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Navigating neoliberal traps in the pursuit of radical change: Promises and tensions in teacher and community organizing against privatization and school closures in Oakland

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Navigating neoliberal traps in the pursuit of radical change: Promises and tensions in teacher and community organizing against privatization and school closures in Oakland

By

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Committee in charge:

Professor Daniel Perlstein, Chair
Professor Janelle Scott
Professor Khatharya Um

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Abstract

Navigating neoliberal traps in the pursuit of radical change:
Promises and tensions in teacher and community organizing against privatization and school closures in Oakland

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Professor Daniel Perlstein, Chair

Students, teachers, and communities who suffer the consequences of market based reforms have organized to put an end to neoliberal policies that exacerbate educational inequities, displace Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, and pave the way for increasing privatization in public education (Buras, 2015; Ferman, 2017; Journey for Justice, 2014; Lipman, 2015, 2017; Rooks, 2017; Scott & Holme, 2016; Syeed, 2019). The growing strength of this movement was evident in the wave of teacher strikes that took place across the U.S. since 2012 that connected neoliberal austerity, privatization, and school closures (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014). Oakland teachers joined this movement when they went on strike in February 2019, demanding higher wages, better working conditions, and increased funding for public schools, but also a halt to the expansion of the charter school sector and an end to school closures.

Most often, scholarship on resistance to neoliberal reforms consider teacher activism independently of community organizing (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Brown & Stern, 2018; Maton, 2018; Pham & Phillip, 2020; Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015; Stern & Brown, 2016). While there is wide recognition in the literature on organizing for educational justice of the importance of teacher and community solidarity, few studies examine how this solidarity is nurtured or undermined in the neoliberal context. Teachers and the communities they serve have not always been on the same side education reforms (Perlstein, 2004; Perrillo, 2012; Weiner, 2012), yet neoliberalism thrives by exploiting tensions between the two, particularly in urban areas where most students are Black or Brown yet the teaching force remains disproportionately white (Perrillo, 2012; Weiner, 2012).

This dissertation fills this gap in the literature and offers insights to grassroots teacher and community organizers by examining teacher and community activism against market reforms as part of a broader social movement for educational justice and equity. My theoretical framework attends to how neoliberal multiculturalism shapes the racial politics of advocacy in the new political grid (Henig, 2011; Melamed, 2006; Scott, 2011, 2013) and draws from social movement theories and concepts to analyze how teacher and community activists in Oakland navigated the neoliberal context in their organizing.

Through a case study of grassroots organizing in Oakland against privatization and school closures since the 2011 Occupy Movement galvanized a mass movement against neoliberal capitalism, I answer these research questions:

1) How did activist groups reflect on their organizing to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland?
2) How did activists shift their framings in response to the political context? How did their framings inform their strategies for organizing?
3) What factors and circumstances facilitated or limited collaboration between teacher and community activists?

Each research question is addressed in a stand-alone journal article. In the first article, *Teacher activists' praxis in the movement against privatization and school closures in Oakland*, I demonstrate how strategic decisions to focus on gaining power within the union and to center the leadership of progressive teachers of color helped activist teachers build support for both the strike and the broader movement against privatization, yet also led them to focus on an inside strategy that may undermine their more transformative goals. The second article, *Framing the unframeable: How activists articulate the need to stop privatization and school closures,* argues that activist groups responded to the complex and evolving political context with more nuanced framings to counter the rhetoric of pro-market reformers and to resonate with broader sectors of city residents. Activists shifted the way they framed their critiques of charter schools, acknowledged the need to transform public schools, and articulated with more specificity the racialized impact of market reforms on Black students and families, yet they continued to struggle with framing in clear and concise messages how race, space, and profit motive drive privatization and school closures. In the third article, *Politics, tensions, and possibilities in teacher and community movements to stop privatization and school closures,* I argue that though there are persisting challenges to building alliances across teacher and community activist groups, including limited capacity, fragmentation, and racial politics, the experience of trying in vain to stop the school closures can be channeled into a shared sense of outrage and common struggle that can be a unifying force (Ferman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020; Warren, 2010).

Teacher and community activists have taken advantage of the opportunities created by the expansion of precarity and disposability that are the direct result of neoliberalism. They have channeled a growing sense of urgency and outrage into building solidarity between teachers and the communities they serve and forming ad hoc coalitions in a fragmented political landscape, allowing them to mount a powerful counterattack to the onslaught of neoliberal austerity policies. At the same time, these activists struggle to navigate the shifted racial politics and power dynamics in a reconfigured political terrain where racial representation within their own movements might work against the pursuit of radical demands for educational and social transformation. Moreover, as activist teachers gain power within their unions and move them toward social justice unionism, they run the risk of losing the capacity to organize from independent spaces outside of the union that afford activists the opportunity to develop a transformative and intersectional praxis for building a mass movement for educational and social justice. Avoiding the traps of neoliberal racial politics present the biggest challenge to building a broad based educational justice movement that is part of a global movement against neoliberal capitalism.

Dedication

To my brother, Frank Anthony Ramos, for being my inspiration.

And

To my husband, Raymond Antonio Pabón, for making it all possible.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the spring of 2016, community, parent, and teacher activists with SOSD (Schools Oakland Students Deserve) organized a tour for the public to educate people about the links between privatization, charter schools, displacement/gentrification, and land development projects in Oakland. I had attended SOSD meetings and was energized by what seemed to be an important shift in the organizing to stop privatization and school closures. SOSD organizers engaged participants in discussions about how Oakland public schools needed to be transformed to truly serve Black and Brown students and families. I decided to participate in the tour, but as I drove past the group while looking for parking, they had started to march to a second location. As they marched, the group chanted "Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Charter schools have got to go!"

Though I had every intention of joining the action, and I understood why this group of activists targeted charters schools, I found myself conflicted about joining them. I parked nearby and sat in my car to think about what I would do. I agreed with the organizers' analysis about the connection between charter school growth and privatization and how these reforms deepened educational inequities and played a large role in gentrifying Oakland. Politically, I was totally aligned with the group, yet I couldn't bring myself to join them. I had two children enrolled in an Oakland charter school and I felt that it would be dishonest of me to join as the group chanted that charter schools had to go. Finally, I decided to drive home, feeling more conflicted than ever about the contradiction of enrolling my children in a charter school though I understood the negative impact that charters have had on the public school system. I was upset about the difficult and uncomfortable situation I found myself in, but also frustrated that the organizers continued to focus on charters as the locus of the problem. Did they not realize or care how chanting "charters have got to go?" would be alienating to parents like myself who shared their analysis and visions yet had for different reasons elected to put their children in charter schools?

The first community meeting organized by SOSD intended to attract people like myself, progressive and activist folks of color who might have their children in charter schools, support charters, or be indifferent to the politics of charter schools. Though almost, if not all, parents in the meeting were of a middle class socioeconomic status by virtue of being highly educated and being in professional roles, the meeting did not address the class[1] based dynamics of charter schools. Instead, SOSD organizers focused on the racial dynamics and politics involved, noting that charter schools appeal to parents, especially Black and Brown parents, who have not been well served in Oakland public schools. The focus of the meeting was not on the need to stop charters from taking over the district and from undermining public education, but rather on the need to transform public schools so that they educate and serve all children, including those from poor families or from Black or Brown families. It was a breath of fresh air to be in a room with other progressive activists of color and teachers talking about how public education needs to be transformed, including many of the issues that have concerned communities of color for many decades, such as policing in schools, harsh discipline policies and practices, Eurocentric and outdated curriculum, excessive standardized testing, and racist teachers. Finally, in this space,

[1] Anyon (1981) defines class as "a series of relationships to several aspects of the process in society by which goods, services, and culture are produced. That is, while one's occupational status and income level contribute to one's social class, they do not define it. Contributing as well are one's relationships to the system of ownership of physical and cultural capital, to the structure of authority at work and in society, and to the content and process of one's own work activity" (p. 4).

people were not pretending that public schools have been democratic spaces or benign institutions that need to be defended. Everyone was clear that public education served a very important function in our society that should be preserved as a public good and not turned into a privately managed system that would be even less democratic, less accessible, and less equitable. Everyone in the meeting appeared to agree that winning the battle against those that sought to expand the charter school sector and privatize public education required that the movement shift from defending toward transforming public schools.

The importance of understanding why parents of color in Oakland would choose to enroll their children in charters was also addressed, as well as the importance of not blaming or alienating anyone for making this choice. In part, this was due to activists' understating that much of the success of the charter school movement resulted from neoliberal reformers' ability to appeal to parents of color who were tired of being ignored, disrespected, and mistreated by public schools. I did not expect, then, to arrive at the tour and hear the group chanting that charter schools had to go. I was not only disappointed for myself since I felt that I could not join the tour, but more so because I believe that making charter schools the main target of an educational justice movement is a losing strategy because it would lose parents like me.

Conceptual Framework

The tension I experienced that day is at the heart of this dissertation project. Having worked in public schools for over a decade, including one charter school, and having myself been a product of underfunded and highly segregated urban schools, I understood the concerns and desires that drive families to pursue the best possible schooling options for their children and how these feed demands for charter schools. I also worked at an independent charter school in East Oakland for ten years and witnessed how racial inequities and injustices can persist even in a grassroots charter school rooted in social justice principles. In fact, anti-black racism and social class privilege were pervasive in this small charter school. Many Black and Brown parents enrolled their children at this school to avoid sending them to neighborhood schools that served larger numbers of poor and Black students.

As a progressive educator and activist scholar, I also understood the imperative of protecting our public school system from conservative, neoliberal, and elite forces who have a vested interest in undermining the liberatory and democratic ideals and potential of public education. It was also clear to me that the ways in which the charter school movement directly undermined the rights and protections of teachers and other school staff were part and parcel of a broader political and economic movement to disempower workers and thereby enrich and empower a capitalist class. This dual perspective propelled me to examine how community and teacher activists who were organizing against neoliberal school reforms like privatization, charter schools, and school closures made sense of and attempted to navigate these apparent contradictions and tensions.

Neoliberal reforms in education infuse market-based principles into the public education system, including competition and choice, incentives and sanctions for teachers, administrators, and schools through high stakes accountability and merit pay, charter schools, and the privatization of educational services (Lipman, 2011; Ravitch, 2010; Scott & Holme, 2016). In the neoliberal paradigm of educational improvement, these reforms are believed to produce both higher quality schools and greater equity through the injection of market competition.

Market reforms dominate the education policy landscape because they align with neoliberal capitalism, the reigning ideological and political economic system in the Unites States today (Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011; Nygreen 2016). These neoliberal policies have had a negative impact on Oakland public schools, including the closing of many neighborhood schools that have been replaced with charter schools. In turn, these policies have sparked an organized resistance led by parents, teachers, and community activists. My dissertation focuses on charter schools, privatization, and school closures because these are the market reforms that are most contentious in Oakland school politics.

What I witnessed in Oakland, starting in 2012 when a movement to stop the closure of five public schools first began forming, was the pervasive use of a narrative that pointed to charter schools as a key driver of the district's financial challenges and their decision to close schools. In these narratives, activists also pointed to the billionaires who funded school choice and promoted charter schools, yet the focus in community actions like the SOSD tour was often on how charter schools were hurting Oakland public schools. Given that almost a third of Oakland's children are enrolled in charter schools and the obvious inequities across the city's segregated schools, I could not understand why activists would deploy narratives that seemed overly simplistic, even to long time educators in Oakland, and that would potentially alienate and even appear to blame families who enrolled their children in charter schools. It seemed counterproductive, in my assessment of the organizing, to use narratives or framings that dismissed the real concerns of families that desired better schools for their children because this only strengthened the appeal of the charter movement who appeared to put these concerns front and center. It seemed to me that the charter school movement used narratives that appealed to parents of color, while the movement to stop charter expansions had less appeal to parents of color who saw charter schools as a better alternative to their neighborhood school.

Moreover, it seemed deeply dishonest and problematic to blame charter schools for the inequities and challenges facing Oakland public schools. Why would progressive activists who claimed to be acting for the greater good ignore the broader issues that historically undermined educational equity, such as the disinvestment in urban schools, school segregation by race and class, and persisting white supremacy and antiblackness throughout the entire educational system (Anyon, 2014; Dumas, 2014; Grande, 2015)? At the time, before starting my doctoral studies, I also thought it was a contradiction that progressives would defend a state-run public education system when in the 1960s through the 1980s, Black, Indigenous, and Brown communities fought for community control over public schools or alternative educational spaces as a means to have greater self-determination and control over the institutions that shaped their lives (Perlstein, 2004; Rickford, 2016; Stulberg, 2008). As argued by many critical scholars, public education is a mechanism for social control and for reproducing colonialism and domination (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Grande, 2015; Sojoyner, 2013). Yet, other critical scholars note that, though far from democratic or equitable, public education has also been a lab for democratic engagement (Su, 2009). They can also be spaces that nurture solidarity and help to develop critical consciousness (Anyon, 1981; Freire, 2018). The seeds of struggle for justice and liberation are often planted in in battles to make education more equitable and just.

These tensions and contradictions about the nature and promise of public education are critical to understanding debates over school choice, charter schools, and other market reforms that have taken center stage in many cities across the nation for at least the past two decades (Lipman, 2011; Pedroni, 2007). The politics involved have become highly contentious and many communities are deeply divided on these issues. Since the 1990s, school choice and charter

school policies have become the most pursued reform for improving educational outcomes and reducing inequities across race and class. Believing that policy makers had stopped trying to force districts to desegregate, and feeling discouraged about attaining meaningful integration in education, many people of color and community leaders began to favor school choice as a mechanism for attaining equitable educational opportunities across different racial and economic groups (Pedroni, 2007; Stulberg, 2008).

It is not a coincidence that communities of color, as well as white communities who had advocated for school choice as a means of avoiding desegregation, had the enthusiastic support of elites, venture philanthropists, and policy makers across both major political parties. As noted by Kantor and Lowe (2013), these powerful actors were interested in shifting attention away from desegregation, which was a more redistributive policy with the potential to destabilize the status quo, and toward policies that would have less of an impact on the social order. Moreover, despite their interests in these policies as mechanism to preserve racial and class privilege, elite reformers promote school choice and charter schools as a civil rights issue and use the langue of racial equity (Ravitch, 2010; Scott, 2009, 2011, 2013). Wealthy philanthropists and corporate leaders use their power and influence to promote and fund these reforms as a mechanism for limiting the function of public education to preparing a workforce that serves their own political economic interests, and to profit from the multi-billion dollar public education sector (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015; Ravitch, 2010; Reckhow, 2012; Scott, 2009, 2011, 2013).

Over the past three decades, the charter school sector has expanded, with some urban areas like Oakland having over a third of its student body enrolled in charters. However, support for charter schools has diminished, particularly among democrats and in urban areas that have seen an explosion of charter schools without experiencing the promised improvements in terms of reducing educational inequities or improving the experiences and outcomes of traditionally targeted communities (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010).[2] The literature on the politics of school choice and charter schools illuminates a multitude of processes and mechanisms through which market oriented reforms exacerbate inequities and undermine efforts to provide all students with a quality education (Lipman, 2011; Ravitch, 2010; Scott & Holme, 2016).

Across cities, teacher and community activists have mounted a movement to stop the expansion of the charter school sector and the wave of school closures that are directly tied to market reforms (Ferman, 2017; Scott, 2011, 2013). This movement was evident in the wave of teacher strikes that took place across the U.S. since 2012 that connected neoliberal austerity, privatization, and school closures (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014). When Oakland teachers went on strike in February 2019, they demanded higher wages, better working conditions, and increased funding for public schools, but also an end to school closures.

As students, teachers, and communities have suffered the consequences of policies that rely on high stakes accountability and competition between schools, scholars have also begun to study the growing resistance to neoliberal and market based reforms that exacerbate inequities, displace Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, and pave the way for increasing privatization in public education (Buras, 2015; Ferman, 2017; Lipman, 2015, 2017; Rooks, 2017; Scott & Holme, 2016; Syeed, 2019). Much of this scholarship conceptualizes this resistance as a

[2] In keeping with the discourse in organizing spaces led by Indigenous peoples, I use the term targeted in place of the more commonly used term marginalized to highlight that the disempowerment and marginalization that communities of color face have never been accidental on incidental. Rather, Black, Indigenous, and Brown people have been exploited and dominated to facilitate processes of accumulation through dispossession of our lands, resources, and bodies.

movement to defend public education from neoliberal and conservative attacks on public education as a public good. However, this framing can obscure the messy and complicated politics of education reform in the neoliberal context that are rooted in longstanding inequities in education (Nygreen, 2016). Few studies, for example, examine the tensions inherent in efforts to defend a system that has long played a role in reproducing social inequities and that has often a site of suffering, containment, and erasure for Black and Brown[3] communities (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Dumas, 2014, 2016; Grande, 2015; Patel, 2015a; Scott, 2013; Sojoyner, 2013).

Scholarship on resistance to neoliberal reforms includes an emerging body of work on teacher activism through teacher activist groups and teachers' unions (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Brown & Stern, 2018; Maton, 2018; Pham & Phillip, 2020; Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015; Stern & Brown, 2016). Most often, these studies focus on teacher activism independently of the activism rooted in community groups. While there is wide recognition in both the literature on community organizing and scholarship on teacher activism of the importance of teacher and community solidarity, few studies examine how this solidarity is nurtured or undermined in the neoliberal context. This solidarity is an important aspect of the movement that needs to be further understood because teachers and the communities they serve have not always been on the same side education reforms (Perlstein, 2004; Perrillo, 2012; Weiner, 2012). As I discuss in greater detail below, it is in fact a defining feature of neoliberalism in education to pit teachers and communities against each other by exploiting tensions between the two, particularly in urban areas where most students and families are Black or Brown yet the teaching force remains disproportionately white (Perrillo, 2012; Weiner, 2012).

In this research project, I sought to both fill these gaps in the literature and to inform the grassroots organizing happening in communities across the country by examining teacher and community activism against market reforms as part of a broader social movement for educational justice and equity. Because privatization and school closures impact urban school communities across the nation and national coalitions have formed to resist these policies, I treat the activism in Oakland as part of a broader social movement for educational justice (Ferman, 2017; Journey for Justice, 2014). Through a case study of organizing in Oakland, I explored what motivated individual activists and activist groups to fight privatization and school closures and how they thought about organizing and navigating tensions and contradictions. I sought to understand their analyses of marketization and neoliberalization and how their analyses informed their framing of the movement and organizing strategies.

Rather than delve deeply into the sensemaking of individual activists or the dynamics within specific groups, I studied the organizing across Oakland's various activist groups who had been organizing explicitly against privatization and school closures since the 2011 Occupy Movement galvanized a mass movement against neoliberal capitalism. In 2012, the successful teachers' strike in Chicago coincided with a community uprising to stop school closures in Oakland, giving birth to grassroots groups of teacher and community activists in Oakland. The various groups included some that were primarily comprised of teachers and others that were mostly led by community and parent organizers. As part of my study, I also assessed how these different groups related to each other.

[3] I use Black and Brown and people or communities of color as an umbrella term to refer to people racialized and self-identifying as Black, African American, or of African descent, Indigenous, Latina/o/x, Asian, Pacific Islander, or mixed race who often share a common experience of being targeted by dominant white society.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How did activist groups reflect on their organizing to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland?
2. How did activists shift their framings in response to the political context? How did their framings inform their strategies for organizing?
3. What factors and circumstances facilitated or limited collaboration between teacher and community activists?

Answering these questions can build our understanding of the challenges and opportunities teacher and community activists must navigate in their fight against privatization and school closures. My findings can also inform the movement building efforts of educators and community leaders who are organizing not only to resist privatization and school closures, but also for the radical transformations needed to make our public education system more equitable and just. As more groups work in solidarity with each other, they will increase the movements' capacity to dismantle neoliberalism's hegemony in education.

Literature Review

This study engages three closely related bodies of literature which I discuss in turn below. The first is scholarship that illuminates the equity implications and politics of market oriented reforms. These studies have helped to fuel resistance to market policies that increase privatization and lead to school closures. I also draw from and build upon scholarship that examines community and teacher activism against neoliberal policies.

Neoliberal education reform: Market based solutions to educational inequities

Market based reforms that increase privatization in the public education sector are manifestations of neoliberalization in education (Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020). Neoliberalization is the process of restructuring that allowed racial capitalism to adapt after the social uprisings of the 1960s (Harvey, 2007), making neoliberalism "the defining social paradigm of the past 30 years" (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). Neoliberalism is a complex "ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere" (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). Neoliberal policies manifest in education via the advancement of market strategies such as school choice, mayoral control, and high-stakes testing, all of which undermine public education and exacerbate inequities in schooling (Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott & Holme, 2016). They rest on the assumption is that if public schools were run more like corporations, they would be more effective and efficient at increasing test scores. Aggarwal (2016) argues that school choice emerged after the *Brown* decision to "ensure the continuity of a tiered citizenship by structuring universal civil rights as individual private choices" (p. 130). Without doing anything to redistribute material resources or upend racial capitalism, neoliberal educational reforms allow for the illusion of equity by extending the "freedom to choose," though more in theory than in practice.

The equity implications of market reforms

There are a wide range of mechanisms through which neoliberal and market oriented policies exacerbate race and class based inequities in education (Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020; Ravitch, 2010; Scott & Holme, 2016). On a systems level, neoliberal reforms shift decision making power away from elected school boards, parents, and teachers and toward the state, appointed administrators, private corporations, and foundations (Lipman, 2011, 2015; Morel, 2018; Nygreen, 2016; Ravitch, 2010). School choice policies also increase racial segregation and the concentration of poverty (Scott, 2005). In these ways, market policies help to reproduce advantage and disadvantage (Roda, 2018; Roda & Wells, 2013; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020; Scott & Holme, 2016; White, 2020). These policies also undermine the ability of school communities to collectively address problems because unsatisfied parents who have the capacity to choose another school have less incentive to work with others to push for change (Ravitch, 2010).

School choice and charter school policies also leave students with the greatest social and academic needs behind in traditional public schools (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010; Smrekar, 2009). Making matters worse, the public school system loses funding when students move to charter schools, so traditional public schools have less resources though they have a concentration of students with the highest needs, including students living in deep poverty, learning English as an additional language, students recently arrived in the country, students in the foster care system, and students with special needs (Lipman, 2011; Pattillo, 2015).

Market reforms that measure, compare, and label students, their teachers, and schools as failing ignore the effects of poverty, disinvestment, and segregation that create gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes (Anyon, 2014). Rather than increase support for students with the greatest need by providing adequate funding for their schools, systems of accountability, choice, and competition lead to school closures that disproportionately hurt Latinx and Black students and Black teachers (Danley & Rubin, 2020; Journey for Justice Coalition, 2004; Lipman, 2011, 2015, 2017; Maton, 2018; White, 2020). Based on accumulated experiences across U.S. cities and research showing their patterns and consequences, educators and activists understand school closures as racialized state violence (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Green, 2017; Journey for Justice, 2014; Lipman, 2017; Syeed, 2019).

School closures exert a "slow violence" upon school communities even years before their closure through disinvestment and neglect (Aggarwal et al., 2012). Closing schools disrupts school communities and displaces students and teachers, with Black students and teachers being displaced at disproportionately higher rates (White, 2020). These policies also facilitate gentrification (Lipman, 2011). Though policy makers pursue school closures allegedly to redistribute money and improve student outcomes, research shows that they do neither (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Dowdall, 2011). Another reason given for school closures is that they are under enrolled and/or underperforming, yet studies show that closed schools are not necessarily those with the lowest enrollment or test scores in a district (Danley & Rubin, 2020). Instead, closed schools most often serve the highest number of poor Black and Latinx students, causing great distress to students and school communities (Buras, 2015; Ewing, 2018; Green, 2017; Journey for Justice, 2014; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Lipman, 2015).

The racial politics of market reforms and charter schools

Despite the evidence that market reforms deepen educational injustices, there remains a high degree of political contestation over choice policies and charter schools. Community activists and parents of color pursue choice policies because they have felt that their local public schools have failed to provide an equitable education (Pedroni, 2007; Rickford, 2016; Stulberg, 2008). Students of color have a history of facing discrimination, neglect, and even abuse in schools, whether public, charter, or private (Dyrness, 2011; Dumas, 2014, 2016; Grande, 2015; Nygreen, 2016; Sojoyner, 2013). When parents or community leaders pursue school choice and charter schools, they do so strategically to expand their potential for attaining a more humane and just education for their children (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011; Pedroni, 2007; Stulberg, 2008). Pedroni's (2007) study on African American voucher parents in Milwaukee demonstrates that while it may appear that parents, guardians, and community activists supporting voucher programs share some ideological commitments with neoliberal and neoconservative reformers, the reality is much more complicated. The deepening segregation and concentration of poverty in some urban schools, along with state disinvestment in public education, also lead families who live in segregated neighborhoods to seek alternatives to their neighborhood schools that are deeply segregated, severely underfunded, and dangerously over-burdened with the challenges of safely and effectively educating children within a socio-political context of extreme inequality, growing precariousness, and persisting racialized violence (Anyon, 2014; Noguera, 2016; Pattillo, 2015; Scott & Holme, 2016).

Further complicating the politics of market reforms are the racial politics of advocacy where policy elites and pro-market reformers deploy civil rights language to frame school choice as a mechanism for reducing racial and social inequities in schooling (Hernández, 2016; Scott, 2009, 2011, 2013). Though these reformers are often white and from elite backgrounds, they claim to represent the interests of targeted communities. Furthermore, they capitalize on the real challenges facing public school systems, especially urban schools serving higher numbers of poor students of color, to advance market oriented policies that only provide technocratic solutions to challenges that are deeply rooted in social policies that have historically disenfranchised and exploited communities of color (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011; Scott, 2011, 2013).

Though market reforms have a disproportionate impact on urban schools and schools serving mostly poor students and students of color (Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott, 2011, 2013), they have also altered the provision of public education in ways that impact almost all students, teachers, and communities (Ravitch, 2010). For example, Castillo (2020) illustrates how market reforms have created a neoliberal grammar of schooling such that even charter schools with ideologically progressive roots are compelled to prioritize test preparation and workforce readiness over other more social justice and egalitarian goals for public education (Castillo, 2020; Hernández, & Castillo, 2020).

Communities facing the negative impacts of market oriented reforms have organized to resist these policies (Ferman, 2017). "Amid the slow, swift, seemingly silent, and flexible restructuring of neoliberal education reform, communities are actively working to reclaim and transform their schools and communities" (Aggarwal et al., 2012, p.163). In these efforts, activists face a political context rife with complexity, contradictions, contentions, and fragmentation. Many of these challenges stem from historical inequities in education, while others are particular to the neoliberal policy context, or the new political grid (Henig, 2011).

Community organizing against neoliberal and market based reforms

This study builds upon an emerging body of work that attends to grassroots community resistance to privatization and neoliberal reforms (Buras, 2015; Ferman, 2017; Lipman, 2015; Scott, 2011, 2013; Scott & Fruchter, 2009; Scott & Holme, 2016; Syeed, 2019). Community organizing for education justice has been an effective tool for improving schools and addressing educational inequities, especially when organizing efforts prioritize relationship building, political education, and collaboration between many sectors of a community (Warren, 2005, 2010). Given the very limited capacity of underfunded urban schools to improve without community engagement, community organizers often pursue collaboration with educators and other stakeholders (Scott & Fruchter, 2009; Wells et al., 2010).

Yet, building collaboration across communities is a key challenge in community organizing (Warren, 2010; Wells et al., 2010). Differences across race, class, ethnicity, language, and other identities, whether real or perceived, often make it challenging to build trust among individuals and between different groups. Also, more affluent people or those with higher education or social privileged may have, or believe they have, more skills and capacity than racially and economically targeted people. This can make more privileged individuals helpful to community organizing efforts, but often they can create tension by dominating spaces in ways that are alienating to other people (Wells et al., 2010). Even within and between different racially and economically targeted groups, overcoming perceived or real differences also presents challenges to alliance building. And yet, working across difference is critical to community organizing.

