"Soldier of Democracy" or "Enemy of the State"? The rhetorical construction of teacher through *No Child Left Behind*

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Abstract

This article examines how the political discourse surrounding *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) rhetorically constructs teachers and teaching. Using the prepared speeches and press releases from the Bush Administration (January 2001-December 2008) we illustrate that teachers were framed as both allies to the federal government (as supporters of NCLB and public education) and therefore, soldiers of democracy, and as obstacles to student learning and therefore, enemies of the state. Further, the discourse employed by the Bush Administration identified educating America's children as the *problem*; teachers, in particular, were to *blame*. It posed a *remedy* that *resonated* with the public: NCLB. By identifying public education as the problem, and blaming teachers for that problem, it was easier to focus on changing (or eliminating) individual teachers, students, and schools rather than larger social, institutional, and structural barriers. Such a phenomenon is further reflective of the influence of neoliberalism on public education in the United States, so that individual teachers and schools are expendable if they fail to meet the expectations of the market.

Introduction

There can be little argument that *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) is and will continue to be a significant piece of educational legislation in the United States. Lauded and criticized by liberals, moderates, and conservatives, people are only now beginning to understand the far-reaching effects that NCLB, and its international equivalents, have on the education of children and youth (see Finn, 2002; Fusarelli, 2004; Hursh, 2005; Karp, 2005). Its focus on ensuring a quality education for all children, "regardless of race or income," was the "cornerstone" of the Bush Administration and teachers and teaching were and continue to be a key concern, even with the new Obama Administration (Bush, 2001; Education Week, 2009).

This watershed piece of legislation is the culmination of more than three decades of debate, and those who control the public discourse surrounding NCLB have a great deal of power to rhetorically shape people's perceptions regarding its efficacy, particularly in relation to teachers and teaching (Galston, 2006; Hess & McGuinn, 2002).[i] This article will take up how the

Bush Administration's discourse surrounding NCLB rhetorically constructed teachers as an obstacle to equal education and NCLB as the solution to achieving equality, thus closing the achievement gap. To highlight these rhetorical constructions, we employed two specific perspectives to make sense of the data. First, we relied upon the theoretical and structural process of framing and frame analysis to conceptually structure our means of inquiry (see Coburn, 2005). Second, we employed critical discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 2003) to uncover the deeper meanings beyond the rhetoric.

Theoretical perspectives: Rhetoric and frames

Given the volatility of the debates surrounding NCLB, there should be little surprise that supporters and critics alike referred to the rhetoric of their opponents. Taken as a whole, however, it is important to consider what they might possibly mean by the term *rhetoric*. According to Eagleton, rhetoric examines "the ways discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects" particularly in relation to "grasping such practices as forms of power and performance;" that is, they are "forms of *activity* inseparable from the wider social relations…and as largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and conditions in which they are embedded" (1996, p. 179). Rhetoric is historically and contextually bound within social relations between those engaging with discourse, is transactional in terms of how people engage with each other and different messages to construct meaning, and is enacted through news channels such as radio, television, the internet, and within and between individuals and groups (Potter, 1996).

Rhetoric can also constrain possible points of entry into political discourse, even as actors engage with it as part of everyday conversation and argumentation. To understand how rhetoric functions beyond simple politics requires an exploration of the socially constructed and constructing normative functions in discourse to uncover how different constituencies employ discursive strategies to limit or expand the conversation. It's not simply that one group is ideological and the other is not; rather, people and groups employ rhetoric and political discourse effectively (or not) by relying on ideological commonly held beliefs within and about groups. In this manner, one can illustrate how problems and solutions are co-constructed, identified,

connected, and how people make sense of different messages (Coburn, 2006; Van Dijk, 2001). Indeed, how people use discourse to create rhetorical *frames* surrounding an argument to shape perception regarding an issue is crucial.

Frames are a "focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed" (Altheide, 2002, p. 45). They connect different ideas and elements together, and are intricately tied to power relations and are useful when making sense of political discourse because they identify points of clarity and a structure in regard to how discursive acts construct meaning (Lakoff, 2004). They enable people to "fix" discourse in place as speech acts. Even so, frames remain contextually dependent and require multiple re-readings of texts across time to understand their evolution (Creed, Langstraat, and Scully, 2002).

