 out of 12 members of the Task Force, including all six of the Commissioner's appointees, all three of the Senate appointees, and one appointee from the House of Representatives. Evidence of compromise is present not just in the majority approval achieved by the group, but also in the language that is included in the final report. Strong partisan positions had been stated in legislative proceedings related to the Statute for several years prior to the Task Force convening, with Democratic representatives arguing strongly for maintaining a focus on integration as related to race and socioeconomic status, and Republicans arguing for a shift in focus to student achievement and academic skills. Both perspectives can be found in the final report.

The Claim for Action represented by the final Task Force recommendations report can be summarized as one that acknowledges both the background of the Integration Revenue Statute and a history of inequity in Minnesota, as well as the need for change. The report urges the legislature to maintain a funding stream that is targeted for integration (approximately 100 million dollars of the overall education budget) and that would promote educational practices that address racial disparities and engage students, parents, and community members from underrepresented communities. The report also, however, included goals for developing evaluation metrics to be implemented by MDE including student achievement measures based on standardized test scores—and financial consequences for districts that do not make adequate progress toward goals. An important aspect of language that is *not* included in the report is reference to "achievement gaps." The avoidance of the use of this term is deliberate and intentional, and points to the discursive importance of the document in broader educational policy. Overall, the bipartisan compromise represented in the report's claim for action presents a vision of schools that model a pluralistic society and empower students from all backgrounds. Objectives that include promoting success by identifying unique needs of particular groups of students and diversifying the pool of educators in the state clearly connect integration revenue to understandings of identity based on race and ethnicity.

