education policy analysis archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,
open access, multilingual journal

Arizona State University

Volume 31 Number 34 April 4, 2023 ISSN 1068-2341

Obfuscating Systemic Racism: A Critical Policy Discourse Analysis on the Operation of Neoliberal Ideas in Media Representation of a School District State Takeover

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Citation: Lopez, T., Riesco, H. S., & Goering, C. Z. (2023). Obfuscating systemic racism: A critical policy discourse analysis on the operation of neoliberal ideas in media representation of a school district state takeover. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 31*(34). https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.6707 Video Commentary: https://youtu.be/n_7qMWvtazc

Abstract: Education reform in the United States has unwisely focused attention on standards and accountability to the state as determined by standardized testing (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Mehta, 2013). Stemming from the emphasis on standards-based accountability are the ideas of rapid school *turnaround* and the state's role in this process (Peck & Reitzug, 2014; VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). The current study employed critical policy discourse analysis to examine the media's portrayal of the 2019 determination to continue or terminate state control of the Little Rock School District. The analysis highlights two argumentative frames—one that emphasized neoliberal values in support of continued state control of the district and another that focused on systemic racism as the basis for advocating for local control of the district. These frames, along with their implications for future actions within the educational policy making process, guide the discussion. Our findings suggest

Journal website: http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/
Facebook: /EPAAA
Twitter: @epaa_aape

Manuscript received: 10/3/2021
Revisions received: 9/6/2022
Accepted: 10/30/2022

sustained community and media participation is needed to bring attention to education policy issues while underscoring the importance of taking a critical stance to assess media coverage.
Keywords: systemic racism; state takeover; critical policy discourse analysis

Ofuscando racismo sistémico: Un análisis crítico del discurso político de la operación de ideas neoliberales en la representación de los medios de comunicación sobre una adquisición estatal de un distrito escolar

Resumen: Reforma educativa en los estados unidos ha imprudentemente puesto atención a los estándares y contabilidad al estado determinado por examines estandarizados (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Mehta, 2013). Derivadas del énfasis en contabilidad basada en los estándares están las ideas del arreglo rápido escolar y del papel del estado en este proceso (Peck & Reitzug, 2014; VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). El estudio corriente usó análisis crítico del discurso político para examinar la descripción de los medios de comunicación de la determinación en el 2019 para continuar o terminar control estatal del distrito escolar de Little Rock. Este análisis recalza dos estructuras argumentativas—una cual enfatizó valores neoliberales en apoyar la continuación del control estatal del distrito y la otra enfocada en racismo sistémico como base de proponer control local del distrito. Estas estructuras, tal como sus implicaciones para acciones futuras dentro del proceso político educacional, guía la discusión. Nuestras conclusiones sugieren que participación sostenida en la comunidad y por parte de los medios de comunicación son necesarios para llamar atención a problemas con la póliza educativa mientras que también subrayan la importancia de tomar una postura crítica para evaluar cobertura de los medios.
Palabras-clave: racismo sistémico; adquisición estatal; análisis crítico del discurso político

Ofuscando o racismo sistêmico: Uma análise crítica do discurso da operação de ideias neoliberais na representação feita pela mídia sobre o controle estadual de um distrito escolar

Resumo: A reforma educacional nos Estados Unidos tem imprudentemente focado sua atenção em padrões e na prestação de contas que tem que ser dada ao estado conforme determinado por testes padronizados (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Mehta, 2013). Decorrentes da ênfase nesta responsabilidade que é baseada em padrões, estão as ideias de mudança repentina no âmbito escolar e o papel do estado neste processo (Peck & Reitzug, 2014; VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). O presente estudo empregou análise crítica do discurso para examinar a interpretação e apresentação feitas pela mídia sobre a determinação de 2019 de continuar ou encerrar o controle estadual no distrito escolar de Little Rock, Arkansas. A análise enfatiza dois quadros argumentativos – um que enfatizou valores neoliberais em apoio à continuação do controle estadual do distrito e outro que focou no racismo sistêmico como base para defender o controle local do distrito. Estes argumentos juntamente com suas implicações para ações futuras dentro do processo de criar políticas educacionais, orientam a discussão. Nossos resultados sugerem que as participações contínuas da comunidade e da mídia são necessárias para chamar a atenção para questões de políticas educacionais e ao mesmo tempo ressaltam a importância de adotar um posicionamento crítico para avaliar a cobertura da mídia.
Palavras-chave: racismo sistêmico; controle estadual; análise crítica do discurso de políticas

Obfuscating Systemic Racism: A Critical Policy Discourse Analysis on the Operation of Neoliberal Ideas in Media Representation of a School District State Takeover

In 2015, the state selected the Little Rock School District (LRSD) as a district for state takeover following a state plan to meet federal mandates for schools classified as academically distressed based on student achievement scores. According to the policy, "any school or school district on probationary status for failing to meet the standards for accreditation" (Enforcement of Standards, 2012, AR Code § 6-15-207) was subject to at least one action by the State Board of Education. In LRSD's case, the state disbanded the locally elected school board and took control of the city's largest district through its State Board of Education. By law, the mandate of state control is reexamined at the five-year mark to make further determinations for the future of a school district.

As this five-year deadline for LRSD approached near the end of 2019, Arkansas print media sources highlighted the policymakers involved, described their proposed plans forward, and promoted discursive feedback that influenced the policy decision. A locally elected school board was reinstated in November 2020, and the district was released from the state-designated "intensive support" category in July 2021 (Millar, 2021). Notwithstanding, the state's fluctuation on the metrics for release from intensive support, changes to the district during six years of state control, and passage of a new state law that bans public employees from collective bargaining (Millar, 2021) provide evidence that the policy decision was a compromise between those who wanted a return to local control and the state's hegemony.

In this study, we critically examine media portrayal of education policy in Arkansas surrounding a 2019 decision to continue or terminate state takeover using critical policy discourse analysis (CPDA), a useful methodological framework that allowed us to consider policy in a relational, constitutive, and context-specific way. Consequently, we have analyzed major print media sources that discuss and conceptualize the state takeover of LRSD for public stakeholders. In analyzing these sources, we investigate our main research question: *How did the media portray the issues, actors, and proposed solutions surrounding the 2019 decision to continue or terminate state control in the LRSD in Arkansas?* Our CPDA ultimately revealed two argumentative frames—one entrenched in neoliberalism and the other rooted in the social reform movement—both of which are broader systemic ideologies, which reaffirm policy as a simultaneously constructive and reflective product of multiple and sometimes contradicting discourses and beliefs (Blackmore, 2017). Given the results of this study, we have determined that education policy decisions in Little Rock were part of a pattern of systemic racism, in this instance enacted through the neoliberal state takeover of the LRSD.