While frames are not static, they do enable people to understand how discourse constructs common meanings about particular social and political problems. Entman (1993) notes they:

> *define problems*—determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes*—identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments*—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies*—offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. (p. 52)

As we illustrate, the political discourse of the Bush Administration's Department of Education framed the problems related to public education, NCLB, teachers and teaching so narrowly that it trivialized the larger structural, institutional, and social contexts shaping public opinion. While the education of children and adolescents in the US was the identified problem, teachers and teaching were to blame (ultimately, the *real* problem), and it was the moral duty of the federal government and the American people to eliminate the injustice caused by inferior teachers. The solution was NCLB, including higher standards, accountability and sanctions for teachers and schools, accepted research-based teaching strategies, and reforming teacher education and certification (Hess & Petrelli, 2006).

Connecting education and politics is a common occurrence in the United States.

Marschall and McKee (2002) noted that public education has been and continues to be a major talking point for those running for public office. They commented:

> Because education is a valence issue—an issue on which only one side of the debate is legitimate—the solutions proposed to address the issue are crucial. Although candidates typically need to do more than simply be for or against a valence issue, they frequently opt for the easiest and often more accessible means of distinguishing the position from their opponents. (p. 102)

Candidates want to win voters and must do so in clear and decisive ways by appearing to present the facts or the truth about a given issue without bias. They represent the reality of the situation in terms of "what it is" (see Potter, 1996). In the case of the "education" president, George W. Bush, the rhetoric employed about the condition of education not only played on his record as Governor of Texas; it also relied on the public's beliefs that public education in the US was in dire straights (Galston, 2006). Bostrom (2003) further noted that while the US public is generally satisfied with the teachers and schools in their own communities, they have grave concerns about schools on a national level and their ability to keep the nation globally competitive. The Bush Administration, acting on these concerns, delivered a reform package in the shape of NCLB.

What was presented as the truth about educational progress in Texas and the public's concern for education connected a solution to a problem (see Apple, 2006a; Haney, 2000; Horn & Kincheloe, 2001; and Salinas & Reidel, 2007 for an in-depth analysis). The Bush Administration's message about education was more convincing than that of that of their predecessors' because they were able to more effectively *frame* the debate surrounding education in the media by focusing on the public's longstanding fears about and suspicions regarding schools nationwide (Altheide, 2002; Chilton & Schäffner, 1997; Cohen-Vogel, 2005; Cohen-Vogel & Herrington, 2005). As we illustrate, the discourse employed by the Bush Administration identified educating America's children as the *problem*; teachers, in particular, were to *blame*. It further posed a *remedy* that *resonated* with the public: NCLB. By identifying public education as the problem, and blaming teachers for that problem, it was easier to focus on changing (or eliminating) individual teachers, students, and schools rather than larger social, institutional, and

structural barriers.

Methodology

People on both sides of the debate surrounding NCLB comment on the extensive rhetoric surrounding the politics and practices of the legislation (Noguera, 2003; Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007). Our interest in the public's perceptions of NCLB and how the Bush Administration presented the legislation and put it into practice helped us to conceive our initial focus for research. As we began to explore different positions and perspectives regarding NCLB, we chose to focus specifically upon the political discourse of the Bush Administration. Our initial exploration included media outlets like television news, newspapers, popular journals, etc. However, we found this to be too cumbersome as a data set, and in many cases, found they included comments and positions removed from their original context. Thus, we narrowed our focus to information directly available from the Bush Administration Department of Education. We reviewed policy briefings, press releases, speeches, and other materials available to identify key ideas and themes pertaining to K-12 public education, and looked for a source of discourse that represented the Bush Administration's position on NCLB and public education (e.g., Wood & Kroger, 2000). This decision narrowed our data set to the press releases and speeches of Administration officials.

Using an iterative, multidisciplinary process (e.g., Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2001), we identified the frames that emerged from and structured the political discourse. We then coded for these frames to develop specific research questions. Given our interest in how the political discourse rhetorically constructed teachers and teaching, we posed the following questions:

1. What does the discourse frame as the *problem*? How does it *resonate* with the public and motivate them to further support NCLB (e.g., Coburn, 2006; Lakoff, 2006)?
2. What does the discourse reveal about where the Bush Administration lays the *blame* for the problems with public education? What moral judgments are involved?
3. What *solutions* does the discourse reveal?
4. How does the discourse rhetorically construct teachers and teaching?