Wells and colleagues argue that "building meaningful multiracial coalitions requires putting racial justice at the center of collaborative efforts" (p. 187, citing Applied Research Center website). Yet, Su (2007) and Welton and Freelon (2017) note the how community organizers, particular organizers of color, can feel like they must downplay racial issues to build unity within their groups and appeal to a wider audience by emphasizing the role of class over race.

Collaboration between groups is also challenging because, despite using similar language to describe their visions of educational justice, underlying cultural practices of different community organizations can lead to different visions of justice or strategies for organizing (Su, 2010). Activists and organizers can also develop differing power analysis, which in turn can lead to different priorities and strategies (Mediratta et al., 2009; Warren, 2010). Groups can also face tensions between pursuing the demands of their members and trying to negotiate common ground with other groups or people to build their base. Attempts to forge broader alliances can lead groups to focus less on building a base of local support (Warren, 2010; Wells et al., 2010). Case studies of community organizing show that efforts are bolstered when communities and teachers' union work in alliance, yet for many different reasons, these alliances continuously prove difficult to build and maintain (Henig, 2011; Perrillo, 2012; Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2010; Weiner, 2012).

Community organizing holds great potential to address educational inequities, but this potential is undermined by high levels of fragmentation and the challenges to collaboration across groups. Also, the current socio-political context favors more wealthy and powerful actors (Henig, 2011; Scott, 2009; Warren, 2010). Yet, organized resistance to the proliferation of market reforms has achieved at least partial victories in many cities (Ferman, 2017; Scott & Fruchter, 2009), and understanding how organizers navigate this context to effectively resist

market reforms can inform the efforts of educators and researchers committed to educational justice. These lessons may also aid efforts to build more sustained social movements that can transform not only education policy, but also broader social and economic policies of austerity and racial capitalism.

Teacher activists in the movement against neoliberal reforms

Another body of literature attends to how teachers, who are a key target of neoliberal policies, organize to resist market reforms. Neoliberalization depends on framing teachers as largely responsible for educational inequities, thus making them a principal target of market reforms that rely on standardized tests to assess teachers' effectiveness. When students' scores are below average, teachers are blamed for not doing their job. Neoliberalism also works by exploiting tensions based on race, class, and gender differences to undermine solidarity between teachers and the communities they serve. Finally, it seeks to subvert the power of teachers' unions, not only as public-sector unions but also as organizations made up largely of women who can be easily vilified for the audacity to strike (Shelton, 2017; Weiner, 2012). Weiner adds that teachers are a target of neoliberal reformers because teachers can develop critical thinking skills and can nurture aspirations that are antithetical to the desires of the capitalist class who want exploitable and expendable workers. Neoliberals have also sought to weaken teachers' unions, and labor unions in general, precisely because collective action and solidarity undermine the logics of individualism and competition that undergird market reforms. Unions also pose a threat to neoliberalism because they are relatively stable institutions with resources and capacity, albeit limited, that enable teachers and workers to fight neoliberalization (Brogan, 2014; Weiner, 2012).

Given the way they have been under attack in the neoliberal era, teachers have engaged in activism to demand the conditions they believe support teaching and learning. An emerging body of work has examined the role of activist teachers in resisting neoliberal and market oriented reforms. Picower (2012) defines teacher activists as those who identify as social justice educators and espouse commitments to racial and economic justice, but also engage in collective action outside of the classroom to demand social change. Teacher activists join community based or teacher based groups to develop critical knowledge and analysis and strategies for organizing to attain the changes they want. Teachers engage in work in a range of grassroots, community-based, and social movement groups, yet to date most studies of teacher activism have focused on teacher activist groups (TAGs) and teachers' unions (Picower, 2012; Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015; Stern & Brown, 2016; Weiner, 2012). Teacher activist groups are a type of social movement organization where teachers committed to social change come together to study and develop a shared analysis of the conditions they face, exchange resources, relieve isolation, and engage in collaborative problem-solving, skill-building, and resistance (Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015).

Teacher activist groups (TAGS) opposing marketization and privatization have become more common since the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS) invigorated mass resistance to growing economic disparities (Picower, 2013). Activist teachers understood the challenges they faced as educators as connected to the broader social and economic policies that enriched the 1% at the expense of average people. Picower detailed the key organizing strategies used by TAGS to fight neoliberal reforms, including "unmasking the neoliberal narrative of meritocracy and choice; diverting discontent with the economic crisis toward educational justice; amplifying voices through tools that allowed for democratic participation...; claiming coalition among

diverse groups...; and generating power by organizing for change" (p. 48). These teacher activists shared OWS's explicit critique of racial injustice and capitalism but focused their activism on fighting manifestation of neoliberalism through market oriented reforms and austerity policies in educational systems.

Studies of teacher activism have also explored the different problem framings and analyses that guide their efforts. Maton (2018) traced how activist teachers in Philadelphia shifted from framing their analysis of educational inequities through the lens of neoliberalism as an economic system, toward a framing that combined neoliberalism with structural racism. Brown and Stern (2018) also found that activist teachers tended to highlight racial and class-based analysis in their movements. They demonstrated how teachers organized through feminist principles yet hesitated to evoke a gender analysis as a lens through which to mobilize. The authors argued that "making feminist claims about labor and education might be useful for creating connections across precariously positioned communities" (p. 172).

In addition to forming or joining an activist group, teachers might focus their activism on reshaping teachers' unions towards social justice unionism (Bascia, 2016; Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Dyke & Muckian Bates, 2019; Maton, 2018; Weiner, 2012). For much of the past three decades, teachers' unions have been ineffective in stopping neoliberal reforms, and sometimes even complicit in the neoliberalization of public education (Brogan, 2014; Weiner, 2012). Yet, as Brogan (2014) notes, "municipal unions are uniquely situated to lead the fight against austerity urbanism and the crisis tendencies of contemporary capitalism" (p. 145). Since Chicago teachers formed the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) and successfully pushed for radical change within the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) in 2012, teachers across the nation have followed their path and applied the lessons they learned from CORE to transform their own unions. This has galvanized a mass movement of educators against neoliberal policies (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Brown & Stern, 2018; Maton, 2018; Stern & Brown, 2016). Teachers in Philadelphia, for example, believed that the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) offered the most strategic platform for advancing their efforts and worked to force the PFT to take a stronger stand to demand resources for the local public education system (Maton, 2018).

The expansion of teacher activism against neoliberal reforms and their efforts to move their unions towards social justice unionism sparked the wave of teacher strikes across U.S. cities since 2012. Scholarship on the recent teacher strikes points to the key role of rank and file teachers and radical organizers in pushing unions to oppose neoliberal policies of austerity and marketization (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Pham & Philip, 2020). As Blanc (2019) demonstrated in his account of the wave of strikes in 2018 and 2019, a core of radical rank and file teachers who were experienced organizers were critical to the relative success of these teacher uprisings. Through solidarity unionism, teachers connected the challenges facing public schools to other social and racial justice movements. They also gained the support of communities that had been alienated from organized teachers because they saw teachers' interests as being opposed to racial justice in education (Perrillo, 2012).

Scholars have drawn important lessons about organizing against neoliberal reforms from the efforts of teacher activism and union organizing. Studies demonstrate that the local and state context impacts how neoliberal policies take form in different places and how teachers react to and resist these reforms based on local and state history, politics, and conditions (Blanc, 2019; Ferman, 2017). Further, activist teachers are stronger when they "organize both inside and outside of their unions, and in the process, completely reinvent them" (Brogan, 2014, p. 161). Teachers must work in collaboration with working-class communities and build alliances with

other unions and community-based groups (Brogan, 2014, Weiner, 2012). Finally, their organizing is most effective when grounded in a social justice framework that centers women, Black and Brown communities, and the working poor, and connects issues that cut across different sectors (Blanc, 2019; Brown & Stern, 2018).

Most studies of teacher organizing against privatization, market reforms, and school closures focus on several key cities, including Chicago, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Newark, and New York City (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Brogan, 2014; Brown & Stern, 2018; Ferman, 2017; Lipman, 2015, 2017; Maton, 2018; Picower, 2013; Stern & Brown, 2016; Weiner, 2012) and most studies of the recent wave of strikes have focused on Chicago (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Brogan, 2014) or on republican dominated states (Blanc, 2019; Dyke & Muckian Bates, 2019; Karvelis, 2019). There remains much to learn about how activist teachers navigate different neoliberal terrains and gain public support for their demands as workers while simultaneously building the movement against neoliberal policies.

Though Oakland has been the site of intense marketization (Jani, 2017), few scholars have examined the vibrant and growing anti-privatization resistance movement in this city. This study of activism in Oakland expands our understanding of the politics of neoliberal reforms because an accumulation of studies across different contexts can illuminate the unique dynamics, as well as the patterns, in community and teacher activism against market reforms. By examining how teacher and community organizers in Oakland respond to the shifts in the political terrain through strategic framing of their resistance, how they reflect on their praxis, and the factors that support or undermine collaboration between them, I illuminate the potential for building a more robust and unified movement against neoliberalization. With this knowledge, education researchers and scholar activists can help to inform and work alongside grassroots movements, increasing their capacity to dismantle neoliberalism's hegemony in education policy and politics.

Dyke (2019) notes that "the proliferation of education uprisings across the nation—and globally—are intricately connected to the many other struggles that ordinary people face in their everyday lives under racial, colonialist, and heteropatriarchal capitalism" and represent not only efforts to reshape education, but also desires for "new ways of being in world" (p. 10). Neoliberal attacks on public education are reflective of the attempt by a capitalist class to prevent mass resistance to neoliberalization by lowering our expectations and our capacity to resist. Thus, struggles to defend public education have political implications that go beyond schools. The urgency of creating more democratic, just, and egalitarian schools and societies demands that educators and activists more effectively navigate the neoliberal terrain to build mass movements capable of dismantling neoliberal capitalism.

Theoretical Framework

Neoliberalism: Ideology, political economy, and policy context

This study examines community and teacher activism against neoliberal and market based reforms through a theoretical lens that attends to how neoliberalism shapes not only the policies and reforms being contested, but perhaps more importantly, the very institutional context and cultural environment on which these battles are fought. More than a set of policy priorities that infuse marketization and privatization into the private sector, neoliberalism also shapes the ideological, cultural, and discursive terrain of our current social and political order in ways that create opportunities and pose challenges to resistance movements (De Lissovoy, 2014; Jani, 2017; Lipman, 2011; Nygreen, 2016; Scott, 2011, 2013).

Racial Capitalism as Neoliberal multiculturalism

Neoliberalism is a stage in capitalism marked by shifts in the racialized social structure and in the role of the state in facilitating accumulation of wealth through dispossession (Harvey, 2007; Jani, 2017; Lipman, 2011; Nygreen, 2016). In the U.S. and throughout most of the globe, capitalism is racial because racialization, or the process of defining difference and ascribing varying degrees of humanity and worth, is formative to the ability to target entire groups of people for exploitation not only through coercion, but also through ideology and consent (Gilmore, 2002; Harvey, 2007). Neoliberalization facilitates the accumulation of wealth and power for the capitalist class and preserves privileges for those racialized as white through the dispossession of poor people and communities of color[4] (Buras, 2015; Harvey, 2007; Jani, 2017; Lipman, 2011, 2015, 2017). Some of its key features are austerity policies, capitalizing on crises, and redistributing wealth upwards.

Since the 1980s, neoliberal discourse and practice have increasingly influenced public policy in the U.S. and globally, leading to disinvestment from the public sector, privatization of public services, deregulation of financial markets, the undermining of labor unions (including teacher unions), and the weakening of the social safety net (Harvey, 2007; Lipman, 2011). In neoliberal discourse, democracy is understood in terms of consumerism and the freedom to choose, rather than democratic engagement, governance, or goals for education (Nygreen, 2016). As explained by Nygreen, "the ascendance of neoliberal discourse in education has marginalized other ways of talking about or envisioning educational justice" and neoliberal reforms are "increasingly taken for granted as normal, natural, and inevitable," while alternative paradigms of educational justice are marginalized (Nygreen, 2016).

Neoliberal reforms, ideology, and discourse help to preserve and extend racial despotism and white supremacy even as it presumes to extend universal civil rights and eliminate structural racism (Aggarwal, 2016; Buras, 2015; Mayorga et al., 2020; Melamed, 2006). Melamed (2006) offers the concept of *neoliberal multiculturalism* to capture how racial capitalism has shifted understandings of the intersections of racial oppression and capitalist accumulation. She argues that neoliberalism meshes new categories of privilege with conventional racial categories, muddying our ability to see how race continues to serve capitalist exploitation. Though race supposedly no longer determines opportunities or outcomes in a society organized by free market

[4] I use the terms "communities of color," "people of color" and "Black and Brown," understanding their limitations and potential harm. Yet, I agree with those scholar activists who find it more inclusive, and aligned with the tradition of social movement building, than the term BIPOC. See: https://www.newsweek.com/bipoc-isnt-doing-what-you-think-its-doing-opinion-1582494

ideology and policies, racism continues to operate in new, more obscure ways by appropriating and abstracting racial references (Mayorga et al., 2020).

In education, neoliberal multiculturalism helps to shape the racial politics of advocacy for market reforms, further complicating the terrain of struggle on which battles over education justice play out (Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott, 2009, 2011, 2013). According to Scott, "the racial politics of educational advocacy defy easy characterizations" (2011, p. 582). As she explains,

> although many researchers have documented opposition movements to market reforms, as yet, this research has not been aggregated. As such, popular depictions of engagement in these reforms have instead tended to focus on the participation of advocates and parents of color in school choice advocacy, thereby obscuring the financial and ideological backbone of the choice movement, which comes primarily from conservative foundations and think tanks (Chi, 2008; R. Cohen, 2007), and neglecting the issues many parents, teachers, and students care about in their efforts to realize more equitable schooling.

A network of wealthy philanthropists capitalizes on desires of targeted populations for equal educational opportunities by co-opting the language of civil rights and racial justice and channeling millions of dollars to promote community demands for market reforms (Hernández, 2016; Jani, 2017; Scott, 2011, 2013). They use moments of crises and civil unrest to promote the idea that the entire system of public education needs to be restructured along the lines of free market ideology (Buras, 2007; Jani, 2017; Scott, 2011, 2013). Through these mechanisms, elite neoliberal reformers have been able to create an optical illusion that obscures the racial and class project of neoliberalization. As Scott (2011) describes, neoliberals create

> a context in which critics of market-based reforms are relegated to being supporters of an indefensible status quo. The result of this rendering is that market advocates, many of whom are White and come from elite backgrounds, are seen as legitimate, the "real reformers," even when their efforts contribute to racially stratified schooling and are silent on other matters of inequality and poverty. And those who raise questions about the directions and effects of their reforms are seen as obstructionist, in the pockets of the teachers unions, as anti–civil rights, and in support of maintaining a racial achievement gap—after all, they are bucking common sense. This dynamic marginalizes many community-based organizations that have long understood and based their advocacy on the notion that social policy is interconnected with educational inequalities and require a rethinking and reprioritizing of the state role in creating or remediating such conditions, particularly in relation to communities of color. (p. 594).

Scott adds that these dynamics occur alongside a shift in the courts toward a position that ameliorating racial discrimination requires that policies cease taking race into account. In other words, the courts have officially adopted a colorblind position to addressing social inequities.

Though Melamed's theorization of multicultural neoliberalism focuses on how racialization has shifted over time to maintain racial capitalism and how it operates in the neoliberal context, her work helps to illuminate how class and gender dynamics are similarly obscured in the neoliberal context. Like racialization, gender and class continue to operate as

meaningful categories of difference that help to determine who has influence, privilege, and power. Intersections of race, class, and gender continue to shape educational experiences and outcomes, as well as the politics of movements for educational and social justice (Brown & Stern, 2018).

Yet, neoliberal multiculturalism shapes a politics of representation in which women, poor people, and people of color are specifically recruited to serve as spokespersons for neoliberal reforms. Having people of color, women, and those from poor backgrounds in significant leadership roles creates an optics that lends credibility to the notion that market reforms promote equal opportunity, racial justice, diversity, and inclusion, even while these policies have a disproportionate and negative impact on poor communities of color (Lipman, 2017; Scott, 2013) and on teachers, the majority of whom are women (Brown & Stern, 2018). By virtue of being representatives of traditionally marginalized groups, these spokespersons are largely effective at giving cover to neoliberals who are less interested in social and racial justice than they are in reproducing racial and class privilege and profiting from privatizing public education.

Understanding and navigating this terrain requires an intersectional framework for examining how capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy work in tandem (Love, 2019). As Love articulates, intersectionality is "a necessary analytic tool to explain the complexities and the realities of discrimination and of power or the lack thereof, and how they intersect with identities" (p. 3). Love also argues that more than just an analytic tool, intersectionality is an approach that can facilitate inclusivity and alliance building in movements for social change. An intersectional framework can help activists more effectively analyze and navigate the complicated and volatile political terrain shaped by neoliberal optics (Hernández, 2016; Scott, 2011, 2013).

The new political grid

Henig (2011) describes how neoliberalism has reshaped the politics and policies of education through broader structural shifts to form a *new political grid*. Globalization, explains Henig, "acts as both a cause and accelerator" of the shifts that make up this new political grid, including changes in the population and the economy that impact jobs and wages. This new political context "poses serious challenges to grassroots organizing strategies" (p. 77) because these shifts complicate the politics of school reform. Demographic shifts can make it challenging to organize a grassroots movement if people feel they have little in common. For example, Latina/o/x immigrants and Black residents may see their interests as competing, segregation can lead some to dismiss the struggles of urban or majority Black and Brown schools, and language barriers and lack of citizenship status can make it hard to organize immigrant families. There are also competing interests within and across groups based on social class, language, citizenship status, ability, religion, and other axes of identity by which people define themselves and their interests. Access to technology and the internet may pose additional challenges to collective organizing for school change.

Henig further describes how the new political grid has altered our system of federalism in school governance, with the state and federal governments becoming more powerful actors in local education systems. These altered systems of governance allow policymakers and elite actors to impose unpopular market reforms like school closures while making it more challenging for communities to influence education policy (Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, 2015; Danley & Rubin, 2020; Morel, 2018). Examples of these undemocratic governance mechanisms include mayoral and state control of school districts, replacing elected school boards

with appointed ones (Morel, 2018), and appointing quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (QUANGO) that are endowed with the power to manage districts without accountability or public oversight (Epstein, K., 2019). Growing a campaign to engage in broader change or to work on multiple levels of government requires not only a lot of coordination, but also resources which are especially scarce for truly grassroots organizing groups who do not have the backing of nonprofit organizations (Warren, 2010).

With very little financial resources and limited capacity, and in this complex socio-political landscape, community organizers and activist teachers have been mounting a growing movement against privatization, often forming coalitions to take on this fight at local, state, national, and even global levels (Ferman, 2017; Syeed, 2019). As evidenced in the recent wave of teacher strikes, activist teachers are critical to building this movement (Blanc, 2019).

Social movements concepts: Praxis, Framing & Opportunity Structure, and Coalitions

Nygreen (2017) argues that scholars committed to educational justice must attempt to understand the messy and complex social world in which people struggle to improve schooling for marginalized communities. She adds, "this labor is necessary to both understand, and intervene in, processes of neoliberal hegemony and resistance" (Nygreen, 2017, p. 58). Heeding Nygreen's call, I examine teacher and community organizing through a framework that combines theorizations of the neoliberal context with theories and concepts from social movement literature to explore how community and teacher activists, as social movement leaders, navigate the contradictions, challenges, and complexities of organizing in the current socio-political context.

From the vast body of work on social movements, I specifically draw on four concepts that are helpful for examining the challenges and opportunities that activists face in mounting a social movement against privatization and school closures in Oakland: praxis, framing, political opportunity structure, and collaboration/alliances. I briefly discuss each concept in turn and explain how they are useful constructs for examining the organizing that makes up this case study.

Praxis

Praxis is a dialogical and iterative cycle of theorizing, taking action, and reflecting that guides collective action, making it an inherent process of social movements (Allman, 2001; Freire, 2018; Montaño et al., 2002). Allman (2001) explains that praxis is a dialectical relationship between action and reflection, "two parts that are necessary to each other because they could not exist as they currently do without each other" (p. 52). She further explains that there is a distinction to be made between "uncritical reproductive praxis" and "critical revolutionary praxis," the latter referring to how activists "question critically the existing relations and conditions and actively seek to transform or abolish them and to create relations and conditions that will lead to a better future for all human beings" (p. 167-168). Thus, it is through critical praxis that activists apply and refine their analysis of social issues and the interventions they make to attempt to resolve issues and improve social conditions (Freire, 1990, p. 68).

Attending to praxis helps to illuminate teacher and community leaders' understanding of the market reforms they are contesting, which inform their analysis, theory of change, and strategies for collective action. Insights into how Oakland's activist teachers reflected on their praxis after a largely successful strike can provide valuable lessons for scholars and activists

about the challenges of navigating the complex neoliberal terrain where austerity and race, class, and gender oppression intersect (Mayorga et al., 2020; Stern & Brown, 2016).

Framing and opportunity structure

Next, using the concepts of framing and political opportunity structure can help scholars understand how activists respond to the opportunities and constraints of the neoliberal policy context (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Framing is an active and dynamic process of constructing meaning that entails agency, contention, and evolution (Benford & Snow, 2000). Framing works like a frame around a picture, focusing attention on what activists feel is important and away from what they deem less important or extraneous. Working together through an interactive process, organizers develop collective action frames to explain their actions and motivate others to join their efforts. Through these frames, activists explain a range of problems in relatively narrow terms, highlighting some issues and ignoring others. The process of assembling these packages is historically specific, though there are patterns across movements (Johnston & Noakes, 2005, p.7).

Framing has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Here, I use an expansive definition of framing that refers to the discursive arguments articulated by activists to capture their understanding of the issues in ways that are educative and compelling to a targeted audience (Steinberg,1998; Syeed, 2019; Tarlau, 2014). While more narrow conceptualizations of framing can refer to slogans or soundbites used to amplify a movements' message and incite action, a broader conceptualization of framing attends to activists' discursive arguments as pedagogical as well as organizing and mobilizing tools (Steinberg, 1998; Tarlau, 2014). Framings are constantly evolving as activists' gain more knowledge and experience. In fact, the very process of framing, much like writing, is a process for meaning making, not just delivering a pre-determined analysis.

In the framing process, activists form and use different types of frames, including *diagnostic frames* that attempt to define the problem or issue and who is to blame, *prognostic frames* that suggest a course of action for addressing the issue, and *motivational frames* that serve as a call to action (Benford & Snow, 2000). As Syeed (2019) demonstrated, activists also articulate frames to counter the rhetoric and dominant narratives used by school district leaders to push school closures.

Frames are effective to the degree that they resonate with the targeted audiences that organizers aim to mobilize (Benford & Snow, 2000). Frame resonance, in turn, is shaped by many factors, including: how much the frame draws from symbols or ideas that appear natural and familiar; consistency and logical connections between the diagnosis, prognosis, and tactics, and the core values that are appealed to; credibility and commensurability with the way the target audience understands the world and their culture, narratives, myths, and beliefs; and the centrality or level of importance of the content and values encapsulated in the frame to the lives of the target audiences. If collective action frames are too abstract and distant from the lives and experiences of the targets, they are less likely to resonate (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Also central to frame resonance are factors related to the activists promoting the frames. For frames to resonate with targeted audiences, those promoting the frames must be sufficiently credible, based on their credentials and experience, and persuasive. Charismatic movement leaders and organizers are likely to be more credible and persuasive, whereas those lacking in charisma, despite their credentials or experiences, may be less convincing (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Following the literature on social movement frames, I examine not only how activists articulate their framings of the issues, but also the interaction between their framings and the political context (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Social movement literature on framing processes notes the dialectical interaction between movement frames and opportunities or challenges in the political structure. Examining movement framings can bring into focus the intersections and interactions of micro, meso, and macro levels of political action. Through framing, activists speak to and attempt to expand the opportunities in the political terrain. But the interaction is both ways, with activists creating and expanding opportunities through their framings (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005).

Frames are "continuously being constituted, contested, reproduced, transformed, and/or replaced during the course of social movement activity" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 628), not in a structural or cultural vacuum, but shaped by the socio-cultural context. According to Schneider (2005), framing links macro-level factors, captured by the concept of political opportunity structure, with micro-level mobilization processes that shed light on how movements grow and evolve over time. Examining how grassroots groups respond to a constantly shifting political terrain through their framings helps to illuminate the complex dynamics of neoliberalization and resistance.

Collaboration, coalitions, and alliances in social movements

Social movements are built through alliances that allow community based activist groups to expand their capacity, reach, and legitimacy through expanded participation, all of which can help grown and sustain organizing efforts (Wells et al., 2010). Social movement scholars explore the complex nature of collective action and the dynamics of diverse individuals and groups working toward a goal to address a discreet social problem or a combination of social issues. Within this broad body of work, scholars have paid particular attention to coalitions in social movements as an important means of achieving a movement's goal. In a review of studies that examined collaboration in collective action, McCammon and Moon (2015) outline how coalitions and alliances are defined, noting that they can range along a continuum from less intensity and formality between groups to more intense, sustained, and formal collaboration. For example, groups may come together to plan and execute a single event, or they may work together over years to coordinate campaigns and actions. At times, more permanent alliances may create an umbrella organizational structure to coordinate coalition work that might even have its own staff and funding sources. Another common feature of coalitions and alliances is their diversity, as they often include members from different backgrounds and identities along race, ethnicity, language, citizenship status, class, political affiliation, religion, and other social positions. They may also include a wide range of bodies or entities, sometimes including state, corporate, or philanthropic actors or media outlets.

McCammon and Moon (2015) also discuss what scholars have found to be the central factors or circumstances that facilitate or impede collaboration through coalitions and alliances. They found four factors were critical: shared beliefs and identities, social ties among activists, opportunities and threats in the broader context, and organizational resources. Not surprisingly, scholars find that groups sharing ideological orientations, similar identities, or common interests and goals are more likely to form alliances. While forming coalitions across these lines can bolster movement efforts, this can be challenging to accomplish. For example, Roth (2010) found that a culture of "organizing one's own" discouraged coalitions across racial and ethnic lines, even where there were common goals or beliefs. Yet, social ties in the form of prior

relationships with peers in other groups or who are members of different groups can serve as an important link that can facilitate collaboration. These "bridge builders" or "brokers" can also help groups work through differences.

McCammon and Moon's review also highlighted the role of political opportunities and threats in facilitating or limiting collaboration, though the direction and power of these influences remain unclear. Similarly, the availability of resources can at times support alliances, while other times it may be the scarcity of resources that lead groups to work together. Less is known about which resources matter for coalition formation.

Wells and colleagues contribute to our understanding of how collaboration and alliances matter for educational justice movements. They note that groups forming alliances "coalesce in ways that are unique to time, place, target issues, resources, and relationships" (2010, p. 174). They also discuss how alliances allow organizations to share expertise, increase each group's visibility, and expand their capacity. Wells and colleagues argue that alliances can be effective when they help people understand the systemic roots of inequities, diminish isolation, and increase the participation and leadership of those most impacted by inequities. Yet, alliances also take a lot of effort to build and manage (Warren, 2010). Individual activists and groups can have different ideas, styles, analysis, or strategies, as well as distinct experiences that make working across groups challenging (Su, 2009). Dynamics related to race and other axes of identity require groups to make an effort to build relationships and generate trust among group members and across groups, yet group leaders do not always have the capacity to prioritize these processes. These challenges often make working together in alliances or coalitions difficult to sustain (Wells et al., 2010).

These four social movement concepts provide a useful lens for assessing the ability of different activists to form and sustain collaborations across groups, and especially collaboration between activist teachers and grassroots, community based groups. This framework allows me to investigate the challenges and opportunities that activists face as they navigate the new political grid of the neoliberal context.

Methodology and Study Design

My methodology is rooted in critical studies of education that attend to the contradictions of public education as a state apparatus that reproduces systems of domination and oppression, and yet also offers a site for contestation and liberation (Freire, 2018; Weiner, 2012). As a scholar-activist in the tradition of radical feminists of color committed to liberation and decolonization struggles (Collins, 1986; Levins Morales, 2019; Smith, 2013), I engage in research as member of a targeted community to increase our collective power to demand the just and humanizing education we deserve (Grande, 2015; Love, 2019). I focus on the agentic and creative efforts of everyday people, community activists, and teachers fighting for educational and social justice to bring attention to their efforts and inspire others to take action.

