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Negotiating Curricular Censorship: A Frame Analysis of Two Cases in Catholic Schools

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Abstract: In today's educational landscape, where censorship is increasingly being used to control and homogenize ideologies, it's crucial to examine how censorship policies are being framed and subsequently negotiated. This paper uses frame analysis to analyze two instances of book censorship in Catholic schools, exploring how insiders (e.g., administrators, students, families, alumni) and outsiders (e.g., news outlets, general public) attempted to establish their frame's relevancy as they responded to the removal of a particular text. The analysis reveals that educational leaders face challenges in reconciling institutional expectations with local community values, but ultimately, in these cases, it was the voices of community insiders that shaped the discourse surrounding the policy and its outcomes. Through this analysis, the paper contributes a nuanced understanding of censorship in educational settings, challenging the assumption that private religious schools are inherently sites of censorship, and emphasizing the value of community perspectives in efforts to understand censorship.

Keywords: curriculum censorship; book ban; frame analysis; private religious schools

Negociando la censura curricular: Un análisis de marcos interpretativos de dos casos en escuelas católicas

Resumen: En el panorama educativo actual, donde la censura se utiliza cada vez más para controlar y homogeneizar ideologías, es fundamental examinar cómo se enmarcan y negocian

posteriormente las políticas de censura. Este artículo emplea el análisis de marcos interpretativos para estudiar dos casos de censura de libros en escuelas católicas, explorando cómo los actores internos (por ejemplo, administradores, estudiantes, familias, exalumnos) y externos (por ejemplo, medios de comunicación, público general) intentaron establecer la relevancia de su marco interpretativo al responder a la eliminación de un texto específico. El análisis revela que los líderes educativos enfrentan desafíos al conciliar las expectativas institucionales con los valores de la comunidad local, pero, en última instancia, en estos casos, fueron las voces de los actores internos de la comunidad las que moldearon el discurso y los resultados. A través de este análisis, el artículo ofrece una comprensión matizada de la censura en contextos educativos, cuestiona la suposición de que las escuelas religiosas privadas son inherentemente espacios de censura y destaca el valor de las perspectivas comunitarias para comprender este fenómeno.

Palabras-clave: censura curricular; prohibición de libros; análisis de marcos; escuelas religiosas privadas

Negociando a censura curricular: Uma análise de enquadramento de dois casos em escolas católicas

Resumo: No cenário educacional atual, em que a censura vem sendo cada vez mais usada para controlar e homogeneizar ideologias, é fundamental examinar como as políticas de censura estão sendo formuladas e posteriormente negociadas. Este artigo utiliza a análise de enquadramento para investigar dois casos de censura de livros em escolas católicas, explorando como atores internos (por exemplo, administradores, estudantes, famílias, ex-alunos) e externos (por exemplo, veículos de imprensa, público em geral) tentaram estabelecer a relevância de seu enquadramento ao reagirem à remoção de um determinado texto. A análise revela que os líderes educacionais enfrentam desafios para conciliar as expectativas institucionais com os valores da comunidade local, mas, nesses casos, foram as vozes dos atores internos da comunidade que moldaram o discurso e os resultados. Por meio dessa análise, o artigo contribui com uma compreensão mais aprofundada da censura em ambientes educacionais, questionando a suposição de que escolas religiosas privadas são, por natureza, espaços de censura, e enfatiza o valor das perspectivas comunitárias na compreensão do fenômeno.

Palavras-chave: censura curricular; proibição de livros; análise de enquadramento; escolas religiosas privadas

Negotiating Curricular Censorship: A Frame Analysis of Two Cases in Catholic Schools

Schools often become “site(s) of conflict” as they determine what knowledge and whose experiences students are exposed to through their curricula, reflecting normative questions about whose perspectives, histories and identities are valued in a student’s education (Apple, 2018, p. xxvii). These tensions are crystallized through book challenges, where individuals and groups strategically frame a text’s content to serve ideological agendas and reinforce existing social and political hierarchies (Collins, 2023). In recent years, book-banning efforts have increased at an alarming rate with a 92% increase in titles being challenged between 2022-2023 (American Library Association, 2024), reflecting a broader backlash against inclusive curricula (Friedman, 2022). These bans disproportionately target books centered on marginalized identities, aiming to exclude vulnerable groups and erase their histories (American Library Association, 2016). By controlling which stories can be told and whose experiences are validated within the classroom, these efforts limit students’ exposure to diverse perspectives.

Knox (2015) argues that censorship is a social justice issue, and the motivation of those who promote censorship should be carefully considered. However, local efforts to restrict students' access to certain texts often remain underreported (Oltmann et al., 2017), despite their potential to reveal the negotiation process between those who promote and resist censorship. Therefore, when book challenges are reported and the negotiations surrounding the decisions become visible, it is crucial to analyze them to understand how both internal and external stakeholders shape the framing of these challenges. Since those promoting censorship defy easy categorization and do not always align with clear political affiliations (Knox, 2017), research into how communities perceive and engage with censorship can help demystify the dynamics of these debates, providing educators and policymakers with a deeper understanding of the challenges they face.

This complexity is further heightened in private schools, particularly Catholic schools, which operate within a vastly different regulatory framework than public schools. Catholic schools are the largest private school sector in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021) and, unlike their public counterparts, have more freedom to shape their curricula based on ideological commitments. This flexibility sets up Catholic schools to be especially responsive to the needs, concerns, and pressures of the families they serve, who often perceive themselves as having greater influence over school policies and content decisions because the schools rely on their tuition (Fleming, 2020). This dynamic makes Catholic schools particularly vulnerable to becoming ideological battlegrounds where negotiation between stakeholders takes place. In this context, Catholic schools are not only sites of educational decision-making but also arenas where broader cultural and political struggles over values, identity, and power are contested.

Given this complexity, a closer exploration of how censorship occurs at the local level is necessary for a more nuanced understanding of its negotiation processes. This paper addresses that need by examining the nuanced negotiation of frames during two specific instances of documented book challenges in Catholic schools in 2019. To explore this, I ask: How do insiders and outsiders frame these two instances of book-banning policies in Catholic schools, and how do these frames evolve and build relevancy over time?

Literature Review

To contextualize this paper's examination of censorship frames within the broader literature, I will first outline the literature on curriculum and censorship, followed by legal precedents related to curricular censorship, and conclude with a discussion of what this means for the specific context of Catholic schools.