Data and analysis

Our decision to narrow the data set to press releases and the prepared speeches of Administration officials was based upon two factors: (1) for the most part, press releases consisted of the main talking points of the speeches, and they served a particular rhetorical (persuasive) purpose because they were carefully prepared statements for distribution to control and construct the image of NCLB; and (2) the speeches provided rich discursive data, provided a wider context for the main talking points, and reflected the voice of the Bush Administration in regard to NCLB.[ii] Our data set is limited to the prepared remarks made available and not actual transcripts for the purposes of objectivity and consistency. By using transcripts available through different media outlets we might have risked including tampered data. Strictly utilizing the speeches from the Department of Education website ensured that the discourse analyzed reflected the Bush Administration's official position. Most speeches included a disclaimer that the speaker "sometimes" or "frequently" deviated from the text, and when modified, included the date of the latest change. Thus, it is impossible to confirm what was actually said; we can only rely on the information made public at www.ed.gov. Further, not all remarks within that time period have been made available at the ED website (most notably, a 2/23/2004 speech we will address in the coming section).

The process of framing that enabled us to understand this particular socio-cultural phenomenon (e.g., the rhetorical construction of teachers and teaching) relied upon critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore the language utilized (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). CDA served as both a theoretical and analytical lens throughout the entire process. By employing this recursive process we hoped to untangle what Jäger (2001) called the "entwined and interdependently deeply rooted net," that is, what the political discourses surrounding NCLB represented and reflected back to the public (p. 50). CDA was appropriate because it examines and recognizes the social nature of discourse and analyzes the social, political, and cultural power influences on that discourse (see Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

The problem: Public education in the USA

On Monday, February 23, 2004, several US media outlets carried the story that Secretary of Education Roderick Paige called the National Education Association "a terrorist organization" [during a private meeting with governors] (Toppo, 2004). The next day, Secretary Paige issued an apology:

> It was an inappropriate choice of words to describe the obstructionist scare tactics the NEA's Washington lobbyists have employed against *No Child Left Behind*'s historic educational reforms. I also said, as I have repeatedly, that our nation's teachers, who have dedicated their lives to service in the classroom, are the real soldiers of democracy, whereas the NEA's high-priced Washington lobbyists have made no secret that they will fight against bringing real, rock-solid improvements in the way we educate all our children regardless of skin color, accent or where they live. But, as one who grew up on the receiving end of insensitive remarks, I should have chosen my words better. (Secretary Paige Issues apology for the comment about the NEA, February 23, 2004)

Understandably, teacher organizations (and teachers themselves) responded strongly, given that the Secretary of Education discursively associated the nation's largest teachers' organization as enemy combatants in the war on terror. Granted, he was most likely responding to NEA resistance to NCLB, which it considered to be poorly conceived. However, in claiming his comments were simply a poor choice of words, Paige dismissed the NEA and teachers' reactions, implying that they were overly sensitive and naïve because NCLB was good for students and society. He later reaffirmed his earlier assertion that "teachers are the real soldiers of democracy, and deserve our respect and our support" (Paige, 2-27-04, National Association of Secondary School Principals). However, it was too little too late, and the public got the message that the Bush Administration's appointed Secretary of Education would only espouse pro-teacher rhetoric for those teachers who toed the party line.

The message this sends teachers is reminiscent of the rhetoric employed by the Bush Administration immediately after the September 11, 2001 attacks: *Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists*.[iii] On one hand, it's politics as usual; it is a classical rhetorical device to "demonize" those who pose a threat. In this case, Paige saw the NEA as a threat to implementing NCLB (see, Paige, 2006). On the other hand, to call the nation's largest teachers' association a

terrorist organization politically detracted from its work and the profession on the whole, especially when the American public was already concerned about teachers and teaching at the national level (Bostrom, 2003). It is interesting to note that Paige accused the NEA of using "scare tactics"; *however*, calling them a terrorist organization was a joke and poor choice of words, not scare tactics in an era of heightened fear of terrorism. Conversely, praising teachers as the "soldiers of democracy" placed NCLB's requirements squarely on their shoulders. Further, by apologizing for the choice of words and not the intent behind them, Paige still associated the NEA and teachers with terrorists, e.g., those who were willing to use violence to harm the American public. Paige's remark was the most explicit in a series of efforts to discursively frame teachers as the problem in education and a threat to the country. This framing of teachers and teaching through the political discourse further undermined the nation's confidence in public education and teachers.