As feminists of color have argued, collecting and sharing stories of resistance helps to fight the hopelessness and despair that targeted communities can experience as a result of multiple systems of oppression that lead to premature death (Gilmore, 2009; Levins Morales, 2019). These stories, passed over generations, are a type of medicine for the generational trauma caused by colonization, enslavement, and continuing dispossession (Levins Morales, 2019). Moreover, capturing the nuances and complexity of educational and social justice movements can offer other activists and future generations important lessons about resistance and survivance

(Tuck, 2009). Indeed, Stern and Brown (2016) note how highlighting the collectivism of teachers and communities organizing for social change is itself a refusal of neoliberal capitalism.

Because I am a mother of school age children, I am also committed to examining the issues that directly impact the communities and schools that I and my children are a part of. Through this study, I hoped to gain insights that might bolster the movement building of educators, parents, students, and community leaders to transform education in ways that truly support all children and families and expand the liberatory potential of public education.

My attention to the efforts of activists and organizers is not to minimize the structural determinants of inequities in society and schools (Anyon, 2014). Rather, attending to these efforts through a social movement lens allows us to see the dialectical nature of oppression and resistance. While studies of power and structures can render invisible or insignificant resistance from the grassroots, I aim to nurture the critical hope that has historically fueled and sustained social justice movements, even against the greatest of odds. The power of elites and their effectiveness at devising schemes to profit at the expense of many poor families and communities of color can be overwhelming. I believe it is critical to highlight people's resistance to destructive policies and the alternative visions of justice put forth by movements in order to nurture the hope and creativity that targeted communities need to fight for their right to exist and to thrive. In an interview shortly before her death, longtime social justice activist Grace Lee Boggs argued that we more creativity and imagination in movements for justice and liberation. Activists and organizers combine critical analysis of systemic oppression with critical hope, creativity, and imagination to bring about needed change, knowing that even partial victories can shift the terrain of struggle, ease suffering, and undermine the most destructive formd of oppression and exploitation.

Data and Methods

I conducted a case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2007) on community and teacher organizing against privatization and school closures in Oakland, focusing on the period between 2012, when the Oakland district closed five neighborhood schools and sparked a grassroots movement against these closures, through the end of 2020. After the teacher strike in February 2019, many teachers and community activists channeled the momentum of the strike into the school board elections of November 2020.

I conducted in depth, semi-structured interviews with fourteen community organizers (6 women and 8 men; 11 identify as Black, Latinx, or biracial, and 3 are white) and eight teacher activists (6 women and 2 men; 7 identify as Black, Latinx, or biracial, and 1 is white) whom I selected purposefully because they each have been leaders in five of the key groups organizing against market reforms in Oakland since 2012 through the end of 2020. Most interviews lasted two hours and most participants were interviewed twice. In the interviews, I followed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) based on my research questions, the literature I engage, and my theoretical framework. The protocol included informal, open-ended, and more formulated questions. I use pseudonyms for all participants but use the real name of the elected official, as well as the true names of activist groups and coalitions. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent, and these recordings were then transcribed through a transcription service.

Over the three year study, I also collected data as an observer, and often participant, in events related to organizing against school closures and privatization in Oakland. These events included meetings of activist groups and coalitions, rallies and marches, picket lines during the

strike, school board meetings, and district sponsored community engagement events. To further understand the broader field of the movement to stop marketization and privatization of public education, I attended conferences where movement activists connected privatization to racial and social justice issues. These included, for example, the annual conference hosted by the Network for Public Education and the Kerner at 50 Conference hosted by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society. I wrote memos based on my fieldnotes from these events which I also coded and analyzed. I also collected and analyzed movement documents such as event flyers, educational materials, and social media posts.

To analyze the data, I used an iterative process that combined elements of narrative and thematic analysis (Glesne, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Initially, I coded data inductively to capture emerging themes, and in second and third rounds of coding, I used findings from relevant literature to finalize my coding. Coding of interview data was done first in Nvivo and later rounds were conducted by hand, while coding of fieldnotes and memos were done entirely by hand. To deepen my analysis, I continuously wrote memos to articulate answers to my research questions that emerged from my data.

Validity in Qualitative Research

To ensure quality in this study, I shared emerging memos with a small group of colleagues in my graduate research groups. I also continued conversations with activists who were interviewed and other community members to help me think through other possible themes, issues, or interpretations of my data. I had also conducted a pilot study that used oral history methods to delve deep into the educational experiences and desires of parents of color in Oakland. Though my case study focuses on a small sector of Oakland activists, I actively recruited participants from groups that did not work together or who had differing perspectives. I also triangulated the data by comparing interviews with what participants said in public meetings or events, documents they created, and social media posts.

The Oakland Context

Given its long-standing tradition of radical politics and social movements for racial and economic justice and self-determination, Oakland offers the opportunity to examine the politics more deeply around neoliberal and market reforms. Oakland is a city that is recognized for its legacy of activism guided by radical critiques of systemic and historic oppression, imperialism, and racial capitalism (Epstein, K. K., 2012; Self, 2005). The city also recognized for the institutions communities have built to celebrate their cultural heritages as well as their historical struggles for justice. These institutions include independent schools, cultural centers, bookstores, churches, media, community based organizations, and cultural/political/educational events such as the annual Malcolm X Jazz and Life is Living festivals. They also include food justice organizations that work with communities to increase access to fresh produce and healthy foods (McClintock, 2011).

Oakland's population, estimated to be over 400,000 residents (U.S. Census, 2015), is the most ethnically diverse in the U.S. Economic disparities and residential segregation are blatant. The flatlands below the 580 freeway are the poorer sections of town and residents tend to be Latino, Black, Asians, and other people of color, while residents of the Oakland hills tend to be much wealthier and whiter, although there are also more affluent people of color. The city's racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic diversity can inform divergent visions of justice and

theories of change, particularly with regards to education policy. These may at times breed demands for greater choice in school options, greater control over educational institutions, and/or new and different models of education and schooling.

For many years, Oakland had a reputation for being dangerous due largely to its high murder rate, but crime tended to be concentrated in the three poorest areas of the city. Although the crime rate had been decreasing steadily (Johnson, 2016), many people, the perfect storm created by the global pandemic, soaring cost of living, and intense precarity has led to growing violence in the city (Neilson, 2021). Black and Brown youth living in parts of the city with high concentrations of poverty suffer from gang violence and sexual violence. Human trafficking and police violence and corruption are just two of Oakland's largest threats to safety and community health. This cycle of violence is a result of decades of disinvestment, deindustrialization, and white and middle-class out-migration, which in turn have led to higher rates of unemployment and poverty (McClintock, 2011; Rhomberg, 2004; Self, 2005).

Oakland is a city in rapid transition, with rents sometimes doubling within one year before the COVID pandemic led to a temporary drop in rents (Levin, 2015; HIP, 2020). Many of Oakland's poor residents are displaced by the dramatic spike in the cost of living, especially many of the city's Black residents (HIP, 2020). The rapid influx of wealthier people moving from San Francisco and other areas, usually white professionals, created tensions in Oakland as these new residents disrupt the traditions of longer standing communities, as seen in the battles around drumming and live or amplified music at Lake Merritt (Levin, 2015).

Oakland schools are highly unequal across the city. There are vast disparities in resources and the educational experiences of students, teachers, and families. A full half of the city's 35,565 public school students speak a language other than English at home, and 30% are designated as English Language Learners (OUSD, 2021b). Over 70% qualify for free or reduced price lunch, a commonly used metric to gauge a school's poverty rate. Oakland's public schools have experienced similar demographic shifts to the city at large, with the Black proportion of students declining from 48% in 2000 to 29% in 2016 (OUSD, 2016) and down to 21.4% in 2021 (OUSD, 2021b). During the same time, the Latino student body has grown to 48% from 29%, and many of these are unaccompanied minors fleeing violence and poverty in Central America and Mexico. Other newcomer students come as immigrants or refugees from regions in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, and many come escaping war. The total number of newcomers in 2021 was almost 3,000

In Oakland, education has long been a central site of local struggles for economic and racial and residents and families have organized to demand changes from the school system justice (Dyrness, 2011; Epstein, K. K., 2012; Ginwright, 2004; Self, 2005; Trujillo et al., 2014). For example, parents and community members advocated for curricular reforms, including a shift in the language instruction for Black students, and whole school reforms towards more culturally sustaining pedagogy for Black students (Epstein, K. K., 2012; Ginwright, 2004). There have also been efforts to target supports for those most impacted by unequal schooling (Epstein, K. K., 2012; Ginwright, 2004). Yet, racial and class divisions often limited the achievements of these and other reform efforts previous efforts. While Ginwright's (2004) study of one major reform effort at McClymonds High School highlighted the role of class differences within the Black leadership of the reform effort, Kitty Kelly Epstein's (2012) account of reform efforts in Oakland highlights the role of resistance and mistrust from some in Oakland towards the Black leadership in the public school district. Thus, differences in class, race, and political ideologies

combined to undermine grassroots community efforts to enact their educational visions and desires for a more equitable and just school system.

This tradition includes organizing to create independent schools and special programs to educate youth of color with culturally sustaining pedagogies (Epstein, K. K., 2012; Ginwright, 2004; Stulberg, 2007). There is also a strong tradition of white liberalism that maintains racial segregation and white privilege, especially in schooling (Epstein, K. K., 2012), further creating demand for alternative schools for Black and Brown youth (Stulberg, 2007). Thus, despite the negative impact of market reforms on Black residents, the city's chapter of the NAACP contested the national leadership's call for a moratorium on charter schools (Rizga, 2016). Oakland's NAACP chapter was not alone in taking a stand against the moratorium, and many other urban areas face these complicated politics at the intersection of racial inequities in schooling and the disproportionately negative impact of market reforms on low income students of color in urban schools (Ferman, 2017; Lipman, 2011).

As one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in the U.S., Oakland is undergoing many of the same challenges as other major urban areas in the country. Rapid gentrification and the neoliberalization of education have dramatically altered the city and its population. In particular, there has been an explosion of charter schools and public school closures, alongside a steep decline in the number of Black students and residents (Epstein, K. , 2018; OUSD, 2016, 2021a,b). As in other cities facing these challenges, teacher activists have worked with community organizers to mount a movement against the social and educational policies that facilitate these changes. This movement has shifted the political terrain by raising critical consciousness about privatization and increasing public scrutiny over school board policies.

Organizing against neoliberal and market oriented reforms in Oakland has focused on combating privatization, the expansion of the charter school sector, and stopping school closures. Some local activists might pinpoint the origin of this movement at least to 1988, when the state first attempted to impose a state loan on the district and with it, a state takeover. This power move was successfully stopped through the political maneuverings of a school board that found a way to avoid the loan (Epstein, K. K., 2012). As activist scholar Kitty Kelly Epstein noted, local residents and educators saw this attempted takeover as a racist and undemocratic attack on Oakland's elected leaders, most of whom were Black. In 2003, the school board was unable to stop another attempt to impose a loan and state takeover. The state appointed an administrator with total discretion over the school district's budget and policy making and empowered the Fiscal Control and Management Team (FCMAT) to audit the district. FCMAT, an independent body created in 1991 by the state, was tasked with monitoring the district's financial progress. During the takeover, the district began to pursue school closures while at the same time increasing the number of charter schools in the district. The district now has one third of its students attending a charter school.

In the aftermath of the state takeover, the Oakland school district was destabilized. When the state returned partial control to the local school board in 2009, they left the district with a larger debt. The state entrusted an appointed trustee to oversee the district and empowered this trustee to veto decisions made by the elected school board. The district has also suffered from high turnover of superintendents, the imposition of austerity measures through budget cuts, and the outside influence of venture philanthropists who pour money into electing and training school board members and training superintendents who support privatization, charter schools, and school closures (Epstein, K. K., 2012).

As in other cities across the country, the Occupy Movement helped to intensify community and teacher resistance to these neoliberal policies and the role of elites in reshaping public education. When in 2012 the Oakland school district decided to close five schools, community activists engaged in Occupy lent support to the founders of OPEN (Oakland Public Education Network), a grassroots group that organized to stop the school closures. Since then, other community and teacher activist groups have formed to expose and derail policies aimed at weakening the teachers' union and increasing privatization, including Parents United, Classroom Struggle, SOSD (the Schools Oakland Students Deserve), and the J4OS (Justice for Oakland Students) coalition. After years of organizing against marketization and privatization, these groups helped to create awareness about the negative impact of these policies on Oakland students, teachers, and communities.

When, in 2019 the district decided to close Roots Middle School, a campus that served entirely low income Black and Brown students, they created a perfect opportunity for teacher and community activists to join forces in a teacher strike. The February 2019 Oakland teacher strike called not only for higher wages and smaller class sizes, but also demanded an end to privatization and school closures. Yet after the strike, the district continued to purse school closures, deciding to close Kaiser elementary. This decision led to the formation of another teacher and community group, Oakland Not for Sale, that organized to stop school closures and privatization. After the strike, these activist groups turned their attention to regaining control over their district and joined a new coalition, Action 2020, to organize together to flip the school board in the 2020 elections.

Overview of three articles

I have written three distinct journal articles to capture the central findings from this case study of teacher and community activism in Oakland to stop privatization and school closures. Each article addresses one of my research questions and focuses on one aspect of the movement in Oakland to illuminate particular challenges to and opportunities for the movement to expand and win.

The research questions that each article address are:

1. How did activist groups reflect on their organizing to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland?
2. How did activists shift their framings in response to the political context? How did their framings inform their strategies for organizing?
3. What factors and circumstances facilitated or limited collaboration between teacher and community activists?

Article 1: Teacher activists' praxis in the movement against privatization and school closures in Oakland

The first article explores activist teachers' reflections on their praxis as leaders in the movement to stop privatization and school closures in the context of the recent wave of teacher strikes across the U.S. These strikes presented a historic opportunity for teacher activists to expand their organizing against market reforms by tethering the fight against neoliberal reforms to demands for better funding and higher wages. The strikes were indicative of a rising tide of

teacher activism for fair wages and improved working conditions and of a resurgence in labor union organizing within a context of extreme racial and economic inequality and precarity under austerity capitalism (Stern & Brown, 2016). The strikes were especially notable because they often connected with community organizing against the racialized impact of market oriented education reforms that increase privatization and lead to school closures (Lipman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020). In a dramatic shift from previous decades, these strikes also helped to change public perception about teachers and schools. Despite historical tensions between communities of color and teachers, and especially teachers unions (Shelton, 2017; Weiner, 2012), the wave of teacher strikes demonstrated unity between teachers and the communities they serve in resisting the imposition of market reforms, representing the "most profound and deepest attack on the basic assumptions of the contemporary governing order" (Corey Robin cited in Blanc, 2019, p.9).

As in other strikes, activist teachers in Oakland, California helped to pave the way for bridging teachers' strike demands with community resistance to neoliberal education policies. This article explores the praxis of Oakland's activist teachers as leaders in the movement to stop privatization and school closures to better understand the challenges of organizing against market reforms in the neoliberal context. Building upon scholarship on teacher activism against neoliberal policies, I employed a case study approach to investigate how Oakland's activist teachers connected their organizing against privatization and school closures with the February 2019 teacher strike, simultaneously advancing both efforts and expanding an understanding of the racialized impact of these neoliberal policies.

The article draws from the in-depth interviews with teacher leaders who helped to connect the 2019 Oakland teacher strike to the fight against neoliberal education policies. In the article, I highlight two strategic decisions that advanced their movement by bridging the fight against privatization and school closures with the teachers' strike. Activist teachers decided to focus on building power within union and centering a racial justice analysis and strategy. Yet, these decisions also presented new challenges to building on their momentum after the strike. The tensions related to these strategic decisions illustrate how issues of capacity and race, class, and gender dynamics interact with austerity and neoliberal multiculturalism to complicate organizing for educational justice. I argue that the findings illustrate the critical role of outside independent activist groups in the movement. These groups are part of an outside strategy that provide an important space for teachers to engage in critical reflections that can help them to develop an intersectional praxis to better navigate the complex neoliberal terrain.

Article 2: Framing the unframeable: How activists articulate the need to stop privatization and school closures

This article examines how activist groups organizing to stop privatization and school closures framed their efforts in response to the political context. I found that activist groups responded to the complex and evolving political context with more nuanced framings to counter the rhetoric of pro-market reformers and resonate with broader sectors of city residents. Specifically, activists shifted the way they framed their critiques of charter schools, acknowledged the need to transform public schools, and articulated with more specificity the racialized impact of market reforms on Black students and families. Activists' framings evolved as they gained experience and shifted the political terrain through organizing over many years, illuminating the dialectical and developmental dimensions of framing. With more nuanced

framings, activists gained momentum and found common ground among disparate groups, yet they also continued to struggle with framing in clear and concise messages how race, space, and profit motive drive privatization and school closures.

In the article, I discuss how activists' changing articulations of their movement underscore the dialectical and developmental dimensions of framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). The dialectical process involved in framing was evident in how activists responded to changes in the political terrain, and many of those shifts in the landscape had resulted from years of activism. As social movement scholars have shown, framing processes and political opportunity structure inform and influence each other in a recursive and dynamic process (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Schneider, 2005). I also discuss the challenge that activists face in framing issues that are complex and layered in ways that resonate with the broadest audience possible. I end the article by discussing some of the implications for educational justice movements.

Article 3: Politics, tensions, and possibilities in teacher and community movements to stop privatization and school closures

In the third article, I examine the factors and circumstances that have facilitated or limited collaboration between teacher and community activists in movements to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland. I begin by discussing how during the past three decades, neoliberal reformers have exploited political tensions related to class and race to drive a schism between teachers and the communities they served (Shelton, 2017; Weiner, 2012). Yet, in the waves of teacher strikes since 2012, there was a renewed solidarity between teachers and urban communities who had grown tired of suffering the consequences of neoliberal austerity (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014). Clearly, racial and class based tensions still existed, yet there were conditions that seemed to nurture this solidarity.

Next, I explore the tensions and challenges of joining forces as well as the opportunities created in the current policy context. I show how race, racism, and racial politics are pervasive issues that undermined collaboration in Oakland's movement to stop school closures and privatization. Issues related to race permeated the interpersonal dynamics within groups, collaboration across groups, and the broader political terrain. In addition to racial dynamics and politics, another challenge to having more collaboration between activist teachers and community groups was the fragmentation within groups. A final challenge activists faced that undermined their efforts to have greater collaboration across activist teachers and community based groups was the limited capacity of both individuals and groups.

Among the many opportunities presented by the shifting political context, this study illuminated three factors that facilitated greater teacher and community collaboration in the movement to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland. These were: a shared sense of disposability and outrage across teachers, parents, students, and community members; convergence around a racial justice analysis; and growing alignment around the demand for accountability from local officials with greater coordination amongst groups to elect anti-privatization candidates.

I conclude the article by arguing that though there are persisting challenges to building alliances across teacher and community activist groups, there also opportunities and conditions in the neoliberal terrain that facilitate collaboration between these groups. Given the ways that neoliberalization and marketization have intensified educational and social inequities, and the

power that elite reformers have had to reshape public education, it is imperative that grassroots movements have enough solidarity across stakeholders to demand an end to these policies.

Chapter 2

Teacher activists' praxis in the movement against privatization and school closures in Oakland

Abstract
In 2019, Oakland teachers joined the wave of teacher strikes across U.S. cities sparked by teacher activism against neoliberal reforms that cut funding to public schools, increased privatization, and led to school closures. As in other cities, a group of progressive rank-and-file teachers working toward transformative change moved their union toward social movement unionism, and in the process, garnered the support of communities of color that had been alienated from organized teachers. Drawing on in-depth interviews with teacher activists involved in the 2019 Oakland teacher strike, I demonstrate how strategic decisions to focus on gaining power within the union and to center the leadership of progressive teachers of color, especially women of color, helped to build public support for both the strike and the broader movement against privatization, yet also led them to focus on an inside strategy that may undermine their more transformative goals. I argue that as activist teachers gain power within their unions, activist groups that function independently from the union provide a critical outside space where teachers can develop an intersectional and transformative praxis that helps them better strategize against the racial politics of advocacy in the neoliberal context.

Key words
Teacher activists, teacher strikes, neoliberalism, privatization, racial politics, inside/outside strategies, transformative dispositions, social justice unionism, teacher activist groups

Introduction

The wave of teacher strikes across the U.S. since 2012 has presented a historic opportunity for teacher activists to expand their organizing against market reforms by tethering the fight against neoliberal reforms to demands for better funding and higher wages. These strikes were indicative of a rising tide of teacher activism for fair wages and improved working conditions and of a resurgence in labor union organizing within a context of extreme racial and economic inequality and precarity under austerity capitalism (Stern & Brown, 2016). The recent strikes were especially notable because they often connected with community organizing against the racialized impact of market-oriented education reforms that increase privatization and lead to school closures (Lipman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020). In a dramatic shift following decades of tensions between communities of color and school teachers, and especially teachers unions (Shelton, 2017; Weiner, 2012), these strikes also helped to change public perception about teachers and schools. The wave of teacher strikes demonstrated unity between teachers and the communities they serve in resisting the imposition of market reforms, representing the "most

profound and deepest attack on the basic assumptions of the contemporary governing order" (Corey Robin cited in Blanc, 2019, p.9).

As in other cities, a group of radical rank and file activist teachers in Oakland, California were instrumental to this moment (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Blanc, 2019). Having activist dispositions informed by critical analyses of the root causes of educational inequities, these teachers had organized over many years to stop neoliberal and market-oriented policies that destabilized the public school system, increased privatization, and led to school closures. While some activist teachers joined community groups, others formed teacher activist groups (TAGs) (Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015) to develop a praxis for transformative and externally oriented activism aimed at dismantling neoliberal capitalism as the root cause of growing educational and social inequities (Mayorga et al., 2020; Mills et al., 2019). By the time of the 2019 strike, many of these activist teachers had moved to leadership positions within the union, helping to ensure that teachers' demands for increased wages and funding for public schools were tied to critiques of how neoliberal reforms had starved the public schools of resources, increased privatization, and led to waves of school closures that displaced the city's most vulnerable and targeted students.

After the teacher strike in February 2019, many teachers and community activists sought to channel the momentum of the strike into the school board elections that would take place in 2020. Seeking to understand how activist teachers understood the challenges of organizing against market reforms within a complicated terrain where racial politics of advocacy collide with the realities of race and class based educational inequities (Scott 2011, 2013), I asked key activist teachers to reflect on their praxis just a few months after the strike. How did they help the movement against privatization and school closures gain traction when for years pro-market and pro-charter reformers had successfully campaigned for school choice as a vehicle for increasing racial justice in education? In the wake of the strike, how did they reflect on what had been achieved, and if anything, what opportunities may have been missed? How did they think about building on the momentum after the strike to continue fighting for an end to the neoliberalization of public education?

This article traces how one group of activist teachers organizing through a leftist TAG initially pursued both inside and outside strategies for building their movement, seeking to transform their union toward social justice unionism while also working from the outside to build grassroots power. Their reflections revealed how strategic decisions to focus on gaining power within the union and to center the leadership of progressive teachers of color, especially women of color, were critical for gaining broad community support for both the strike and the movement against privatization and school closures. Yet, these decisions also destabilized one leftist activist group that had nurtured a transformative activism aimed at disrupting neoliberalization in education. By not maintaining this independent activist group as a site from which to develop an intersectional and transformative praxis and organizing strategy, activist teachers weakened their own ability to develop a strategy for navigating the racial politics within a new context where the union leadership were progressive teachers of color.

Based on their critical reflections, I argue that teacher activist groups that serve as independent organizing spaces can support activist teachers in developing a strategy for navigating racial politics in the neoliberal context and allowing them to organize for the most radical and broad based demands possible. As hinted at in this study, it is possible that without an independent organizing space in which to develop an outside strategy based on critical study

and reflection, activist teachers could be trapped by the optics of racial politics and begin to move away from their transformative and externally focused goals of dismantling neoliberalism.

As noted by Dyke and Muckian Bates (2019), "the proliferation of education uprisings across the nation—and globally—are intricately connected to the many other struggles that ordinary people face in their everyday lives under racial, colonialist, and heteropatriarchal capitalism" and represent not only efforts to reshape education, but also desires for "new ways of being in world" (p. 10). Because neoliberal attacks on public education are reflective of the attempt by a capitalist class to prevent mass resistance to neoliberalization by lowering our expectations and our capacity to resist, struggles to defend public education have political implications that go beyond schools. The urgency of creating more democratic, just, and egalitarian schools and societies demands that educators and activists learn to more effectively navigate the neoliberal terrain in order to build mass movements capable of dismantling neoliberal capitalism.

Neoliberalization in education and the racial politics of advocacy

Neoliberalism, an "ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere" (Lipman, 2011, p. 6), has become "the defining social paradigm of the past 30 years" (p. 6). Neoliberalization is the restructuring process of racial capitalism that facilitates the accumulation of wealth and power for the capitalist class and preserves privileges for those racialized as white through the dispossession of poor people and communities of color (Harvey, 2007; Jani, 2017; Lipman, 2011, 2017). In education, neoliberalization occurs through a variety of strategies that infuse market principles into the school system (Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott & Holme, 2016). As Brogan (2014) notes, "the neoliberal reform project is committed to dismantling public school systems and privatizing them through an expansion of charter schools and vouchers, a focus on standardized testing, the construction of scripted curriculum, a reorganization of school governance along corporate models, and the institution of draconian disciplinary policies aimed largely at working-class African-American and Latino students" (p. 148). While all of public education is under siege from neoliberalization, it is poor and working-class students of color who are most harmed by market reforms (Katz et al., 2013; Mayorga et al., 2020).

Neoliberal policies and market reforms do little to mitigate the effects of poverty, racial segregation, and economic policies that negatively impact teaching and learning. Rather than increase support for students who need it most, systems of accountability, choice, and competition lead to school closures that disproportionately hurt Latinx and Black students and Black teachers (Lipman, 2017; Maton, 2018). Although policy makers claim that school closures save money and increase resources to underperforming schools and students, research shows they do neither (Syeed, 2019). Based on accumulated experiences across U.S. cities and research showing their patterns and consequences, many educators and activists understand school closures as racialized state violence (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Lipman, 2017; Syeed, 2019). The injustices and suffering caused by massive waves of school closures has sparked a growing movement of educators, parents, students, and community advocates across the nation who seek an end to neoliberalization and demand reinvestment in public education and transformation of their public schools (Ferman, 2017). Activist teachers committed to transformative educational and social justice have often been central to these movements (Ashby & Bruno, 2016).

In organizing against privatization and school closures, activist teachers must navigate complex and contentious political terrain shaped by the racial politics of advocacy (Scott, 2011, 2013). Race, racism, and racial politics are entangled in neoliberalization and in grassroots resistance movements (Hernández, 2016; Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott, 2011, 2013). Historically, people of color have been denied access to safe, nurturing, and quality schools, and many Black and Brown children continue to experience discrimination, neglect, and abuse in schools (Dumas, 2014; Grande, 2015; Valenzuela, 2015). Struggling to find the best educational opportunities for their children, many families of color support school choice and charter schools (Pedroni, 2007; Scott, 2013; Stulberg, 2008).

A key strategy of neoliberal reformers has been to capitalize on this desire for better schools by promoting school choice as a mechanism for increasing educational opportunities and improving schools through competition (Scott, 2009, 2011, 2013). An advocacy network of wealthy philanthropists and reformers, including Teach for America alumni and billionaires like the Gates and Walton families, co-opt the language of civil rights and channel millions of dollars to promote community demands for market reforms (Jani, 2017; Scott, 2011, 2013). These neoliberal reformers also place people of color in significant leadership roles within their advocacy networks and in policymaking positions in order to sell the idea that school choice is a racial justice issue, even though these policies have a disproportionate and negative impact on poor communities of color (Hernández, 2016; Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott, 2013).