Curriculum and Censorship

Curriculum extends beyond textbooks to encompass the full range of students' learning experiences at school (Joseph, 2007). As such, curriculum should be understood as a cultural entity, shaped by beliefs about "what is considered normal, or alternative, or simply unthinkable" (Joseph, 2007, p. 286). When school stakeholders debate what content should be included or excluded from curricular materials, they are, in effect, engaging in discussions about the underlying values and ideologies they wish to uphold or challenge within their school community. Consequently, determining whether a particular idea should be upheld or contested becomes a complex process, requiring the negotiation of competing beliefs about knowledge, values, and power (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

This complexity is illustrated by Hess and McAvoy's (2015) taxonomy of controversial topics, which clarifies how certain ideas are perceived as either conventional or counter-cultural. By

categorizing topics as open, closed, or tipping, their framework highlights the contested nature of curricular decisions and the shifting boundaries of what is deemed appropriate for classrooms. Open topics invite the consideration of multiple perspectives; closed topics are regarded as settled in the public sphere and not open for debate; and tipping topics are those under active debate, with disagreement over whether they should remain open or be treated as closed (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). In the current landscape, where there are deliberate attempts to control and homogenize ideologies through censorship, educators are called to engage students in open discussion of tipping topics while modeling inclusive and critical deliberation (Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Gutmann (1987) further argues that such deliberation must be both non-repressive, protecting students' right to engage with differing viewpoints, and non-discriminatory, ensuring inclusive participation.

In this context, literature often becomes a focal point in curricular debates because of the tangible nature of texts and their implicit and explicit messages about what it means to be educated (Knox, 2020), particularly when the content is perceived as "objectionable or dangerous" to students' development (American Library Association, 2016, p. 3). The subjective nature of those labels opens space for harmful fears and biases, exemplified by the recurring book challenges in 2022 related to LGBTQ+ topics (Friedman, 2022). In fact, Moms for Liberty, a nonprofit organization, frequently challenges books that feature Black or LGBTQ+ perspectives (see Rahman, 2022). Despite the legalization of same-sex marriage suggesting that it should be treated as a closed topic, the frequency of book challenges highlights the treatment of LGBTQ+ inclusion as a tipping topic, where one's humanity is vulnerable to being up for debate. Importantly, these censorship efforts are not contained to already-published texts but also occur during a text's production stage (Knox, 2015).

The censorship policies resulting from these challenges determine whose knowledge is permitted and who holds the authority to decide (Jansen, 1988), reflecting broader efforts to establish or maintain social and political power (Collins, 2023). Thus, recognizing the inherent power dynamics at play is crucial when analyzing censorship cases. Some groups have sought to reclaim power in response to the rise of censorship. For instance, Defense of Democracy (2023) is trying to counter the rise of Christian nationalism in public schools and the American Library Association (2016) annually hosts a "freedom to read" week. Both organizations are trying to resist exclusionary practices and increase access to challenged or banned books. Notably, the American Library Association's language of "freedom to read" intentionally echoes the constitutional protection of "freedom of speech," raising ongoing questions about the scope of students' rights within the educational context.

Legal Precedents in Curricular Censorship

The dynamics of censorship unfold at a contested intersection: families and schools assert authority to regulate what students read, while students themselves retain rights to access a broad range of ideas (Rehn, 2023). Navigating these competing interests has long challenged the courts, especially in cases involving public education. Over time, key Supreme Court decisions have established foundational legal frameworks that continue to shape how we understand the boundaries of censorship and the protections afforded to students' intellectual freedom.

In *Island Trees School District v. Pico* (1982), the Supreme Court considered whether school officials could remove books from a public school library based solely on ideological objections. A plurality of justices ruled that removing books to suppress seemingly controversial ideas violated students' First Amendment rights, emphasizing that students have a constitutional right to receive information. However, the ruling also acknowledged that school boards retain discretion to remove materials deemed "pervasively vulgar" or lacking educational value. Because the decision lacked a

majority opinion, it left room for interpretation, leading to ongoing debates about the extent of school authority to curate or restrict access to texts.

In *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986), the Supreme Court addressed student expression, ruling that schools can prohibit speech if it conflicts with the school's educational mission. The decision reinforced that schools have the discretion to regulate student speech when it is determined to be disruptive, inappropriate, or inconsistent with the school's values and goals. The majority found that the school's actions were permissible as they strove to maintain a proper educational environment, while the dissenting justices argued that the ruling infringed on students' First Amendment rights by allowing schools to suppress speech too broadly.

In *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), the Supreme Court extended this authority, ruling that school administrators could exercise editorial control over student-produced content in school-sponsored activities if their actions were "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns." This decision granted schools broader discretion to regulate content that conflicts with their educational mission, prioritizing institutional values over unrestricted student expression. While the majority upheld schools' authority to shape curricular content, the dissent warned that such broad discretion could suppress students' ability to engage with controversial or socially significant issues.

These three Supreme Court decisions serve as precedents in ongoing legislative debates over who has the authority to determine curricular content in public schools. For private religious schools, these legal rulings grant them greater discretion to censor materials as they can legally claim that texts conflict with their religious mission. In other words, decisions like *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* (1988) and *Bethel v. Fraser* (1986) reinforced schools' authority to regulate and censor student speech that is inconsistent with their religiously affiliated educational mission. Additionally, religious institutions benefit from exemptions under the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause (Legal Information Institute, n.d.), which protects religious institutions from governmental interference in their free exercise of religion. This grants Catholic schools significant autonomy over curricular decisions. This legal flexibility creates a unique space for stakeholders to negotiate the content presented to students, offering an opportunity to explore how censorship decisions are framed, understood, and negotiated.

Catholic Schools and Censorship

Since Catholic schools have broader discretion to shape curricula in ways that align with their faith-based mission, it raises the question of how that mission is defined and interpreted. There exists a tension around this question within the Catholic school system itself as it struggles to balance its historical commitment to social justice with the growing influence of conservative ideologies. While Catholic education has traditionally emphasized values of equity and service (Storz & Nestor, 2007), it has also been complicit in identity-based discrimination, often contradicting its stated mission (Scanlan, 2008). This tension complicates how Catholic schools are perceived: some view Catholic education as promoting justice and inclusion, while others see it as a space for upholding a traditional understanding of the status quo.

The absence of a clear, centralized decision-making structure further complicates these tensions, with authority dispersed among church leadership, school administrators, and local community influences (Miller et al., 2024; Miller et al., 2023). Moreover, there is a fundamental disagreement between system and school leaders about ways to pursue system-wide reforms (Miller et al., 2025). This dynamic places Catholic schools in a unique position, where they must navigate the complex task of balancing the expectations of various stakeholders. These schools find themselves in a space that is neither fully aligned with progressive social movements nor entirely

beholden to conservative ideologies; rather, they must negotiate censorship in ways that account for the diverse values and priorities of families, educators, and religious leaders.