Blame laid, problem reframed: Teacher as soldier of democracy/teacher as enemy of the state

Building upon existing concerns regarding public education, the Bush Administration presented NCLB as a bipartisan response to the dire state of education. To garner support for NCLB, the Department of Education then carried this message to the public in through some of Secretary Paige's earliest remarks. He noted:

> In his inaugural address, the President declared that 'we will reclaim America's schools, before ignorance and apathy claim more young lives.' And this past weekend, the President used his first radio address to discuss the education crisis in our nation. He said, 'We need more than a few new programs. We need a new way of thinking.' He is absolutely right. (Paige, 1/30/2001, Remarks before National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities)

From the moment of his appointment, Paige began canvassing the country to communicate the President's vision regarding the change in the culture of US public education. Schools failed to do their jobs to educate students, and apathy was allowed to negatively affect the education of children and adolescents. According to the Bush Administration, this apathy did not exist on a societal level; rather, it was deeply entrenched in America's schools and reform was necessary.

Among the changes were raising academic standards to close the achievement gap, holding schools and teachers accountable for student achievement, and tying standardized tests scores to funding in order to maximize tax dollars. This sentiment was best articulated in an April 2001 budget request:

> Improving our schools isn't just about money…despite more than a decade of rapidly increasing Federal spending on elementary and secondary education, student performance has not improved. Simply spending more money in the same way is not the answer. We need to do things differently, to adopt a culture of achievement in our schools and school systems, and to demand results for our growing investment in education. (Remarks as prepared for delivery by U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige — President Bush's FY 2002 Education Budget Request, 4/9/2001)

Clearly because educational spending had increased in previous administrations, the roadblocks to student achievement were not funding related (see Bracey, 2004). There must be something else at work concerning the very nature of school culture. The remedy, therefore, was to change that culture by ensuring results from teachers by testing students; changing what and how teachers teach; how to allocate funds, to whom, and for what purpose; and evaluating student achievement. The discourse further revealed an oversimplification of the connection between funding and results. Rather than acknowledge the differences between students, schools, and communities, educating students was reduced to a series of inputs and outputs. As long as the culture of achievement was instilled in all schools, teachers, and students, it shouldn't matter under what conditions one taught and learned. The test scores would realize achievement.

At first, Paige's critique focused on the culture of achievement, and he initially noted the crucial role that teachers played in the shift from a culture of apathy and failure to one of accountability and success:

> Ultimately, all solutions will only be as good as the teachers who implement them. Few things are as important to a child's education as having a quality teacher…Teachers are the most valuable resource in any classroom, and our investments in education will also include investments in our teachers. (1/30/2001)

Paige acknowledged the need for good teachers. According to the Bush Administration,

no major educational reform, no matter how bold, could be successful without teachers who were willing and able to implement its goals, and it was crucial to garner their support. Further, as Paige noted, "Teachers [were] America's heroes" (4/27/2001), and the power of a great teacher could change a child's life forever, including his own: "I had a great many teachers as a child, including my mother, and I worked with many great teachers in Houston. I know that all of them affect eternity" (5/1/2001, Remarks to the International Reading Association). The discourse rhetorically constructed teachers as saviors, people who did amazing things with and for their students.

This sentiment differed greatly from that of three years later, when Paige referred to the NEA as a "terrorist organization." One might be confused at the radically different tone toward teachers. However, the data revealed a contradiction within the rhetoric. Teachers were not only "heroes" and "soldiers of democracy". They were also the primary obstacles to closing the achievement gap, a paradox revealed in the view that individual teachers could be saviors, but collectively they were to blame for the failure of US public schools to adequately educate children. As early as July 2001, Paige's references to teachers with low expectations illustrated the rhetoric of blaming teachers:

> I understand why teachers have sympathy for children born into bleak circumstances and who face many barriers to learning. But making excuses for poverty, race, or language breeds low expectations, and low expectations breed low achievement. The only way to raise achievement is to raise standards and assist every child in meeting them. (Paige, 7-13-01, American Federation of Teachers' Quality Educational Standards in Teaching (QuEST) Biennial Conference)