To that end, we first situate the research in relation to broader education reforms and narrow to the historical context of LRSD. We then contextualize school turnaround efforts and the underlying neoliberal agenda behind these efforts, connecting these broader turnaround movements to the LRSD takeover. We next establish CPDA as our methodological framework, discussing its significance to educational policy and media analyses. Employing CPDA, we explore how print media represented the deliberations and arguments surrounding the LRSD state takeover, pointing to two argumentative frames in the underlying subtext related to educational policy. Finally, we conclude by pointing to the implications this study has for education policy, including the need for critical literacy and continued advocacy for education reform.

Background

After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), education policy shifted toward capitalizing on economic potential by instituting language that promoted standardization, including testing systems that made schools and teachers narrowly accountable to deficit ideologies (Mehta, 2013). Within this context of shifting responsibilities, measurement, purpose, and goals of education, the scope of conflict within education policy expanded to include state legislators and business groups (Mason & Reckhow, 2017). No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, codified state involvement in the context of these education reforms, specifying an endogenous problem representation (Bacchi, 2009) which placed emphasis on the state's responsibilities in rapid school turnaround. Turnaround, defined as the "rapid, significant improvement in the academic achievement of persistently low-achieving schools" (Peck & Reitzug, 2014, p. 8), often incorporates paradoxical approaches (Peck & Reitzug, 2014), which include curricular and structural changes focused on standardized testing, test prep, and staff restructuring while ignoring "the pervasive effects of class, race, and funding disparities on schools' potential to improve" (Trujillo & Renée, 2012, p. 7).

Carpenter et al. (2014) expand on the ideas of education reform and turnaround in K-12 education, describing a global movement toward specific neoliberal policy vocabularies that limit the available policy solutions for problems in education. The inclusion of these neoliberal policy vocabularies represents movement toward hegemonic control of the political process, where the "political apparatus and the shaping and instilling of supporting values" (Gaventa, 1980, p. 58) and the discourse surrounding problematization (Bacchi, 2012) become methods of ideological reinforcement. Following neoliberalism outcome-based measures (i.e., achievement tests) creates narrow evaluations of efficacy within educational services and provides an assessment of school performance and accountability to the community and government that dehumanizes students and educators and obscures systemic racial, socioeconomic, and social inequities that both students and schools face. Further, a neoliberal lens on student achievement outcomes creates a false narrative of failure and deficit ideology that benefits private interests and promotes the commercialization of school systems (Endacott & Goering, 2015), facilitating colorblind racism that harms students of color by positioning their social, cultural, and linguistic identities as lying outside the realm of K-12 schools.

Systemic Racism in Neoliberalism

Processes and institutions that have a disparate impact, or which "adversely affect one group of people...more than another, even though the rules applied by employers, teachers, the government, landlords etc. are prima facie neutral (i.e., neutral on their face)" (Fandl, 2018, p. 484), are examples of systemic racism. As Feagin (2006) notes, "systemic racism encompasses a broad range of racialized dimensions of [U.S.] society: the racist framing, racist ideology, stereotyped attitudes, racist emotions, discriminatory habits and actions, and extensive racist institutions developed over centuries by whites" (p. xii). Furthermore, research that explores systemic racism investigates "the unjust, deeply institutionalized, ongoing intergenerational reproduction of whites' wealth, power, and privilege" (Feagin, 2006, p. 4).

Previous research on systemic racism in education has found that policy insiders use different discursive strategies to explain educational inequity, with some viewing inequity as a result of structural inequity and others implementing a deficit discourse related to families and teachers (Bertrand et al., 2015). For example, Berliner and Biddle (1995) and Gillborn (2018) call into question the practice of assessing schools on performance since achievement as measured by standardized tests correlates with socioeconomic status and race. Critical race theorists (e.g., Wright

et al., 2018) have also studied "racism as both a structural characteristic of educational systems and an individual element" (Gillborn, 2018, p. 67), in which changes and advances are made and countered cyclically. Wright and colleagues (2018), for example, analyzed the implementation of discipline following Public Act 4 and argued the law was applied in a racialized pattern to majority Black urban school districts. Additional case studies (e.g., Bowman, 2013; Mason & Reckhow, 2017) contextualize education reforms, pointing to the historical development of racially disparate systems. Mason and Reckhow (2017) argued that connections to local political networks are necessary for sustainability of education reforms in their comparative case study school turnaround efforts in Detroit and Memphis, connecting the two cases through historical and political similarities in racial segregation and inequality. Bowman (2013) also used Michigan as a case in her argument that changes to the role of education manager worked to exclude local actors in education policy. These studies point to education reform as a *racial project,* defined by Omi and Winant (2015) as "*simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines*" (emphasis in original, p. 125). A *racial project* can be described as *racist* "if it *creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial significations and identities"* (emphasis in original, Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 128). Education reforms that promote private sector involvement, school choice, accountability, and performativity align with neoliberalism (Brathwaite, 2017; Carpenter et al, 2014; Lipman, 2011). Neoliberalism, in turn, "has set in motion new forms of state-assisted economic, social, and spatial inequality, marginality, exclusion, and punishment" (Lipman, 2011, p. 220). The enactment of neoliberal education reforms operates covertly as a racist *racial project* (Omi & Winant, 2015) to perpetuate existing racial, socioeconomic, and other socially constructed inequalities. For example, standardized tests do not—at face value—appear to have racist motivations behind them, but in reality and in practice, they are used by policymakers to further segregate schools through tools like school grading policies (Endacott & Goering, 2015). Within this study, we set out to analyze how the media described, supported, and challenged these behind-the-scenes machinations in the case of Little Rock.

History of Education in Little Rock

In 1957, then-Governor of Arkansas Orval Faubus deployed the Arkansas National Guard to block nine Black[1] students from entering Central High School in Little Rock. These students, known as the Little Rock Nine, eventually were allowed to attend the school after federal intervention. The Little Rock crisis was one focal event within the broader context of integration. A relationship existed between the actions of various local and state constituencies and the speeches and actions of the political elite in the Massive Resistance segregation movement (Baer, 2008). This sustained a sociocultural context within which *de facto* segregation could continue. For example, Kirk (2005) chronicled the accumulation of segregationist actions of the Little Rock Housing Authority and the Little Rock School District throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s as one that marked "certain parts of the city as 'black' or 'white' [and] paved the way for the *de facto* segregation of numerous other facilities" (p. 279). For example, a separate high school was created for Black students living in the city. Although the school was within the city limits, the state categorized it as part of a rural school district, so it was inadequately funded (Kirk, 2005).

[1] Following Clement (2018) who echoed Touré's suggestion, we have capitalized Black and not white throughout this text because Black represents a distinct group of people who are unable to trace their lineage to a specific nation due to familial and national disruptions of slavery. In quotations, we have kept the capitalization of each word as it was originally published.

Litigation challenging the implementation and results of desegregation measures and disparate funding continued from the 1980s (Woods & Deere, 1991) into the 2010s. In addition to pointing to disparate funding, cases such as 1984's *Little Rock School District, et al. v. Pulaski County Special School District, et al.,* found evidence of segregation because the school district population was 70% Black, while the population of Little Rock was around 65% white (Jordan, 2017). The Little Rock school board was majority white until 2006 (Clement, 2018). While some court cases and other small steps toward integration succeeded, decades of trouble surrounding integration and adequate funding have plagued Little Rock Schools. This reflects broader national trends that reinforce structural barriers to integration and economic equality (Rotberg, 2020). These challenges persist throughout larger, national movements of education reform.