As a result, there is an increased opportunity to understand how different stakeholders interpret and negotiate instances of censorship that occur within Catholic schools. This exploration is particularly important as the legislative landscape surrounding censorship is becoming increasingly complex, not only for Catholic schools but for all types of educational institutions. Despite efforts by researchers to compile records from public libraries and schools, the available data remains limited, leaving our comprehension of the censorship process incomplete (e.g., Oltmann et al., 2017), especially in how families, educators, and external individuals perceive instances of censorship (see Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020; Sachdeva et al., 2023). Closing these knowledge gaps is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics surrounding curricular censorship policies that impact not only Catholic schools but also other public and private institutions navigating complex and shifting legislative landscapes.

Theoretical Framework

The negotiation and formulation of policy decisions, such as curricular censorship, are intricately shaped by discourse, as policies are enacted, influenced, and comprehended through discursive frames (Ball, 1993). In the process of communicating a policy's problem and proposed solution, value-laden arguments are made to create, destroy, or reinforce boundaries (Stone, 2012). These arguments function as frames and actively shape our understanding of the world (Entman, 1993).

In the process of framing a policy problem and its potential solutions, communicators purposefully employ calculated language (Entman, 1993) with the aim of transforming thought (Snow & Benford, 1988) and promoting action (Coburn, 2006). Thus, frames are strategically crafted to foster alliances or enemies, maintain power hierarchies, or encourage complacency (Stone, 2012). The persuasive strength of these frames lies in their ability to “evoke values and emotions by presenting something as good or evil, innocent or guilty, responsible or not, possible or impossible, strong or weak, right or wrong” (Stone, 2012, p. 384). When a communicator seeks to cultivate consensus around specific solutions, their framing leverages shared symbols, ambiguous narratives, and descriptions of harmful consequences that would result from alternative decisions (Stone, 2012).

At the same time, Entman (1993) notes that the construction of a frame is not a unilateral process; it is intricately influenced by the communicator's intended audience and the cultural context in which they operate. Consequently, frames do not merely emerge from discourse but actively contribute to shaping discourse on a broader scale (Entman, 1993). This is important when considering policies of curricular censorship as communicators are “guided by different visions of what is appropriate knowledge, of what schooling should do, and who should have the right to decide” (Apple, 2008, p. 26). Thus, communicators' frames are shaped by the broader context in which they operate as well as their personal beliefs about whether a topic is controversial.

Snow and Benford (1988) describe three specific factors that can impact a frame's relevance to an audience. When evidence is perceived as trustworthy, it can lead to empirical credibility. Experiential commensurability occurs when the frame has congruence with previous experience. A frame's alignment with dominant cultural assumptions can create narrative fidelity. When a frame encompasses these three factors, the frame has higher success as the logic fits with accepted evidence, previous experience, and larger cultural beliefs. In the pursuit of consensus, a frame may undergo a shift, either by bridging two frames together or aligning with the audience's pre-existing beliefs, especially if initial consensus is not achieved (Coburn, 2006). This shifting is done to promote relevance between the audience and the frame.

Binder (2002) emphasizes the impact that people within and external to schools can have on others accepting or resisting movements that challenge the curricula. For this paper, people actively involved in Catholic education are considered insiders, some of whom hold positional authority over and within the school, though in varying ways. For instance, some Catholic schools follow the president-principal model, where the president oversees financial, administrative, and strategic operations, while the principal focuses on educational leadership (Dygert, 2000). In diocesan schools, the superintendent serves as the chief executive overseeing multiple schools, while the pastor plays a pastoral and, in some cases, administrative role, particularly in parish schools (Hegseth & Miller, 2024). However, in independent Catholic schools, governance is determined by the school's board of trustees or sponsoring religious order, rather than the diocese (Miller et al., 2023). In contrast, outsiders are those who do not have explicit positional authority or involvement in Catholic education. As Binder (2002) notes, juxtaposing the perspectives of organizational insiders against outsiders is a harmful dichotomy, so it is important to note that the insiders and outsiders both agree with and challenge censorship in Catholic schools.

To understand the nuance of and negotiation between these perspectives, I follow Knox's (2017) approach in looking at the "discourse of censorship to better understand both why and how people construct arguments against reading particular materials" (p. 17). By considering both insiders' and outsiders' discursive frames in instances of curricular censorship, we can gain a deeper understanding of how censorship is negotiated among various stakeholders.

Methodology

For this paper, I analyzed two specific cases of text censorship in Catholic schools, both of which occurred in 2019¹. I searched Google using the terms "book banning" and "Catholic schools," while restricting it to 2019–2020. Three instances consistently surfaced in my initial searches. Since one case was based in Canada, I excluded it from further analysis because Canadian Catholic schools are considered part of the public school system (CCSTA News, 2023) and, as a result, differed too greatly in governance and funding from the other two U.S.-based cases. Systematic Google searches for each U.S.-based case revealed primary artifacts (i.e., internal documents) reflecting insiders' perspectives and secondary artifacts (i.e., news articles and videos) providing outsiders' perspectives. The following paragraphs outline the systematic Google searches for each case, quantify and qualify the analyzed artifacts, highlight the voices represented in the primary artifacts, and identify the sources of secondary materials. For the secondary sources in video format, I consistently reviewed up to 50 comments to remain consistent in my analysis of their commentaries.

Data Sources

In the first case, *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997) was removed in the Fall of 2019 from a coed PreK to 8th grade urban Catholic school library in the Southeast. The school, which is affiliated with a parish and describes itself as a "true Roman Catholic community," is located in a city of approximately 28,000 people, 75% of whom are white-identifying, with a median income of \$76,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The state is a part of the Bible Belt, which is defined as areas where people "are believed to hold uncritical allegiance to the literal accuracy of the Bible" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). My analysis of this case included several primary artifacts: an email from the pastor to teachers, a statement from the superintendent to the public, and a family response letter. A Google

¹ Since all the data used in this research is publicly available, it does not require IRB approval.

search of “Catholic Schools + ban + Harry Potter + Book + [State]” resulted in 14 news articles, two blogs, one article from an advocacy group, six commentary videos, and six news videos.