Paige equated sympathy with low expectations; thus, teachers who sympathized with and were aware of the challenges some students face were, within his rhetorical world, guilty of holding low expectations. Both Delpit (1995) and Ladson-Billings (2001) have discussed this phenomenon, noting that believing students are incapable of learning because of their circumstances denies students access to quality learning experiences. However, Delpit and Ladson-Billings's arguments differ in one key way from the Bush Administration's. They do not want teachers to lose sympathy for students; they want them to use their knowledge of students' needs to create stronger educational opportunities. In contrast, Paige's discourse revealed a leap

in logic and argument. Sympathy begot excuses and low expectations, and led to failure. The only solution was to inoculate the teaching and learning relationship by raising standards, regardless of existing educational challenges. According to this logic, if teachers simply raised their standards, their students would be successful. From the Bush Administration's perspective, the federal government must enforce more stringent standards and expectations to remediate teachers' faulty thinking.

In fact, Paige claimed that the major impediment to teachers holding high standards was their *dispositions*, that is the "personal or interpersonal qualities that a [teacher] [needed] to develop" to be effective in the classroom (Bogen, 2007, p. 4). Paige noted, "When they [teachers] begin to make excuses for children based on race or socioeconomics, those who make excuses—and our children—fall prey to what the President calls the soft bigotry of low expectations" (2/13/2002). Here, Paige's discourse revealed a denial of systemic forces—a lack of health care, poverty, crime, homelessness, and other social ills—that play a role in achievement. Despite teachers' best hopes for students, they were often powerless to compensate for these extenuating social inequities under the jurisdiction of the federal government. The Bush Administration's myopic presentation of the teacher as the lone soldier primarily responsible for rescuing at-risk students is a powerful exclusionary framing device, as it blames the teacher, rather than the educational system, and ultimately frames the teacher as an enemy of the state, because of *what she or he believes and does*. Indeed, the discourse also reflects a larger issue: the ascendance of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Freeman, 2005). Freeman (2005) notes,

> Color-blind racism is a package of "postracial" understanding that claims that race no longer constitutes a significant barrier to social and economic participation. Within the discourse of color-blindness, equality is a fact of law, everyone is treated the same, and racism exists because of individual failings rather than because of institutional failings…It deflects the social and political claims of marginalized groups and serves to neutralize challenges to the existing racial order (pp 190-191).

That racism is now nothing more than a function of individual prejudices and not deeply embedded in social institutions and structures in the US resonates with many people (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). By drawing attention to teachers who acknowledge the existence of race (e.g., racial barriers), the Bush Administration is able to further a conservative ideology that places all

responsibility and blame for success or failure on the individual, in this case, the teacher.

The discourse alluded to a larger problem concerning teachers and teaching. Not only were they blamed for poor student achievement, they were framed as being morally and ethically irresponsible if they acknowledged any difference between their students, what they need, and how they learn. We agree that to believe children cannot learn because of their race and socio-economic circumstance is morally reprehensible. However, the Bush Administration's failure to acknowledge that individuals and communities differ and its insistence that individuals and communities are the same reinforces the marginalization NCLB purports to alleviate. What is most problematic about this discourse of sameness is that it constructs those who acknowledge difference as anti-American and immoral. As a result, the discourse reinforced one of the stated purposes of NCLB: to save the hearts and minds of children. To achieve this moral imperative, teachers must raise their expectations (e.g., their beliefs) regarding student learning. For the Administration, this was crucial because of the important role that teachers play:

> …[We] cannot overlook the fact that we want to make sure that every teacher believes that children can learn. Not only must they know their subject deeply, but they must also believe that their children can learn. And teachers who do not believe that children can learn cannot have the kind of success that we need in order to make this work.
>
> I've heard, unfortunately, some teachers say, "You don't know my kids. They can't learn; they're too poor, they're too disadvantaged, they're too unprepared, or they're too you-fill-in-the-blank to achieve like the kids in the suburbs." (Paige, 12/11/2002, Remarks to the National Conference of State Legislators)

There would be no excuses. "They can't learn; they're too poor," etc., would no longer be part of the acceptable teacher lexicon, even though some of the structural and institutional realities that teachers and students face might be beyond their control and affect student achievement (Hodgkinson, 2003). Further, the Bush Administration presented these words ("they can't learn", etc.) as if all teachers make these claims about all students. In many cases, teachers are not talking about the inherent abilities of their students; they instead refer to the challenges that many students face socio-economically—the lack of resources in-district, over-crowded classrooms, lack of resources in the home—all things over which they have no control (Obidah & Howard, 2005). This is not to say that young people will fail because of these roadblocks;

some are successful in spite of them. The Administration, however, seemed to discount these structural and institutional realities, and instead attacked the character and preparation of the teachers who work with the most needy students. No one would argue with the need for high expectations. Indeed we, the authors, agree whole-heartedly with challenging bigotry and inequity. Teachers cannot use excuses like race, gender, class, poverty, etc., to justify student failure. However, the Bush Administration oversimplified the realities of teaching in some schools and communities.