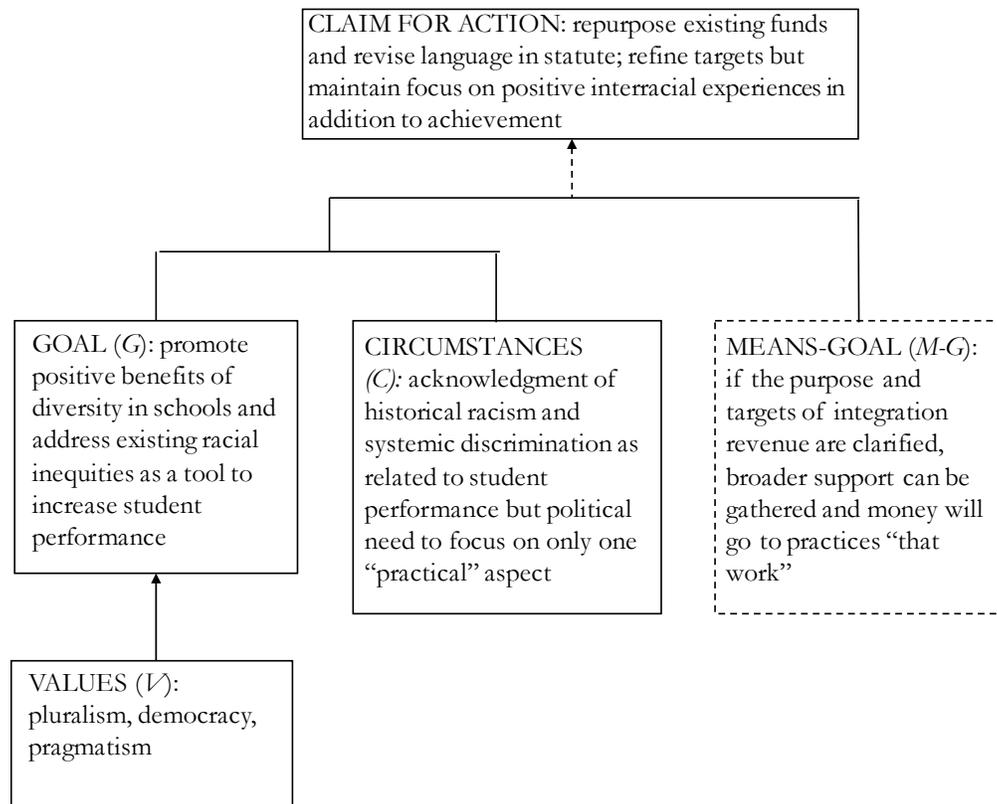


Figure 3: Claim for Action: Bipartisan Compromise

Claim for Action: Conservative Dissent

Two of the Task Force appointees from the House of Representatives did not vote to approve the final recommendations and instead appended their own “Minority Reports” to the document. One of the dissenting perspectives was presented by a co-chair of the Task Force, House of Representatives appointee Peter Swanson. Swanson, an attorney from an inner-ring suburb of Minneapolis, had earlier presented a draft proposal to the group on January 24, 2012, and a “reaction to draft policy and fiscal recommendations” document on February 7, 2012, that identified specific areas of concern and objection relative to co-chair Scott Thomas’ alternative proposal. Despite discussion of these documents at Task Force meetings, he was not satisfied with the final proposal and voted against it. He wrote that he dissented “reluctantly, as I do believe the majority report represents improvements over the current system” but that he believed “there are too many details left open to interpretation that could ultimately undermine the great work of the task force.” Katherine Kersten, another House of Representatives appointee affiliated with a local right-wing organization, was the other dissenting opinion. Given her frequently expressed objection to any use of the term “integration” in revenue statutes and any race-based policies in general, this vote was unsurprising. Unlike Swanson, who made it clear through his leadership and communication with others throughout the time the Task Force was convened that he sought a bipartisan approach, Kersten arrived with a deep-seated ideological commitment to conservative principles that she applied in an unwavering manner.

The two Minority Reports issued by Swanson and Kersten present an alternative claim for action that was expressed during the Task Force’s deliberative process. Despite the differences in how the two members expressed their conservative perspectives and their flexibility in considering other points of view, similar ideological underpinnings are represented in their dissents. Fundamentally, they believe that funding targeted toward education should focus exclusively on achievement, and that policies that address inequities based on race and ethnicity are representative of government overreach and violate personal liberties. This contrasting argument proposes that integration revenue be repurposed as achievement revenue exclusively, and focuses on meeting efficiency goals defined as increased performance on assessments of students’ academic skills, regardless of background.