In the second case, the notion of text is expanded to consider censorship of a student’s written work recommending a list of LGBTQ+ texts. In the Spring of 2019, an urban Catholic high school president in the Midwest retracted an article written by a student, originally published in their school newspaper. The independently operated school, founded by a sisterhood that emphasizes whole-person development, is located in a city of approximately 310,000 people, 51% of whom identify as white, with a median income of \$45,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The state is a part of the Rust Belt, characterized by shifting political identities, especially following the loss of manufacturing jobs (McQuarrie, 2016). However, the region also has a complex identity, where local activism and progressive movements are present, often challenging media narratives that portray it solely as “Trump Country” (Catte, 2017). Here, my analysis was grounded in the following primary sources: the banned student publication entitled “LGBT+ Book Master List,” an alumni petition, and two responses by the school president. A Google search of “Catholic Schools + ban + LGBTQ+ Book Master List + article + [State]” yielded four news articles, one blog, two articles from advocacy groups, four news videos, and one commentary video.

Data Analysis

As frame analysis is an analytic tool that can elucidate the various discourses surrounding a policy decision (Snow & Benford, 1988; Stone, 2012), I applied frame analysis to examine the discourses surrounding the censorship policy decisions at the two focal Catholic schools. This approach was particularly suited to my inquiry, as it offered an analytic lens to understand how both insiders and outsiders initially framed these policies, and how these frames were negotiated over time to build relevance.

For each case, I analyzed the discursive frames constructed by both insiders and outsiders, using a range of primary and secondary artifacts. This allowed me to understand how each group understood and took up the decision to censor the text’s content. While the dataset does not include the discourses that inevitably happened within the school building, it encompasses all publicly available artifacts, including internal documents shared via news media. Consequently, it offers a robust perspective on the frames informing the policy conversation around these censorship cases. In conducting the analysis, I adopted a recursive approach to the data, first unpacking the initial frame for censorship and then examining how insiders and outsiders responded to it. Acknowledging that policy is both understood and negotiated through discourse (Ball, 1993), my reading of the data was guided by an awareness of the dynamic interplay between the text, its audience, and the broader contextual factors at play.

Specifically, I repeated the following four-step process for each case. First, for each artifact, I color-coded the type of artifact (e.g., primary source, news outlet, blog), noted if the communicator was an insider (e.g., administrators, students, families, alumni) or outsider (e.g., news outlets, general public), and arranged the artifacts in sequential order. Second, I read each artifact, making detailed notes in a matrix that included the author’s positionality and intended audience, their framing of the problem, and specific quotes utilized to promote consensus or resistance to censorship. Third, I coded instances where the policy actor’s language worked to build narrative fidelity, empirical credibility, and/or experiential commensurability, ultimately pushing for consensus or resistance to the policy decision. Fourth, I sequentially reread the artifacts, writing analytic memos that considered the communicator’s relationship to the school, the frame they were responding to, any shifts in their response, and references to broader contexts beyond the specific school. These memos allowed me to understand how different frames were being negotiated within and across insider and outsider groups. After completing this process for both cases, I conducted a cross-case analysis, writing

analytic memos to capture the similarities and differences between the ways frames were established and negotiated across the two instances of book banning.

Findings

For each case, I provide an overview of the primary sources using the communicator's own words. Then, I unpack the frame used to either justify or resist the censorship decision, examining how the frame evolved as both insiders and outsiders responded to censorship in an attempt to enhance relevance. In the final section, I look across cases to understand how the communicators tried to build consensus for censorship or persuade resistance to censorship. Due to space constraints, representative discourse was selected to illustrate key points.

Case One: Challenge to Distribution

Description of Case

In the first case, the school's pastor made the decision to remove the *Harry Potter* series from the school's library. This removal occurred as an externally hired librarian was downsizing the school's collection of books in preparation for its relocation. In response to a query from a family regarding the book's removal, the pastor communicated his decision to teachers via email in the summer. He outlined three primary reasons for removing the book. First, the pastor argued that the books "present magic as both good and evil, which is not true, but in fact, a clever deception" and "the curses and spells used in the books are actual curses and spells." Second, he expresses concern that the books "use nefarious means to attain the goals of the characters," asserting that "this is a serious problem, especially in the formation of young Catholic children." Third, he contends that the books "glorify acts of divination; of conjuring the dead, of casting spells among other acts that are an offense to the virtue of religion." To support his argument, the pastor references two passages from the Catholic Church Catechism and concludes with a statement reinforcing his position on the removal of the *Harry Potter* series from the school's library:

[School name] is committed to advancing the Catholic faith and teaching the standards of sound doctrine to instill strong Catholic morals. Books and other materials which present a possible threat to our faith will not be promoted by our church or school.

In this statement, the pastor reiterates the school's commitment to promoting the "Catholic faith" and upholding "sound doctrine," positioning the *Harry Potter* series as a threat to this mission.

Following the pastor's email, the superintendent emailed families over Labor Day weekend. She began the email by acknowledging the media attention surrounding the decision and then provided insight into the rationale behind the removal "in order to keep the school community informed." She explained that the library's relocation prompted a "local Library Science professional" to thin out their collection and that the pastor was "acting out of an abundance of caution" after deciding "that the Harry Potter series was not appropriate for the library for a variety of reasons and chose not to include them in the new space." The superintendent clarified that "students who obtain the books from other sources are still able to read the books at school; the school library will simply not offer them as part of its selection" and that magic and witchcraft are appropriate "when due consideration is given to the maturity of the reader." Ultimately, she left the decision "up to individual families as the student's primary teacher." She ended the email by reiterating the school's strategy for managing media attention and addressing rumors of a potential "disruption" in response to the book's removal at the beginning of the school year.

In response, the school's families collectively wrote an anonymous letter in the Fall, citing "fear of retaliation against [their] children" as the primary motivation for maintaining anonymity in their communication. They began by acknowledging the media's attention on their school and positioned themselves as "concerned parents" who "feel that it is important that [their] voices are also heard." Then, they clarified that they did not receive appropriate communication, asserting that the principal was not consulted about the removal, and the school's internal librarian position was eliminated before this "unilateral decision-making." The parents expressed a lack of surprise, attributing the pastor's decision to what they described as his "fringe, conservative views of the Catholic faith and doctrine," noting a perceived alignment with a "Church Militant view of our faith that sees life as a battle against evil." The letter recounted three meetings with the diocese since the Fall of 2017, during which they requested the pastor's reassignment because of "abuse of the school children through his messages in and outside of the church" and "bullying of students, teachers, and parents who disagree with his views." Since this reassignment did not occur, they stated, "It is our contention that the diocese is protecting [the pastor] at the expense of numerous faithful members." The letter concluded by urging other Catholic school families to inquire about the pastor's record. Despite these concerns, they explained their choice to remain at the school, expressing "hope that we can correct injustices such as these, as our faith gives us the courage to do."