Methods

Combined, we[2][3][4] have over 40 years of experience across elementary, secondary, and higher-ed settings, including firsthand experience as educators in Arkansas. We are white, middle-class educators who are interested in making visible the invisible spaces created by the dynamics of state and local conflicts over control within certain school districts that highlight inequities within these "unmarked spaces" (Brekhus, 1998, p. 44).

Together, we conceptualized this study of LRSD to critically examine the impacts of discursive argumentation in the media as a harbinger for education policy decisions in Arkansas and beyond specifically as a part of a broader patterning of systemic racism consistent with neoliberal education reform in the United States. We employed CPDA to look further into the 2019 decision to continue or terminate state control of the LRSD and how that issue was portrayed in the media. Undoubtedly, our own negative experiences and observations within the neoliberal structures of our K-12 classrooms affected the decision to apply CPDA to consider the role of media in their explicit and implicit support of neoliberal policy implementation. We see the effect of neoliberal lenses on education as a problematic trend that adversely affects BIPOC[5] students within public school districts, especially those districts that face state takeover initiatives. This study used CPDA to

[2] Trish A. Lopez taught kindergarten, second, third, and fifth grade from 2011 to 2018 and 2021 to present in two large districts in the state. During this timeframe, the state used three separate standardized assessments as the basis for determining school grades. Seeing the work families, teachers, and students put forth toward the success of each student to then have a student or school labeled as failing to meet standards through an ever-changing assessment system is frustrating.

[3] Holly Sheppard Riesco taught English language arts at the secondary level in Arkansas for 15 years and recently moved to a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction. During her career in secondary education, she witnessed trends that focused on deficit thinking in literacy through standardized testing. Troubling to her was how these tests classified students, parents, teachers, schools, and communities as failing, rather than as merely one instrument or tool for improving schools. She noted how the testing culture influenced curriculum and instruction that often had educators teach to the test to remove the label of failing from schools. Realizing decision makers often view schools through deficit lenses, she began a doctoral program in hopes of impacting literacy policy and teaching in future teachers of English language arts.

[4] Christian Z. Goering taught in the K-12 system in a different state prior to taking an Arkansas-based role preparing future middle and high school English teachers and mentoring doctoral students on their journeys in curriculum and instruction and through an interdisciplinary public policy program. Born out of frustration with eroding conditions for innovative teaching and authentic learning in K-12 schools, they added a secondary research agenda on K-12 education policy.

[5] Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

examine the research question, *How did the media portray the issues, actors, and proposed solutions surrounding the 2019 decision to continue or terminate state control in the LRSD in Arkansas?*

Methodological Framework

Because neoliberal education reforms operate covertly (Carpenter et al., 2014), we employed a critical stance that allowed for consideration of the historical, contextual, and institutional factors at play within the media. The context around LRSD led us to adopt a stance that allowed for the evaluation of how dominant media discourses influenced the decision-making process. Using a critical theoretical framework allowed us to take a stance centered on increasing consciousness about injustices, identifying the "historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centered" (New London Group, 1996, p. 86) sources of inequalities and injustices, and tackling the issue of who has power and how that power is maintained (Patton, 2014). For these levels of analysis, CPDA provided a methodological framework consistent with a critical stance that allowed us to study how the complexities of educational reform movements were promoted or negated by the media in brokering policy reform (Yanovitzky & Weber, 2019).

CPDA bridges critical discourse analysis (CDA) with critical policy studies, engendering an enriched "analysis of policy discourse" (Farrelly et al., 2019, p. 264). Like discourse analysis, CPDA offers a method for analyzing the effects of discourse to text (Farrelly et al., 2019), which "provides a general framework to problem-oriented social research" (Wodak, 2008, p. 2). As Wodak (2008) explains, the general framework of discourse analysis recognizes interdisciplinarity, employs intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, incorporates the history and archaeology of an organization, and considers the context of a situation (Wodak, 2008). CPDA uses theoretical and methodological contributions from CDA as a guide for engaging in critical policy studies, allowing for a focus on social power and power relations (Farrelly et al., 2019). While researchers who use CDA may examine policy texts, these more linguistically focused studies remain somewhat siloed from social and political approaches (Van Dijk, 2015). CPDA attempts to connect these silos by bringing epistemological, ontological, and normative perspectives from critical policy studies to CDA to enrich the analysis (Mulderrig et al., 2019). CPDA supports a relational analysis of policy, which examines the role and context of discourse, and it "encourages analysis of the connection between policy and power" (Farrelly et al., 2019, p. 264). Furthermore, CPDA provides a framework that analyzes the discourses of the policy process within the context in which they occurred; in other words, discursive practices form a part of the process which also shapes the structure of future discourse (Mulderrig et al., 2019). As such, CPDA provides a framework for normative and explanatory critique focused on the context of *how* a policy developed, a distinguishing feature of the approach from CDA. Through the use of policy discourse as a medium for analysis, CPDA focuses on the relational, constitutive, context-specific, and power-laden issues and properties of policy (Farrelly et al., 2019). The approach's focus on argumentation, in particular, meets a call for new directions of policy analysis such as a focus on knowledge development through argumentation (Fischer, 2007) while converging with concerns typically associated with policy studies such as the process of deliberation as an applied practice (Fischer & Gottweis, 2013), concentration on framing and the implementation of causal stories (Stone, 1997), and issues of agenda access and denial (Cobb & Ross, 1997; Gilens & Page, 2014) as evidenced through discourse patterns that include certain ideologies and actors while excluding others.

In the context of control of LRSD, CPDA allowed for an examination of the actors, the issue, and the proposed solutions while considering the history of education in Little Rock and the contemporaneous education reform movements to examine the discourse promulgated within and across media sources. As media simultaneously describes and promotes ideological hegemony, this

study focused on deliberation present in media sources as the *genre* (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). Since media acts as a brokering agent that connects the multiple actors in policy ecosystems (Yanovitzky & Weber, 2019), CPDA provided a method for examining the relationship between *social structures, practices,* and *events* described in the media*,* as well as the argumentative frames described and developed within them (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, as cited in Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Poutanen, 2019). Within the framework of CPDA, the media investigation turned specific attention to both the historical and contemporaneous contexts of the issues of race, class, and the interposition of levels of government. Following Poutanen (2019) and Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), the focus on argumentative discourse analysis offers a framework for understanding the competing argumentative structures.