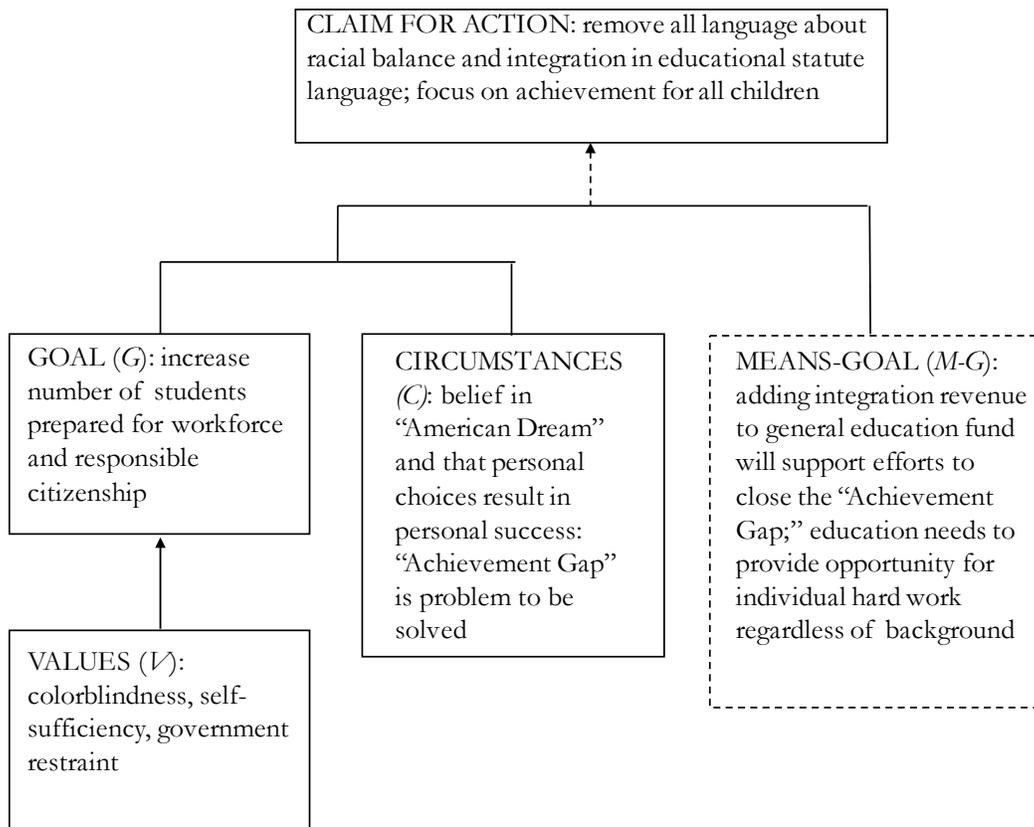


Figure 4: Claim for Action: Conservative Dissent

Discussion: Integration Discourse(s) and Argumentation

Examining the formation of the two competing arguments outlined in the previous section reveals additional aspects of contextual social meanings that are evident in discourse. In this section I explore themes that clarify the role of ideological affiliations and understandings in political argumentation about integration revenue, and identify particular points of tension among members of the Task Force. These excerpts from documents and in-person deliberations serve to illustrate the components of Fairclough and Fairclough’s model of political discourse as argumentation.

Regional Variation in Defining “Diversity”

Several members of the Task Force remarked on how participating in the meetings contributed to their own learning about the differences in communities across the state. These references to geographic variation reflected another key factor in partisan politics, as voting patterns and party affiliation tend to differ across states and regions. Although Task Force membership was divided between six Democratic appointees and six Republican appointees, geographic representation did not fall along these lines. Of the 12 members, five were from the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, two were from inner-ring suburbs that bordered these cities, four were from outer-ring suburbs or exurbs, and only one was from far outside the Twin Cities Metro Area. Given that about half of Minnesota’s total state population is located within the Metro Area, the committee membership was skewed toward the urban center. At times, participants took obvious care to address issues in ways that acknowledged the differences in school experience and programming that were a function of geography and community size, rather than use of integration funding specifically. They also invited speakers who described inter-district collaboratives of rural school districts and contrasted the practice of those partnerships with similar collaboratives in the Metro Area.

At the beginning of the January 10, 2012 Task Force meeting, members were asked to summarize what they had learned so far. Three participants’ statements emphasized the value of sharing information across regions and different parts of the state. The quotations selected here use Minnesota-specific phrasing to reference the urban Twin Cities region and more rural areas. Betty McAllister, a Task Force member from the southwestern corner of the state noted:

I’ve learned a lot particularly about the Metro, because that’s not my personal experience. It seems to me that—in Worthington for instance where we have an extremely diverse population—we do have integration that is *de facto* because the schools that exist are the only schools. It would seem to me that in order for the benefits of integration to be achieved in the Metro area there has to be collaboration just like there is on a much smaller scale in our area between Worthington and our adjacent districts.

Bob Erickson, from a Twin Cities outer-ring suburb, referenced McAllister’s earlier comment and said “in turn, I’ve learned a lot about the Outstate, and that’s very valuable to me.” Peter Swanson followed up with his own observation that “what I found interesting...is certainly learning about the rural, Greater Minnesota schools, and suburban, exurban, whatever you want to call it, and the differences between districts that you would think are the same.”

During the December 20, 2011 meeting, Task Force member Helen Bassett referenced changing racial demographics she had observed as a school board member in a Metro Area inner-ring suburb, and how she had observed growing concentrations of poverty in these communities. Research has indicated that even rapidly diversifying suburbs will follow trends toward resegregation if efforts are not taken to address integration concerns (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012) and that suburban segregation shows distinct patterns in terms of which racial or ethnic groups are isolated from one another (Reardon & Yun, 2001). The particular demographic composition of communities impacts collective understandings of diversity, race and ethnicity, and the perceived need (or not) for integration in schools; individual representatives from these communities bring these varied perspectives to deliberative democratic processes.

From “Closing the Achievement Gap” to “Achievement and Integration”

At the time the Task Force was convened, bipartisan support was developing in the state legislature for the idea that focusing on racial difference and isolation should not be a key concern of educational policy; rather, focusing on improving academic achievement for “all students” would be a better way to address the problem. Not unique to Minnesota, such messaging is promoted by a number of educational reformers associated with charter schools and other choice-oriented policy interventions. This language is appealing because it is more palatable for people who do not acknowledge the existence of institutionalized racism as an outgrowth of generations of discrimination, and also supports those who wish to imagine a post-racial present and future in which quality educational settings can exist in the midst of otherwise unjust circumstances. Critical educational scholars, in response, have critiqued a focus on achievement as a false goal that itself is constructed out of an oppressive accountability system that uses inappropriate metrics; researchers who have studied the impact of desegregation on school performance have also noted the dangers of conflating “diversity” with academic “improvement” (Frankenberg, Diem & Cleary, 2016).