The racial politics of advocacy that advance marketization and privatization are facilitated by what Melamed describes as *neoliberal multiculturalism* (Melamed, 2006). Melamed argues that neoliberalism meshes new categories of privilege with conventional racial categories, muddying our ability to see how race continues to serve capitalist exploitation. Though race supposedly no longer determines opportunities or outcomes in a society organized by free market ideology and policies, racism continues to operate in new, more obscure ways by appropriating and abstracting racial references (Hernández, 2016; Scott, 2011, 2013). Neoliberal multiculturalism enables the type of racial politics of representation where the optics of having people of color advocate for market reforms in the name of racial equity and justice provide a cover for neoliberal reforms, even while these policies have a disproportionate and negative impact on poor communities of color (Lipman, 2017; Scott, 2013) and on teachers, the majority of whom are women (Brown & Stern, 2018). Those who critique market oriented reforms, especially school choice, can be dismissed as racist or as opposed to expanding educational opportunities to students of color.

Though Melamed's theorization of multicultural neoliberalism focuses on how racialization has shifted over time to maintain racial capitalism and how it operates in the neoliberal context, her work helps to illuminate how class and gender dynamics are similarly obscured in the neoliberal context. Like racialization, gender and class continue to operate as meaningful categories of difference that help to determine who has influence, privilege, and power. Intersections of race, class, and gender continue to shape educational experiences and outcomes, as well as the politics of movements for educational and social justice (Brown & Stern, 2018).

Teacher activists in the movement against neoliberal reforms

An important mechanism through which neoliberalism threatens public education and the right to quality education for all students is by attacking teachers and exploiting tensions based on race, class, and gender differences to subvert the power of teachers' unions, not only as

public-sector unions but also as organizations made up largely of women who can be easily vilified for the audacity to strike (Shelton, 2017; Weiner, 2012). Teachers are particularly threatening to the neoliberal project because they can shape people's minds and develop critical thinking skills that are not desirable for capitalists seeking exploitable and expendable workers. Teachers' unions, like all organized labor, have been targets of neoliberalization because collective action and solidarity undermine the logics of individualism and competition that undergird neoliberal capitalism. Unions also pose a threat to neoliberalism because they are relatively stable institutions with resources and institutional capacity that enable teachers and workers to fight neoliberalization (Brogan, 2014; Weiner, 2012).

As key targets of neoliberal policies, teachers have engaged in collective efforts to combat these attacks on public education. Using Mills et al.'s framework, teachers organizing for an end to neoliberalization, privatization, and school closures are engaging primarily in transformative and externally focused activism because they are working toward a fully and equitably funded and democratically controlled public education system. As opposed to affirmative activism that aims to ameliorate the effects of inequality, transformative activism is rooted in a "commitment to engaging with structures, policies, and practices that generate injustice and subordination outside the domain of schooling" (Mills et al., 2019, p. 625). Teachers engage in transformative activism through a range of grassroots, community-based, and social movement groups, though most of the literature focuses on teacher activist groups (TAGs) and teachers' unions (Picower, 2012; Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015; Stern & Brown, 2016; Weiner, 2012). Teacher activist groups are a type of social movement organization where like-minded teachers come together to learn, channel resources, sustain passions, relieve isolation, and engage in problem-solving, skill-building, and resistance (Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015).

Teacher activist groups expanded their organizing against neoliberal reforms after the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS) invigorated mass resistance to growing economic disparities (Picower, 2013). Activist teachers connected broader social and economic policies that enriched the 1% at the expense of average people to market reforms in education that undermined democratic control over public schools and diminished resources for public education. Picower detailed the key organizing strategies used by organized teachers to fight neoliberal reforms, including "unmasking the neoliberal narrative of meritocracy and choice; diverting discontent with the economic crisis toward educational justice; amplifying voices through tools that allowed for democratic participation...; claiming coalition among diverse groups...; and generating power by organizing for change" (p. 48). These teacher activists shared OWS's explicit critique of racial injustice and capitalism but expanded the movement to focus on how these manifested through market reforms in educational systems.

Oftentimes, teachers focus their activism on reshaping teachers' unions towards social justice unionism (Bascia, 2016; Dyke & Muckian Bates, 2019; Maton, 2018; Weiner, 2012). Teachers' unions have been at the forefront of efforts to defend public education as a public good, but they have also been ineffective in stopping neoliberal reforms, and sometimes even complicit in the neoliberalization of public education (Brogan, 2014; Weiner, 2012). Yet, as Brogan (2014) notes, "municipal unions are uniquely situated to lead the fight against austerity urbanism and the crisis tendencies of contemporary capitalism" (p. 145). Teachers in Philadelphia, for example, believed that the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) offered the most strategic platform for advancing their efforts and worked to force the PFT to take a stronger stand to demand resources for the local public education system (Maton, 2018).

Following the 2012 success of CORE (Caucus of Rank and File Educators), Chicago's radical caucus, in galvanizing a mass movement against neoliberal policies, teachers in other cities attempted to apply the lessons they learned to fight neoliberal policies in their own districts and states (Blanc, 2019; Weiner, 2012).

The expansion of teacher activism against neoliberal reforms and their efforts to move their unions towards social justice unionism sparked teacher strikes across U.S. cities. Scholarship on the wave of teacher strikes since 2012 points to the centrality of rank and file teachers in pushing their unions toward more radical action against neoliberal policies (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Pham & Philip, 2020). As Blanc (2019) demonstrated in his account of the wave of strikes in 2018 and 2019, a core of radical rank and file teachers with organizing experience was critical to the relative success of these teacher uprisings. Through solidarity unionism, teachers connected the challenges facing public schools to other social and racial justice movements. They also gained the support of communities that had been alienated from organized teachers because they saw teachers' interests as being opposed to racial justice in education (Perrillo, 2012).

Methods and Methodological Issues

This article is based on data collected as part of a case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2007) of teacher and community organizing against privatization and school closures in Oakland during the period from 2012 (when the district first pursued massive school closures and sparked a grassroots movement against these policies), to the end of 2019. While drawing primarily from in-depth interviews with eight activist teachers, my analysis of their reflections is also informed by two years of fieldwork that included participant observations of activism during this period, interviews with community and parent organizers, and analysis of social media posts and other materials created by activists.

These eight activist teachers (6 women and 2 men; 7 identify as Black, Latinx, or biracial, and 1 as white) had been actively working against privatization and school closures during this period and took on leadership roles during the strike. All were key members of the most active community and teacher groups organizing this movement. All but one of these teachers moved to key leadership roles within the union just before or soon after the 2019 strike. I elected to interview teachers across different groups in order to reflect on lessons for the broader movement.

Teacher activism in Oakland

Oakland, one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in the U.S., is undergoing many of the same challenges as other major urban areas in the country and has long been a test site for neoliberalization and market-oriented policies. Rapid gentrification and the neoliberalization of education have dramatically altered the city and its population. In particular, there has been an explosion of charter schools and public school closures, alongside a steep decline in the number of Black students and residents (Epstein, K., 2018; OUSD, 2021a,b). As in other cities facing these challenges, teacher activists have worked with community organizers to mount a movement against the social and educational policies that facilitate these changes. This movement has shifted the political terrain by raising critical consciousness about privatization and increasing public scrutiny over school board policies.

Organizing for educational justice in Oakland has always been contentious, partly due to its racial and class politics. The city has a strong tradition of progressive and even radical politics

rooted in critiques of systemic racial oppression, imperialism, and racial capitalism (Epstein, K. K., 2012). This tradition includes organizing to create independent schools and special programs to educate youth of color with culturally sustaining pedagogies (Epstein, K. K., 2012; Ginwright, 2004; Stulberg, 2007). There is also a strong tradition of white liberalism that maintains racial segregation and white privilege, especially in schooling (Epstein, K. K., 2012), further creating demand for alternative schools for Black and Brown youth (Stulberg, 2007). Thus, despite the negative impact of market reforms on Black residents, the city's chapter of the NAACP contested the national leadership's call for a moratorium on charter schools (Rizga, 2016). Oakland's NAACP chapter was not alone in taking a stand against the moratorium, and many other urban areas face these complicated politics at the intersection of racial inequities in schooling and the disproportionately negative impact of market reforms on low income students of color in urban schools (Ferman, 2017; Lipman, 2011).

Within this political context, the expansion of the movement to end privatization and school closures, along with widespread public support for the Oakland teachers strike, demonstrates an important shift in the political terrain and points to the possibility of upending neoliberalization in education. To build on this moment, activists committed to educational justice can learn from the reflections of activist teachers in order to better navigate this complex political field and expand the movement against privatization and school closures.

Focusing on building power within their teachers' union

Four of the teachers interviewed had worked together for years before the strike in a leftist group of mostly teachers, though the group also included some parents and community activists. This group had come together after the 2011 Occupy Movement and the 2012 Oakland school closures. Rooted in the politics of Occupy, these teachers approached market reforms in education as part of a neoliberal capitalist project of the elite class. Initially formed as a group outside of the union, founding members sought to organize teachers, parents, and community activists as well as influence the teachers' union, the Oakland Education Association (OEA). After getting a few of their members and allies on the union's executive board, they eventually decided to channel their limited capacity into gaining more control over the OEA by building alliances with other caucuses to elect a new slate of progressive teachers of color.

Amada, a Latina mother and Oakland school teacher, explained that the group had originally wanted to be a force outside of the OEA that organized teachers, parents, and students in order to "build a movement of people fighting for social justice…and try to like change the direction of OEA as much as we could." In time, she explained,

> it became clear that we didn't have the capacity to organize parents to have a full-fledged parent organization. We knew that we were being much more successful in getting folks on the Executive Board of OEA and, so it was a definite decision. Do we want to be actually part of the leadership, or do we want to be on the outside being the kind of people who are like, standing up to leadership?

Amada and several of her colleagues explained that because their group was small, they felt the need to channel their limited capacity into areas where they experienced most success-transforming the union. Following the lead of activist teachers in other cities, Oakland's teachers felt that transforming their union from within was a powerful and necessary step to dismantle neoliberal reforms (Maton, 2018).

After winning an election in which a new, more progressive leadership was elected in the union, five of the teachers I interviewed moved to organizing within the union, taking leadership

roles in committees such as the newly formed Race and Privatization committee. Two others continued to be active as site reps and as teacher activists in community organizing groups. Amada explained why she did not wish to continue working with an outside caucus to push against the union leadership:

> That's not what I want to be about…I want to be about helping, I want to be in there doing the work, because they're doing phenomenal work and I want to be part of it. So I don't want to be on the outside looking at it. It feels better because we're not like trying to strategize how to make things happen. We're like doing it, you know? So I feel really, really good about it.

For Amada and some of her colleagues, it made practical and political sense to organize through the union, particularly in light of the challenges they had faced as a small activist group with limited resources and capacity to build a base of Oakland families and community members. With the new leadership they had helped to elect, Amada and other activist teachers felt they were in a better position to transform education in Oakland and shift policies away from market reforms and toward more sustainable schools. Especially after the strike, Amada and many of her colleagues felt it was imperative to channel their limited capacity into building more authentic relationships with families in every school community.

Yet, one activist teacher who had also organized with the leftist activist group raised concerns that these strategic decisions might undercut efforts to transform Oakland schools. Rob, a white man who had decades of experience as both a rank and file member and a leader within the OEA, insisted on the continued need for a left caucus of rank and file teachers to push the union toward more radical action. He believed that a caucus of radical teachers was necessary in order to guard against union leadership taking conservative positions, which in his experience, was sure to happen for a variety of reasons. In his words, "there's fear of failure, a very strong fear of failure…And so you can't operate on that!...The strategy needs to be developed by the rank and file." In his analysis, ensuring that the new leadership would live up to its progressive ideals required ongoing mobilization by rank and file teachers because union leaders tended to become more cautious and conservative, particularly when they were less experienced leaders who would be susceptible to the influence of the CTA (California Teachers Association).

Though Rob raised a critical point, his colleagues Amada and Alex had several reasons for preferring to focus on building power within the union. First, as mothers, they personally struggled with the immense challenges they faced trying to balance teaching, mothering, and organizing. While all the activist teachers who were also mothers of school age children raised concerns about being able to sustain a balance between these competing roles, Rob, who had grown children and was primarily working as a substitute teacher, did not. Second, the women, who were all full time classroom teachers, also noted how much the growing inequality and poverty had undermined the ability of parents to be more engaged in their children's schools. These teachers were especially attuned to the challenges that poor and working class families in Oakland experienced in light of the rising cost of living alongside the growing precarity of workers. These concerns over their own and their students' families' capacity led the women teachers to be strategic about focusing their energies into organizing through the union now that they had attained leadership positions and could be strategic about using the union's resources to organize teachers and families at each school site.

Neoliberal policies created a context of precarity for teachers and families and expanded the demands on teachers, particularly in urban areas where many families struggle with housing

and food insecurity and a host of other issues stemming from austerity capitalism (Brown & Stern, 2018; Stern & Brown, 2016). These constraints impacted teachers who were also mothers differently than they impacted Rob, a mostly retired teacher who had already raised his children. Much like the teachers in Brown and Stern's (2018) study, Oakland's activist teachers did not explicitly articulate a gendered or intersectional framework for understanding their differing priorities, yet my analysis of their reflections reveals a clear connection between their identities and how they thought about the priorities that should guide their organizing after the strike.

The decision to channel limited resources and capacity into building power within the union and organizing from inside helped activist teachers organize a widely supported strike and advanced the movement against privatization and school closures. Yet, as I discuss below, it also meant that they gave up the ability to organize from the outside as a caucus of leftist teachers who would push for radical change by continuing to demand an end to neoliberal policies in education.

Centering the leadership of teachers of color

Oakland's activist teachers made a strategic decision to elect and elevate more teachers of color to leadership roles within the union and in the movement against privatization. This decision was part of a strategic shift to framing neoliberal policies and market reforms as racial justice issues and elevating the racial inequities that result from market reforms, a strategy that is now common in teacher and community movements against neoliberalization (Maton, 2018; Mayorga et al., 2020).

These teachers supported Keith Brown for OEA president, as well as a slate of other progressive teachers of color. They understood that electing Keith, a Black male teacher with deep roots in Oakland and connections to labor and community groups, would bolster their efforts to highlight the racial justice implications of neoliberal reforms. Keith understood this as well, as he explained:

> OEA was one of the first unions to really talk about Eli Broad, the Broad Foundation and ...their role in training administrators and bringing in a neoliberal reform model to education. But I think one of the things was, for different reasons, that narrative was coming, usually, from white male teachers and it was like, as far as whenever OEA talked about privatization, it was a space dominated by white males. And then actually, I think that that was used against us a lot. So, you know, that always had been a challenge for OEA.

Keith's acknowledgment of the racial politics of advocacy for neoliberal reforms (Scott, 2011, 2013) was echoed by many other teachers and community organizers I interviewed. These activists recognized that pro-market reformers and some families of color have argued that it is primarily white teachers and more affluent people who oppose school choice and charter schools, at the expense of poor families of color who lack access to high quality schools. This has allowed market reforms to proliferate and has created a paradox for educators and community organizers who believe that market reforms exacerbate racial inequities. As in other cities (Maton, 2018), Oakland teachers have thus felt it necessary to stress how communities of color, and especially Black students, families, and teachers, are negatively impacted by market reforms that lead to privatization and school closures.

The teacher activists, including Keith and the new OEA leadership, believed that it was important not only to frame the movement against privatization and school closures as a racial justice issue, but also to have teachers of color helping to promote this counter narrative. As social movement scholars point out, collective action frames used by movement leaders must resonate with the people they seek to mobilize (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). The more a movement's frames resonate with the target audience, the more likely the movement is to achieve at least some of its goals. One of the key factors that determine the degree to which frames resonate with a targeted audience is the credibility of those articulating the movement's frames, and credibility, in turn, is shaped by many factors, including the expertise and status of those articulating the frames.

Activist teachers understood this, and as part of the new union leadership, they intentionally centered the leadership of teachers of color, especially women of color. Women teachers of color, especially those who were also mothers, were credible advocates of the framing that connected neoliberal reforms and the racialized impact of school closures. This racial justice framing resonated with other Oakland families in new ways and helped to generate broad support for the teachers' strike and for the movement against market reforms.

Yet, the decision to elevate the leadership of teachers of color also created new challenges. As Alex explained, it was much easier to push the union from the outside when the leadership consisted of white liberals who had done little to challenge market reforms.

> Once you have this leadership that isn't perfect but they're better and they are doing a lot of good work for all of their flaws, then what does it mean to be a left caucus? To what extent are you outwardly critiquing them and pushing them? To what extent are you trying to work with them and move them? I still feel confused. I don't quite know what it means to be a left caucus to someone like Keith. It's a more complex thing to figure out.

Alex expressed a concern shared by other teachers about how critiques of the union leadership could easily be used to undermine the gains they had achieved. Alex explained that she and other teachers of color in their caucus believed that outwardly critiquing this leadership of color could be problematic because Black and Brown leaders already faced greater scrutiny and criticism. Not only would criticism undermine the leaders they had fought so hard to get into power, but also, they could be labeled racist if they did not seem to fully support the new leaders of color. Their reflections are illustrative of another dimension to the racial politics of advocacy in the neoliberal terrain. While the movement had managed to shift the terrain such that neoliberal and pro-market reformers could no longer dismiss critiques of reforms like charter schools as being only a concern for white teachers and other whites who wanted to limit the educational choices of parents of color, the neoliberal terrain still shaped how the optics of critiquing Black and Brown leaders could be perceived and manipulated to undermine transformative change.

When building power from within means losing an outside strategy for movement building

When Oakland's activist teachers in the movement to stop privatization and school closures made strategic decisions to focus on gaining power within their union and to center the leadership of progressive teachers of color, they helped to build public support for both the strike and the broader movement against privatization. Prioritizing these strategies meant that these activist teachers channeled their energies primarily into an inside strategy that would allow them to use their union's resources and institutional capacity to organize teachers and families school

site by school site. With these strategic decisions, activist teachers were doing their best to navigate the racial politics of advocacy (Scott, 2011, 2013) and the challenges of austerity and precarity in the neoliberal context (Melamed, 2006; Stern & Brown, 2016). Yet, these decisions also created new challenges in the reconfigured political landscape that could undermine their ability to build on their momentum after the strike through an outside strategy for building a mass movement for the radical transformation of education in Oakland and beyond.

The tensions these activist teachers faced in making these strategic decisions played a large part in the eventual dissolution of the leftist activist group through which some of them had been organizing since the Occupy movement. As already discussed, some of the women teachers felt they had limited capacity to organize outside of the union once they took on leadership roles within the union. They sought more of a balance between their activism and their roles as full-time teachers and mothers. Months after the strike, these teachers explained that they had yet to fully recover from the intensity of preparing for and then leading the strike.

An equally important consideration that led some teachers to focus on organizing within the union was how the decision to center leadership by teachers of color, as part of a broader shift to a racial justice framing of the movement against privatization and school closures, created tensions within their activist group. Reflecting on the factors that led to the group disbanding, Alex said,

> I think that it was about two things and I think some of us think it was about one thing some of us think it was about the other thing. I think it was about differences in how much we center race in terms of our politics. Like maybe you could say like, whether you see class is more central or race is more central...But there were also differences around how we characterized the strike and how critical we were of leadership, and how much we saw it as intentional, like malice or manipulation versus a lack of capacity and inexperience.

For Alex and other women of color in the group, these tensions were interconnected and underscored a schism within their group based on divergent understandings of race and class and their intersections. They found it challenging to continue organizing with colleagues who did not agree with the strategic move toward a racial justice framework for their movement, despite the fact that across U.S. cities, many other activist groups and unions were moving toward this framework as well (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2017; Maton, 2018; Mayorga et al., 2020). As tensions continued, Amada and Alex felt less desire to continue meeting as an outside group of leftist teachers more drawn to spending their limited time and energy working primarily within the union and found it more strategic to spend their limited time and energy working primarily within the union.

However, Alex also expressed having mixed feelings about no longer meeting with the activist group because she believed it played an important role in pushing for radical change in the district. For her, the leftist group had provided "a political compass that I think we need in order to be strong leftists within the union and to have reflection space." Without this activist group, Alex felt she had lost a space where leftist teachers could determine how best to navigate working with the new union leadership while ensuring that they continued to demand radical change. Several months after the strike, the union had yet to provide a formal space for collective reflections, and the activist teachers who had been organizing against privatization and school closures lacked a space for critically reflecting, not only on the strike, but also on their broader efforts to stop privatization, school closures, and other market reforms.

Alex's reflections underscore the challenges of navigating the neoliberal terrain, where teachers and families have limited resources and capacity, and the racial politics of advocacy are complex and messy. In this context, some activist teachers felt compelled to focus on organizing within their union after they had managed to gain power and shift their union toward social justice unionism. In part out, their decision was based on their need to be strategic with their own limited capacity, but they were also reacting to the challenges of organizing with people who have divergent perspectives on how race and class figure into the politics of neoliberal reforms and are unable to agree on a unified strategy for propelling their movement forward. Yet, studies of teacher activism and social justice unionism underscore the importance of maintaining an outside/inside strategy where rank and file teachers can push for radical change and where teachers can build alliances with community groups and families (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Karvelis, 2019; Weiner, 2012). By focusing their activism on organizing within the union and letting their outside activist group dissolve, teachers may have inadvertently undermined their ability to build on their momentum after the strike and continue mounting an effective movement for ending neoliberalism and privatization in education.

Conclusion

Teacher activists in Oakland made strategic decisions as social movement leaders (Johnston & Noakes, 2005) that both increased community support for teachers' demands and expanded the movement against privatization and school closures. By taking power in their union and elevating the leadership of teachers of color within the union, these teachers helped to connect privatization and school closures to the austerity policies that diminished funding for public schools and led them to strike. Through these strategies, activist teachers helped to shift the terrain of struggle and were able to grow support for their movement. After being on the defensive for so many years, teacher and community activists were able to shift the narrative that to critique school choice and charter schools was to be in opposition to racial justice. This took power away from the neoliberal reformers who had taken control of the racial politics of advocacy by deploying civil rights and racial justice rhetoric to build consent for their privatizing schemes.

Yet, the activist teachers faced new challenges to building on the momentum after the strike. When one teacher and community activist group dissolved, Oakland's activist teachers lost a space where they could continue to develop their praxis by engaging in critical reflections with other leftist teachers and organizers. I argue that as activist teachers gain power within their unions, activist groups that function independently from the union provide a critical outside space where teachers can develop an intersectional and transformative praxis that helps them better strategize against the optics of a racial politics of advocacy in the neoliberal context and maintain fidelity to their transformative goals. An outside space, independent of the union, has several critical affordances for building an effective movement against privatization. First, it can be a place for rank and file teachers to protect against the more conservative influences acting on the union leadership, including that state and national teachers' unions that can pull even progressive leaders toward a political center. There are also more conservative teachers within the union membership that leadership will attempt to accommodate through compromising and more radical positions. Second, organizing spaces outside of the union can facilitate the types of teacher and community collaboration that is necessary to sustaining a grassroots and radical movement that remains focused on the need for radical social transformation and not merely education reforms. Working in collaboration with community organizers also helps give activist

teachers legitimacy for their social justice activism and works against them being painted as self-interested or divorced from the communities they serve. Finally, an outside space can support ongoing critical reflection and learning for activist teachers to develop a radical and intersectional praxis that can adapt as the political terrain shifts with new leadership, new gains, and new reforms.

Rather than allowing different positions on race and class to splinter their activist group, teachers can help to mount a more powerful and effective movement for educational justice if activists with different perspectives struggle together to develop an intersectional analysis and approach to organizing. An intersectional praxis would attend to how race, class, gender, as well as other axes of difference and power, interact in the processes that reproduce inequities in education and in organizing (Brown & Stern, 2018; Love, 2019). In this way, they will be better positioned to not only build capacity and power within their union, but also to continue growing a movement capable of stopping neoliberalization in education.

As the assault on public education is part of a global effort to consolidate power through privatizing education and other social services and public resources, local organizing efforts against market reforms in education have implications far beyond local school districts. Weiner (2012) noted that "a new movement of teachers can help spearhead the development of the broad political and social resistance needed to reverse the tidal wave destroying public education" (p. 36). Activist teachers fighting against these policies are social movement leaders engaged in a global struggle against neoliberal capitalism. Lessons learned from teachers' reflections on their praxis can bolster the organizing of educators, students, and parents all over the world who, against all odds, are fighting for the schools all students deserve and the democratic, equitable, and just society we all desire.

Chapter 3

Framing the unframeable: How activists articulate the need to stop privatization and school closures

Abstract

This study examined how activist groups organizing to stop privatization and school closures framed their efforts in response to the political context to better understand the politics of neoliberal school reform. I found that activist groups responded to the complex and evolving political context with more nuanced framings to counter the rhetoric of pro-market reformers and resonate with broader sectors of city residents. Specifically, activists shifted the way they framed their critiques of charter schools, acknowledged the need to transform public schools, and articulated with more specificity the racialized impact of market reforms on Black students and families. Activists' framings evolved as they gained experience and shifted the political terrain through organizing over many years, illuminating the dialectical and developmental dimensions of framing. With more nuanced framings, activists gained momentum and found common ground among disparate groups, yet they also continued to struggle with framing in clear and concise messages how race, space, and profit motive drive privatization and school closures. I end by discussing some of the implications for educational justice movements.

Introduction

Community organizing against privatization, charter school expansions, and school closures is fueled by the disastrous impact these reforms can have on communities and schools, including the displacement of Black and Brown students, increased racial and economic segregation, divestment from district schools, political disempowerment of teachers and residents, and trauma resulting from school closures (Buras, 2015; Danley & Rubin, 2020; Ferman, 2017; Journey for Justice Coalition, 2004; Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott & Holme, 2016). Yet, research on market reforms in education has, until recently, largely focused on elite policy actors and less on community and teacher resistance to market reforms. Fewer studies of community or teacher resistance to market reform focus on how these actors navigate the contradictions and challenges of the neoliberal policy context (Ferman, 2017, 2021; Nygreen, 2017).

I build upon this scholarship to gain insights into how teacher and community activist groups organize against market reforms within a socio-political context dominated by neoliberalism (Lipman, 2011; Nygreen, 2017). Using a case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2007) and an analytic framework based on social movement scholarship on framing and political opportunity structures (Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2004), I examined how community and teacher activists in Oakland, California organized against market reforms. I asked: How do activist groups organizing to stop privatization and school closures frame their efforts? How do their framings shift in response to the political context?

Community organizing can play an important role in shaping education policies, though the current socio-political context favors more wealthy and powerful actors (Warren, 2010). Organizers face enduring challenges of racial and class politics and limited resources that are rendered even more complex in the neoliberal context of extreme inequality, austerity, and official anti-racism (Melamed, 2006). Yet, organized resistance to the proliferation of market

reforms has achieved at least partial victories in many cities (Ferman, 2017, 2021; Scott & Fruchter, 2009), and understanding how organizers navigate this context to effectively resist market reforms can inform the efforts of educators and researchers committed to educational justice. These lessons may also aid efforts to build more sustained social movements that can transform not only education policy, but also broader social and economic policies of austerity and racial capitalism.

This study follows Nygreen's (2017) call to study the "messiness and complexity" of people on the ground working for educational justice. Nygreen writes:

> (scholars) sometimes argue that constituent groups are duped into supporting reforms that go against their self-interest, and we demonstrate how powerful interests and corporate elites have co-opted the discourse of educational justice to facilitate this. However, when we enter into the spaces where embodied social actors are working every day to advance contested visions of educational justice, it becomes clear that most are neither enlightened nor duped. The reality on the ground is far too complicated for such oversimplifications. (p. 58)

Nygreen then argues that scholars committed to educational justice must attempt to understand the messy and complex social world in which people struggle to improve schooling for marginalized communities. She adds, "this labor is necessary to both understand, and intervene in, processes of neoliberal hegemony and resistance" (Nygreen, 2017, p. 58).