The framing of teachers as the problem and educating students as a moral duty continued to be reflected throughout President Bush's tenure. The Bush Administration's second Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, reflects this consistency in discourse in a speech to the Education Trust: "I'm inspired by hard-working teachers who are committed to doing whatever it takes to leave no child behind…we must do a better job making sure we have our best teachers in our neediest classrooms" (Spellings, 11/6/2006, Delivered Remarks at Education Trust Dispelling the Myth Award Ceremony). This discourse resonated with earlier Bush Administration assertions that better teachers are needed, with *some* acknowledgement that some teachers are inspiring. Further analysis revealed an additional disturbing assumption; teachers who worked with the most needy students were not necessarily the most committed or the hardest workers. If they were, students from understaffed and under-resourced communities would be academically successful and NCLB would not be necessary. Again, effective teaching was tied to a disposition with moral and ethical overtones, particularly in regard to doing one's part to protect the nation's well-being. One must be committed to be considered an effective teacher. That commitment was also necessary to protect the nation and be a patriotic citizen (Gerstmann & Streb, 2006).

Like earlier messages on public education, later ones presented the same conflicting message; teachers were both the problem and the solution to closing the achievement gap and improving public education. Teachers were framed as the principal obstacle to student achievement and federal intervention was justified to "ensure every child has a highly qualified and effective teacher" (Spellings, 11/6/2006, Remarks to the Education Trust Dispelling the Myth Award). Spellings presented teachers as an integral part of the solution, but only if they parroted the Bush Administration's position. By shifting blame, the federal government

obfuscated its role in exacerbating "this crisis" (e.g., cutting services like healthcare, education funding, etc.). Simultaneously, the Administration continued to fan the flames regarding the dangers of failing to fix the public schools.

Teachers as enemies of the state: Public education and national security

Connecting the well being of the nation to the education of its youth is not new (see for instance, Abowitz, 2003; Kliebard, 1986; Parker, 2002; Tyak, 1986). While the Bush Administration did not create a new frame connecting public education to national security, it did capitalize on an already existing culture of fear in the United States (see for instance, Altheide, 2002; Glasser, 2000; Giroux, 2002; Siegel, 2006). Public education was identified early in the Bush Administration as an issue of national security. In his remarks to the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), Paige referenced a report issued by the U.S. Commission on National Security for the 21st Century:

> Second only to a weapon of mass destruction detonating in an American city, we can think of nothing more dangerous than a failure to manage properly science, technology, and education for the common good over the next quarter century. (Paige, 2/25/2002, Remarks to American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Annual Meeting)

Here, Paige's discourse mirrored that of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) from two and a half decades before. However, Paige, relying on a direct quote from the Commission on National Security, also connected the crisis in public education that NCLB was supposed to redress directly to the war on terror (Giroux, 2008). If the nation failed to "manage" education for the good of all citizens the terrorists would win, and currently, "As things stand, this country is forfeiting that capacity" (2/25/2002). In framing the crisis in public education as a national security issue, the federal government must step in, even though it claimed to value state choice (Saltman, 2007). In this instance, resistance is futile, and anyone or any entity (e.g., the NEA or any other critics) who stands against NCLB is against national security, the good of the republic, and hence, an *enemy of the state*.

Framing the problem as one "of national proportions" (Paige, 3/12/2003, Remarks by

Secretary Paige to the Commonwealth Club of California) and a "national security issue (Paige, 2/25/2002, 3/12/2003), the discourse further justified the Bush Administration seizing power from local communities and states, thereby dictating what teachers teach, how teachers teach, and what consequences they would face if and when their students fail, all in the name of "national security". Interestingly, the rhetoric here justified *more* federal control of teachers, teaching, and schools, not only in an effort to protect students from teachers who had low expectations, but also as a means to protect the nation from perceived terrorist and anti-American threats (Giroux, 2008; Goldstein & Beutel, 2008; McGuinn, 2006). Thus, even as the Bush Administration touted NCLB as education reform based in more choice for families and individual states, it justified more surveillance and oversight of individual teachers and schools to ensure the realization of the Administration's vision of *individual* opportunity and responsibility, at the expense of those least able to gain access to that opportunity (see Hursh, 2005, 2007).