Further, the language of the “achievement gap” places the burden of underachievement “on the students, their families, and in some cases individual teachers” and “constructs students as defective and lacking” and in need of “catching up” (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 322). This is clear in language from Kersten’s Minority Report:

...the learning gap springs from socioeconomic and family risk factors that leave many poor, minority youngsters deficient in the skills and knowledge required for academic success. They need an intense emphasis on fundamentals; targeted assessment and intervention; and a school climate that emphasizes order, discipline, high expectations, accountability and incentives for success.

The use of the word “learning” instead of “achievement” implies an even deeper deficit approach—one that assumes that not only are students not performing well on standardized assessments, but they are not learning anything in the first place. Labeling children themselves rather than their social positions as “poor and minority” and assuming they come from families who do not expect them to succeed is pathologizing. In contrast, Ladson-Billings (2007) has proposed reframing the debate to one focused instead on an “education debt” owed to students from marginalized backgrounds. These tensions were evident in much of the Task Force deliberations in which the concept of racial and ethnic integration was juxtaposed with the idea that academic achievement was of greater interest for the state’s well-being.

The first page of the Task Force Final Recommendations report included the exact wording of the Legislative Charge (see Figure 1). Importantly, this charge removed the term “integration” and its associated goals of “sustained interracial contacts” (terminology from Statute 124D.86) altogether. The only two instances in which the word integration appeared at all in the charge was in the name of the Task Force and in the phrase “develop recommendations for repurposing integration revenue funds.” A reading of the Legislative Charge language alone would seem to suggest that the very concept of integration had lost all support at the state level, as the purpose of the task force was to:

...consider how districts may effectively narrow and close the academic achievement gap and foster academic success for students by:
(1) pursuing academic achievement goals premised on continuous adapting of best teaching practices and efficient use of resources, and; (2) identifying variables to show annual progress toward achieving student, school, and district goals for student’s [sic] academic success.

This wording not only erases integration as a public educational goal in Minnesota, but also includes language linked to neoliberal constructions of schooling, among them “efficient use of resources.” Ultimately, these understandings were reflected in the Conservative Dissent Claim for Action, supported by value commitments to supposedly “colorblind” (per Bonilla-Silva, 2014) solutions to racial inequities, and policy approaches that promote meritocratic, individualistic notions of educational success. These values are identified in Figure 4 as colorblindness, self-sufficiency, and government restraint.

The alignment of these values with conservative political ideologies was reflected in particular discursive moves during Task Force deliberations. Although several of the members clearly wished to keep a focus on the integration goals of the existing statute, others frequently referred to the language of the charge to direct attention away from positive interracial contact and back to a narrow understanding of “achievement.” During the January 10, 2012 meeting Erickson stated “I’m focused on closing the achievement gap, that’s why I’m here” and said this goal is “number one on my priority list.” He also submitted a report to the group on January 24, 2012 with recommendations to repurpose integration funds specifically to academic achievement, and promoted models of accountability and intervention used in charter schools that were invited to speak to the Task Force. These schools did not receive integration funds and were lauded by Erickson and Kersten for their ability to support students in supposedly race neutral ways.

To counter these claims, proponents of integration sought to move the conversation away from achievement or to demonstrate that reducing racial segregation has a positive impact on achievement. Invited legal expert Cindy Lavorato noted during the December 20, 2011 meeting that the Rule had been criticized because “there is no evidence that it has closed the achievement gap.” She responded that “closing the achievement gap is not an appropriate way to measure the efficacy of integration and it’s not an appropriate way to measure many other educational goals.” This claim reflected the pragmatic underpinnings of the Means-Goal premise identifiable in the Bipartisan Compromise Claim for Action (see Figure 3), in which members discursively re-included racial justice as a target of integration revenue; this reframing was accomplished by focusing on what changes participants thought could realistically be enacted and agreed upon by a state legislature and administration divided along partisan lines. Lavorato echoed the statements of many of the Task Force members in saying “closing the achievement gap should be the goal of educational policy, but it shouldn’t be the measure of whether an education program has been effective or successful.” During the same meeting, psychologist Linda Tropp presented findings that intergroup contact provided by integrated school environments significantly reduced racial prejudice.