Heeding Nygreen's call, I examine teacher and community organizing through a framework that uses the social movement concepts of framing and political opportunity structure to understand how activists respond to the opportunities and constraints of the neoliberal policy context (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Framing has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Here, I use an expansive definition of framing that refers to the discursive arguments articulated by activists to capture their understanding of the issues in ways that are educative and compelling to a targeted audience (Steinberg,1998; Syeed, 2019; Tarlau, 2014). While more narrow conceptualizations of framing can refer to slogans or soundbites used to amplify a movements' message and incite action, a broader conceptualization of framing attends to activists' discursive arguments as pedagogical as well as organizing and mobilizing tools (Steinberg, 1998; Tarlau, 2014). Framings are constantly evolving as activists' gain more knowledge and experience. In fact, the very process of framing, much like writing, is a process for meaning making, not just delivering a pre-determined analysis.

By attending to how activist groups articulate framings, or the discursive arguments they use in their organizing and mobilizing efforts to stop privatization and school closures (Syeed, 2019), this study adds to an emerging body of research that examines the complicated and messy politics of building a grassroots movement to stop privatization and neoliberalization in education. Following the literature on social movement frames, I examine the interaction between the political context and the framings deployed by teacher and community activists in Oakland, CA, where community organizing against privatization and school closures have gained traction and achieved notable, if partial, victories.

Studies of teacher and community organizing against market reforms, privatization, and school closures focus mostly on several key cities, including: Chicago, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Newark, and New York City (Buras, 2015; Ferman, 2017; Lipman, 2011, 2015, 2017; Scott & Fruchter, 2009). Though Oakland has been the site of intense marketization (Jani, 2017), few scholars have examined the vibrant and growing anti-privatization resistance movement in this city. This study of activism in Oakland expands our understanding of the politics of

neoliberal reforms because an accumulation of studies across different contexts can illuminate the nuances and patterns in how neoliberal policies take shape and gain traction in different places, and the unique dynamics and patterns in how local organizers react to and resist these reforms. By examining how teacher and community organizers in Oakland respond to the shifts in the political terrain through strategic framing of their resistance, I shed light on the messy and complicated politics of resisting neoliberalization. With this knowledge, education researchers and scholar activists can help to inform grassroots movements and potentially increase their capacity to dismantle neoliberalism's hegemony in education policy and politics.

The equity implications of neoliberal and market oriented policies in education

Neoliberal reforms in education infuse market-based principles into the public education system, including competition and choice, high stakes accountability for students and teachers, merit pay, charter schools, and the private operation of schools (Scott & Holme, 2016). Neoliberal reformers promoting market policies primarily pursue technocratic and paternalistic approaches to school systems that serve poor children of color (Scott, 2011, 2013). Though these educational reforms are sometimes promoted as apolitical by their proponents, they are in fact part of a highly political class project that scholars describe as essentially a stage in capitalism marked by shifts in the racialized social structure and in the role of the state in facilitating accumulation of wealth through dispossession (Harvey, 2007; Jani, 2017; Lipman, 2011; Nygreen, 2017).

Scholars have demonstrated how neoliberal reforms, ideology, and discourse help to preserve and extend racial despotism and white supremacy even as it presumes to extend universal civil rights and eliminate structural racism (Aggarwal, 2016; Buras, 2015; Melamed, 2006). Aggarwal argues that "choice—as a key principle of reform and management in public education—emerged in the post-*Brown* moment and ensured the continuity of a tiered citizenship by structuring universal civil rights as individual private choices" (Aggarwal, 2016, p. 130). Neoliberal reforms portend that "the problem of inequality can be resolved through measuring, monitoring, and reforming capacities for citizenship in the liberal racial state" (Aggarwal, 2016, p. 143). Without doing anything to redistribute material resources or upend racial capitalism, neoliberal educational reforms allow for the illusion of equity by extending the "freedom to choose," though more in theory than in practice.

Though market reforms have a disproportionate impact on urban schools and schools serving mostly poor students and students of color, they have also altered the provision of public education in ways that impact almost all students, teachers, and communities. For example, market reforms have created a neoliberal grammar of schooling (Castillo, 2020). As Castillo illustrates, even charter schools with ideologically progressive roots engage in practices that prioritize test preparation and workforce readiness over more democratic and civic goals for public education to ensure their organizational survival (Castillo, 2020; Hernández, & Castillo, 2020).

There are many mechanisms through which neoliberal and market oriented policies exacerbate race and class based inequities (Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020; Ravitch, 2010; Scott & Holme, 2016; White, 2020). Choice policies and school closures increase instability by causing a high turnover of school leaders and teachers and displacing students and teachers of color, especially Black teachers and students. School choice policies also deepen segregation and the concentration of poverty and reproduce social and academic advantages and disadvantages (Roda, 2018; Roda & Wells, 2013; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020; Scott & Holme, 2016; White,

2020). These policies also undermine collective action to address school or district wide issues because parents can move schools if they are unsatisfied. Moreover, the expansion of charter schools drains resources from urban school districts and leave students with the most needs in district schools (Lipman, 2011).

Market reforms include high stakes accountability systems of measuring, comparing, and punishing schools which are then used to justify closing schools that are labeled "underperforming," most often in poor Black and Brown neighborhoods (Danley & Rubin, 2020; Journey for Justice Coalition, 2004; Lipman, 2011, 2015). Though policy makers pursue school closures allegedly to redistribute money and improve schools, research shows that they do neither (Lipman, 2015). Another reason given for school closures is that they are under enrolled and/or underperforming, yet studies show that closed schools are not necessarily those with the lowest enrollment or test scores in a district (Danley & Rubin, 2020). Instead, closed schools most often serve the highest number of poor Black and Latinx students. School closures exert a "slow violence" upon school communities years before their closure, through disinvestment and neglect (Aggarwal et al., 2012).

Organizing against market reforms in the new political grid

In response to these inequities and injustices, community and teacher activists have organized to counter market reforms and promote more democratic and just policies (Ferman, 2017). "Amid the slow, swift, seemingly silent, and flexible restructuring of neoliberal education reform, communities are actively working to reclaim and transform their schools and communities" (Aggarwal et al., 2012, p.163). In these efforts, activists face a political context rife with complexity, contradictions, contentions, and fragmentation. Many of these challenges stem from historical inequities in education, while others are particular to the neoliberal policy context, or the new political grid (Henig, 2011).

Longstanding educational inequities have denied access to safe, nurturing, and quality schools for many Black and Brown communities (Dumas, 2014; Grande, 2015; Valenzuela, 2015). Communities of color have had to organize and sacrifice to get better educational opportunities and experiences, and yet many inequities remain in the quality of schools, teaching, and care that children of color experience. These inequities fuel demands for alternative school systems, which neoliberal reformers conveniently tap into to promote market reforms like school choice and charter schools (Nygreen, 2017; Pedroni, 2007; Stulberg, 2008). However, Nygreen (2017) and Pedroni (2007) demonstrate that community organizers and families who pursue school choice do not necessarily embrace neoliberal ideology. Rather, they often work from a social justice framework that contradicts many of the ideals of a neoliberal paradigm.

Adding complexity to the politics of market reforms is what Henig (2011) describes as the new political grid, the broader structural shifts that reshape the politics and policies of education in the neoliberal era. Globalization, according to Henig, "acts as both a cause and accelerator" of the shifts that make up this new political grid, including changes in the population and the economy that impact jobs and wages. This new political context "poses serious challenges to grassroots organizing strategies" (p. 77) because all these shifts complicate the politics of school reform. For example, Latina/o/x immigrants and Black residents may see their interests as competing, segregation can lead some to dismiss the struggles of urban or majority Black and Brown schools, and language barriers and lack of citizenship status can make it hard to organize immigrant families. Access to technology and the internet may pose additional challenges to collective organizing for school change.

Henig further describes how the new political grid has altered our system of federalism in school governance, with the state and federal governments becoming more powerful actors in local education systems. These altered systems of governance allow policymakers and elite actors to impose unpopular market reforms like school closures while making it more challenging for communities to influence education policy (Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, 2015; Danley & Rubin, 2020; Morel, 2018). Examples of these neoliberal governance mechanisms include mayoral and state control of school districts, replacing elected school boards with appointed ones (Morel, 2018), and appointing quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (QUANGO) that are endowed with the power to manage districts without accountability or public oversight (Epstein, K., 2019).

The new political grid also increases the role of a powerful business sector with a vested interest in promoting neoliberal policies that infuse market reforms into the public education system. Scholars have documented the powerful influence of this business sector through venture philanthropy (Lipman, 2015; Scott & Holme, 2016; Ravitch, 2010). These elite actors mobilize their vast resources against community demands that run counter to their interests. Combined with the force and resources of the national government, these elite policy actors have de-emphasized the role of public education in supporting democracy and equity (Ravitch, 2010).

Considering how this new political grid impacts organizing for educational justice, Henig (2011) notes that communities organizing for radical changes to the current dominance of neoliberalism face the constraints of narrow definitions of educational quality and equity and even of the purposes of public education. Also, while local policymakers and actors still play important roles, activists must also address state and national entities. This, in turn, requires additional resources, skills, and social capital to access to policymakers outside of the local context (see also Ferman, 2017). Organizers must make decisions about the level or levels of government to target, which also requires greater understanding of the role of each level of government and the strategies best suited for each. As they target higher levels of government, activists may also need to build alliances with more groups, which can be challenging in itself and also lead them to lose focus on engaging local residents.

Nygreen (2017) argues that much of the literature on organizing for educational change fails to critically examine the neoliberal policy context that consistently marginalizes grassroots community organizers. “This terrain is best understood as a field of power relations constituted by vast material inequalities along with regimes of knowledge and discourses that naturalize and legitimize those inequalities. On this terrain, the very definition of educational justice is contested and uncertain, as is the path to achieving it” (Nygreen, 2017, p. 56). Despite the many challenges organizers may face, especially in the new political grid, community organizing is important and necessary. What have scholars learned about organizing in this political context?

Scholars have examined collective organizing against neoliberal reforms across the U.S., with most studies focusing on a few key cities like New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans, and Memphis (Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, 2015; Danley & Rubin, 2020; Ferman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020). Ferman’s (2017) edited book examined the various strategies used across groups and locations, how organizers defined the issues, and the role these activist groups play in shaping education policy. Ferman found that activists have forged new alliances, adopted creative tactics, and strategically reframed issues. She argued that attending to the organizing efforts across local contexts illuminates the nuances created by differences in demographics, political structure, political history, and geographic scope. Looking across local contexts, Ferman articulated some of the opportunities that support movements against market reforms. She found

that by expanding the scope of the conflict beyond individual schools or a local school district, organizing efforts can activate new people or groups, broadening the base of support and increasing the chance of influencing elected officials. She also found that organizations and institutions helped turn individual activism into collective action.

Ferman further illuminated some of the challenges facing grassroots organizing efforts, including the way discussions of race and racism can create tensions when a range of stakeholders are involved. Other challenges include working with unions that may lack diversity, having very limited resources, and how a sense of urgency can sometimes lead to reactionary politics or undemocratic processes. Like Henig, Ferman sees changing demographics as a potential challenge, but adds that diversity can also serve grassroots campaigns.

Other scholars have examined factors that help explain why resistance takes place in some places more than others, as well as factors contributing to stronger resistance movements. Danley and Rubin (2020) compared resistance in Newark and New Jersey, both facing undemocratic governance mechanisms, and found that the interaction of three factors help explain the degree of sustained resistance campaigns: access to social and economic capital, timely access to information via an engaged press, and political control. The press played a critical role in exposing privatization efforts and the impacts of market reforms, in turn facilitating community mobilization against harmful policies. The media also provided a platform for resistance leaders to communicate their messages or framing of the dangers of market reforms (Danley & Rubin, 2020; Lipman, 2017; Simon et al., 2017).

In addition to the factors that Danley and Rubin highlight, Simon and colleagues (2017) found that funding mattered for what organizers in Philadelphia could do, but also pointed to the importance of a variety of organizations with different tactics and strategies, and a "culture of activism" among a community of people with a history of organizing who have trusting relationships with each other. Lipman (2017) found similar factors at play in Chicago's resistance and added the important role of social movement unionism of the Chicago Teachers Union, which contributed social and economic capital to Chicago's organizers. In the context of undemocratic governance and extreme political imbalances, material resources become especially important, making collaborations between community organizers and teacher unions critical for mounting effective movements against neoliberal reforms (Danley & Rubin, 2020; Lipman, 2015; Weiner, 2012).

Another factor found to increase the ability of grassroots movements to fight market reforms are collaborations with local community based organizations (Scott & Fruchter, 2009). Analyzing the community organizing efforts in NYC against a plan to have Edison, a for profit education manager, take over a local public school, Scott and Fruchter highlighted the uneven political power in the struggle over control of the school. Yet, despite Edison's political and economic advantage, community organizers leveraged resources to stop undesired market oriented reforms. Community based organizations with roots in the local community were well positioned to articulate the interests of the community against pro-privatization forces. The community based organization benefited from a home turf advantage because community organizers already had relationships with local families and were adept at building alliances with city and neighborhood leaders, the teacher's union, other public sector unions, higher education groups, and civil rights activists that proved essential to mobilizing opposition to the Edison takeover. This body of research underscores the wide range of factors that both facilitate and limit successful movements against marketization and neoliberalization in education.

Framing in movements for educational justice in the neoliberal context

Another factor often referenced in studies of organizing in the neoliberal political context are the framings used by movement actors. Studies have found that framing can be critical to a movement's success in navigating the neoliberal context (Ferman, 2017, 2021; Danley & Rubin, 2020; Maton, 2018; Syeed, 2019). Henig argues that given the complexity and fragmentation of the political landscape and governance structure, organizers need to frame their movements in broad terms that speak beyond local concerns yet avoid technical language or complicated narratives that do not facilitate local mobilizations. For example, he suggests that activists may need to reframe the issues in broader terms, which could mean that their framings speak less to local interests. Also, centering racial or ethnic inequities may resonate more locally, while economic inequities tend to resonate more generally across larger areas (Henig, 2011). Ferman (2017) also noted that the pervasiveness of neoliberal values, like freedom of choice, makes it difficult for activists to challenge school choice and other related reforms. Grassroots groups sometimes use frames like local control, parents' rights, and empowerment, which can reinforce neoliberal ideologies.

Studies of organizing sometimes capture some of the ways in which organizers and community leaders frame the problem of privatization and market reforms. For example, Danley and Rubin (2020), in describing the political struggle in Newark over mass school closings, noted that longtime civic activist Junius Williams framed the issue as "a real estate scheme to put public property in private hands" (Danley & Rubin, citing Mooney, 2012c, para. 19). Scott and Fruchter (2009) also demonstrated how community resistance to privatization was bolstered by framing the proposed takeover as an instance of community disempowerment and exploitation through the imposition of an undesired shift in school governance that would result in economic gains for Edison. In framing the takeover as disempowering, many in the community argued that the struggles of the school could be addressed without turning it over to private management. A particularly effective organizing tool was organizers' ability to deploy a clear, consistent, and simple message: "No on Edison." This framing resonated with local parents who wanted to preserve their local school and did not want to be exploited by an outside business.

Recent studies have examined how and why activists deploy different problem framings. Ferman (2017) noted that shifting framings away from "austerity" to "fair funding" worked to mobilize broader support. Maton's (2018) study explored how activist teachers in Philadelphia pushed their group to shift from framings focused on neoliberalism as the framework for understanding the threats to public education, "toward an intertwined problem framing of *both* neoliberalism and structural racism as responsible for inequitable patterns in public schooling" (p. 294). The activist teachers shifted their framings as an organizational strategy to strengthen the group's efficacy and to align their efforts with anti-racist values. These shifts represented the group's desire to be more responsive to its members who pushed for a racial justice analysis of market reforms.

As Syeed (2019) noted in his study of community organizing against school closures in Washington, DC, activist groups also shifted their framings in response to the discursive arguments put forth by the school district to justify closing schools. Syeed illustrated how community members articulated counter frames that countered the three dominant frames used by school district leaders to create a "common sense" around the desirability and necessity of school closures. Together, these studies underscore the importance of framing to effectively building community and teacher movements for educational justice.

Despite the challenges of organizing against such politically charged reforms as school choice and charter schools, teacher and community leaders have taken advantage of opportunities in the socio-political structure to mount a formidable resistance to the hegemony of neoliberal and market oriented reforms. With limited resources and organizational capacity, grassroots community, parent, and teacher groups, along with teacher unions, have seen some successes because of their movements. For example, their efforts played a role in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) decision to call for a moratorium on the expansion of charter schools in Black communities and for elimination of for-profit charter schools (White, 2020). When teachers across the U.S. went on strike in 2018 and 2019, they not only demanded better salaries and working conditions, but also protested neoliberal policies that increased privatization and reduced funding and support for public schools (Blanc, 2019; White, 2020). Even relatively privileged white and Black and Brown parents have organized against choice policies that perpetuate school segregation and undermine public school (Roda, 2018). Neoliberal reforms remain hegemonic, but they are also fiercely contested (Lipman, 2011; Nygreen, 2017).

A social movement framework: Framing and political opportunity structure

This study builds on this literature by delving deeper into the interaction of the political context, or the new political grid, and how activists articulate framings for their efforts to stop privatization and school closures. Frames and framing processes are key to understanding social movements and their successes and shortcomings (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Frames are defined as "cognitive and interpretative schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action" (Johnston & Noakes, 2005, citing Snow and Benford, 1988, p.137). Frames organize experiences and guide action by "rendering events or occurrences meaningful" (Snow et al.,1986, p. 464). They are both individual (happening in our minds) and collective because they are socially constructed.

The related concept of framing is an active and dynamic process of constructing meaning that entails agency, contention, and evolution (Benford and Snow, 2000). Framing works like a frame around a picture, focusing attention on what activists feel is important and away from what they deem less important or extraneous. Working together through an interactive process, organizers develop collective action frames to explain their actions and motivate others to join their efforts. Through these frames, activists explain a range of problems in relatively narrow terms, highlighting some issues and ignoring others. The process of assembling these packages is historically specific, though there are patterns across movements (Johnston & Noakes, 2005, p.7).

An essential component to the framing perspective in social movement theory is the issue of resonance. Frames are effective to the degree that they resonate with the targeted audiences those organizers aim to mobilize. Frame resonance is shaped by many factors, including: how much the frame draws from symbols or ideas that appear natural and familiar; consistency and logical connections between the diagnosis, prognosis, and tactics, and the core values that are appealed to; credibility and commensurability with the way the target audience understands the world and their culture, narratives, myths, and beliefs; and the centrality or level of importance of the content and values encapsulated in the frame to the lives of the target audiences. If collective action frames are too abstract and distant from the lives and experiences of the targets, they are less likely to resonate (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Also central to frame resonance are factors related to the people promoting the frames. For frames to resonate with targeted audiences, those promoting the frames must be sufficiently credible, based on their credentials and experience, and persuasive. Charismatic movement leaders and organizers are more likely to be more credible and persuasive, whereas those lacking in charisma, despite their credentials or experiences, may be less convincing (Benford & Snow, 2000).

The framing perspective in social movement theory is especially useful in bringing into focus the intersections and interactions of micro, meso, and macro levels of political action. Frames are "continuously being constituted, contested, reproduced, transformed, and/or replaced during the course of social movement activity" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 628), not in a structural or cultural vacuum, but shaped by the socio-cultural context. According to Schneider (2005), framing links macro-level factors, captured by the concept of political opportunity structure, with micro-level mobilization processes that shed light on how movements grow and evolve over time. In his study of graduate student union organizing, Kitchen II (2011) demonstrated how framing processes provided both a theoretical and empirical link between micro level actions of activists and the broader macro level conditions in which these actors were situated. Moreover, whether focused at the school, district, state, or federal level, organizers' demands and strategies are influenced by the historical moment in which groups emerge, their organizational capacity at any given time, and the opportunities for successfully moving an agenda in their political environment. All these factors shape the political opportunity structure in which groups operate and the interventions they advocate for (Mediratta et al., 2009).

Examining how grassroots groups respond to a constantly shifting political terrain through their framings helps to illuminate the complex dynamics of neoliberalization and resistance. Moreover, building our knowledge through an accumulation of local studies can help those committed to educational justice and equity to sharpen our strategies for uprooting neoliberalism's hegemony in education and social policy.

The Oakland context

Oakland's education politics are influenced by a wide range of factors, including the city's history of progressive and even radical politics (Epstein, K. K., 2012; Self, 2005). This tradition includes Black and Brown communities organizing to create independent schools and special programs to provide youth of color a culturally affirming and nurturing education (Dyrness, 2011; Epstein, K. K., 2012; Ginwright, 2005; Stulberg, 2008). This legacy helps to explain why the city's chapter of the NAACP contested the national leadership's call for a moratorium on charter schools (Rizga, 2016). Oakland's school politics are also shaped by the racial, ethnic, language, and class diversity of its population. As in most urban areas across the country, the schools are highly segregated along racial and class lines. Finally, deeply entrenched white liberalism combined with structural racism have undermined movements for transformative change and racial equity in Oakland's schools (Epstein, K. K., 2012).

As in many urban areas serving large numbers of students of color and facing gentrification, Oakland school leaders have pursued market oriented reforms, especially school choice through expanding the charter school sector. In fact, Oakland has a larger number of charter schools and is currently considering closing more public schools (McBride, 2021; OUSD, 2021a,b). Since at least 2012, district leaders have also pursued school closures, claiming that the schools they seek to shutter are under-enrolled, extremely low performing, or both. The district leaders pushing these policies, from the superintendents to the elected board members,

have largely been trained by pro-market billionaires like the late Eli Broad, who through donations and philanthropy invest large sums of money to radically alter the landscape of public education (Jani, 2017).

Despite the power of pro market reformers and the local support for school choice, there is evidence that teacher and community activism in Oakland has shifted the political terrain by raising critical consciousness about privatization and increasing public scrutiny over school board policies. Evidence of these shifts can be seen in the broad public support for the teachers strike, which was largely framed as a demand to stop austerity measures, privatization, and school closures (Tadayon et al., 2019). Alongside the teachers' union demands for higher wages and smaller class sizes, strike leaders joined community activist groups in contesting the disinvestment in schools serving predominantly Black and Brown youth. Over years of organizing against market reforms, teacher and community activists have also slowed the growth of the charter school sector and made co-locations of charter schools harder to impose on public school campuses. These community led efforts also played a key role in the 2020 school board elections, where none of the 4 incumbents ran for re-election. For the first time in many years, teacher and community activists had the opportunity to win back half of the school board seats from pro-market school leaders.

Nevertheless, the balance of power remains in favor of the pro-market reformers and billionaires. Organizers and residents struggle to understand who really controls Oakland's public schools since the elected school board has limited powers and FCMAT (Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team), a QUANGO, and the state appointed trustee (who is embedded in the Alameda County Office of Education) have final say over the district budget. As demonstrated in the recent struggle over a commitment to Reparations for Black students, these unelected bodies can veto decisions made by the elected board (Epstein, K., 2021). Also, though the Oakland teacher's union (OEA) is now led by a more progressive slate, some teachers fear that the more conservative CTA retains too much influence over the OEA (see chapter 2). Most importantly, Oakland families remain divided on the issue of charter schools and even school closures, and one well founded "astroturf" organization is continuing to push for charters. Thus, there remains critical work to be done. How do teacher and community organizers navigate this landscape as they build movements against privatization and school closures?

This study focuses on the community and teacher activist groups who began organizing in earnest in 2012, when the Oakland school district decided to close several schools, sparking a resistance movement that has continued to grow. From the beginning of this wave of organizing against market reforms, there have co-existed at least three major strands or campaigns. One has highlighted the need to stop school closures, another has focused on stopping privatization and the expansion of charter schools, and a third has sought to regain local control of Oakland schools. While these issues are connected and the campaigns overlapped, not everyone organizing on one front necessarily supported the other fronts. For example, some groups in Oakland who opposed privatization and charter expansion advocated for AB1840, a state policy that allows closing schools as an option for increasing school funding. The J4OS alliance initially advocated for "cuts with equity," before joining calls for "No Cuts, No Closures." Around the same time as the 2019 teacher strike, the district decided to close Roots Middle School against the wishes of its students, families, and teachers. The timing of this decision created more impetus for activists to connect the issue of school closures, increasing privatization, charter school growth, and public school funding. The framing of No Cuts, No Closures became a unifying framework for the disparate activist groups. With all these shifts, I

sought to better understand how activists framed their efforts in response to the changing political context.

Research Design and Methodology

This article draws from a qualitative case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2007) of organizing in Oakland conducted over three years, from 2017 to 2020. My methodology and research design are guided by the traditions and commitments of women of color feminist scholars and Indigenous scholars whose engaged scholarship aim to further decolonial and liberatory movements (Collins, 1986; Delgado Bernal et al, 2012; Patel, 2015b; Smith, 2013; Tuck, 2009). For me, this means that as a Latinx mother, educator, and activist scholar, I chose to examine social dynamics and issues that are directly relevant to me and my community. It also means that I focus my study on the agentic and creative praxis of grassroots and teacher movements to radically transform unjust schooling practices and policies. The actors in my study are primarily Black and Brown activists, as well as teachers, who are directly impacted by market reforms and who take action to bring material changes to the conditions that constrain their lives and their futures. Many of the activists leading the work are also women and mothers, demanding that I apply an intersectional lens to my study, attending to questions of race/ethnicity, class, and gender in their activism.

I draw on data that includes in depth interviews with organizers and teacher activists who were selected purposefully because they have been leaders in five of the most active groups organizing against market reforms in Oakland in the period from 2012 through the elections of November 2020. Participants included eight current teachers (6 women and 2 men) and 14 community organizers (10 of whom are also parents of current Oakland students; 6 women and 8 men). I use pseudonyms for all participants except the one elected official and use the actual names of activist groups and coalitions. Additional data include fieldnotes from participant observations of meetings, community events, and school district forums. Finally, I also analyze documents created by activist groups including educational materials, event flyers, banners and signs, and social media posts. While interviews give me insights into the activists reasoning for using particular framings, analysis of materials they produce allow me to see how they translated their understandings and motivations into messages directed at the people they aim to mobilize.

For data analysis, I used an iterative process that combined elements of narrative and thematic analysis (Glesne, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) These are common methods used in case studies that help researchers uncover answers to research questions. I coded data first inductively, and later, deductively based on previous findings from the relevant literature. Coding was done first in Nvivo, and later rounds were conducted by hand. I continuously wrote memos to deepen my analysis and finally consolidated codes that captured salient themes related to my research questions.

Framing is a dynamic process and frames are in constant flux. My study is just a snapshot of some of the most salient shifts in framings during the period of my study. Given the diversity of groups and loosely connected organizers engaging in this work, it is not possible to cover all the different frames that have been used. I also do not go into the framing processes of any group or coalition of actors. Rather, I offer a bird's eye view of the organizing against market reforms to examine some of the important shifts to illuminate how organizers are navigating the political context in their attempts to stop privatization of public schools and school closures.

Findings

This study explored how activist groups organizing to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland, California shifted their framings in response to the opportunities and challenges they perceived in the political structure (Snow et al., 2004). I found that activist groups responded to the complex and evolving political context with more nuanced framings to resonate with broader sectors of city residents in order to elect more progressive school board leaders. First, I show the challenges and opportunities that activists perceived in the political context that led them to shift their framings. Next, I show how, in response to these challenges and opportunities, activists articulated a racial justice framing that included more nuanced critiques of charter schools, acknowledgement of the need to transform and not just defend public schools, and attention to the specific impact of these policies on Black students and communities.

Opportunities and challenges in the political context that informed activists' framings

All the organizers interviewed agreed that, after two decades of organizing, the political terrain had shifted significantly with more people understanding the impacts of privatization. Clemente stressed that over the years, organizers had elevated people's understanding of privatization and what was driving it. Discussing efforts to mobilize support for flipping the school board, he argued "it's not something that we have to constantly educate people on. I think people are already concerned and starting to understand what's been going on for the last decade plus. So I feel like we're a few steps ahead... And I think now, there seems to be more and more people that are starting to connect the dots."

Clemente articulated how over time, more people understood how market strategies were negatively affecting Oakland public schools. This made activists' organizing efforts easier because they did not have to spend as much time on the basic facts, allowing them to push for the types of solutions they wanted to propose. After years of organizing, activists were able to increase public awareness and understanding of market reforms through forming broad coalitions like the Justice for Oakland Students (J4OS) group, which was founded in 2017 by Oakland Kids First. According to their website, "the J4OS Coalition, is a multi-racial, intergenerational collaborative group that was formed to create a movement-building vehicle for educational justice in Oakland. Membership includes students, parents/families, teacher allies, and organizations working to increase equity for low-income students of color in OUSD.[5]" J4OS helped to drastically increase public understanding through a social media campaign that used savvy infographics to connect the dots between all the issues that negatively impacted Oakland students (discussed below).