In the media, "powerful and persuasive frames resonate with powerful arguments" (Poutanen, 2019, p. 126), but these persuasive frames should not be seen as factual in and of themselves. Instead, they are representative of larger assumptions and underlying connections to specific arguments surrounding education. By analyzing the assumptions upon which the media presents its arguments about education, and in this specific case about the LRSD takeover, the research question creates an opportunity for a more complex look into the media portrayal of education reform through district takeovers. Further, analysis of media portrayal of the LRSD takeover supports additional understandings about how the media mirrors societal assumptions about education. Focusing analysis on the argumentative discourse allows for an examination of how media, and the actors quoted within the media articles: (1) provided information to support the arguments; (2) critically reflected on other potential framing options; and (3) gave opportunity for argumentation by representing different voices and perspectives (Poutanen, 2019). Furthermore, critical analysis of media offers "a principled way of criticizing powerful arguments that are not easily challenged, arguments that draw on dominant discourses and ideologies," which paint the opposing argumentative frame "as being grounded in unreasonable and rationally indefensible values and goals" (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 81). Guided by the historical and contemporaneous issues at play in LRSD, argumentative frames that aligned with these dominant and dominant-opposed discourses emerged in the analysis.

Data Collection

To build the corpus of analyzed texts, we employed a "top-down approach" of selecting texts "from the 'universe of possible texts'" (Mautner, 2008, p. 36). The goal of the search and selection of texts was to establish a body of text as a "scientific object" (Montesano Montessori, 2019, p. 40) that could provide data suitable to answering the research question (Mautner, 2008). In initial searches in the database Nexis Uni for the dates January 1, 2019 to February 29, 2020, we combined the terms and Boolean operators "Little Rock," "Little Rock School District," "School*," "takeover," "state takeover," "state control," and "school choice" for various results that ranged from 91 to 1,329 news articles. These search terms were informed by other case studies of state-driven reforms in education (i.e., Mason & Reckhow, 2017) and our understanding of neoliberal policy vocabularies (Carpenter et al., 2014). Comparing the results between the various searches, "Little Rock School District" and "State Board" provided the most accurate news stories related to the research question of how the media portrayed the events regarding control of the school district. We analyzed the initial search result to eliminate duplicate results, leading to a total of 168 articles for analysis from this search. To analyze additional sources, we conducted the same search of "Little Rock School District" and "State Board" on the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. This search resulted in 104 news items. Both searches resulted in a corpus of 272 articles. We selected the time frame to allow for analysis of coverage of the issue before the five-year deadline approached. In 2019, the

decision regarding control of the LRSD quickly approached a five-year time limit of state control that originally began in 2015.

Most news articles came from *Arkansas Times* and *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* (Table 1). Both news sources rank "high" for factual reporting according to Media Bias/Fact Check (Van Zandt, 2020). The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* is rated "right-center biased" (Van Zandt, 2020) because many of the editorials favor right-leaning positions. The *Arkansas Times*, on the other hand, is rated "left-center biased" because editorial and news reporting favor left-leaning positions (Van Zandt, 2019). In addition to these two main sources, several articles came from *TalkBusiness.net*, a website focused on business, political, and cultural news in Arkansas. We aggregated and analyzed the 272 news articles from both the Nexis Uni and *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* search and conducted our analysis using Dedoose computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. These data provided the basis of the material for CPDA.

Table 1

News Articles by Source

Source	Number of news articles
Arkansas Democrat Gazette	104
Arkansas Times	134
TalkBusiness.Net	12
The Associated Press State & Local Wire	3
U.S. News & World Report	9
Other	10
Total	272

Data Analysis

Consistent with CPDA, we employed a two-step, iterative research design (Farrelly et al., 2019). In the first step, we analyzed texts using inductive open coding which provided the basis for the development of axial codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 166). The unit of analysis for this code was an excerpt from within an article that had enough information to stand alone or make meaning by itself. To provide consistency in coding among the researchers, we developed a codebook after initial analysis of 30 articles with the code, a definition of the code, and excerpts that served as examples (Table 2). Through weekly debriefing meetings among the researchers, we conducted constant comparison (Kenny & Fourie, 2015) among the codes and between the codes and new reading. In other words, while the initial codes were used as a guide, inductive processes were followed to further refine, define, and add codes throughout the first coding process as more text was read and analyzed. For example, the initial code *race* was further refined with the addition of the child codes *covert* and *overt* to distinguish whether issues that disproportionately impacted different racial groups (covert) or race directly (overt) were mentioned in the media article (see Table 2). As an additional measure of reliability, we selected 10% of the articles using a random number generator for a second code. The second coder read the article noting points of disagreement with the first

coder, in which instance a third coder would review the article. In the 30 articles randomly selected, first coders identified 84 relevant excerpts. Second coders agreed with the coded excerpts of the first coder and identified 15 additional excerpts to code.

Table 2

Selected Examples from the Codebook

Code	Definition	Excerpt	Media Source
Local control	Includes term "locally elected school board," reference to return of local control	"It would have relinquished control of the best schools in Little Rock--those concentrated in the north and west parts of the city that have the highest enrollment of white students, allowing them to be run by a locally elected school board." (Camera, 2019a)	*U.S. News & World Report*
		"With the locally elected school board, will there be respect between what you guys decide and what you allow it to do?" (Camera, 2019b)	*U.S. News & World Report*
Race	Specific delineation of the race of students, or how students of different races were likely to be affected differently. Child codes: Covert (implied mention of race) or Overt (explicit mention of race)	**Covert—** "But her talk of 'a more diverse pool of race and socioeconomics,' a euphemistic way of saying that Hall [High School] needs to attract more white students, nods toward the complex and often conflicting challenges the LRSD and urban school districts have to balance." (Millar, 2020)	*Arkansas Times*
		Overt— "Under the framework, that would leave the newly elected school board in control of schools in the white areas of town and not in the areas with higher black and brown populations—especially if those schools set for reconfiguration aren't put under local control. That's led many to criticize the plan as promoting resegregation and separate but equal treatment of LRSD schools." (Millar, 2019a)	*Arkansas Times*

Code	Definition	Excerpt	Media Source
State actors in public education	Commissioner, governor, Arkansas Department of Education, State Board, association members at state level	"State Education Secretary Johnny Key released a draft memo Tuesday that laid out a framework for the creation of community schools and outlines conditions under which the school district will be returned to local control." (Ellis & Herzog, 2019)	*Arkansas Democrat Gazette*
		""The ability of LRSD to successfully compete with public charter schools was demonstrated this year as the LRSD grew in student enrollment,' Hutchinson said in the statement." (Herzog, 2019b)	*Arkansas Democrat Gazette*

Prior to the second stage of analysis, the research team discussed the details and overarching ideas noticed within the context of the analysis. In debriefing, this conversation highlighted the presence of neoliberalism and systemic racism through a large portion of the data set, as well as examples of a multifaceted understanding of those terms such as issues of state and local control. The second round of analysis, therefore, used this deductive lens. While these overarching frames guided analysis, the researchers kept an open mind to new findings in this second analysis.