Analysis of the primary sources and secondary sources uncovers three shifting frames conveyed through statements from insiders, along with a fourth frame constructed by the responses from outsiders. These frames are described below.

Analysis of Insiders' Frames

Catholic Schools as Spaces of Protection. One frame was that Catholic schools have a responsibility to shield children from danger, thus justifying the censorship of *Harry Potter* as a rational decision. The school's pastor framed witchcraft as the root danger and a closed issue in Catholic schools. Instead of participating in deliberative discussions with staff or families, the pastor opted to reactively email teachers with his decision rationale when it was inquired upon. In this email, he framed *Harry Potter* as dangerous to the entire Catholic community, expressing concern with *Harry Potter's* positive depiction of magic and the potential conjuring of deceased spirits through real spells. To bolster his credibility, the pastor quoted the Catechism's rejection of conjuring the dead. Furthermore, he stated that he consulted with exorcists from the United States and Rome, who supported his claim that reading spells could have harmful consequences.

Expanding on his frame of shielding students from danger, he accused *Harry Potter* of Machiavellian approaches (i.e., using whatever means necessary to achieve a desired end), a stance he framed as antithetical to the Church's teachings. The pastor generalized his decision to censor texts by stating that they censor all books that threaten Catholic ideals. In this manner, he aimed to foster consensus by arguing that censorship is consistently the best course of action when protecting Catholic youth. However, by making this decision unilaterally, without inviting discussion or deliberation, he limited opportunities for families to engage with his reasoning. As a result, his framing of the issue may have seemed less experientially valid to those affected, as the lack of deliberation restricted their ability to critically engage with and understand the decision.

Families as Ultimate Decision-makers. The superintendent's response was tailored for a different audience: the public and the school's families. As a result, she strategically shifted the frame. Through her shift, she reframed the pastor's argument to fit within the dominant culture and secular norms. She presented a narrative wherein a librarian removed books during renovations based on factors such as age-appropriateness and circulation, emphasizing the removal of inappropriate or unread books, a concept more relatable within shared secular experiences. In this

reframing, she positioned the pastor as a secondary figure who cautiously removed *Harry Potter* for multiple reasons. The Superintendent also mentioned the Church's disapproval of witchcraft but emphasized that the book could still be accessed from home, aligning with the Catholic Church's institutional belief that families are children's primary educators. Here, the superintendent reframed the pastor's logic to emphasize the family's role and build consensus for the book's removal. Despite this reframing effort, the superintendent maintained an echo of the pastor's frame, emphasizing the need to protect the Church's teachings, albeit using ambiguous language presumably intended to mitigate negative reactions.

Catholic Schools as Spaces for Social Justice. In their anonymous letter, the families reframed the problem, emphasizing that their concern was not solely about the removal of *Harry Potter* but rather the pastor's repressive decision-making process, which they believed endorsed polarizing and anti-Catholic views. According to the families, they had previously raised concerns to the diocese about the pastor's leadership, asserting that this top-down decision-making was not an isolated incident. Since the diocese had not taken action, these families perceived the diocese as protecting the pastor rather than their children. Ultimately, they expressed disappointment in the pastor's pattern of leadership, particularly his tendency to exclude family voices and repress dialogue around liberal ideals. They framed their decision to stay at the school as being grounded in their commitment to their faith, guiding them to rectify injustices like those they perceived to be enacted by their pastor.

In their reframing, the families denounced the censorship as a direct threat to their interpretation of Catholicism, which they saw as being aligned with principles of social justice. They bridged the frames of Catholicism with justice, contrasting it with the bridge between censorship and injustice. The families voiced concerns about the pastor's perceived lack of empirical credibility in promoting true Catholicism. Consequently, they called for new leadership that would actively promote a vision of Catholicism centered on justice.

Analysis of Outsiders' Frames

Catholic Schools are a Threat to Democracy. News outlets circulated the pastor's email and the family letter, opening space for the media and general public to respond with their own frames. In general, the outsiders' frames were broader in scope, perceiving Catholic schools as a potential threat to democracy.

Given that outsiders regarded *Harry Potter* as a high-quality series with essential teachings promoting democracy, the pastor's frame contradicted their perceptions of the text. As a result, most outsiders framed their resistance to the banning of *Harry Potter* as an irrational decision by the Catholic church and school, asserting that it overstepped their power. Illustrating this perspective, a national news outlet's article entitled "Harry Potter and the Poorly-Read Exorcist" drew a parallel between the pastor's censorship and a *Harry Potter* storyline that centers around anti-democratic leadership. The author goes on to state, "[City's Catholic School] might as well be Harry Potter's Hogwarts, for the story of [the pastor] sounds very much like the story of Delores Umbridge, a Ministry of Magic bureaucrat-turned-school-inquisitor."

Moreover, outsiders viewed this decision as another example of cancel culture and disagreed with the pastor exerting his influence to make decisions about the school's reading materials. One individual expressed this sentiment, asking, "Who are they, the Catholic church, to decide what people can and can not read?" In the few instances where there was consensus with the censorship, the frames consistently portrayed Catholic schools as endorsing anti-democratic views. Those who shared this perspective accepted that this form of ideological promotion was inherent and

anticipated in Catholic schools. For example, one commenter posted: “Well, isn’t the whole idea of catholic schools to moderate what’s being taught? Per se, it’s censorship.”

Case Two: Challenge to Production

Description of Case

Instead of a published text (i.e., *Harry Potter*), the second case features a Catholic all-girls high school’s removing, and thus censoring the ideas within, a student-written article recommending a list of LGBTQ+ texts.

In the student-written article, a student reviewed six of her favorite books featuring LGBT+ characters, explicitly referencing their presence in the school’s library. She labeled her audience as students who are “getting tired of the traditional storyline and heterosexual relationship of books.” The president told the student editors to retract the edition because of “contradictions to Catholic Church teaching.” The editors then replied with their own statement stating, “[This restriction] contradicts our core values as listed in our student handbook: Voice. Values. Vision.... We’re not here to combat the Catholic Church... We are not trying to divide our school, we’re trying to save it.”