Pamela, a parent of Oakland public school children and co-founder of the groupParents United, reflected on how J4OS helped increase public awareness of neoliberal reforms, Pamela noted,

> part of what that coalition did was, for a long time it was only the union, OPEN, and few others who were actually talking about it (privatization) publicly. And folks were made to feel super like marginalized in fighting against privatization. And the sort of NGO groups that are working in our schools were being very silent about it because they felt very worried about the funders.

[5] https://www.oaklandkidsfirst.org/programs/j4os/

Many other activists and educators agreed that the J4OS campaigns had a marked impact on how the general public understood the connection between market reforms like charter schools and increasing privatization, austerity measures, and school closures. But as a longtime organizer with Parents United, one of several small parent and teacher activist groups, Pamela also added that, "the work of Parents United, of OPEN and of other folks happening through the years had created a foundation for that. A lot of it wouldn't have happened if they hadn't been organizing that base for so long."

Pamela moved to a position organizing with the Oakland Teachers' Union, and in her interviews, she pointed to the important role that the wave of teacher strikes, also known as the Red for Ed movement, played in increasing public support for anti-privatization efforts.

> I definitely think that, like the narrative, like public opinion and understanding around privatization has changed. I think that it didn't just happen overnight with the Oakland strike. Partially, it happens with the Red for Ed wave in the country and teachers reclaiming their sort of power and like, ability to stand up for their students and not just be seen anymore as just acting in a self interested way...And through the Red for Ed strike wave, like public opinion of what teachers are doing really changed because teachers were very clear that like, we're not doing this for us...Like I need a roof over my head but also that when I'm worried about, like not having a roof over my head, I can't teach your kid. Like, I can't give them what they need...

Here, Pamela points to how national events also created opportunities for local teachers and organizers to connect the teacher strike in Oakland to demands to stop the privatization of public education through the expansion of charter schools and an end to school closures. Reflecting on the Oakland teacher strike, Pamela added,

> when OEA came out, really first UTLA, came out in a really big way that was like, "privatization is like getting in the way of our ability to give our kids what they need," they had public opinion on their side already. Right. So it was like they were credible in talking about this *in a way that they hadn't necessarily been credible before* because the charter school industry had always painted it as like well charter schools are non union and the only reason unions even care about it is because it's taking away jobs.

Frank, another long time parent and community organizer, also spoke about how times had changed and opened up new opportunities for mobilizing against neoliberal reforms. He explained,

> I have for years been trying to highlight the connection between school privatization and gentrification, and I've been poo-pooed. Teachers have been like, 'Yeah, we tried that. We tried that. We tried that.' I'm not saying that that's incorrect. I'm sure that they have tried it, but I've just been poo-pooed. I'm not a big subscriber to the philosophy that 'Oh, yeah, we tried that, and let's not try it again.' I'm a subscriber of, 'Well, let's think about how we tried that. Did we try it the right way? Did we put the right effort into it or not?'... I just think, I'm all about timing. You approach people about something at one time and they say no, it doesn't mean the answer is always going to be no. You come back to them. If we look at the past three years of this public education advocacy in Oakland, so much has changed. So much has changed.

Here, Frank echoed how the political terrain had shifted in ways that created new opportunities for the movement to stop privatization and school closures. As many activists noted, taking a

stand against privatization and charter schools had for many years been politically risky. Yet, years of organizing, the creation of broad coalitions, the use of savvy media campaigns, and the wave of teacher activism and strikes, all helped to propel the local movement by creating more public awareness of privatization. All these shifts also made it hard for groups to remain neutral on charter schools.

Though the movement had made great strides in increasing public understanding of how market reforms, especially charter schools, impact educational equity, activists still expressed difficulties in understanding, much less articulating, the politics of neoliberal reforms and privatization. Jax is an activist educator who helped to found OPEN (Oakland Public Education Network) in 2012 after the district closed several neighborhood schools. He explained how he developed his framing of the movement after years of resisting market reforms and learning what resonated, and what did not, with his community. “You will probably never hear me use stuff like neoliberal. Those kinds of things took me a long time to feel comfortable using, even privatization. Because I don't think those words have a lot of meaning for most folks.” But Jax not only expressed the challenge of framing the issues in ways that made sense to most people in his community. Rather, he also talked about how the politics are confusing even for him to understand. “Oakland had always had a combination of big city politics, mismanagement and corruption. But now we've thrown in privatization on top of it. Sometimes it's really hard to pull out what's driving and, and it gets very, very confusing.” As Frank noted, “it takes either hearing these stories or doing some reading to connect the dots and see the depth of it, and that takes a certain luxury or privilege.” Many of the organizers interviewed shared how time and experience helped them to sharpen their understanding and analysis of the issues.

Jax’s co-founder and partner in OPEN is Clemente, a single father who spearheaded a community camp-in of Lakeview Elementary when the district decided to close the school in 2012. Clemente expressed the same issue with understanding, much less articulating, the complexity of market reforms and privatization.

> Even when I talk about this, sometimes, there's a lot of different directions we can point and talk about, and I think all of them are extremely important. This is a very complex and dynamic conversation...about public education. How is it that people who have been in this process for so long can't really explain it? I mean, why is it that we don't know all the players in how this process works?

Because the issues are layered and complex, activists have a hard time fully understanding the politics that drive market reforms, which in turn hampers their ability as movement leaders to articulate clear diagnostic frames (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Many of the activists I interviewed discussed how their own understanding became sharper over the years. Jax explained how it took a long time for him to understand and accept what was driving these policies.

> I've known a lot of the board members personally for a long time. And I think it prevented me from realizing that some of the stuff was going on, because it was hard for me to believe that they would be a part of it...Numbers don't lie and over time, what people used to call conspiracy theories, it's actually proven, it's not a theory anymore, it's actually proven.

Frank, a close ally of Jax and Clemente, explained how his analysis became sharper with experience he gained over time.

> The more I followed the financial crisis in Oakland in 2002, it was just very, very, very obvious to me that it was about real estate. It was about gentrification...Jerry Brown

> and Don Perata were scheming to basically take local control away from the school district so they could sell this school district building which they still want to sell. It is real estate development that's really the machine in Oakland.

In these reflections, activists expressed that the political context had changed over time, particularly because there was more public awareness and understanding of the connections between market reforms. This presented an opportunity for activists to continue to build on their momentum. However, there continued to be the challenge of fully understanding the issues and translating that understanding into frames that made sense to a broader audience.

Another major challenge that activists faced was continued resistance from district leadership, who no matter the amount of evidence and data protesters presented to refute their justifications for school closures, continued to push these policies. Clemente shared that,

> there's many times I thought, you know, we're going to sit down with the board member or sit down with the mayor's office and provide the facts, like this isn't really going to save the school district any money. I mean, it was almost like they stopped even saying that, it wasn't even a talking point. They stopped saying that it was gonna save any money.

As Syeed (2019) noted, activists sometimes shift their frames to counter districts' changing excuses for the need to close schools. However, the activists in Oakland explained that they came to believe that the district was committed to school closures and would simply rely on new excuses for closing schools. Thus, activists began to focus on articulating frames that appealed not so much to district decision makers, but to the general city population. As a response to an incalcitrant system, activists shifted to framings that would help garner public support for electing new district leaders who would be responsive to community demands to stop privatization and school closures. This pivot made it a priority for activists to articulate framings that resonated more broadly with Oakland residents, especially Black and Brown communities who often supported charter schools. Echoing the concern about deploying frames that resonate widely, Isioma, a leader of a parent organizing group that serves largely Black and Brown poor families, stressed the need for organizing and framing that is culturally relevant. "I don't know that the Alinski model really works for all communities or all issues. And I think that there's some problems in it when you put the cultural framework piece into it. It doesn't really talk to folks." As a leader in J4OS, Isioma played an important role in helping the coalition prioritize framings that could educate and resonate broadly with Black and Brown parents in Oakland.

Activists' framings articulate a racial justice frame to resonate more broadly with Oakland residents

The findings illuminate how Oakland activists shifted their framings to resonate more broadly with Oakland residents. Like activists in other cities, they began to highlight the racial justice implications of privatization and school closures (Maton, 2018). In Oakland, activists elaborated a racial justice framing in three ways:1) they added nuance to the way they framed their critiques of charter schools; 2) they acknowledged the need to transform public schools; and 3) they highlighted the especially disastrous impact of closures on Black students and families. Understanding framing as a process of articulating discursive arguments and frames as pedagogical tools affords the opportunity to examine how activists were both reacting to and attempting to change the political terrain.

Articulating a more nuanced critique of charter schools

In participant interviews and in the organizing spaces I participated in, the need to craft smarter messaging around charter schools was a frequent concern. Charter schools have been one of the most contentious issues in the fight against privatization, so activists became aware of the need to craft frames that were less alienating to charter families and supporters. Jax explained the dilemma organizers faced.

> How do you push people to see the light without it being heavy handed while still giving people an opportunity to learn it on their own? I have to remind myself all the time, I used to go into a room or a school and try to beat people over the head with it. And I realized that people have to experience the emotion themselves, of the school board lying to them before they're really able to hear a lot of what we have to say….And thankfully, I've seen people in the community go through that process quicker and quicker where it doesn't take two years anymore to understand pretty quick, but they're still there...*I wish this was just discovering information, putting it out there. But it's so much more than that*. (emphasis added)

Here, Jax demonstrates how he came to understand the importance of how the information was presented if they hoped to shift people's thinking, particularly about charter schools. Jax further explained,

> the national coalition had to remain neutral on charter schools intentionally. And so and here I was coming in the room, you know, trying to swing both fists and so this has been a battle that we fight every place even in our emotions...we've still had to have this discussion, this fight, because then the pushback is and I feel, you know, our public schools have never performed well. *And so there has to be this recognition.* We need to be careful about how we talk about charter schools, knowing that 15,000 students take that very seriously. I've seen people try to accuse (charter families), you know, you're part of the problem. That's just horrible.

Being in a national coalition of groups fighting against school closures, particularly in urban areas, Jax and Clemente learned how charter schools were a contentious issue across the country. They also gained a better understanding of why Black and Brown activists, educators, and community leaders were hesitant to take a position against charter schools. They did not want to alienate the large number of people who had direct connections to charter schools.

Pamela also discussed the importance of framing the movement carefully around the issue of charter schools:

> Because the charter school industry has done such a good job as painting any opposition to charter schools as actually being an opposition to charter school parents. And that if we think that expanding charter schools is bad, that's because we want to take agency and choice away from low income black and brown parents.

Pamela and many other activists recognized that critiquing charter schools could play into the hands of pro-charter reformers. They also recognized how this had been effectively used to discredit the movement against privatization. Thus, any progress in the struggle would require addressing this trap.

Krista and Clemente, leaders of two prominent community organizing groups, articulated the nuance that activists introduced into framings that connected privatization and school closures to charter schools. Krista explained, "it's a shift in consciousness. I feel like so many people that charters are not necessarily bad but are not doing the work of solving inequities in

education, which they've been, you know, claiming to do for so long." Clemente echoed these sentiments, explaining how OPEN tries to frame the issue with charter schools.

> It's not working. It's not fixing these issues. Charters are not resolving the things that really need to be resolved. It doesn't mean that there aren't good examples. But the argument to be made is there are just as many if not more in the public education system.

Acknowledging that some charter schools were good schools introduced more nuance to the framing of organizers and allowed them to express that charters schools, as a policy, were not a solution to educational inequities.

Reflecting on the success of connecting the strike to the fight against privatization and school closures, Pamela discussed how the union also framed their critiques of charters with more nuance.

> I think really importantly that OEA wasn't saying we should close down all charter schools, right? They were acknowledging there are kids in those schools for whom that is their home. That is their community and schools are communities and we're not trying to close down all charter schools. We are saying we cannot have any more and we need to reform the industry as it exists.

Pamela also added that the union refrained from taking a hard line against charters by not making "demands that, A. they were never going to win or B. that was going to feel like an attack for charter school parents and students." Like the community activist groups, the teachers' union also became more tactful in how they discussed charter schools. They also explicitly took into account charter families as an important audience for the framings and mobilizing efforts.

Acknowledging the need to transform public schools

Activists' framings also expanded on a racial justice analysis by being explicit about the need to transform public schools rather than merely defend them because they are public institutions deemed critical to a democratic society. A dominant framing in the fight against market reforms and privatization had centered on this aspect of public education and anti-privatization activists and scholars tend to elevate this argument. Yet, a racial justice perspective required that activists engage with the actual reality of racialized inequity and injustice in schooling.

Pamela explained the need to shift frames away from defending traditional schools as superior to charter schools. "We are really making an effort to not be like, we have all the answers, public schools are the bomb for Black students. What we actually know is that none of us are really doing a good job and we need to do a better job." At the same time that organizers began to stress the need to transform public schools, they also argued that market reforms, like charter schools, were not improving schooling for Black and Brown students. Most organizers I interviewed and observed agreed with Pamela that "having this alternative system that is undermining the public school system is actually not getting us anywhere."

As captured in a quote by Jax, his approach to the charter school issue became more measured because he learned that taking a strong stance was futile. While he and his colleagues at OPEN understood that charter school expansion was directly connected to school closures, their allies in the Journey for Justice Coalition (J4J) were not ready to oppose charter schools. They often debated the issue and Jax learned that a key sticking point was the long history of neglect and abuse that communities of color suffered in the public school system. Jax noted that "we've still had to have this discussion, this fight, because then the pushback is and I feel, you

know, our public schools have never performed well. *And so there has to be this recognition.*" For Jax and OPEN, this recognition translated to a framing that called for Sustainable Community Schools in each neighborhood. These community, district run and publicly accountable schools would offer wrap around services to students and the surrounding community.

Jax's partner in OPEN, Clemente, expanded on the need to name more explicitly how public education could be transformed to educate all children. "It goes back to not just properly funding our education system, but getting things in and around those communities that the students and families actually need and want...Then we can start talking about what we're actually going to do to improve public education. We've been so busy fighting and being reactive and trying to prevent school closures." With this framing, OPEN pivoted from a critique of charters and a defense of district schools toward putting forward a call for the type of transformations required to guarantee a quality school for all students and all neighborhoods.

Another example of an activist group articulating the need to transform public education is captured in their very title, Schools Oakland Students Deserve (SOSD). The activists that organized SOSD brought Black and Brown educators, community leaders, and parents together to articulate a community driven vision and plan for "the schools Oakland students deserve," a framing that brings attention to the need to improve schools across the board. SOSD organizers invited parents, like myself, who had children enrolled in charter schools, but who also engaged in social and racial justice movements. SOSD organizers began by asking each community member to share what they felt needed to radically change in public schools. With this input, and with the writings put out previously by other groups, like the CTU, Oakland's SOSD moved to organize against privatization from a framework that went beyond saying NO to neoliberal reforms to articulating what they were saying YES to.

The shift to frames that acknowledge how public schools often fail to serve Black and Brown and poor children has not been easy, as Krista explained. "But you know, but I think that we teachers are so frequently in a defensive stance, that I think it can feel, you know, it's really scary to acknowledge what is actually wrong with our teaching and our schools." Nevertheless, organizers recognized the importance of making this shift if they were going to grow the movement against privatization and school closures. While in the past they had focused more explicitly on how charters hurt public schools, through the shift to a racial justice frame organizers began to instead highlight how all schools needed to better serve Black and Brown students.

Adding specificity to the racial justice framing by focusing on the impact on Black students and communities

Another way in which activists articulated a more nuanced racial justice framing of the fight against privatization and school closures was by calling attention not only to the disproportionate impact on Black and Brown students, but also on the particularly devastating impact on Black students, teachers, and communities that were the most often displaced by these reforms (Mayorga et al., 2020; White, 2020).

Because of the complexity of neoliberal politics and policies, activists struggle to clearly explain who is harmed by privatization and school closures. Issa, a former teacher at Roots Middle School at the time the district decided to close the school, became a teacher leader in the organizing to stop school closures. After Roots was closed, Issa joined Oakland Not For Sale (ONFS), another activist group that formed after the district decided to close Kaiser Elementary,

a more racially and economically diverse school that was often portrayed as largely white and middle class. She explained that the organizing had to be "for all students, because it's not just a Kaiser fight, and actually school closures and mergers are going to impact East and West Oakland, more than anything. And so like, that's actually who's going to be harmed in all these decisions that are being made."

Having been a teacher at Roots, which was an entirely Black and Latinx school, Issa pushed for a racial justice framing that placed the fight for Kaiser in the broader context of school closures. She argued that it is primarily Black and Brown students who are harmed, yet, in the same conversation she also stressed that everyone stood to lose from the privatization of public education.

> I think that it is important what's happening, like this includes everyone. And if you think it doesn't (include you), well, your campus looks real good with co-location on it, like you've got a few empty classrooms, it doesn't take much for someone to, you know, jump on your campus too. So I think that it's really vital to make sure that people know that like, *it actually impacts everyone*. Yeah. And that public education will be gone!

On one hand, Issa pointed out that any school community can be targeted for closure (or co-location) and that privatization threatens all public schools. On the other hand, she also expressed an understanding that it had been, and likely would continue to be, Black and Brown students who attend underfunded schools with higher concentrations of low income families that will be hurt and displaced most by school closures.

Helping Oakland's activists understand and articulate the particularly devastating impact that school closures have had on Black communities were a series of infographics created and shared by the Justice for Oakland Students (J4OS) coalition. Many of J4OS graphics include the statistic that "since 2003, 16 of 18 schools closed: over 60% Black," and the highlight the dramatic decrease in numbers of Black students enrolled in Oakland district schools, noting that "14 of 18 (closed schools) became Charters serving 62% FEWER Black students." A highly circulated flyer at many community events included these statistics on a map of Oakland showing that almost all schools closed were flatlands schools serving mostly poor Black students (figure 1). J4OS infographics argued that "decades of disinvestment, closing 16 historically 'Black' schools, and a culture of anti-Black racism has led to push out and generations of harm."

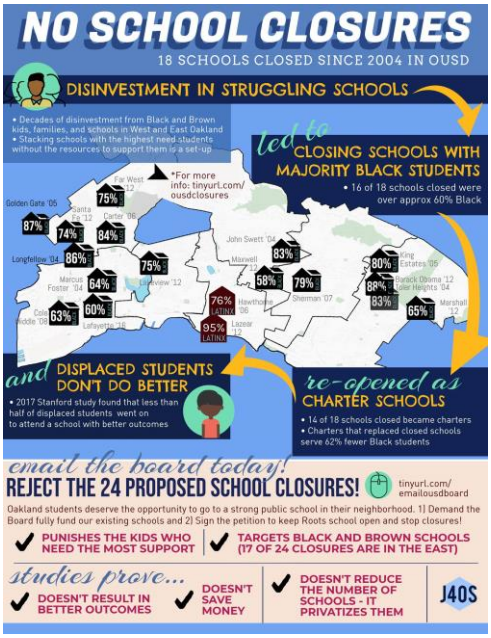

Figure 1 (retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/demandJ4OS/photos/1736670473099500).

With these infographics, organizers in the J4OS coalition began to connect the dots between charter schools and the harm that charter expansion had inflicted on Black students. Connecting these issues, organizers began to frame their organizing as an effort to transform Oakland's public schools by holding the district leadership accountable for their policies to expand the charter school sector that led to school closures and the displacement of Black students.

Discussion

In this study, I sought to understand how activists framed their efforts to stop privatization and school closures in response to changes in the political context. The findings show that activists responded to the challenges and opportunities they perceived in the political context with more nuanced framings to resonate with broader sectors of Oakland residents and increase community support for their movement. Activists analyzed how pro-market reformers had effectively used narratives that seized upon community demands for better schools in order to push for more charter schools, increasing privatization, and school closures. Activists also believed that they had, over years of organizing, shifted the terrain in their favor by contesting privatizers' rhetoric and expanding the public's awareness of the negative impact of charter school growth and privatization, particularly by reducing funding for Oakland schools and closing neighborhood schools that served mostly poor students of color.

Yet, the local political context remained complicated and contested. The district decision makers were intent on closing schools despite evidence that doing so did not save the district substantial money. There seemed to be no way to convince this leadership to stop closing schools, so activists shifted their focus from developing counterframes directed at decisionmakers (Syeed, 2019) to articulating frames that resonated with the public as a way to educate and mobilize the Oakland residents to elect more progressive school board members.

Moreover, pro charter reformers continued to appeal to Black and Brown communities who desired better schools and were critical of the school district. Activists increasingly saw the need to appeal to those who had critiques of public schools for failing to educate and nurture youth of color. They thus determined to reframe their efforts in ways that might better resonate with a population that felt neglected by the public school system, particularly Black and Brown communities. All these challenges and opportunities in the political context led activists to articulate a racial justice analysis of privatization and school closures, which they elaborated in these three ways: they added nuance to their discussion of charter schools, became more explicit about the need to transform and not just defend public education, and articulated with more specificity how market-oriented reforms harmed Black students and communities in particular.

The dialectical and developmental dimensions to articulating frames

Activists' changing articulations of their movement underscore the dialectical and developmental dimensions of framing (Benford & Snow, 2000; Steinberg, 1998). The dialectical process involved in framing is evident in how activists responded to changes in the political terrain, and many of those shifts in the landscape had resulted from years of activism. As social movement scholars have shown, framing processes and political opportunity structure inform and influence each other in a recursive and dynamic process (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Schneider, 2005; Steinberg, 1998). Partly through framing, activists mobilize people to join a movement, and in turn, broader public engagement often shifts the balance of power and the terrain of struggle. In this case, activists shifted their frames as they perceived greater public understanding about the connections between privatization and school closures, a direct result of years of organizing. With more public awareness, activists felt they were making strides and continued to push against market reforms. Responding also to the intractability of the local school board, activists came together across groups to elect more progressive school district leaders.

Like the organizing that Syeed (2019) examined in Washington, DC, in Oakland activists used framings that countered the dominant arguments put forth by district leaders to justify school closures. But rather than focusing on counterframes that contradicted districts' arguments for closing schools, Oakland activists focused on crafting frames that might convince pro-charter advocates, especially Black and Brown parents who support charter schools. Activists shifted their frames in a dialectical process of countering the arguments leveled against them by the school district leaders as well as pro-market reformers who argued that those opposed to charter schools and privatization were mostly white or more privileged people who sought to limit the choices of Black and Brown parents. Activists sought to counter this narrative by resonating more with communities of color. For this effort to succeed, it was critical that activists develop framings that more intentionally spoke to the concerns of Black and Brown families and communities.

The dialectical nature of framing also illuminates the developmental and pedagogical aspects of movement building (Steinberg, 1998; Tarlau, 2014). Time and experience allowed activists to learn which framings resonate with what audience and how they need to change their messaging to resonate more broadly with audiences. With time, activists were also able to expand on their framings, from frames that were primarily reactive and diagnostic to more prognostic and motivational frames (Benford & Snow, 2000) that pointed to alternatives to privatization and school closures. Time and experience also led activists to determine that, rather than directing frames at a school district leadership that would not be moved, they needed to

pivot toward educating and mobilizing the general population, especially families and communities of color who may support charter schools and needed to be persuaded to elect more progressive school leaders.

Articulating nuance and specificity in movement frames requires time, experience, reflection, and deliberation. In Oakland, a racial justice framing became especially prominent as activists sought to name the dynamics and patterns they saw more accurately. Organizing across cities and working to build a base in their local communities, teachers and community activists became more adept at responding to the political context with more effective framings. Maton (2018) documented a similar shift in organizing in Philadelphia, yet this study also shows how activists elaborated on the racial justice framing to more specifically articulate how privatization and school closures disproportionately harmed and displaced Oakland's poor and Black students.

Over time, Oakland residents gained personal experiences and knowledge that helped them to understand the impacts of privatization, so it became easier for activists to craft framings that built on an emerging consensus among disparate groups about how the movement needed to move forward. For example, the framing of No Cuts, No Closures was initially used by only certain groups, but by the end of the period under study, had become a unifying demand. Activists were also able to deploy their articulations of racial justice framings to build momentum and collaboration across groups to prioritize electing more progressive school board members.

Ongoing challenges in framing the movement

How to frame issues that are complex and layered in ways that resonate with the broadest audience possible appears to be the most salient challenge that organizers encountered with framing their movement against market reforms. The neoliberal political terrain has created a fragmented governance structure (Henig, 2011) with quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations that operate like a shadow state (Epstein, K., 2019). This makes it hard for organizers to identify a clear opponent. Scott and Fruchter (2009) showed that the ability of a grassroots movement to target a clear enemy was among the many factors that facilitated their success against those seeking to privatize a public school but this has not yet happened in Oakland. Without such clarity, organizers struggled to craft diagnostic frames that adequately or succinctly defined the problem or issues, or prognostic frames that outlined a clear solution (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Scott and Fruchter (2009) also found that organizers were not only able to focus on a clear opponent, but that opponent, Edison, had strong ties with then Mayor Guiliani, who the community saw as racist. This made it easy to portray their opponent as a clear enemy of the people. In the Oakland context, organizers had a much harder time identifying a clearly racist opponent, not only because of the fragmented governance structure, but also because the elected board and recent superintendents have been mostly Black and Brown officials. Moreover, some of these district leaders frame their decisions as motivated by racial equity. This also illustrates how multicultural neoliberalism (Melamed, 2006) and the racial politics of advocacy (Hernández, 2016; Scott, 2011, 2013) complicate the political terrain. Oakland activists had to contend with local school district leaders who were almost all people of color yet supported school closures and privatization.

This study also demonstrates how activists continued to struggle with framing in clear and concise messages how race, space, and profit motive drive privatization and school closures (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015; Mayorga et al., 2020). This continues to present a challenge

to framing the diagnosis of the problem (Benford & Snow, 2000). There is a tension between framings that focus primarily on a racial justice analysis and framings that capture the complex interplay of race, space, and capitalism, through more intersectional frameworks. In part, this is because activists continue to struggle with understanding the complex terrain. As this study shows, activists may have only a limited analysis of who or what drives these reforms and why, and who stands to lose and who wins. Moreover, activists do not necessarily have the same analysis. This makes it hard for activist groups to articulate clear frames that adequately yet succinctly capture the complexity of how market reforms, like charter schools, have racially disparate impacts yet represent a universal threat to public education.

The findings also show how activists' framings must speak to a variety of audiences, including the base they hope to mobilize (Oakland residents), district leaders and other policy makers, and their pro-charter opponents. The need to resonate with such diverse stakeholders can make it hard for activists to develop clear and concise framings that resonate widely and can unify a movement. This creates a challenge for articulating the diagnosis, prognosis, and motivational messages that frames need to articulate (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Implications for educational justice movements

Framing, by definition, is an exercise in simplifying and highlighting some aspect of a broader injustice that a movement wants to tackle (Benford & Snow, 2000; Johnston & Noakes, 2005). In the case of this study, activists focused their framings on a racial justice analysis to resonate with more Oakland residents, but especially communities of color who want charter schools because they have been failed by a highly segregated and unequal public school system. As activists refined their racial justice framings to become more nuanced in their critiques of charter schools, to acknowledge that public schools need to be radically transformed, and to articulate the disproportionate harm they inflict on Black students, they helped to make more explicit and accessible the racialized impact of market reforms.

However, how activists frame the issues has implications for how they think about the solutions that are required. Initially, much of the organizing against privatization was rooted in such an analysis of neoliberal capitalism and connected to the critiques that fueled the Occupy Movement (Picower, 2013). With time, many activist groups began to better articulate what was most evident in the urban areas where market reforms proliferated, and that was the racially disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities.