In the second round, we read together all excerpts under a given code to provide an understanding of the "arguments that were most visible and persistent" throughout the entire body of text (Poutanen, 2019). In addition, we focused our attention on selecting excerpts for close analysis. "Moving from analysis of a large set of texts to close analysis of individual texts" (Vaara, 2014, p. 504) allows for an investigation of characteristic patterns in media discourses. The movement from large to small bodies of text is consistent with CPDA's focus on the interaction of discourse and power. While not predetermined, we then grounded the general frames generated by the discourse analysis—neoliberal ideologies and systemic racism—in the literature.

We selected excerpts for this close analysis, defined as a quote from within an article that had sufficient information to hold meaning on its own, based on the extent to which they: (1) represented the corpus of excerpts with that code; (2) provided argumentation toward one of the general frames; (3) explained an underlying rationale within a frame; and (4) proffered sufficient detail and contextualization for additional analysis. In analyzing these selected texts, we gave attention to the argumentative components within each frame. The argumentative components for the two frames are provided in the appendix. The components within each frame included the *claim* or solution that was proposed, the *goal* and *values* which expound the underlying aims and beliefs of the argument, the *means-goal* or course of action proposed to achieve the solution, and *circumstances* which include the external societal or institutional factors that either provide or limit available courses of action to a given actor (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Poutanen, 2019). Considering these argumentative components elucidates how the frames were implemented by various actors to problematize the situation, which in turn has implications for the possible solutions each group proffered (Bacchi, 2009). In addition, we considered the *alternative options* or counterclaims to a given frame as well as the extent to which the argument *addressed alternative options* (Fairclough &

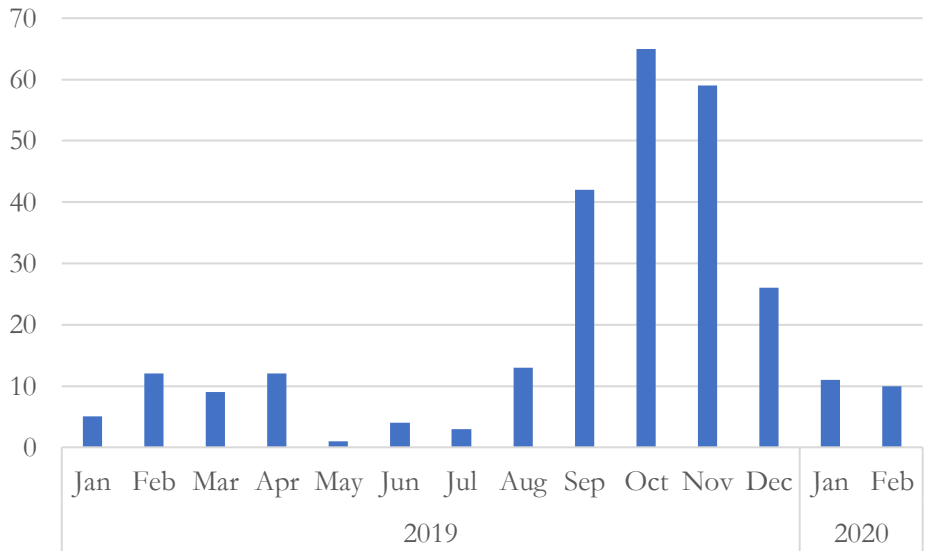
Fairclough, 2012; Poutanen, 2019). Finally, we analyzed the given *actors* associated with each frame in the media discourse (Farrelly, 2019).

Findings

As the deadline for the five-year state control of the LRSD approached, news articles surrounding LRSD and "State Board" increased (Figure 1). In the first seven months of 2019, the number of news articles published related to the two terms ranged from 1 to 12 per month. As the 2019-2020 school year began, however, the number of articles published increased, reaching as high as 65 published articles in October.

Figure 1

Number of Articles Published by Month



This increase in published articles illustrated a reciprocal relationship between the media and policy, where interest in an issue in one realm is supported and reinforced by the other (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). The 2020 deadline from the 2015 implementation of the policy provided a focal point for both political and media sources and guided discourse around the issue.

The Emergence of Two Argumentative Frames

According to the 2015 policy, the state's control of LRSD would end if the district met exit criteria, based largely on the ratings schools received from a state framework that heavily relies on students' scores on an achievement test. Mirroring this policy, media coverage in 2019 reported scores from this achievement test from the schools in LRSD, fulfilling their role as brokering agents to policy ecosystems through public discourse and information (Yanovitzky & Weber, 2019). In the media outlets that focused on the state's control of LRSD, the media mirrored "frames already present in public discourse" (Poutanen, 2019, p. 126), which confirmed the analysis and reflected previous discourses. These frames within the media, in fact, reflected the opposing values and goals in education that are centered in policy reform movements (Giroux, 2014).

One argumentation frame represented a hegemonic, neoliberal, continuation of state control. Excerpts within this frame echoed the concepts of accountability, the state's responsibility in education policy, and performativity. For example, in discussing schools' scores on achievement tests, the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* (Howell, 2019) reported:

> Within the district, the results at the schools varied widely. Better than 79% of third-graders and 83% of fourth-graders at Forest Park Elementary achieved at the ready and exceeds-ready levels on the reading tests. But at Baseline Elementary, no percentage of third-graders scored at ready levels in reading, and 15.63% of fourth-graders and 17.02% of fifth-graders attained ready scores. At McClellan High, one of the eight F-graded schools, fewer than 9% of ninth- and 10th-graders scored at the desired levels in reading, compared with fewer than 7% at Hall High, another F-graded school. At J.A. Fair, no more than 9.74% of ninth- and 10th-graders hit the ready mark in reading. At Central High, about 44% of ninth-graders and about 35% of 10th-graders scored at ready or better levels. At Parkview Magnet High, 39% of ninth-graders and 36% of 10th-graders did the same.

By focusing on achievement test scores, the argument *claimed* that schools failed to meet standards for student achievement. It begins by framing "the results" as the actor, taking a non-personal stance. It then emphasizes the scores of the students by naming "third-graders" and "fourth-graders." This emphasis moves the responsibility of the so-called failure onto the students, alleviating the state of guilt in the process. At the same time, this argumentative frame suggests it was the state's obligation to support "failing" schools, and the designation of failing is largely defined by the school's standardized test scores and attendance rates. The use of percentages of students scoring at proficient level on achievement tests serves to represent the problem as student achievement, contributing to a problematization (Bacchi, 2009) in which specific policies related to schools, curriculum, and expected proficiency levels are used as a metric. Additionally, the article lists the schools individually, presenting the information in a way that is difficult to understand and makes it easy to lose sight of which schools are which, obfuscating correlations of achievement, race, and class. For example, Forest Park elementary, the only school with which the article uses the verb "achieved," was 74.5% white for the 2019-2020 school year and had 19% of students identified as low income (Arkansas Department of Education, 2020). Finally, by reporting the schools in this separate way, the reader is forced to compare the schools, echoing the concept of school choice and market competition which neoliberalism supports as a method for school improvement (Underwood & Mead, 2012).