Alumni responded with a petition that garnered over 1,000 signatures and promoted a GoFundMe account supporting LGBTQ+ organizations. Attached to their petition was a letter to the administration. They began their letter by reiterating their appreciation for the school: “We are a group of alumnae who love [school name] and who were fundamentally shaped by our experience there” and reiterated that the school’s mission statement “perfectly” states “what makes [school name] so great.” Then, they introduced the problem as they saw it. They stated it was “partially as the result of pressures from certain parents and board members, the administration has recently taken actions that are precisely against this imperative.” They went on to say that censoring student voices “in such a way is wrong” and “is a statement that a young woman’s ideas can be silenced, at any time, by others who don’t value what she has to say.” Diving specifically into the censorship of LGBTQ texts, they stated, “it is also a statement that LGBTQ students should, if they happen to exist at [school name] (which they do, have, and will) be doubly silent.” This, they said, is antithetical to the school’s mission to support and nurture all students. Reminding the school of its responsibilities to “students of different backgrounds, faiths, and beliefs,” they emphasize that “Catholic values, such as a deep love and respect for all beings of God’s creation, for community and dignity among all humankind” are core to the school and that it should be providing a space for young women “to speak, learn, question, and wonder in a world where young women are too often denied that space.” They demanded that the school’s newspaper stay “under the discretion of the faculty moderator as before, providing students with an open outlet” and “that the school maintain[s] policies that support LGBTQ students within the school, and allow[s] them to receive the same freedom and support granted to all other students.” They ended by reiterating that the school gave them “the tools and the confidence” to speak their minds, “which is why we cannot be silent when we hear of actions that will—and already have—undoubtedly hurt current and future [school abbreviation] students.”

In response, the school president wrote a letter to alumni stating “the recent issue that was removed wasn’t reviewed by the administration and wasn’t in keeping with the standards of our publications.” Restating their mission “to empower young women to give voice to their ideals,” the president also reminded alumni that

We have a duty to empower our young women to use their voices in an effort to inform, educate, and enrich. Because we also have been entrusted with guiding the young women of [SCHOOL NAME], we have a duty to protect our students from actions that may have consequences for themselves or for the school.

Then, the president released an unaddressed letter to a local news station that began with an affirmation of the school's mission:

Every day we try to care for and love our students as part of our Catholic, [school name] mission... [school name] fosters community in an atmosphere of mutual respect by enhancing understanding and cooperation among all [school name] students regarding different cultures, ethnicities, learning styles, opinions, religious traditions, sexual orientation and socio-economic backgrounds.

She then goes on to describe how “the administration made a choice to withdraw a recent edition of our student newspaper because it stirred confusion and even questions about what [school name]’s mission and values represent.” As an action step, the letter stated, “We are going to take the time to review our protocols for our publications before setting any firm policies.” It ended with, “The Foundress of the [school name], [Foundress name], calls us to recognize the unique gifts of the individual, and we do not want to silence any student’s voice, and we are committed to that tenet.” Shortly after, it was announced that the president would leave the school after 27 years of service. The reason was not disclosed. One alumna responded with the statement, “[President’s] dismissal is a ‘huge mistake’ because she is ‘an institution’ and ‘the face of the school’.”

Analysis of the primary sources and secondary sources uncovers two frames created by insiders alongside two outsider frames. These are described below.

Analysis of Insiders’ Frames

The sources surrounding this case uncover a division between insiders around the values inherent in a Catholic education, similar to what was shown in the first case. However, in this case, whose identities were being protected became the focus of conversation.

Protecting Catholic School Students. The school’s president initially framed the decision to pull the article by citing adherence to its Catholic traditions, arguing that the article conflicted with “Catholic Church teaching.” However, this rationale shifted following vocal opposition from alumni. Rather than sticking to her original stance of labeling the article as anti-Catholic, the president adjusted her frame to align with the alumni’s concerns about the school’s mission. She emphasized the institution’s commitment to diversity and stated that the article “stirred confusion and even questions.” Notably, her revised stance portrayed the school as having a dual obligation: to empower its students while also protecting them from potential repercussions from the school’s affiliation with the Catholic church.

Protecting Young Females. Alumni swiftly mobilized in response to the student editors’ letter, which expressed concern that the article’s removal threatened the school’s values. Framing the removal as an infringement on student’s intellectual freedom, they urgently called for action. They framed their concerns within broader societal anxieties about stifling the voices of young women. The alumni’s statement aligned with this concern, creating a transparent frame that Catholic schools should be democratic spaces that uplift student voices. They framed the retraction as repressive and called for democracy in the school’s review procedures. In turn, their petition accused the removal as communicating that young “women’s ideas can be silenced.” In this light, they illuminated the school’s compliance and promotion of a concerning trend in the dominant culture. Compounding their fears of silencing women’s voices, they worried about the discrimination and delegitimization of LGBTQ+ voices. Despite their pointed criticisms, the alumni framed their advocacy as rooted in loyalty and affection for what they perceived to be the school’s mission. This loyalty extended to the president, despite their disagreement with her decision to censor student writing.

Analysis of Outsiders' Frames

Outsiders' perspectives were split into two opposing frames. On the one hand, some outsiders framed the school's decision as logical because of its affiliation with the Catholic church. On the other hand, some outsiders aligned with the alumni's frame but situated their viewpoint within secular debates around including marginalized voices.

Catholic Schools as Censorable Spaces. Some outsiders framed Catholic schools as having the right to censor content, especially since families choose to attend, or unenroll in, these schools. One commentator's statement summarizes this frame well by saying, "The Bible is very clear on homosexuality, and private schools can do as they wish. It shocks me when people get all up in arms over a Catholic school firing a gay teacher or censoring an LGBT article. Like, duh? It's a Catholic school!" Thus, their logic was that families should choose differently if LGBTQ+ inclusion is important to them.

Case as Representative of Wider Debates. For others, the alumni's proactive stance in empowering students resonated strongly. One news outlet leaned on a public educator and activists' viewpoint, who echoed the sentiments that schools must be places that foster connection and diversity. A commenter pushed this further, expressing disappointment with what they considered to be the repressive nature of this censorship, calling for deliberation in schools: "It's sad that instead of pulling the story, they didn't encourage debate." Another commenter noted that prioritizing student voices would show "so clearly what a profound shift there has been in the culture and that you can't silence, not Catholic youth, not girl Catholic youth." These frames aligned with the alumni's petition that censoring student work was threatening to democracy because students should deliberate ideas, and all schools should be inclusive of identities. However, they did differ from alumni as they framed the president leaving the school as an appropriate response to this controversy.