Other testimony, however, focused on the benefits of integration for improving academic performance. University of North Carolina Professor Roslyn Mickelson presented findings from 20 years of research about the positive effects of integrated education on achievement outcomes and described diverse schools as part of a pipeline to “social cohesion in multiethnic democratic societies.” The vision of integrated education presented by the Bipartisan Compromise is aligned with values of democratic pluralism ascribed to multicultural education scholars like James Banks, who adapted Talcott-Parsons’ (1975) sociological definition of ethnicity and extended previous understandings of cultural pluralism in stating “ethnic pluralism describes a society composed of various ethnic groups fully participating in ethnic subsocieties but having allegiances to the nation state and accepting its idealized values” (Banks, 1977, p. 78). Several discussions during deliberations indicated that this was an understanding that was challenged by some members of the Task Force whose comments reflected more progressive political ideologies. For example, Task Force member Myron Orfield, a law professor who has spent years studying the impact of segregation patterns in

Minnesota communities, asked pointed questions of presenters who advocated for schools that predominantly enrolled students from a single racial or ethnic background, and reported research that shows charter schools in the state tend to be more segregated than traditional public schools. Similar statements that questioned highly segregated spaces as inherently unequal, and that suggested that the “democracy” first enacted in the United States was racist and therefore itself in need of reform were made by guests aligned with Critical Race Theory and critical pedagogy scholarship; other conversations focused on democracy as an act that could be modeled through the group’s work. The Values that were reflected in the Bipartisan Compromise are identified in Figure 3 as pluralism, democracy, and pragmatism.

In contrast with the legislative Charge, the tone of the final recommendations report is broadly positive and action-oriented. Although it is the result of a legislatively mandated process, the text avoids relying on state-generated jargon and terminology. There is a notable inclusion of vocabulary and references to programs and systems more familiar to educators themselves than to state lawmakers. The final Task Force Recommendations include intertextual references and terminology specific to local school district practices, unlike the language of the Statute language and its associated Administrative Rule that reflexively support state authority rather than referencing local control. Perhaps most importantly, however, the recommendations immediately (re)include the word “integration” in a prominent position. The first recommendation reads (*italics in original*):

Create the “Achievement and Integration for Minnesota (AIM)” program funded through *existing categorical revenue* to address the concerns with the current program while focusing uses of the revenue in a manner that can be easily tied to student achievement.

The points that clarify this recommendation call for the legislature to “develop a revised integration rule that is grounded in our state’s history and law” that addresses academic achievement, while also paying attention to racial segregation in schools. This statement also discursively rejects an ahistorical colorblind approach to educational policy, and calls for changes to be made to both policy and practice. Specifically, the report calls on the state to maintain the current language defining racially isolated and identifiable districts and schools, and also to reexamine the current exemption of certain educational settings from the Rule. Overall, this recommendation attempts to draw attention back to the broader social context in which educational policy is implemented, rather than narrowing the focus of all educational programming to the falsely oversimplified “achievement gap.” Recent analysis of a state policy in Texas that aimed to “close the gaps” found that “while these reforms aim to increase educational access and achievement for people of color, they fall short of addressing systemic inequities such as enduring segregation” (Cumings Mansfield & Thachik, 2016).

Role of Task Force Chairs

Examining the power positions held by the two chairs of the task force is a key part of understanding the ultimate outcomes of the Task Force as well as the competing claims for action proposed. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) are clear in identifying the fact that “power can be and often is itself *a reason for action*” (p. 14, *italics in original*) but note that even in deliberative political processes not all participants have equal opportunities or weight in contributing to these deliberations. The election of two co-chairs, Commissioner-appointee Scott Thomas and House-appointee Peter Swanson, was an attempt on the part of the other Task Force members to provide a sort of balance of power to the leadership of the group. The two co-chairs approached their roles in different ways that reflected their professional backgrounds and distinct points of view.

Thomas is a career educator who at the time was the educational equity coordinator for an outer-ring suburban district known for its magnet school program approach to integration. He was also a key organizer of the Minnesota School Integration Council, a grassroots-oriented statewide professional organization that in 2010 organized and conducted public listening sessions in communities across the state to solicit feedback about the integration revenue program. MSIC presented a recommendation report to the legislature in 2011 that included proposed metrics associated with five outcomes the authors considered key to successful integrated learning environments: equitable academic outcomes, access to opportunity, intercultural learning, racial balance, and strong communities. Much of the language of the Task Force's final recommendations echoes this phrasing and reflects the intention of that report; this is evidence of the influential role Thomas was able to take during the meetings.