Clarifying a racial analysis of neoliberal policies that undermine public education and exacerbate educational inequities can mean that activists inadvertently sideline an analysis of the political economy that drives the neoliberalization of education (Scott & Holmes, 2016; Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020). Focusing frames on the racialized impact of privatization can obscure the interaction of privatization and school closures with gentrification and land grabs. As is often the case, narrowly attending to dynamics of racial politics can lead us to forget that what drives these reforms is the capitalist pursuit of accumulation by dispossession (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015). The implications are that activists may inadvertently pursue strategies that only target some of the mechanisms through which market reforms undermine educational and social equity (Mayorga et al., 2020).

This did not have to mean that activists would forgo a political economic analysis of these reforms, yet scholars, historians, and political commentators have noted the challenges of integrating racial and economic analyses of social issues in movements for change (Grande, 2015; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). This dilemma has also been documented in the literature on

teacher and community organizing against market reforms (Blanc, 2019; Maton, 2018; Mayorga et al., 2020), so it is not surprising that activists struggle to articulate framings that capture the interplay of racial injustice and political economic processes Among the many reasons why this integration has been challenging for activists, Mayorga and colleagues argue that the seemingly distinct market based reforms have been hard to comprehend as part of a larger neoliberal agenda and "larger forces of racialized dispossession (that) advanced through market-based and privatization-driven reforms" (p. 2). In an attempt to illuminate the intersections of neoliberal capitalism and structural racism, and inform a more intersectional framework for contesting neoliberal school reform, Mayorga, Aggarwal, and Picower edited a volume with the title "*What's race got to do with it?*" They draw on Melamed's theorizations of multicultural neoliberalism to explain how this challenge has only intensified as neoliberalism further mystifies how race continues to operate and serve capitalist accumulation (Melamed, 2006).

Yet, the theoretical framework of racial capitalism and processes of accumulation through dispossession found in the scholarship on the neoliberalization of education (Mayorga et al., 2020) is harder to pinpoint in the praxis of teacher and community organizers. In part, this is because translating such complex and dynamic systems, structures, and processes into political action frames that are clear and concise and resonate with everyday people remains a challenging task for movement leaders. Scholars focusing on activism and organizing have demonstrated how attempts to incorporate a racial analysis to understanding and combating neoliberalization have been divisive for activist groups (Blanc, 2019; Maton, 2018). Teachers and activists of color have pushed white allies to not only develop an understanding of structural racism and its role in privatization and neoliberalization, but to also confront their own racism or blindspots as they engage in activism. When groups pursue a racial analysis and anti-racist approaches to the work, some white activists feel it is a mistake and may even feel alienated or attacked in activist spaces (Maton, 2018). Eric Blanc (2019) demonstrated how in some red states, frames that did not allude to racial inequities allowed for a broader base of educators to revolt, at the cost of educators of color who felt that it was imperative to acknowledge and address the racialized impacts of these policies. In time, educators of color felt the necessity to organize separately. Oakland organizers also faced these dilemmas, as I demonstrate in chapter 2. When one activist group shifted to highlight a racial justice framing, it created tensions between some of the leftist teachers and community organizers, eventually leading to the dissolution of one of the most politically effective groups.

One way that activists can tackle this challenge is to prioritize political education to examine and understand the complexity of neoliberal reforms and how they shift over time more deeply. Through political education, activists can deepen their analysis, thus allowing them to articulate framings that more adequately capture the racial and political economic dimensions of neoliberal reforms (Tarlau, 2014). As Tarlau notes, engaging in political education adds intentionality and elevates the pedagogical aspects of social movements and how involvement in movements can become an educational experience of consciousness-raising and empowerment. But it is important to note that movement leaders must engage in political education not only for themselves, but also organize political education campaigns for the public they aim to mobilize and organize.

Moreover, with a deeper commitment to political education, activists can develop framings that not only resonate with the public, but that are rooted in intersectional frameworks. As examples, Ferman (2021) argues that social justice frameworks allow youth organizers to counter neoliberal reforms by connecting disparate issues and struggles with broader social

justice movements. Rooks' (2017) elaboration of a segrenomics framework is especially useful for articulating the intersections of race and capitalism in the privatization of public education and school closures. Segrenomics captures how the system of separating children in different schools based on race and class is profitable, allowing wealthy elites to impose reforms they claim will improve outcomes for poor students and students of color without any accountability for the reforms they impose. These reformers profit economically by offering programs and services that market strategies rely on, allowing them to tap into the multi-billion dollar public education sector (Lipman, 2011; Ravitch, 2010; Rooks, 2017).

Frameworks like segrenomics offer activists a greater opportunity to resonate with Black and Brown communities based on their experiences in segregated and underfunded schools, while also making direct links between the racial and economic dimensions to the neoliberal reforms that exacerbate racial inequities, displace Black and Brown students and especially Black students and teachers, and more generally undermine efforts to make quality and equitable public schools available to all communities. As argued by Brown and Stern (2018), including an analysis of gender dynamics and feminist perspectives can further deepen an intersectional framework for understanding and articulating the neoliberal threats to public education, helping movement leaders to develop the most robust challenges to these threats.

Conclusion

Though grassroots organizers faced many challenges to fighting back market reforms, including having limited resources and capacity, with time they have built a formidable opposition to privatization, school closures, and the unfettered expansion of the charter sector. In Oakland, as in other cities across the U.S., community and teacher organizers have achieved meaningful victories, demonstrating that though neoliberal reformers exert outsized influence in education policy, money does not always rule the day. Being strategic about framing has been a critical aspect of their success, though activists have also faced challenges with framing. Activists struggled to frame the issues in ways that resonated with Black and Brown families and community members who experience the harm of a public school system that is not only often culturally irrelevant, but outright subtractive and harmful (Dumas, 2014; Grande, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999).

Activists made strides by adding nuance to their framings, which allowed them to find common ground among disparate groups and increase support for their movement amongst Oakland residents. With this momentum, Oakland's activists have practically stopped the expansion of charter schools in the city and prevented many more school closures. They also helped to galvanize broad support for the 2019 teachers' strike, ensuring that the strike connected the need to increase funding for public schools to the necessity of stopping privatization, school closures, and the neoliberalization of public education. Finally, these activists helped the city to elect more progressive school board members who ran on a platform of resisting these market reforms.

This study also illuminates the ongoing challenges to framing the complex and mystified interplay of governance, race, class, and land in the neoliberal context. Neoliberal policies and reforms are part of capitalist project to secure the power and increase the wealth of elites by profiting from the public education sector while at the same time depressing the potential of public education to prepare a more critical population with the skills and dispositions to demand more just, equitable, and democratic society (Lipman, 2011; Weiner, 2012). These policies are a threat to all but the elite class. Yet, these reforms also disproportionately harm poor communities

of color and Black and Brown students, constituting a *racialized* project of accumulation through dispossession (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015; Mayorga et al., 2020).

Yet, my findings suggest that, with time, activists will continue to develop intersectional approaches and frames that will increase support for the movements against privatization and neoliberalization. The Covid-19 pandemic makes these activist efforts even more urgent, as organizers must mount a movement capable of protecting public institutions and vulnerable communities from those who seek to exploit this crisis for their own gain. The pandemic has made abundantly clear that public schools are vital institutions that serve important functions in our society.

Chapter 4

Politics, tensions, and possibilities in teacher and community movements to stop privatization and school closures

Abstract

This article examines the factors and circumstances that have facilitated or limited collaboration between teacher and community activists in movements to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland, CA. It explores the tensions and challenges of joining forces as well as the opportunities created in the current policy context. Based on a case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2007) of organizing in Oakland conducted over three years, this article draws extensively from interviews with key activists and organizers and as well as observations and participation in movement activity. I draw from and build on an emerging body of scholarship that examines teacher activism and community organizing against neoliberal school reforms through a framework that combines insights from social movement literature on alliances and coalitions and literature on the neoliberal policy context.

Introduction

In February 2019, Oakland's public school teachers went on strike to demand higher wages, better working conditions, and increased funding for public schools. Like other striking teachers in recent years, they also demanded an end to school closures and connected privatization in education to the austerity politics that had been imposed on Oakland schools. The teacher strike was important not only because it was part of an uprising of teachers against austerity, but also because it seemed to signal a shift in the ways teacher and community activists related to each other. It was widely supported by the Oakland community, and it brought greater attention to the problem of privatization and school closures and helped to shift the narrative about why urban public schools are struggling and what policies are needed to provide quality education for all students.

Starting at least since the 1980s, neoliberal reformers infused market principles into the public school system to serve their political interests by making workforce readiness the primary function of schooling and to profit from the multibillion dollar sector (Lipman, 2011; Scott & Holme, 2016). To achieve these goals, reformers exploited political tensions related to class and race to drive a schism between teachers and the communities they served (Shelton, 2017; Weiner, 2012). Teachers had interests as workers that sometimes went against community demands, and there were also tensions related to racial politics, particularly in urban areas where most teachers were often white, but the student bodies were mostly Black and Brown (Perlstein, 2004; Perrillo, 2012). Yet, in the waves of teacher strikes since 2012, there was a renewed solidarity between teachers and urban communities who had grown tired of suffering the consequences of neoliberal austerity (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014). Clearly, racial and class based tensions still existed, yet there were conditions that seemed to nurture this solidarity. Working more closely together, teacher and community activists have mounted a movement to put an end to neoliberal and market oriented reforms that increase privatization and lead to school closures.

This article examines how neoliberalism impacts the ability of teachers and community activists to work together toward educational justice. I discuss the factors and circumstances that have facilitated or limited collaboration between teachers and community activists in movements

to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland, CA. Further, I describe the tensions and challenges of teacher and community collaboration as well as the opportunities created when they join forces to shift the current policy context. Based on a case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2007) of organizing in Oakland conducted between 2017 and 2020, this article draws extensively from interviews with key activists and organizers and as well as observations and participation in movement activity. I build on an emerging body of scholarship that examines teacher activism and community organizing against neoliberal school reforms through a framework that combines insights from social movement literature on alliances and coalitions and literature on the neoliberal policy context. I ask, what challenges and opportunities do teachers and community organizers face in building a movement to stop market reforms? How do historical tensions and the current political context support, inspire, or limit the possibilities of teacher and community collaboration to stop privatization and school closures?

Literature Review

This study builds upon an emerging body of work that examines community and teacher organizing against market based reforms in education. Scholarship on education reform has found many benefits to community organizing for education justice. It has been a powerful and effective tool for improving schools and educational outcomes. It also can generate strong and sustained forms of public engagement in low-income communities who are the ones generally having to organize to improve their schools. With a focus on the active engagement and leadership of grassroots people in the politics of creating social change, community organizing can develop the capacity of everyday people to lead efforts to remedy inequalities and failure in public policy and institutions (Nygreen, 2017; Warren, 2005, 2010). To be most effective, researchers find that community organizing efforts should prioritize relationship building, political education, and collaboration between many sectors of a community(Warren, 2010; Wells et al., 2010). Given the limited capacity of underfunded urban schools to improve without community engagement, community organizers often pursue collaboration with educators at the school or district level. Yet, working in collaboration with schools and educators is fraught with tension and challenges. One challenge is that activists and organizers can develop differing power analysis based and assessments of who has the institutional authority to make decisions around community demands and which allies can help to win a group's campaign (Mediratta et al., 2009). Identifying a clear target in movements to improve or transform education can be difficult (Su, 2010). Whether activist groups direct their energies toward the school, district, state, or federal level is partly determined by the historical moment in which groups emerge, their organizational capacity at any given time, and the opportunities for successfully mobilizing mass support within the political environment (Mediratta et al., 2009; Warren, 2010).

Activist groups can also face tensions between pursuing the demands of their members and trying to negotiate common ground with other groups or people to build their base. When working to build broader alliances aimed at affecting change on the district, city, or state level, groups might neglect to build relationships at the local level (Warren, 2010; Wells et al., 2010).

Building collaboration across different communities is another key challenge that movements have to contend with. Differences between people across race, class, ethnicity, language, and other identities, whether real or perceived, often poses a challenge to building trust among individuals and between different groups. For example, middle class people, whites, native or fluent English speakers, and those with higher levels of formal education may have, or believe they have, more experience working with civic and city wide organizations than racially

and economically targeted people that can make them helpful, but often they can dominate spaces in ways that are alienating to other groups (Wells et al., 2010). Even within and between different racially and economically targeted groups, overcoming perceived or real differences also presents challenges to alliance building. While Wells and colleagues argue that "building meaningful multiracial coalitions requires putting racial justice at the center of collaborative efforts" (p. 187, citing Applied Research Center website), other scholars find that organizers, particularly organizers of color, sometimes feel compelled to downplay racism or racial differences to build unity in their groups and appeal to a wider audience by emphasizing the role of class over race (Su, 2007; Welton & Freelon, 2017)

Building collaboration between community groups and teachers has been a consistent challenge to building movements for educational justice. Case studies of community organizing show that efforts are bolstered when communities and teachers' union work in alliance, yet for many different reasons, these alliances continuously prove difficult to build and maintain (Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2010, p. 160). Maximizing the potential of community and teacher collaborations to join forces in demanding educational justice requires a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities for collaboration in the current political context.

Teacher and community organizing against market reforms

This study builds on an emerging body of scholarship that explores teacher and community organizing to stop marketization and privatization in education (Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, 2015; Danley & Rubin, 2020; Ferman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020). As Aggarwal and colleagues noted, "amid the slow, swift, seemingly silent, and flexible restructuring of neoliberal education reform, communities are actively working to reclaim and transform their schools and communities" (Aggarwal et al., 2012, p.163). These studies have further illuminated the challenges, tensions, and opportunities for collaboration across activist groups and with activist teachers to stop market reforms, privatization, and school closures.

Studies of grassroots movements to stop privatization and market reforms highlight the uneven political power in these struggles (Ferman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott & Fruchter, 2009). The ability of communities to engage meaningfully in a deliberative process to gauge the desirability of these reforms is limited, and as Nygreen (2017) showed, more performative than true democratic participation. For example, Scott and Fruchter's (2009) study of one community campaign to stop a school takeover showed that even though school district policies allowed the school community to cast votes on whether Edison should take over the school, in reality, Edison was advantaged to win the vote because it had the mayor's as well as school leaders' support.

Ferman (2017) further illuminated some of the challenges facing grassroots organizing efforts, including the way discussions of race and racism can create tensions when a range of stakeholders are involved. Other challenges that activists dealt with included working with unions that lacked diversity, having limited resources and capacity, and responding to a sense of urgency with reactionary politics or undemocratic processes. Ferman also noted how changing demographics presented a challenge to collaboration within and across groups but added that diversity might at times serve as an asset to grassroots campaigns.

Despite these challenges, activist groups have had some success in their efforts to stop privatization. For example, Scott and Fruchter (2009) found that alliances between groups, city and neighborhood leaders, the teachers' union, other public sector unions, higher education groups, and civil rights activists proved essential to mobilizing opposition to privatization through a school takeover by Edison Schools. Though they were less resourced, community

organizers had valuable experience that allowed them to draw on multiple tactics to build support for their opposition movement. These community based organizations were well positioned to articulate the interests of the community against pro-privatization forces and to build effective alliances. Looking at activism across different cities, Ferman (2017) found that activists have forged new alliances, adopted creative tactics, and strategically reframed issues in their movements to stop the marketization of public education

Another body of scholarship has focused on the organizing of teacher activists and social justice unions in movements to stop market reforms (Brown & Stern, 2018; Maton, 2018; Picower, 2013; Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015; Stern & Brown, 2016; Weiner, 2012). Several studies document how teachers have organized against neoliberal attacks through teacher activist organizations (Picower, 2012; Quinn & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015; Stern & Brown, 2016), and others have examined the role of activist teachers in reshaping teachers' unions towards social justice (Bascia, 2016; Dyke & Muckian Bates, 2019; Maton, 2018; Weiner, 2012).

Many studies underscore the importance of teachers organizing outside the union and building alliances with other unions and with community groups (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Dyke & Muckian Bates, 2019; Karvelis, 2019; Pham & Philip, 2020; Sherfinski et al., 2019). Through solidarity unionism, activist teachers helped to bridge teachers and communities in a unified movement to combat the austerity measures that undermined not only public schools, but also the ability of families to thrive (Dyke & Muckian Bates, 2019). This also helped gain support from communities, especially communities of color, that had been alienated from organized teachers because they believed teachers' interests undermined the goals of educational and racial equity (Perrillo, 2012). Perrillo documented how racial politics and the political persecution of radicals and communists undermined solidarity between teachers' unions and community activists. Neoliberal framings of teachers as lazy, parents as uncaring, and students as criminal also helped to drive wedges between groups that could be working together for education (Picower, 2013).In the context of undemocratic governance and extreme political imbalances, material resources become especially important, making collaborations between community organizers and teacher unions critical for mounting effective movements against neoliberal reforms (Danley & Rubin, 2020; Lipman, 2015; Weiner, 2012). In Chicago, for example, the teachers' union played an important role in the movement to stop privatization and school closures by contributing social and economic capital to grassroots movements (Lipman, 2017).

Weiner (2012) argues that teachers unions can take leadership in coalitions to combat neoliberalization, but because they have lost credibility with communities by not doing more to stop neoliberal reforms, teachers may need to start working in alliances with community groups outside of the union and "develop ways of developing mutually respectful and supportive alliances with communities that have been ill-served by public education" (p. 45). Brogan (2014) also argues that teachers unions, by virtue of having large numbers of members concentrated in urban areas and providing a critical social service, have great potential to build integrated labor and community alliances.

Research demonstrates that the potential of activist teachers and teachers' unions to advance the goals of educational justice and equity can be strengthened by organizing through social justice frameworks that center the concerns, experiences, and leadership of women, Black and Brown communities, and the working poor (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Weiner, 2012). This scholarship also demonstrates the how important it can be for teachers to explicitly name racism in their efforts to fight for educational inequities and build solidarity with communities because

not doing so has greatly undermined their efforts in the past (Weiner, 2012). Specific attention to race and power is critical to building broad coalitions that include teachers and community groups, argue Pham and Phillip (2020). Scholars also find that amplifying the role of gender and centering women of color educators can help draw connections between teachers' lives and working conditions and the well-being of communities (Pham & Phillip, 2020). This can be done through a feminist and intersectional framework for analyzing and organizing against the contradictions of global city development that causes the shared precarity of teachers and the communities they serve (Brogan, 2014; Brown & Stern, 2018). "It is imperative now, more than ever, that we show up for one another and build alliances in our shared precarity" (Brown & Stern, 2018).

While most studies of organizing against market reforms focus either on grassroots community groups or on activist teacher groups or teachers' unions, many studies point to the importance of collaboration and coalition building between these two stakeholders (Perrillo, 2012). As demonstrated in the most recent wave of teacher strikes since 2012, and especially in 2018 and 2019, there is great potential to disrupt the hegemony of neoliberalism in education and mount a robust movement for educational and social justice when teachers and communities organize together. Given the historical tensions between teachers and the communities they serve, this study seeks to understand how the current political context undermines or facilitates these important collaborations.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study combines social movement scholarship on alliances and coalitions in social movements with scholarship on how neoliberalism shapes a new political context. Together, these bodies of work provide a useful lens for assessing the ability of different activists to form and sustain collaborations across groups, and especially collaboration between activist teachers and grassroots, community based groups.

Coalitions and alliances in social movements

Social movements are built through alliances that allow community based activist groups to expand their capacity, reach, and legitimacy through expanded participation, all of which can help grown and sustain organizing efforts (Wells et al., 2010). Social movement scholars explore the complex nature of collective action and the dynamics of diverse individuals and groups working toward a goal to address a discreet social problem or a combination of social issues (McCammon & Moon, 2015). Within this broad body of work, scholars have paid particular attention to coalitions in social movements as an important means of achieving a movement's goal. In a review of studies that examined collaboration in collective action, McCammon and Moon define coalitions as formations of distinct activist groups that "mutually agree to cooperate and work together toward a common goal," and note that while groups involved in coalitions might pool resources and coordinate actions, they maintain their own distinct organizational identities (p. 2).

McCammon and Moon also note that coalitions can range along a continuum from less intensity and formality between groups to more intense, sustained, and formal collaboration. For example, groups may come together to plan and execute a single event, or they may work together over years to coordinate campaigns and actions. At times, more permanent alliances may create an umbrella organizational structure to coordinate coalition work that might even have its own staff and funding sources. Another common feature of coalitions and alliances is

their diversity, as they often include members from different backgrounds and identities along race, ethnicity, language, citizenship status, class, political affiliation, religion, and other social positions. They may also include a wide range of bodies or entities, sometimes including state, corporate, or philanthropic actors or media outlets.

McCammon and Moon (2015) then discuss what scholars have found to be the central factors or circumstances that facilitate or impede collaboration through coalitions and alliances. They found four factors were critical: shared beliefs and identities, social ties among activists, opportunities and threats in the broader context, and organizational resources. Not surprisingly, scholars find that groups sharing ideological orientations, similar identities, or common interests and goals are more likely to form alliances. While forming coalitions across these lines can bolster movement efforts, this can be challenging to accomplish. For example, a culture of "organizing one's own" discouraged coalitions across racial and ethnic lines, even where there were common goals or beliefs. Yet, social ties in the form of prior relationships with peers in other groups or who are members of different groups can serve as an important link that can facilitate collaboration. These "bridge builders" or "brokers" can also help groups work through differences.

McCammon and Moon's review also highlighted the role of political opportunities and threats in facilitating or limiting collaboration, though the direction and power of these influences remain unclear. Similarly, the availability of resources can at times support alliances, while other times it may be the scarcity of resources that lead groups to work together. Less is known about which resources matter for coalition formation.

Writing about movements for educational justice, Wells and colleagues contribute to our understanding of how collaboration and alliances matter. They add that groups forming alliances "coalesce in ways that are unique to time, place, target issues, resources, and relationships" (2010, p. 174). They further note how alliances allow organizations to share expertise, increase each group's visibility, and expand their capacity. Wells and colleagues argue that alliances can be effective when they help people understand the systemic roots of inequities, diminish isolation, and increase the participation and leadership of those most impacted by inequities. Yet, alliances also take a lot of effort to build and manage. Individual activists and groups can have different ideas, styles, analysis, or strategies, as well as distinct experiences that make working across groups challenging. Dynamics related to race and other axes of identity require groups to try to build relationships and generate trust among group members and across groups, yet group leaders do not always have the capacity to prioritize these processes. These challenges often make working together in alliances or coalitions difficult to sustain (Wells et al., 2010).

Neoliberalism in education: The new political grid

Scholars of education have written extensively about the many ways that neoliberalism has attempted to make public education function primarily as a means for preparing a workforce that can serve a neoliberal political economy. Neoliberal reforms make this shift by shaping the experiences of teaching and learning (De Lissovoy, 2014), the organization of schools, governance of systems, and the very values that justify a system of public education (Engel, 2000; Labaree, 1997). Yet, few studies have specifically examined how the neoliberal terrain impacts community organizing for educational justice or collaboration among activist groups. Nygreen's (2017) study of one community organizing effort was intentional about attending to this question. She argued that community organizers exercised their agency to pursue their educational visions, yet they did so on a political terrain that consistently marginalized them.

"This terrain is best understood as a field of power relations constituted by vast material inequalities along with regimes of knowledge and discourses that naturalize and legitimize those inequalities. On this terrain, the very definition of educational justice is contested and uncertain, as is the path to achieving it" (Nygreen, 2017, p. 56). This study engages Henig's (2011) description of the ways that neoliberalism has altered the socio-political terrain where battles for educational justice and equity are fought, which he described as the *new political grid*.

Henig echoes other critical scholars of education who argue that the new political grid "poses serious challenges to grassroots organizing strategies" (p. 77). The neoliberal policy context is shaped by broader structural shifts caused by globalization and its impact on demographics, the political economy, jobs and wages, and competition between nations. As has been well documented, globalization and neoliberalization have depressed wages, exacerbated inequality, and increased the number of people living in precarious circumstances (Anyon, 2014; Lipman, 2011; Taylor, 2012). Even those with middle class jobs, like school teachers, experience economic challenges. All these shifts directly impact education and politics of education reform. They have dramatically altered the educational opportunities and experiences of students, particularly students of color and those from lower income families in urban areas.

Henig notes that new governance and funding structures require that organizers working for educational justice and equity must also address policies at the state and national levels, requiring additional resources and capacity. Organizers must also contend with powerful elites who, through their philanthropy, have become mayor policy influencers. Movement leaders must also determine which level or levels of policymakers to target, requiring greater understanding of the role of each level of government and different policy actors. In this policy context, allies and collaboration between groups is key to effectively contesting neoliberal policies. Henig argues that organizing needs to be "tactically more flexible, equipped to compete in multiple political venues, and built around loosely coupled relationships among distinct interests that allow (organizers) freedom to pursue specific interests while maintaining relationships that facilitate *ad hoc* coalitions" (p. 53).

In combining insights from these bodies of work, I aim to better understand in what ways this new political grid impacts collaboration between community groups and activist teachers. Social movement scholarship helps us understand the benefits of alliances and coalitions, as well as factors that facilitate or impede sustained collaboration. As the neoliberal context has impacted every facet of social life and the public education system, it is important to examine how conditions in the current policy context might create greater opportunities for broad collaboration across stakeholders to reverse the tide of neoliberalization in education. Evidence of this potential can be seen in the wave of teacher strikes since 2012 as well as the broad community resistance to school closures and other effects of privatization and marketization.

Methodology and Study design

As a researcher and activist scholar, I seek to better understand how educators and community activists can make education more equitable and just. To this end, my research focuses on grassroots and community organizers to draw lessons about the intricacies and nuances of building a social movement for educational justice in the current political context. In the tradition of decolonizing methodologies and scholarship by radical feminist women of color, my research attends to challenges and contradictions in resistance movements, while also recognizing the agency, creativity, and courage of movement leaders and activists (Collins, 1986; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Patel, 2015b; Smith, 2013; Tuck, 2009).

To collect data for this study, I conducted in depth interviews with fourteen community organizers (6 women and 8 men; 11 identify as Black, Latinx, or biracial, and 3 are white) and eight teacher activists (6 women and 2 men; 7 identify as Black, Latinx, or biracial, and 1 is white) whom I selected purposefully because they each have been leaders in five of the key groups organizing against market reforms in Oakland from 2012 through the end of 2020. Most interviews lasted two hours and most participants were interviewed twice. I use pseudonyms for all participants but use the real name of the elected official. I also use the true names of activist groups and coalitions, all of which are publicly available through social media

Over the three year study, I also collected data as an observer, and often participant, in events related to organizing against school closures and privatization in Oakland. These events included meetings of activist groups and coalitions, rallies and marches, picket lines during the strike, school board meetings, and school district sponsored community engagement events. To further understand the broader field of the movement to stop marketization and privatization of public education, I attended conferences where movement activists connected privatization to racial and social justice issues. These included, for example, the annual conference hosted by the Network for Public Education and the Kerner at 50 Conference hosted by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society. I took wrote memos based on my fieldnotes from these events which I also coded and analyzed. I also collected and analyzed movement documents such as event flyers, educational materials, and social media posts.

To analyze my data, I used an iterative process that combined elements of narrative and thematic analysis (Glesne, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Initially, I coded data inductively to capture emerging themes, and in second and third rounds of coding, I used findings from relevant literature to finalize my coding. Coding of interview data was done first in Nvivo and later rounds were conducted by hand, while coding of fieldnotes and memos were done entirely by hand. To deepen my analysis, I continuously wrote memos to articulate answers to my research questions that emerged from my data.

The Oakland Context

Organizing against neoliberal and market oriented reforms in Oakland has focused on combating privatization, the expansion of the charter school sector, and stopping school closures. Some local activists might pinpoint the origin of this movement at least to 1988, when the state first attempted to impose a state loan on the district and with it, a state takeover. This power move was successfully stopped through the political maneuverings of a school board that found a way to avoid the loan (Epstein, K. K., 2012). As activist scholar Kitty Kelly Epstein noted, local residents and educators saw this attempted takeover as a racist and undemocratic attack on Oakland's elected leaders, most of whom were Black. In 2003, the school board was unable to stop another attempt to impose a loan and state takeover. The state appointed an administrator with total discretion over the school district's budget and policy making and empowered the Fiscal Control and Management Team (FCMAT) to audit the district. FCMAT, an independent body created in 1991 by the state, was tasked with monitoring the district's financial progress. During the takeover, the district began to pursue school closures while at the same time increasing the number of charter schools in the district. The district now has one third of its students attending a charter school.