Across Cases: Understanding the Attempts to Build Relevance

The above sections addressed how the schools' insiders (e.g., administrators, students, families, alumni) and outsiders (e.g., news outlets, general public) framed and reframed two different instances of censorship. In the first case, a pastor removed the *Harry Potter* series, citing concerns over magic and moral implications, while the superintendent reaffirmed that families are the ultimate decision-makers. Families reframed the concern as the pastor's unilateral decision that moved the school away from social justice, while outsiders viewed the space itself as inherently anti-democratic. In the second case, a Catholic all-girls high school censored an article recommending LGBTQ+ texts, which led to statements from the student editors and alumni about stifled student expression. Outsider responses were divided, with some justifying the school's decision because of its status as a Catholic school, while others disagreed and positioned their concerns within broader struggles for schools to be spaces of inclusivity. To understand how these frames gained relevance (Snow & Benford, 1988), it is important to examine how the initial frames attempted—and in some cases, succeeded—to build consensus by establishing empirical credibility (i.e., trustworthy evidence) and narrative fidelity (i.e., alignment with broader cultural storylines). In response, the reframing efforts challenged the initial evidence and storylines by highlighting that they did not align with stakeholders' prior experiences or their understanding of the school's mission (i.e., experiential commensurability).

In efforts to garner consensus for censorship, insiders with positional authority often tried to build empirical credibility by citing Church doctrine and authoritative figures as evidence to support their frames. They framed censorship as a necessary measure to protect the Catholic school and its

values, constructing a narrative of a looming threat that justified their decision. However, this portrayal did not fully align with insiders' own perceptions of the values undergirding Catholic education, revealing a disconnect between the efforts to frame censorship as necessary and the personal beliefs of some within the school community.

In turn, insiders who resisted censorship challenged the empirical credibility of the narrative that censorship was necessary by invoking the school's mission, which they understood to emphasize inclusive values. By doing so, they advocated for an interpretation of Catholicism grounded in social justice and student empowerment. To further support their reframe, they built experiential commensurability, drawing upon their personal experiences within the school community. In the first case, families called for a vision of social justice to be the cornerstone of the school's mission. In the second case, alumni and students rallied around their experience of the school as one of female empowerment. In both cases' reframing, concerns were raised about the promotion of conservative Catholic ideologies within the school, with a preference instead for a vision of Catholicism grounded in social justice principles.

Although some outsiders in the second case framed the censorship as reflective of broader struggles to include marginalized voices, most found that the framing of censorship in these Catholic schools aligned with their broader perceptions of Catholic education. In their view, Catholic schools were seen as institutions with the legal authority to enforce strict rules and make repressive decisions. Even if they disagreed with the specific decision, many outsiders reluctantly accepted this perceived norm, seeing Catholic schools as having long operated within a structure that upholds such control. In other words, the censorship frame held narrative fidelity with their understanding that censorship could be justified as a means of preserving a Catholic school's values and mission.

The analysis of how insiders and outsiders framed two instances of censorship within Catholic schools reveals the intricate dynamics of empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity in influencing the discourse surrounding the censorship policy decisions. While insiders often relied on institutional authority and doctrine to justify censorship, the significance of insiders' personal experiences within Catholic schools led to frames shifting. However, insiders' calls for social justice within Catholic contexts did not seem to resonate strongly enough to shift the broader narrative for outsiders. This highlights the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader societal perceptions in shaping attitudes towards censorship within educational institutions.

Discussion

These censorship cases prompt reflection on the underlying tension inherent in decisions around curricular materials. As curriculum plays a pivotal role in shaping students' perceptions of societal norms, ethical standards, and moral principles (Joseph, 2011), the observations made by Knox (2017) regarding the purpose of education are particularly salient. Education, as Knox (2017) observes, "has a specific intent of introducing students to new ideas and socializing them into a distinct culture" (p. 21). This assertion underscores the inevitable influence of education in socializing students into a specific cultural ethos, shifting the discourse from whether schools socialize students to the mechanisms through which they do so.

In the context of the examined cases, censorship was a deliberate mechanism employed to mold students' beliefs according to a prescribed set of norms and values. While proponents of censorship often framed their actions as safeguarding students from perceived ideological harm, resistant voices appealed to the imperative of protecting students' rights to access diverse perspectives and have their voices heard. In both cases, the influence of students, families, and alumni played a significant role in reshaping the initial frames of these censorship cases. Their

frames prompted a reevaluation of the underlying assumptions driving the unilateral censorship decisions.

Tracking the shifts in these frames raises fundamental questions about who holds the authority to define a school's cultural norms. While individuals with formalized power (e.g., pastors, superintendents, and presidents) hold institutional authority within the school's formal hierarchy, it was the voices of insiders with less formalized power (e.g., students, alumni, and families) that ultimately shaped the subsequent conversation. By turning inward and building experiential commensurability through their personal experiences and shared values, these insiders challenged the prevailing narrative and reshaped the discourse surrounding the censorship decisions. While these frame shifts did not immediately result in formal policy changes, they contributed to a broader cultural shift within the schools, prompting leadership to reconsider the framing behind their censorship decisions. The family and alumni's insistence that the school's mission was aligned with social justice and inclusivity, coupled with the institution's financial reliance on their support, may have resulted in their influence to reshape the conversation.

At the same time, it's important to note that when navigating these moments of censorship, the superintendent and president seemed to be grappling with competing demands. They held a responsibility to answer to the Catholic Church as an overarching institution in addition to the concerns and expectations of the families within their immediate educational community. Through the course of these instances of censorship, the leaders shifted their frames to become more attuned and responsive to their local educational community. This evolution underscores how leadership, under community pressure, can become more contextually accountable, indicating that insider resistance may serve as a precursor to cultural or procedural policy shifts, even if not yet codified in written regulations. In turn, these cases demonstrate the potential significance of insiders advocating for change within their school contexts, as their voices and actions can shape the trajectory of censorship frames.

The persistence of outsiders' frames portraying Catholic schools as spaces where censorship is tolerated raises significant concerns that extend beyond the immediate contexts of these schools. By perpetuating this narrative, there is a risk of overlooking the similarities between instances of censorship in Catholic schools and those in public schools. This oversight not only fails to recognize the universal challenges faced by educational institutions in navigating censorship issues but also reinforces the harmful stereotype that Catholic educational environments are uniquely and inherently exclusionary. Depictions of Catholic schools as spaces for censorship not only misrepresent the reality of these educational environments but also reinforce the discourse that Catholic schools are suitable alternatives for conservative families (e.g., Graham, 2021). This becomes particularly concerning in light of the rise of White Christian Nationalist beliefs, which increasingly underpin censorship organizations (e.g., Zabian, 2023). Ultimately, this reduction of complexity exacerbates the problems faced by insiders striving to foster social justice and inclusion within Catholic educational settings. Thus, it is imperative to challenge and critically evaluate these narratives to foster a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding censorship in these educational settings and to support the efforts of insiders working towards creating better schools. Rather than dismissing Catholic schools as ideologically rigid, we can recognize them as important sites of study where contested issues, particularly tipping topics, are being actively worked through. Their organizational and ideological diversity, shaped by the voices of students, families, faculty, and alumni, creates conditions for ongoing negotiation and debate. These dynamics make Catholic schools valuable contexts for examining how educational communities respond to controversy, navigate competing values, and reimagine what is deemed appropriate for their curriculum.