In comparison, the opposing frame from *Arkansas Times* (Millar, 2019b) separates students from failure and groups the schools:

> Three of Little Rock's five high schools remain on the list: J.A. Fair, Hall and McClellan. So, too, does Washington Elementary. Newly in the group are Henderson Middle School and three elementary schools — Baseline, Meadowcliff and Watson. Aside from Hall and Henderson, all of those schools are located south of Interstate 630 in neighborhoods, and all the schools have high concentrations of blacks and/or Latinos living in poverty.

What stands out in comparison to the first quote is that this one does not use the student-focused action words. For example, the use of the word "remain" to describe the schools separates the failure from the students and positions it as an action of the state by emphasizing the state-created list. This frame also makes the *claim* that systemic racism is observable, stating "all the schools [on

the list of failing schools] have high concentrations of blacks and/or Latinos living in poverty" (Millar, 2019b). This quote illustrates the argumentation present in the frame that served as a counterargument to the neoliberal, state control frame. In general, this opposing frame claimed that social reform was necessary at the local level to combat systemic racism, and the history of Little Rock is still relevant in current events. In addition, proponents of this frame highlight the capability and importance of local community members' inclusion in district decisions. For example, at a state Board of Education meeting district parents Ali Noland and Julia Taylor:

> ...pointed out that the Little Rock district community is highly engaged in the school district operations and ready to take back the operation of the district. Noland said the Education Board can't take credit for the positives in the district without also accepting responsibility for ongoing problems. (Howell, 2019)

This frame emphasized the need for a return to local control and decision-making. The components of both argumentative frames are summarized in the Appendix.

Discourse Between the Frames

In response to this opposing frame, the governor first attempted to *address alternative options* using a strategy of agenda denial (Cobb & Ross, 1997). The excerpts we have included in this section illustrate how language and arguments were used within each respective frame. For example, in this excerpt, the focus is first on the opposing frame's concept of local control, and how the state board framework supported it. Then, the quote from the governor demonstrates his refutation of the problem as proposed by the opposing frame:

> Hutchinson praised the board's framework because it would restore some local control to a majority of the schools in the 23,000-student district. He said the framework wasn't based on geography but on school performance. "I absolutely reject the proposition that this is a resegregation of the Little Rock School District," he said during a Monday morning meeting with reporters. "That is wrong. It is not based in fact, and it is really trying to resurrect old history that has no application to today." (Field, 2019)

By couching praise for the board's framework in vague language like "some" and "majority," Hutchinson omits that following the framework would allow those schools with high populations of students belonging to low-income households to continue to receive state control. Class and race are omitted as he centers this argument on the framework of school performance, positioning the results from school performance as objective "fact" while ignoring the correlation between school performance, class, and race. Using the term "absolutely reject" further distances the argument from the nuance of both the contemporaneous and historical context within which the media discussed these policy options. While new strategies have promoted *de facto* segregation such as the proliferation of private schools in the 60s and 70s, the same sense of segregated schooling promoted before *Brown v. Board* remained. By suggesting that the opposing frame is "trying to resurrect old history," the argument implies that this decision-making moment is contextually ahistorical, and Governor Hutchinson's position as a "truthmaker" means some readers will follow this line of argumentation simply because it was put forth by the governor (Endacott et al., 2018). In addition, because this quote is presented toward the beginning of the news article followed by reporting of the decisionmaking process, with quotes from the counterargument not presented until toward the end of the article, the structure of the media portrayal elevates the quote from the governor while diminishing the counterargument.

Furthermore, in *addressing the counterclaim* by suggesting the complete local control supported by the opposing frame was untenable, the governor promoted the neoliberal frame's *solution*. When looking at the following quote, this argument promoted a frame in which the state was "required" to continue controlling the district.

> Citing the Arkansas Constitution and the Arkansas Supreme Court's ruling in the Lake View case that found that the state is required to provide an equitable education for all public school students, Hutchinson said if the state returned LRSD schools to local control that continue to receive an 'F' grade under the state accountability framework, then 'we would surely have dedicated civil rights lawyers that would immediately be filing a lawsuit saying we are not meeting our obligations under the Lake View decision' (Millar, 2019a)

The frame that the state was "required to provide an equitable education for all public school students" suggested that by following the mandates of the *Lake View* decisions, the state had no choice but to take over the schools. The *Lake View* cases were a series of six Arkansas Supreme Court decisions which began with litigation in 1992 and continued into 2007, and they centered on the distribution of state funds for education (Fritsche, 2014). Within the cases, "the most definitive definition" (Fritsche, 2014, p. 752) of equality was put forward in *Lake View III* and stated, "[e]quality of educational opportunity must include as basic components substantially equal curricula, substantially equal facilities, and substantially equal equipment for obtaining an adequate education" (*Lake View School District No. 25 v. Huckabee,* 351 Ark. 31, 79, 91 S.W.3d 472, 2002, sec. 21). The argumentation from the governor here, then, makes a jump from adequate funding to equality of outcomes. By using the word "required," the implication was that the state had no choice but to take over the schools. Other options, however, did exist, as outlined under the policy that guided the options available to the state (Arkansas Educational Support and Accountability Act, 2018). This act was engrossed after the state had controlled the LRSD for two years and similarly based its justification on the opinions set forth in *Lake View* and an older case in Arkansas, *DuPree* (*Dupree v. Alma School Dist. No. 30*, 1983, 279 Ark. 340, 651 S. W.2d 90). These options included annexation, consolidation, or reconstitution of the public school district; reassignment of staff within a school; requiring a new curriculum to be implemented in the district; reorganization, closure, or dissolution of one or more schools within the district, among others. By later referencing the "state accountability framework" in which "schools...continue to receive an 'F' grade," Hutchinson indicates a failure of the schools rather than a failure of the framework or the assessment of student achievement which formed a large basis of the school grade. The problematization as represented through the neoliberal frame ignores factors of race or socioeconomic status, using statistics from the accountability framework to represent the problem as school failure and the state's role in alleviating it (Bacchi, 2009). This mention of state accountability standards and the subsequent letter grade also establishes a duplicitous dichotomy between the state's responsibility to create the factors for achievement and the state's role in the failing schools, which were under the state's leadership at the time. Similarly, identifying "dedicated civil rights lawyers" in this what-if situation implies that these lawyers would side with state control because injustice would exist if the state had not controlled LRSD. This implication of civil rights' lawyers' support of state control leaves out the state's role in setting the criteria and selecting as an option state control and suggests that the state control of the district is more equitable than local control.