In contrast to Thomas' organization of recommendations in a two-page bulleted list format, Swanson's initial proposal was a nine-page slide show titled "Integration Improvement" with contrasting font size and frequent use of brief phrases that used cautionary language. For example, "no stereotyping," "no quotas," "use money as intended," "carrot rather than stick." Perhaps applying the detailed analysis of documents associated with his work as an attorney, he used a spreadsheet to organize his critique of specific elements of Thomas' proposal, with reactions and suggested changes to particular language indicated by paragraph and line number. Both chairs served important roles in structuring the social dynamic of the Task Force. Swanson served the role of critical questioner, while Thomas sought to build consensus among the group. In introductory comments he made at the start of the January 10, 2012 meeting, Thomas could be heard acknowledging conflicting points of view as contributions to a productive debate, while also seeking to make his own argument for the preservation of integration goals in state policy:

I've appreciated working with all of you and hearing your different perspectives. One of the things that I think has been most striking to me is just how much the state already spends to teach reading and math, by which the achievement gap is measured. And I share that sense of urgency with you, Katherine, because I see it play out everyday. I work in a school district, I work with both teachers and principals. And I see the instructional practices that work, and I also see where we have failed. And I ask myself 'why can't we figure this out with the existing funding we have?' Because if we're spending the billions of dollars to teach reading and math, we should have the expectation that these gaps should be closed. We know that the use of integration revenue has had some real positive outcomes, and it has met some real challenges. Knowing that, if we say that integration is no longer a part [of policy] and we should only fund an achievement gap approach, well, that means not only do we have an unfunded mandate for our schools, because the Rule does stand—then we have even more money put onto the formula that is already supposed to do something that it is not currently doing. So I really wrestle with the idea of saying 'let's just continue giving that money, do what you continually do, teach reading and math...' [because] we will have the same outcomes. Unless we say 'this money needs to be narrowly tailored, used effectively, with clear support and oversight from the Department of Education, and address those clear disparities.' I do know that a 'one size fits all approach' probably isn't necessarily the best. So I look forward to our discussions.

Conclusions

The two competing claims identified through analysis of the Integration Revenue Replacement Advisory Task Force discourse reveal how power and values are used to frame morally-charged concepts in political deliberation. In the case examined here, the causes of racial segregation in schools and whether or not state policy should promote integration were issues of contentious debate. This debate can be viewed as both a function of the tendency of political processes to focus on immediate crises and conditions rather than historical contexts, and the benefits to those in power of failing to identify how public structures contribute to the maintenance of injustice. As Anderson (2006) summarized:

The history of public school segregation, desegregation, and re-segregation from the antebellum period to the present constitutes an American story of contradictory legal and social reforms- reforms that are liberal regarding standards of constitutional equality and conservative with respect to the subtle and institutionalized arrangements designed to sustain racial inequality and school segregation in day to day life (p. 30).

When Howard University Law Professor Derek Black testified before the Task Force on December 20, 2011, he began his remarks by describing “racial segregation and the concentrated poverty that inevitably follows it” as the “most pressing issues confronting our nation’s schools today.” Such language is echoed in the opening statement of Kersten’s Minority Report: “Minnesota’s racial and ethnic academic learning gap is a disaster.” Black reported that his research revealed that reducing racial segregation in schools was correlated with reduced achievement gaps. Kersten alluded repeatedly to the idea that addressing students as individuals, rather than as members of racial or ethnic groups, was a better way to address these gaps, and made many statements that discredited the idea that institutional barriers to success were maintained by structures such as public education. During the January 10, 2012 meeting she said she knew “from her own experience” that “the learning gap that we’re facing is catastrophic, it is one of the biggest problems facing our state and our nation” and that “we all know that what we have done to date has not worked.” These anecdotes demonstrate how identifying the underlying values that participants bring to such debates are essential to identify in understanding why and how they will propose particular policy strategies. Per Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012) approach, analyzing the form and content of arguments made during deliberative processes does not only explicate resulting Claims for Action, but also reveals evidence of underlying Values Premises.

Ultimately, the Task Force recommended steps forward that attempt to acknowledge (and appease) stakeholders with strong convictions about the scope of interests that should be addressed by public schooling practices. Kersten’s repeated attempts to narrow all discussions back to her singular focus on reading and math and achievement, and her failure to engage in true dialogue with other points of view, demonstrate the difficulties posed to deliberative processes by participants who are not willing to be open to new ideas. Her insistence on promoting a particular ideological construction of the problem to be addressed, however, also demonstrates a desire to be solution oriented. Beyond this particular example, identifying such moments in discourse analysis demonstrates the link between the Values and Means-Goal Premises of competing claims (per Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012).