Public schools, too, are beginning to mirror this complexity, especially in the wake of the Trump administration, as educational leaders navigate unclear and often contradictory guidance on issues like censorship. This is evident in the range of federal and state laws being introduced or enacted, which highlight the ongoing tension between censorship and intellectual freedom. At the federal level, bills such as the Right to Read Act (H.R. 2889, 2023), the Fight Book Bans Act (H.R. 6592, 2023), and the Books Save Lives Act (H.R. 6830, 2023) are actively seeking to protect students' rights to access a diverse range of books. In contrast, the Stop CRT Act (S. 2346, 2021) sought to prohibit federal funding for schools promoting certain discussions on race and sex. Even more recently, *Mahmoud v. Taylor* (2025) has established legal rights for families who want to opt out of LGBTQ+ content. At the state level, New Jersey enacted the Freedom to Read Act (S. 2421, 2023-2024), with similar legislative efforts to reinforce students' rights to intellectual freedom in New York (S. 6350, 2023-2024), Colorado (S. 25-063, 2025), and Connecticut (S. 1271, 2023). Meanwhile, other states have taken the opposite approach: Oklahoma's Critical Race Theory Ban (HB 1775, 2021) imposes restrictions on how race and gender can be taught in public schools, while Idaho's Parental Rights Act (S. 1999, 2025) aims to grant parents greater oversight over their children's educational materials and upbringing. These legislative developments underscore the ongoing debate over censorship in schools, where insiders and outsiders will continue to be framing their decisions to increase relevancy with arguments for consensus or resistance to censorship. As such, this study aims to become one of many that illustrate how censorship frames are shaped by insiders and outsiders, offering insights into their efforts to build relevance and resist censorship.

The two particular cases presented in this paper contribute to these conversations by centering the often-overlooked perspectives of local communities (Sachdeva et al., 2023). Moreover, while this study confirms Knox's (2017) argument that supporters of censorship defy easy categorization, it goes further by showing that this complexity extends to different contexts within the education sector. Specifically, it shows that insiders' attitudes toward censorship challenge the stereotype of private religious school environments as spaces where censorship is readily tolerated (e.g., Graham, 2021). This is particularly significant, as many outsiders in these cases perpetuated this stereotype through their framing of the censorship as justifiable, given that the schools were Catholic. Therefore, this examination of two censorship cases can help dispel these misconceptions as they demonstrate that sustained pressure from students, families, and alumni can lay the groundwork for future shifts in how censorship policies are understood and contested.

Policy Implications

While this analysis offers valuable insights, it is limited by its reliance on publicly available sources, which may have excluded key perspectives, such as those of educators and the larger student body. This highlights the need for further research into how frames around censorship are negotiated by different stakeholders within the school building. Nevertheless, this study builds on others (see Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020; Sachdeva et al., 2023) to provide a foundational framework for future research, particularly regarding how both insiders and outsiders perceive censorship. It underscores the importance of gathering diverse viewpoints to form a more comprehensive understanding of how censorship decisions are shaped and contested in schools.

Importantly, the resistance from students, families and alumni in these cases goes beyond reacting to censorship decisions; they were actively influencing the discourses surrounding the censorship. Their pushback highlights how insiders can challenge imposed restrictions and, in turn, call for deliberation around future censorship issues. Experiential commensurability becomes evident as these resistance efforts draw on personal experience within the school, reminding administrators that they are active participants in the school while advocating for more participatory

policies that redefine the authority of who can decide what is censored. The frames used by these resistance insider groups, such as appeals to social justice, students' freedom of expression and democratic participation, have the potential to influence future policy development, and in turn, reshape institutional norms. Because these frames reflect internally understood community values, educational leaders should actively acknowledge and create channels for community input in decision-making processes, recognizing that student, family, and alumni voices are vital in shaping curricular policies.

Their resistance also functioned as a reframing strategy, with insiders not only opposing censorship but exposing the disconnect between such censorship and their understanding of the school's mission as being aligned with broader social justice principles. While previous research has shown how highlighting this tension can support individual teachers in advancing inclusion within their classrooms (Giunco, 2025), this study reveals how it can operate collectively at the school level. In these cases, groups of insiders united around empirical credibility as a cornerstone of their reframing effort by presenting tangible evidence, such as the school's stated mission, and specific examples of injustice to challenge the legitimacy of censorship decisions. While the legislative conditions supporting book bans and content restrictions remain entrenched, resistance from insiders forced institutional leaders to reconsider their framing of the initial censorship decisions. In each case, leadership initially presented censorship as a protective measure but later adjusted their rhetoric in response to the community's frame. This dynamic shows that resistance doesn't always result in an outright reversal of censorship but can lead to a reframing that might gradually reshape institutional policy. Thus, resistance efforts have the potential for reclaiming educational spaces through strategic reframing, where shifts in discourse challenge the dominant logic that underpins censorship.

While this study emphasizes that frames around censorship are not just reactive but active processes of negotiation between insiders with varying levels of authority, the frames held by outsiders also help illuminate how narrative fidelity operates on a larger scale. Outsiders often adhered to the narrative that Catholic schools are inherently spaces of censorship, a perception that felt relevant to them based on broader societal assumptions about Catholic schools' role in upholding exclusionary norms. By reinforcing the narrative fidelity of these outsiders, the discourse surrounding censorship gains legitimacy, as it aligns with accepted storylines in secular discourses, such as the belief that Catholic schools are inherently conservative. However, as seen in these cases, this narrative is not monolithic and can be actively contested through insider resistance by introducing alternative perspectives and values that challenge these established assumptions. This dynamic highlights the importance of policymakers recognizing the contested nature of censorship discourse and considering how these frames take root in broader societal debates.

Given the persistence of censorship challenges in various educational settings, those within schools must be equipped to navigate and respond. As Knox (2017) points out, "It is imperative educators be aware of [censorship] arguments to be adequately prepared for a school curriculum challenge," highlighting the need for continuous research that unpacks the framing around censorship policies in various educational settings. Efforts to widen these conversations to include all sectors are essential for providing educators with the insights necessary to navigate censorship challenges while upholding principles of justice and inclusion. By continuing to explore and discuss these issues, researchers and educators alike can contribute to the development of strategies that reshape censorship frames to promote social justice and inclusion within all educational environments.

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