The opposing argumentative frame, which supported local control as part of social reform to combat systemic racism, also brought up the state accountability framework as part of its

argumentation scheme. State Senator Joyce Elliott commented on the framework, tying her response to another report from the government:

> Elliott said this framework is "blatantly racist in effect," saying that though Governor Hutchinson and board members have said that this is not the case, "you cannot have a framework built on three separate categories of schools and not understand that this is segregation." Elliott then referred to a report released in September by the nonpartisan Bureau of Legislative Research on Arkansas's education accountability system. Elliott said the report essentially revealed that the criteria used by the state to determine school performance is "junk science." She also described the effects experienced by a school and its students when it receives an "F" grade. (Hall, 2019a)

Media portrayal supported Elliott's argument by beginning with identifying the framework as racist in effect which illustrates how she was striving for a change in policy. By blaming the policy instead of a particular person or group of people, Elliott attempted to expand the conflict and make it more palatable to those who may support the politicians. This acknowledgement of the policy as the failure also ties in the concept of *de facto* segregation, as Elliott noted the three separate categories did segregate the schools even though the Governor and board members said that was not the intent. She supports this claim with a report from the Bureau of Legislative Research (2019). This report, commissioned for the committees on education in both the Arkansas House and Arkansas Senate, similarly notes "the demographic make-up of a school's student body often still is statistically significantly correlated with the ESSA [Every Student Succeeds Act] Index Score" (p. 13) and that "schools with a lower than average percentage of black students are six times as likely to receive A's than schools with larger than average percentage of black students" (p. 15). By calling into question the accountability system with the term "junk science" and later emphasizing the effects on students' self-perceptions as well as community real estate values that occur when schools are labeled as failing, Elliott highlights the *values* of the systemic racism frame. Focusing on the effects of a policy as implemented, like the Supreme Court justices did in the historic *Brown v. Board* decision (Souter, 2010/2017), demonstrates how labeling the schools has consequences beyond the political realm that disproportionately affect low-income, Black and Brown students.

Compromise Aligned with Neoliberal Hegemony

Facing growing discontent that would eventually lead to a protest of thousands of community members at the foot of Central High School and later a teacher strike, Little Rock's Mayor Frank Scott Jr. set forth a proposal in early October. Little Rock's first elected Black mayor, Frank Scott Jr. positioned himself as an actor within the local control frame, stating, "I'm on public record advocating for complete and full control of LRSD" (Brantley, Oct. 31, 2019). His proposal, however, was "focused on solutions with the realistic understanding of what I can and cannot do" (Brantley, Oct. 31, 2019). In other words, his proposal nominally put forward a path to local control tempered by the state's neoliberal policy context. The media coverage of his proposal reflects the support for community outreach within a neoliberal framework:

> Mayor Frank Scott Jr. announced on Monday a proposal to return the Little Rock School District to local control, which includes putting an interim school board in place in January 2020 and having the district operate its schools that received an F grade under a partnership between the city and the state. (Herzog, 2019a)

Beginning with the frame of returning the district to local control and then dovetailing that information with the "partnership between the city and state" attempts to show the proposed

solution met the goals of the local control frame. The terminology of the neoliberal frame, however, with the separation of "schools that received an F grade," show that whatever the machinations are, they are predicated on the false narrative perpetrated by the color-blind neoliberal policy of grading schools which serves as a proxy for class and race. The mention of an interim school board, rather than a locally elected school board, also suggests that this is an unequal partnership between the city and state at best. This support for collaboration between district and state is continued with the phrase "having the district operate," which suggested that the district would regain full local control, but then included "under a partnership" indicating the state would have some role. While a local actor, the mayor's plan develops a relationship between the state and local actors with the state only involved in those schools with an F grade.

A large part of Mayor Frank Scott Jr.'s proposal was the community school model. This model was eventually adopted on a pilot basis for some of the schools in LRSD.

> Scott said the community school model is "something that's not foreign to the nation in regards to assisting challenging schools within local school districts and providing wrap-around services." He said the schools are often in low-income, distressed areas or have low school "grades" because of "things that may be happening in the community," including "poverty, food insecurity [and] health insecurity." Scott said the "wrap-around services" could include programs that ensure children have three meals a day, and also services "as complex" as ensuring that social and mental health workers are available in schools to help students experiencing trauma or mental health issues. (Hall, 2019b)

Components of the community school model did fit the demands of the systemic racism, local control frame. In his statement, Scott tied low school grades with external factors of "poverty, food insecurity, [and] health insecurity." The examples of wrap-around services illustrate the concern not only for achievement on the standardized test, but also on the health and psychosocial well-being of the students. Still, the entire concept of the community school model being predicated on "assisting challenging schools" reflects the notion of failing schools as developed through the idea of a manufactured crisis. Bell's (1980) concept of *interest convergence*, defined as "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality [being] accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523), is reflected in the promotion of the neoliberal frame of argumentation as justification for the community school model. "Challenging" is used as a synonym for low achievement scores. Scott does not explicitly mention race or racial segregation, instead referring to "low-income, distressed areas." The connection between low school grades and external factors highlights systemic issues, but it also allows the state to evade culpability in their role with the schools. At this point, the state had controlled the district for five years, but highlighting the external factors as Scott does here places the blame on the issues within the community instead of the state or policies. The community school model as a solution was palatable to both argumentative frames, but it was not problem free.

Discussion

The 2019 decision to return LRSD to local control with a memorandum of understanding between the state and school district, as well as creation of a pilot program of community schools for select schools in the district, demonstrates how the hegemonic frame continued to dominate the policy process despite polarized media sources promoting both argumentative frames. The CPDA conducted in this study allowed for an examination of how two argumentative frames in the media portrayed the actors, issues, and possible solutions using components of the hegemonic, neoliberal

viewpoint, contributing to the adoption of incremental change in the policy that did not address issues of systemic racism in education policy.

One argumentative frame aimed for a continuation of state control of the district based on color-blind, neoliberal policy. Portions of articles that aligned with this frame focused on accountability, using test scores to make the claim that schools and students were failing (following Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Mehta, 2013). Most of the time, actors quoted and portrayed by the media affiliated with this frame were incumbent state officials like the Governor or members of the State Board of Education. Justifying the state's involvement in the school district in their own rhetorical interests (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012), the actors and media that promoted this frame used terms referring to the state's requirement, duty, and obligation. Furthermore, they portrayed their position as *color-blind* (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Collins, 2009), suggesting the tumultuous history of LRSD and race had no application to a proposed system which would have acted as a racist racial project (Omi & Winant, 2015) by categorizing and providing different levels of state and local control to the schools within the district.

The media challenged the dominant discourse in this instance, unlike other previous media coverage of groups that have been marginalized (Collins, 2009; López, 2020), through the inclusion of parents of students in the district, teachers, teacher union members, advocates from community groups, some state officials, and local government representatives. These actors and the media questioned the framework used to identify failing schools, pointing to the correlations between school grades, race, and class. Proponents of this argumentative frame proffered that the history of Little Rock did apply in this decision-making process and advocated for a return to full local control of the district, rather than a return to local control for only a portion of the school district. By pointing out these proposed disparate outcomes were based on the institutionalized framework, this frame rallied against systemic racism (Fandl, 2018). The language used by the media and actors under this counter-hegemonic frame, however, suggested that the dominant frame still influenced discourse in this policy decision (Carpenter et al., 2014). As Collins (2009) suggested, coded language is implemented within the societal context of color-blind racism, "a system of power" that is "deeply entrenched…[in] America's struggle for democratic social equality" (p. 53). In the state control of LRSD, implementing a community school pilot aligned with the narrative of "Black youth in low-income settings [framed] as 'broken' and in need of 'fixing'" (Baldridge, 2017, p. 781). The coded accountability framework influenced how the problem was represented as well as the proposed solutions (Bacchi, 2012), and it provided the basis for determining which schools would become part of the community school pilot.