Conclusions: Developing frames that resonate

Blaming teachers for the failure of public education has existed since *A Nation at Risk*. What makes the Bush Administration's negative framing of teachers so important is how it relies on the paradoxical view that the US public holds regarding teachers. Teachers are both positively regarded and reviled. On the one hand the 39nd Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll found that the US public was mostly satisfied with teachers but agreed that public education reform was necessary (Rose & Gallup, 2007). Hart &Teeter (2002) noted that 52% of Americans said that public education needed a partial or complete overhaul. In this sense the message regarding teachers resonated because it relied on already-existing beliefs among the American public. However, what a reformed education system would look like in regards to teachers differed greatly from the Bush Administration and the public's perspective. Hart and Teeter (2002) note:

> The public equates quality education with quality teaching. They have a clear sense of what defines quality teaching, and what they believe is lacking in many classrooms. Quality teaching is defined as a teacher in every classroom who has a gift for designing learning experiences that engage young people, and successfully communicate

information and skills. In-depth knowledge of the subject matter is considered less important than this ability to design lesson plans and teach well (p.1).

In other words, to improve education one must improve teaching. This statement is congruent with the Bush Administration's framing of the problem (public education is failing to close the achievement gap) and where to lay the blame (on teachers). However, the Bush Administration's focus on teachers and teaching focused more on blaming teachers for their beliefs about students is significantly different from the public's view (Hart & Teeter, 2002) that engaging students, increasing pedagogical content knowledge (e.g., Shulman, 1986), and communication are keys to successful education. Even though the rationale for blame differed, by focusing on an already existing frame, the Bush Administration was able to garner early support for its focus on teaching and its later focus on teacher education and higher education (see for instance, Spellings, 10/12/2008, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings Addresses John F. Kennedy, Jr. Forum at Harvard University). Such concern regarding the teaching force has persisted and is part of the new Obama Administration's roadmap for improving public education (Education Week, 2009).

To illustrate the already existing resonance between the discourse employed by the Bush Administration and the negative public perception, former *New York Times* education columnist Rothstein identified four assumptions about teachers that comprised what he refers to as "a widely accepted syllogism":

1. Student performance is unsatisfactory because most teachers are themselves pretty dumb. (If they're not the least talented high school grads, then they must be the least able college students.)
2. Traditional certification encourages hiring academically inferior teachers because it requires courses in pedagogy, not academic content.
3. Once inferior teachers are hired, tenure and unions make getting rid of them impossible.
4. Thus, to improve student outcomes, districts need to break the lock of both education schools and unions, by recruiting bright college grads uncorrupted by "methods" courses and by allowing principals to fire teachers who can't raise student test scores. (2002, Available: http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=blaming_teachers)

Each statement reflects a general disregard for the work of teaching. Indeed, they mirror, in many respects, the Bush Administration's discourse regarding public school teachers. Here, pedagogy is not nearly as important as content area, and the unions obstruct the reform process. Paige's discourse regarding teachers relies upon these beliefs while upping the ante in terms of the sense of urgency.

When NCLB was unveiled in 2001, the Bush Administration employed a very different discourse than it did in the subsequent years. That discourse, however, shifted because of historical events (e.g., 9/11 and the Second Gulf War) and the metaphors that developed as a result (Giroux, 2003a, b, c; Lakoff, 2004). By relying on an existing view regarding teachers and their work, this discourse further justified the need for NCLB and utilized NCLB to address issues of teaching as not only a moral and ethical issue (e.g., the soft bigotry of low expectations), but also as a national security issue during a time of war. Simultaneously, the discourse also absolved the government of other obligations. Kantor and Lowe (2006) note,

> For all the talk about reducing the achievement gap, No Child Left Behind has more to do with reducing public responsibility for education and other areas of social life. It intensifies the importance placed on education and education policy-making at the same time it contributes to the diminution of political support for a more expansive view of public social provision. Moreover, it forecloses discussion about the erosion of the social and economic supports that are key components of educational success (pp. 493-494).