Building shared understandings around complex social issues is a daunting task that requires resources of time and patience. As Bischoff (2008) stated, “racial segregation is a manifestation of personal preferences, restrictive housing policies, discrimination, and differential resources, all of

which can become more pronounced in smaller, more controllable political units” (p. 3). The debates that took place during Task Force deliberations about whether or not state funds should be used for integration programming, or only focused on achievement, reflect broader tensions about whether government social policies represent “safety nets” or “social engineering.” The fact that a clear majority of the group was able to come to an agreement about these topics is a rare accomplishment in a heavily polarized political climate.

Implications for Practice

In his theorization of ways that power is expressed through policy, Heimans (2012) described how “the world is constantly recreated and made possible in and through practice” (p. 372). In spite of the strong reproductive forces that mediate social contexts, changing dynamics and shifts in power can produce new meanings that can change practice (Heimans, 2012). Beyond the competing claims for action that resulted in particular policy language, the Task Force’s activities have the potential to enact change at the level of educational experience. The third recommendation included in the Task Force report offered the most concise list compiled to date regarding suggested “best practice” uses of integration revenue. MDE had previously distributed documentation of activities implemented in local districts through integration revenue, but appropriate uses of this funding had been subject to debate for several years prior to the Task Force convening. The broad recommendation reads:

Clearly focus and define limited uses of AIM revenue. Districts must submit plans, develop measureable goals (consistent with 2e), and budgets that limit their use (districts may not supplant) within any of the following areas...

These areas of action are to create conditions that will encourage: “a) innovative and integrated learning environments, b) family engagement, c) professional development, d) access to opportunity, and e) increase the diversity of teachers and administrators.”

Following legislative review of the Task Force Recommendations, the statute was revised and the new version (124D.862) was signed into law in 2014. Now called “Achievement and Integration Revenue,” the statute retains language specific to integration, but no longer calls for “sustained interracial contacts.” Districts are now offered “incentive revenue” to implement “voluntary plan[s] to reduce racial and economic enrollment disparities through intradistrict and interdistrict activities,” at least 80% of which must be used for “innovative and integrated learning environments, school enrollment choices, family engagement activities, and other approved programs providing direct services to students.” Although not all Task Force recommendations are included in the new Statute language, many of these phrases directly mirror language from the report. The Minnesota Department of Education website now includes a tab for “Achievement and Integration” and describes the purpose of this program as:

To pursue racial and economic integration, increase student achievement, create equitable educational opportunities, and reduce academic disparities based on students’ diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools (MDE, 2016).

By identifying multiple aims, this statement implies that the state acknowledges that strategies that claim to address equity through the use of proxies for race, such as socioeconomic status or vaguely defined “cultural diversity” initiatives, are lacking. This is consistent with the findings of many scholars of school desegregation efforts and the work of advocates for racial justice, who call for intersectional approaches to dismantling historically institutionalized inequities.

Significance of Findings

Critical scholars have demonstrated the steep challenges faced in the implementation of educational policies that supposedly exist to address existing social inequalities, but must be enacted in a contemporary neoliberal context of increasing social stratification (see e.g. Lipman, 2011). Research on policy failure also suggests that the divide between front-line implementers and policy makers is a frequent source of breakdown; the deliberate engagement of lawmakers and educational practitioners in Task Force meetings offers insight into how to bridge this divide and to overcome both ideological and experiential differences. As Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) describe, “structures constrain (or enable) agency by providing people with reasons for action” (p. 81). In the case described in this article, the bipartisan nature of the Task Force was a particular element of structural constraint that also offered a space for political compromise. The temporal boundedness and specific legislative language guiding its convening and activities provide a valuable lens through which to analyze broader debates over policy meaning. Fairclough and Fairclough describe the purpose of political discourse as “ultimately not to describe the world but to underpin decision and action” (p. 13). Applied argumentation analysis, therefore, can be used to identify moments of shared understanding (beyond political compromise in which one actor yields power to another); such understandings are important for the analysis of educational policy as a contested site of ideological enactments, and for the promotion of inclusive educational practices.

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