Utilizing CPDA allowed us to examine the argumentative frames developed through the media and to investigate the relationship between media reporting, political actors, and the policy decision process. Increased media coverage of Little Rock schools during this policy process correlated with a policy change (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009), and the use of CPDA provides a method for studying the responsiveness of this policy change to the goals of the two opposing arguments. While the policy nominally responded to the aims of the counter-hegemonic frame, the continuation of state control though a memorandum of understanding and changes to the school board, along with the pilot community school initiative and discontinuation of the bargaining power of the teacher union, suggests the policy change reflected the goals of the hegemonic frame. This finding is consistent with other studies of state takeover and education reform (e.g., Bowman, 2013; Brathwaite, 2017; Carpenter et al., 2014; Mason & Reckhow, 2017; Peck & Reitzug, 2014; Wright et al., 2018), which suggest entrenched racist systems (Collins, 2009; Omi & Winant, 2015; Trujillo & Woulfin, 2014) operate within and influence education policy in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Conclusion

The CPDA conducted on the media surrounding the decision to continue or terminate state control of LRSD illuminated two argumentative frames. One frame reflected a neoliberal perspective while the other aligned with social reform movements. Previous research has pointed to a concern for the role of "consolidated media sources" which may reflect only one argumentative frame (Poutanen, 2019). In this instance, polarized media sources provided outlets for both the hegemonic view of continued state control and the counter-hegemonic view of a return to full local control to be portrayed. Despite representation of both sides, the policy decision to grant local control operating under a memorandum of understanding with the state serves to underscore how the dominant, neoliberal frame continued to influence the policy process. While proponents of the counter-hegemonic frame supported teachers striking for a change in conditions and sponsored a protest, mounting a relatively large and visual form of opposition, systems which perpetuate racist categorization and allocation of resources continued, such as the state framework which assigns grades to schools. The policy decision in this case returned local control following the argumentative frame of social reform, but it continued to reflect components of the hegemonic view by allowing only partial local control and banning collective bargaining.

This finding points to several implications for the relationship between media coverage and education policy. In order to have a significant policy change, sustained community and media attention to an issue is needed, especially if the actors promoting change are outside of the government or are challenging systemic issues. In the instance of Little Rock, community advocacy groups played a large role in organizing events like the protest at Little Rock's Central High that were large enough to garner media attention. Notwithstanding, systemic issues such as achievement on standardized testing used as coded justification for racist, differing systems of governance to schools within the district were not sufficiently challenged within media coverage to influence large, state-level policy changes. Our findings point to the necessity for continued opposition with accompanying, careful media attention that challenges the coded language used within policy and by policymakers.

Regarding movement toward integration, there are lasting effects of decades-long barriers and policies that have created segregated schools throughout the U.S. (Rotberg, 2020). Media coverage in LRSD reflected the influence of the existing discourses (Blackmore, 2017) of neoliberalism's implicit support of segregation policies when quoting various actors who supported or accepted the existing systems of accountability and performativity. Media coverage of the LRSD takeover was mostly reflective and constructive of the neoliberal status quo, and increasing coverage from opinions that challenge the neoliberal lenses that lead to segregation could have increased support for new policies.

Another finding is the importance of taking a critical stance when reading news media. As the media are seen as a form of education (López, 2020) and a source of information (Poutanen, 2019), media consumers should approach media with a critical stance (Kohnen & Lacy, 2018). In the case of Little Rock, audiences that do not take a critical stance will likely see the 2019 and 2020 events surrounding the district control as a step toward local control and may therefore be less likely to favorably view continued calls for social reforms. Furthermore, neoliberal discourses in education surrounding achievement and accountability warrant critical consideration of the extent to which they promote systemic, racist ideologies. Considering argumentation and argumentative frames present in media discourse surrounding a policy issue allows for an understanding of the relationship between discourses present in media coverage and policy decisions and provides a method for analyzing how the claims from differing argumentative frames are supported or refuted.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge and thank Melissa Taylor and Jake Warren for their contributions to the research project in summer 2020 and Roseli Matos Franco for translating the title and abstract to Portuguese.

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Appendix

Table A1

Summary of the Neoliberal, State Control Frame

Frame	**Neoliberal advocates for state control of Little Rock School District**
Circumstantial premises (problems)	Schools were not meeting standards for student achievement, defined largely by standardized test scores and attendance rates. The state has an obligation to support "failing" schools.
Claim (solution)	Continued state control of LRSD would ensure schools meet achievement as defined by the state.
Goal (premises)	Schools should be accountable to the state and to the public and should meet student achievement targets.
Value (premises)	State has a "moral" obligation to ensure all schools meet standards. Promotion of school choice increases competitiveness for schools to meet standards. Color-blind perspective on quantitative achievement.
Means- goal premise	Continued state control will ensure quantitative achievement increases and meet legally mandated obligations.
Alternative options (counter- claim)	State control is not the right thing to do because it serves state public-relations interest and not the local community. Proposed solutions promote segregation.
Addressing alternative options	State needs to "support" schools in meeting student achievement targets. The solutions as proposed are race-neutral; a desire to "take the politics out" in reaching a solution.
Actors	Governor, State Commissioner of Education, State Board of Education

Table A2

Summary of the Social Reform, Local Control Frame

Frame	**Social reform at the local level is needed to combat systemic racism**
Circumstantial premises (problems)	Proposed solutions to "failing" schools were racist in effect.
	The history of Little Rock continued to influence perspectives around the school district.
	Students did not meet achievement standards due to external factors like poverty.
Claim (solution)	State should support local initiatives for schools in LRSD.
	Community-based initiatives would ensure schools meet achievement.
	Local decisions would not "resegregate" schools.
Goal (premises)	Local, community- based decisions meet the needs of students in schools and should be supported by the state.
Value (premises)	Schools should support students, not an achievement score "grade."
	Diversity in schools benefits students' perspectives.
	Local, not state, interests are the best for schools.
	There is no race-neutral policy.
Means- goal premise	A return to local control with social reform supports will ensure higher student achievement.
Alternative options (counter- claim)	Local control is not the right thing to do because in the past schools had not met achievement standards, and the state has a duty to help.
	Local control is not the right thing to do because the state was not being racist in its proposals.
Addressing alternative options	State control over the past five years did little to improve student achievement outcomes.
	Student achievement outcomes as judged by standardized tests are not the best metric of student performance.
Actors	Parents, Mayor, Union leaders, Teachers

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Volume 31 Number 34 April 4, 2023 ISSN 1068-2341