> The Bush Administration's rhetorical success in identifying teachers as the primary source of blame for the achievement gap enabled them to circumvent a number of arguments that otherwise might be effective in challenging NCLB. First and foremost, by framing teachers as the reason for students' academic failure and the nation's perilous security position, the Bush Administration was able to further cement its neoliberal political and economic policies as common sense solutions to societal problems. Second, by lauding some teachers as *soldiers of democracy* for doing the hard work of ensuring children's academic success while condemning others as *enemies of the state* for challenging NCLB and endangering the nation, the Bush Administration was able to capitalize on liberal commitments to equity and social justive and conservative concerns regarding national security and the continued ascendancy of the United States as *the* world power.

> In doing so, the Bush Administration was able to effectively institutionalize neoliberal

policies and practices as a function of educating children in the United States (see also, Apple, 2006b; Hursh, 2008; Kumashiro, 2008). The public education of America's children and youth is a function of individual committed teachers who treat individual children the same, have high expectations, and practice teaching strategies reflecting the goals of the Bush Administration. In addition, it is more efficient to fire individual teachers and close individual schools for failing to meet the expectations laid out by the Bush Administration. Such a practice reflects neoliberal principles of the free market—those who cannot compete have no one to blame but themselves, and it is not the government's job to provide handouts to those who struggle.

This disturbing paradox—viewing teachers as soldiers of democracy ensuring that all young people will be able to engage fully in public life *on an equal playing field* while simultaneously fearing them as enemies of the state because they question or challenge NCLB—effectively set the stage for the provisions originally outlined in NLCB, and provided further rhetorical support for the law's reauthorization. This is particularly troubling given that the American public supports such provisions and reauthorizing NCLB, *even though they know little about the law itself* (Hart, et al., 2007). This reality, coupled with the current attack on teachers closes down a serious debate regarding what is necessary to close the achievement gap (Sirotnik, 2002; Hursh, 2008). The rhetoric reinforced the neo-liberal and neo-conservative goals of the Bush Administration because it framed successful teaching as a function of providing all students with the same, while marginalizing conversation regarding concerns about teaching all students effectively without adequate resources to do so.

Even with the election of President Barak Obama and the installation of Arne Duncan as his first Secretary of Education, many questions persist regarding how teachers and public education will be framed. As Lipman (2003) and Hursh (2008) have both noted, Duncan, too, has a long history of supporting neoliberal principles like privatizing, choice, accountability, and changing teacher preparation programs. The recently released Obama education plan also reflects a desire to reform NCLB, ensure choice and accountability, and ensuring a "qualified teacher" in every classroom (Education Week, 2009). That the Bush Administration so effectively employed a rhetorical frame that focused attention on teachers at the expense of critical examination of others issues related to the education of young people in the United States *and* the Obama administration is also focusing on teachers is of great concern to these authors. A recent speech by Secretary Duncan reflects much of the same rhetoric regarding the state of the nation and

public education. He noted,

> …91 years ago—when the American Council on Education was founded—we had an academic in the White House, we were a nation at war—and we were confronting a new global economic and political reality that required us to think differently and act boldly.
>
> So in some ways things haven't changed. Today we're fighting a war that diverts us from other priorities. We face a new global reality that requires us to think differently and act boldly. And once again we have an academic for a president. (Duncan, 2/9/2009, Secretary Arne Duncan Speaks at the 91st Annual Meeting of the American Council on Education).

According to Duncan, the current moment in history calls for bold action, particularly in regard to public education. Programs like Teach for America and the KIPP schools, strengthening standards and accountability through the development of "state of the art" data systems, and collaboration will enable the United States to regain its global educational leadership. While it is too early to determine the Obama Administration's impact on public education, it is crucial to observe how it frames teachers and public education. If it persists in continuing the Bush Administration's meme of blaming teachers for a perceived failure of public education, the efforts of critical educators and community activists will continue to face great institutional obstacles to changing educational experiences in the United States.

Notes

[i] The power to control public discourse and its ability to shape public perception has been studied extensively beyond the arguments surrounding NCLB. See for instance, Chilton & Schäffner (1997) for a discussion of the connection between disocurse and politics. Creed, Langstraat, & Scully (2002) also offer a useful discussion of how political discourse frames or presents different issues.

[ii] At the time of preparing this article, these speeches were available at http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/index.html.

[iii] http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html

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