In the aftermath of the state takeover, the Oakland school district was destabilized. When the state returned partial control to the local school board in 2009, they left the district with a larger debt. The state entrusted an appointed trustee to oversee the district and empowered this

trustee to veto decisions made by the elected school board. The district has also suffered from high turnover of superintendents, the imposition of austerity measures through budget cuts, and the outside influence of venture philanthropists who pour money into electing and training school board members and training superintendents who support privatization, charter schools, and school closures.

As in other cities across the country, the Occupy Movement helped to intensify community and teacher resistance to these neoliberal policies and the role of elites in reshaping public education. When in 2012 the Oakland school district decided to close 5 schools, community activists engaged in Occupy lent support to the founders of OPEN (Oakland Public Education Network), a grassroots group that organized to stop the school closures. Since then, other community and teacher activist groups have formed to expose and derail policies aimed at weakening the teachers' union and increasing privatization, including Parents United, Classroom Struggle, SOSD (the Schools Oakland Students Deserve), and the J4OS (Justice for Oakland Students) coalition. After years of organizing against marketization and privatization, these groups helped to create awareness about the negative impact of these policies on Oakland students, teachers, and communities.

When, in 2019 the district decided to close Roots Middle School, a campus that served entirely low income Black and Brown students, they created a perfect opportunity for teacher and community activists to join forces in a teacher strike. The February 2019 Oakland teacher strike called not only for higher wages and smaller class sizes, but also demanded an end to privatization and school closures. Yet after the strike, the district continued to purse school closures, deciding to close Kaiser elementary. This decision led to the formation of another teacher and community group, Oakland Not for Sale, that organized to stop school closures and privatization. After the strike, these activist groups turned their attention to regaining control over their district and joined a new coalition, Action 2020, to organize together to flip the school board in the 2020 elections.

Findings

This study asked: What challenges and opportunities do teachers and community organizers face in collaborating to stop privatization and school closures? How do historical tensions and the current political context support, inspire, or limit the possibilities of teacher and community collaboration in movements to stop market reforms? I first discuss three main challenges and tensions that were illuminated by the data, then three factors or circumstances that appear to have facilitated collaboration.

Race, racism, and racial politics

Race, racism, and racial politics are pervasive issues that undermined collaboration in Oakland's movement to stop school closures and privatization. Issues related to race permeated the interpersonal dynamics within groups, collaboration across groups, and the broader political terrain. I discuss here three instances where tensions and challenges related to racial politics were evident, from micro level dynamics to the more macro level of collaboration across stakeholders.

Race and racial politics presented challenges to organizing against market reforms at the micro level of organizing across racial and ethnic differences within groups. When groups began to engage a racial justice framework more intentionally for understanding market reforms and for organizing against these policies, they sometimes experienced tension between group members. Activists of color tended to advocate for and support a racial justice analysis because they

wanted to address the racialized disparities in the impact of market reforms, especially with regards to school closures. Some white colleagues in these activist spaces resisted elevating a racial analysis and advocated for continuing to promote a class based analysis that focused on how billionaires were driving these reforms. For example, Rob, an experienced white male teacher activist, argued that "the strategy is supposed to be aligned with the power analysis,...our power analysis has always been we're fighting to billionaires, it's the billionaires who are behind the school district that won't give in to our negotiations, who is privatizing." Rob raised concerns that elevating a race-based analysis could undermine the power analysis that the group had developed over years of study and praxis.

The debates about whether to elevate a race based or a class based analysis also exposed underlying challenges of organizing across race, class, and gender differences. Some of the women of color expressed that they had tolerated organizing with white male colleagues because they had a shared commitment to leftist politics and recognized that many of their white colleagues had extensive experience teaching and organizing in Oakland. However, the shift to a racial justice analysis and framing intensified the cleavages they perceived between themselves and their white colleagues. Alex, a Latina and white teacher activist and mother, shared,

> My sense, at least for me, it's like I can't handle being in an environment that feels toxic...We've had like a few different older white people who took up disproportionate space in the space. We're also like, they come with lots of knowledge around this neoliberal piece and lots of long-term history in the district...But, there's a way that they're entitled in the way they bring agenda items or how long they talk for, where they're important.

Alex went on to explain that their group had continuously engaged in conversations to address how race was showing up in their collective space and meetings, but they had not extensively discussed the strategic importance of centering leaders of color in the movement or the OEA. For Alex and some of her colleagues, it was politically necessary and right that the organizing *and* the union be led by teachers of color since students of color were the most impacted by the district policies that needed to be changed. She and several other colleagues thus advocated for union leadership that was mostly people of color, ideally from Oakland.

> I have like a strong value around that and I think that there are ways that came out that some of the white people in (our group) felt ... first don't value that as much. But second, felt a little like attacked or defensive because they've been able to hold a lot of power and clout from being older people who kind of ran our union in different ways...and, now there's something that kind of excludes them to some extent...there was just like a way that now that there's like real shifts around who's the leadership of our union and how race is being talked about, then you could like see the reality of people's racial politics differently.

Alex and Amada explained that some white colleagues felt they were being shut out of the work, while others just continued to push their positions. Not only had their white colleagues taken up too much space in their organizing group, but they also exposed their privilege when they objected to elevating a racial analysis. As women of color, they felt these issues were too much to deal with on top of all the energy they expended as mothers, teachers, and activists, and they finally decided to walk away from that leftist group, which eventually dissolved when key leaders moved to organizing primarily within the union. This activist group had served as an

outside caucus of leftist teachers that also include community and parent activists, so the dissolution of this group also meant the loss of an important collaborative space.

On a broader scale, activist teachers also faced resistance from many teachers when they attempted to provide political education workshops that connected privatization, austerity, and racial inequities in public schooling. The newly formed Race and Privatization committee of the teachers union created an educational presentation that they shared with teachers across the district. They used a training of trainers model to prepare teachers to lead these educational sessions for their school communities. Yet, the committee found that many teachers felt that the presentation was too controversial in how it discussed racial inequities and they wanted to soften the material to make it more acceptable to teachers at their school sites. Even with these changes, teachers leading the trainings found that many white teachers were offended by the material. They found that some of their colleagues were hesitant to lead these conversations and others were outright defensive when discussing racism. Amada discussed this challenge:

> So, figuring out how to talk to folks about race relations…and that we have to be able to, you know, it's it isn't a personal attack on you. And it's interesting, how many specifically white teachers that have heard this, have said, 'I'm feeling insulted by this presentation!' How is this insulting? I didn't tell you that you failed. Like, maybe you did. Maybe you didn't. I mean, I don't I don't have any sort of illusions that every black student I've had in my class has gotten the best. So how do we hold that?

Amada found these conversations about race and racism to be "insanely challenging." Some teachers trained to lead these discussions even altered the presentation to reduce or eliminate the focus on race. Though she could understand why talking honestly about racism could be difficult for teachers, Amada insisted that this needed to be a focus of the movement as they continued to build their base of support and improve connections between teachers and the communities they serve. The resistance from many teachers suggests that they were not ready to confront the depth of racial inequality, presenting a challenge for collaborating with community groups and Oakland residents who lead with a racial justice analysis.

Race and racism were also used by the district to drive a wedge between communities facing school closures and mergers. Kaiser parents and educators mobilized quickly to save their school, conducting research and providing evidence to counter the district's rationale for the need to close Kaiser. As their resistance grew, district leaders continuously changed the reasons for needing to close Kaiser and eventually framed the decision as one that would lead to more racial integration by bringing white families from Kaiser to Sankofa, a school that had a majority Black and Brown student body. Edwin, a white father of Kaiser students who became a leader in the fight to save the school, explained how the district "would say on the record at board meetings, you know, it's all about you know, white people who don't want to share…the reason why they're fighting this closure is because white people don't want to share." District leaders used this justification to discredit Kaiser families and teachers.

> They were kind of weaponizing social justice memes against us and how they were kind of... once there is an identity, that identity can be exploited. You know, and I feel like they were exploiting the different identities of Oakland basically to benefit the profits of the billionaires.

Edwin also noted that members of pro charter also used these arguments against those fighting to keep Kaiser open. After young students spoke at a board meeting in defense of Kaiser, adults from these groups booed the students and said they were privileged white kids who did not want to mix with Sankofa students. Edwin explained how this impacted Kaiser parents, students, and teachers.

> So not only were we going through that bruising trauma of having our school and our community ripped away from all of us, we were being shamed for kind of fighting for it. And it just got really, really, ugly and really, really unpleasant. Yeah, it's an injustice. It's an injustice not just what they're doing but *the way* they're going about it. They're trying to divide Oakland more than it already is.

Edwin and his fellow parents and Kaiser teachers saw through the districts' rhetoric because using integration became a justification for closing their school only after the Kaiser community had effectively nullified previous justifications, like that the closure would save money for the district or that the school had been under enrolled. In addition, the Kaiser community was aware that the district had wanted to close their school for several years, and only through community pressure had they been able to stop the district in their previous attempts.

However, Ella, a Black mother of Oakland students and an organizer with the union noted that there were likely Kaiser families who really did not want to send their children to a school that was largely Black and Brown. It is well known that white families in particular tend to not enroll their children in schools that are majority children of color (Holme, 2002; Lankford & Wyckoff, 2005). As Ella noted, the racial tensions that had been heightened by the district's use of integration as a reason to close Kaiser caused a rift between the Kaiser and Sankofa communities. Without some intentional effort to repair the relationship, the effort to stop the closure of Kaiser likely lost some potential allies. It also presented another challenge to greater collaboration between teacher and community groups because it stoked racial animosity between whites and people of color. It was a case of dog whistle politics (Haney López, 2015) used to undermine solidarity.

Racial dynamics and politics also presented a challenge on the scale of inter organizational collaboration and coalition building between the teachers' union and community groups. Activist teachers working through a leftist caucus and other progressive teacher groups had helped to build a bridge between the teachers' union and community groups. This provided much needed organizational capacity and resources that the grassroots movement to stop closures had not had previously. Yet, there was also a sense among community leaders that the union should not and could not lead this movement because their primary function was to represent teachers as workers. Jax explained his position in these words:

> Teachers' unions cannot lead in this fight and will not lead this fight. And that is the problem that I have with a lot of the teachers' unions and a lot of the language that comes out from them. Teachers' unions say stuff like, yes, we need to organize the parents, we're going to organize the community, and I say no they're not. They shouldn't even try that and they can't. What they need to do is they need to support the organizing that parents and community (are) already doing.

Jax elaborated on why he felt that teachers could not lead the efforts to stop school closures. He offered several reasons for his position.

> We don't have the same interests. If a school closes, the teacher will get assigned to another school. If a school closes, that community doesn't have a school anymore. There are class differences, you know, teachers have a postgraduate degree to be able to be a teacher. Most of the communities that they're working in don't have that. Most of the teachers in Oakland did not come from here. There's this whole list of things. And teachers should be advocating and organizing for teachers. Which they don't do. But there's this mistake in the language, you know, teachers say, we're gonna start the movement, we're going to organize those teachers. And it is a patronizing attitude to think you're going to show up in a city and we need you to come save us. What we need you to do is learn how to support what we're already doing.

Similar sentiments were expressed by a grandmother at an informal gathering of a small group of Black parents and grandparents where the Superintendent came to listen to their concerns and priorities. This grandmother, who had put her children and now her grandchildren in Oakland public schools, shared that she did not understand why teachers went on strike for higher wages when they already make so much more than many of the families in the communities they serve. Moreover, she added, many teachers still did not do their jobs well because they did not know how to teach and love Black children (fieldnotes, 4/16/19). Most of the other parents in the room nodded their heads in agreement or offered verbal affirmations of this statement. There was a shared recognition that too many teachers were not from the communities they served and that they failed to adequately support Black students.

This study reveals how race and racial politics continue to present a challenge in the neoliberal policy terrain. As has long been the case in social justice movements, activists of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, even when they share political commitments, can find it difficult to work together due to the legacy of racism. While activists of color felt it was imperative to address racism and racial privilege within their activist groups, their white colleagues found these discussions divisive. They also disagreed about the need to elevate a racial justice framework for their movement against privatization. These differing perspectives led some of the teachers of color to decide to step away from the activist group that had organized with for years. Yet, as I discuss in further detail below, the strategic decision to elevate a racial justice framework, did have the intended benefit of expanding public support for the movement against privatization and school closures. The lesson is that centering issues of race and racism has its cost, as some activist groups and alliances may not be able to overcome the tensions that are inherent when racism is addressed head on. But as demonstrated in other studies of movements to stop privatization, centering race and racism had an overall positive impact on the movement's ability to resonate more broadly and engage broader sectors of Oakland's community.

In the neoliberal context, what has become more complex and mystified are the intersections of race and class in the politics of market reforms (Mayorga et al., 2020; Scott, 2011, 2013). This was evident in how school board leaders were able to effectively paint white parents fighting to save their school as being self-interested bigots who simply did not want to integrate with a largely Black school. Though Kaiser parents were not entirely white, the district leaders were able use race as a wedge between them and the mostly Black and Brown parents of

the school to which their children would be assigned. Moreover, in the face of parent and community outrage over the decision to close Kaiser, the district shifted their rationale for closing their school as serving the goal of racial and ethnic desegregation. This discursive move instantly turned Kaiser advocates into racists, despite the fact that the school district had not made good faith efforts to desegregate Oakland schools and only used this rationale when their other justifications were effectively refuted by data.

Most importantly, school closures in Oakland, as in most other cities, have disproportionately targeted schools serving poor Black and Brown students. Closing schools has been a mechanism for profiting from the displacement of low income Black and Brown students and families. Real estate developers promote school closures to gentrify neighborhoods and profit from privatizing public buildings and lands (Jani, 2017; Lipman, 2011). Kaiser teachers and parents attempted to highlight this motivation by naming their group "Oakland Not for Sale." Yet, the optics of a school in the more affluent Oakland Hills, with a population that was disproportionately white and more affluent, made it easy for the district to undermine Kaiser's attempts to argue that they were part of a broader social and racial justice movement against school closures, displacement, and gentrification.

Divisions and fragmentation within and across groups

In addition to racial dynamics and politics, another challenge to having more collaboration between activist teachers and community groups was the fragmentation within groups. Teachers and community groups were themselves divided over important issues. I highlight several of the most critical tensions that divided teachers and community activists.

Among activist teachers, there were divisions based on different views about the priorities that should guide their efforts in the wake of the strike. After the strike was over, teachers committed to fighting privatization and school closures had different views about what was needed to continue to build this anti-privatization movement. Several teachers interviewed expressed a need to focus on organizing teachers and families in every school. In Amada's words,

> This is our year to build. This is our year to slow down. We don't want to burn ourselves out, or anybody else. And we need to build structures at our schools so that we're ready for what's coming next year with the elections and the new contract campaign. And if we're, you know, if we're calling on people to mobilize every week, every month for the school board meetings, then what?

For Amada, the sustainability of teacher activism was a major concern. She did not want neither teachers nor community members to get exhausted from fighting the district. She and other women teachers also raised the challenges of balancing motherhood, teaching, and activism. They expressed the need to prevent burnout among teachers, especially those who were mothers like themselves. This was important to them because it was a personal issue, but also because they valued the activism and leadership of women teachers of color.

Like many of the women of color interviewed, Ella, a Black teacher and mother of Oakland students, felt that teachers needed to repair the harm of making some families feel used by the union during the strike.

> Right now we're just trying to know families. And my personal commitment, as a parent myself, is I'm sensitive to being transactional**.** Some families felt like that

> during the strike...and I don't want that to be a part of this process. I want families to feel heard and invested in this."

She understood that this would require long term efforts to build relationships with families and help support their own capacity to organize for the things that mattered to them. All the teachers who were also mothers spoke of the need to put time and energy into building relationships with families. They believed that this required them to be more active and visible at each school site, allowing families to see how much teachers worked to serve their school communities. Not only would teachers help improve conditions at their schools and for their families, but in doing these, they would also secure the support of their school communities in their continuing efforts to fight market reforms and win more resources for Oakland's public schools.

However, not all activist teachers agreed that this needed to be the top priority. Though Rob acknowledged the need for this work, he disagreed that activist teachers should focus solely on organizing. In his words,

> We need to do it all! I think they've kind of turned it into a formula. It's like, 'now we're in a more organizing phase, we're not in the mobilizing phase, and we're not ready to win.' You can't just let up. I mean, yes, you can respect the fact that there are ebbs and flows, but we're getting our asses kicked this year!

Unlike the women, Rob did not raise the issues of capacity and sustainability, though he talked at length about the many challenges teacher activists face in Oakland because of the deep inequities in students' lives that impact teaching and learning. Instead, he argued that teachers should be organizing and mobilizing at the same time, as well as pursuing other strategies like legal challenges to district policies that violate the union contract.

Across activist groups comprised of teachers and community members, another division that sometimes made collaboration challenging stemmed from differing analysis of market reforms and views about the best strategy for stopping privatization and school closures. Some activists stressed the role of state actors in facilitating a larger role for corporate actors who sought financial gains through real estate development, as well as the quasi-governmental body FCMAT. These activists wanted to target the state for imposing a loan on the Oakland school district, taking over the district, and then growing the districts' debt. For these activists, it was imperative to expose the role of the state and to hold them accountable for deepening the financial and structural issues facing Oakland public schools. An ad hoc group of retired teachers and education activists pushed for the state to cancel Oakland's debt because as long as there was a balance due, the state could retain ultimate authority over the district through an appointed trustee that had the power to veto the decisions of the elected school board. Clearly, they argued, this was a way to control Oakland school leaders and exemplified a racist and classist project that perpetuated a colonial model of rule (Lipman, 2015). Further, it operated through neoliberal models of governance that included a "shadow state" by empowering FCMAT, an unelected and unaccountable body, to audit and impose austerity policies on the Oakland district, as well as many other school districts throughout the state.

Yet, for other activists fighting privatization and school closures, targeting the state and FCMAT only undermined the power that residents have through their elected school board members. In Jax's view, FCMAT would not be able to impose austerity measures on Oakland

without the consent of the elected board. He argued that activists should focus attention on how current elected officials went along with decisions to close schools and expand the charter sector. In his analysis, if Oakland residents elected board members who refused to go along with market reforms, then neither the state nor FCMAT would be able to impose their preferred policies. For him, it was a necessary first step to hold local officials accountable for their complicity and for Oakland residents to take back power over the district by electing leaders who would stand up to the privatizers.

These contrasting positions had implications for collaboration between groups because each side could not agree to strategies that they believed would undermine their overarching goals. For example, the ad hoc committee wanted to call for an outside audit of FCMAT, especially given that they had failed their task of making the Oakland school district financially stable. But they did not want to call for an audit of the district itself, since there had already been a grand jury report that found several problems with the way the district was governed. Also, an audit of the district would only reinforce a longstanding notion, based largely on racism, that Oakland leaders were incompetent and unable to run their schools effectively. In contrast, Jax and OPEN advocated for another audit on the district because they believed there was ample evidence that district leaders not only mismanaged finances, but also altered the budget reports to push a narrative that the district was facing a deficit when it was not. Moreover, they saw state elected officials as potential allies, as they had been able to secure their support for legislation that increased oversight for charter schools. The ad hoc committee, on the other hand, was eager to put pressure on the state officials to forgive the loan, get FCMAT out of Oakland, and return full authority to the local school board. Thus, their different analysis of power informed divergent and competing strategies that undermined collaboration across these groups.

These tensions provide support for Henig's (2011) finding that, in the context of a complex education system which has become more complicated and fragmented through neoliberal policies, ad hoc coalitions of different activist groups can be one way to overcome these challenges. Otherwise, activist groups might remain divided over the details and be unable to pool their resources and capacity to mount a resistance that can counter the immense power and wealth of neoliberal reformers.

Limited individual and organizational capacity

Another challenge activists faced that undermined their efforts to have greater collaboration across activist teachers and community based groups in the fight to stop privatization and school closures was the limited capacity of both individuals and groups. On the individual level, parent and teacher leaders spoke extensively about how hard it was to sustain their activism and organizing efforts. They recognized that many of their fellow parents and educators did not have the capacity to be involved at the same level. Clemente shared that many of his fellow parents at Lakeview worked long days or were single parents and could not come to the school in the evenings for all the meetings being organized to save their school. He recognized that although he himself was a single father, he had the flexibility and capacity to be at the meetings, but it was also very exhausting, and he often had to bring his children to the meetings. As a parent leader in the fight for Kaiser Elementary, Edwin also acknowledged that Kaiser families likely had greater capacity than other lower income communities that had faced school closures. He explained that "we organized, we fought, we had more time on our hands than maybe parents at other schools may have had. So, we were able to kind of put the efforts in that other schools might not be able to put in."

After months and even years of activism and organizing, these movement leaders felt exhausted by the level of engagement and intensity that the struggle required. Edwin lamented,

> None of it helped in the end. We thought this is going to be something that took a few weeks. So at that early stage, there were maybe 30 or 40 of us that were working on this 5 to 6 hours a day. And some of us more, I mean, I was kind of like seven or eight hours a day and I think maybe there were ten (of us) at it full time. So, three weeks became four weeks became five weeks became six weeks became seven weeks, became eight weeks. And it just ended up into the full time thing for myself. Essentially, I took a year out of my life. I'm still in the fight. I can't, you know, I can't give 30, 40 hours a week to it anymore. From a perspective of pure exhaustion as much as anything else.

Edwin went on to add how demoralized many other families and educators felt after fighting for so long. "A lot of people just want to move on and just think that the fight's lost, and you just gotta make the most of it. And then there's those of us that are still fighting. We're not the close, tight knit community we were beforehand." In addition to all the time and energy spent organizing to keep their school from closing, there was a high emotional toll involved for parent and teacher activists doing this work.

Every parent and teacher interviewed shared the same sentiments about how much time and energy they poured into organizing and they recognized that they did not have the capacity to do all the things they felt were necessary to build the movement. After the strike, for example, teacher leaders reflected on how much work they had to do to build up to the strike, maintain the picket lines, and get to an agreement with the district so they could return work. Alex noted how limited capacity prevented teacher leaders from doing a more thorough job at building solidarity with students, families, and community groups. As a leader in the committee for community outreach, she shared that the committee was spread too thin and was tasked with building connections across many different stakeholders. This meant that they did not do a great job, and it showed it showed in the way student leaders were upset with teachers.

> I think (the district) played us against each other. Like they just used divide and conquer tactics…and it shows our weakness and the things like we didn't do enough student organizing. There was like student organizing happening at individual school sites but there wasn't like a coordinated city-wide way that we are communicating. Just like the way it ended up show the limitations of, or just like what we didn't do, the communication we didn't have and organizing we didn't do for like I'd say mainly lack of capacity.

Sometimes, when promising coalitions were formed, sustaining these efforts was also a challenge because of individuals' limited capacity. In another instance, teacher and community activists formed SOSD to bring together progressive Black and Brown community members and leaders of community based organizations partly to decenter white teachers and activists as the main people talking about privatization. Their goal was also to connect the issue of privatization of education to other social issues facing Oakland's diverse communities, like the housing crisis, gentrification and displacement, and criminalization and incarceration. Based on reflections of key organizers, this was an important angle and line of work that was hard to sustain. Krista, a

key organizer in the movement who helped to start SOSD, said she moved to working with the J4OS coalition "mostly just because there was someone else organizing who was willing to hold it. I could just show up to a meeting. I can't like plan the agenda and reach out to people to come out."

Yet, in J4OS, Krista encountered a different issue. She explained,

> After the infographics, we didn't know what else to do. We were always kind of like, what's our relationship as a coalition of organizations, because that's hard to figure out. Whatever J4OS as a new coalition you know…are we just producing like infographics and framing? Are we like gonna do campaigns? I don't I don't feel like I totally would know what a campaign would look like.

A key challenge, according to Krista, was that everyone in the coalition was doing other work as part of the organizations or groups they represented. As was the case with SOSD, no one had the capacity to steer the coalition and provide a direction for organizing together. Without clear leadership or direction for moving forward, many of the leaders fell back to working with their organizations and groups, and activist teachers especially moved to focus on building power within the teachers' union.

The SOSD and J4OS coalitions represented movement leaders' attempts to have more collaboration between diverse stakeholders, including families, students, teachers, community leaders, and community based organizations. But the limited capacity of individual activists and activist groups made it hard to sustain these efforts. Many of the organizers of SOSD continued to work to stop privatization and school closures in other groups, mostly with the teacher's union. Because J4OS was supported by an organization that took the lead in bringing the coalition together, it continued to bring people together to push campaigns for educational justice and racial equity in schooling.

Outside of the union, grassroots activists have few resources to fight market reforms because there is almost no funding for this work. Speaking about the broader efforts of community and teacher groups to organize against market reforms, Krista noted that,

> A lot of the limitations around privatization activism have been I think, that there's so much work that needs to be done around like counter messaging and framing. And then there's no funding because all the motherfucking funding in the education world comes from like the Gates Foundation and all these privatizers. And so it's been really difficult. I do know of like a couple of bodies that have tried to get funding for this kind of work. And it's almost impossible because no one is trying to fund, you know, stop charter expansion work. Everyone is trying to fund charter expansion because that's sort of like the already established.

This lack of funding is one reason why collaborations with organized teachers can be so important. Alex explained that the OEA also had very limited capacity, with only one paid organizer. Yet, Jax noted that the union had organizational capacity and resources that community groups did not have.

> Especially like nationally, the unions have the money. The community organizations are doing the work. And so what we need the unions to do is loosen up their money and help fund and resource the authentic organizing that's going on. Not say hey, we're going to organize you and this is what we're going to do.

Though Jax felt that the teachers could not lead the movement, he recognized that they could play an important supportive role.

Aside from the organizational resources of the union, Jax and Clemente felt that collaborating with teachers had strengthened their capacity in other ways as well. They both stressed how retired teachers were instrumental in carrying out the research that helped them to understand the mechanism of market reforms and privatization. Clemente shared,

> There were some amazing retired teachers that were part of our group and provided a lot of data, like they're almost advisory because they would provide the facts for us like, 'Where's GO getting the money from?' And they're like, 'The Waltons, you know, the Gates Foundation, billionaires'...and here's an article, here's their tax returns.' I mean, we were getting all this information. These are by and large retired Oakland teachers... it was pivotal to get those facts because I was like, at first you don't want to believe it.

Clemente and Jax went on to say how they used this research to help inform the organizing of sister cities in the national coalition Journey for Justice. Armed with this investigate work done largely by the retired teachers in their group, OPEN helped activists in other cities see the interconnected of different market reforms and to understand the this was a national, even international, attack on public education, teachers, and students and communities deemed disposable.

After the strike, there was a sense of victory in the movement, despite the fact that teachers themselves were divided on the agreement reached with the district. But from the perspective of the teacher and community activists, there was a recognition that the political terrain had shifted dramatically in their favor. Not only was there greater awareness about the connections between privatization, school closures, and austerity measures that increased educational inequities, but there was also a higher degree of collaboration among teacher and community activist groups. Among movement leaders, there was hope and excitement about the potential of working together to stop the spread of market reforms in Oakland.

Though there were many challenges to sustaining collaboration between teacher activists and community groups, the movement to stop privatization and school closures also benefitted from opportunities created in the political moment. As resources are always limited for grassroots movements, and the current neoliberal context only makes resources scarcer, the ability of groups to join forces and share resources is as important as ever. Just as important is the moral support that individual activists and activist groups can gain from working with others. Mounting a grassroots movement against the powerful and wealthy groups that seek to benefit from privatization is an uphill battle and one that will likely take years of struggle. By working together, groups can share the burden and help to sustain the movement, even in the face of fatigue, scarcity, and demoralization (Stern & Brown, 2016).

Opportunities for teacher and community collaborations

Among the many opportunities presented by the shifting political context, this study illuminated three factors that facilitated greater teacher and community collaboration in the movement to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland. These were: a shared sense of disposability and outrage across teachers, parents, students, and community members; convergence around a racial justice analysis; and growing alignment around the demand for accountability from local officials with greater coordination amongst groups to elect anti-privatization candidates.

A shared sense of disposability and outrage

One factor that facilitated greater collaboration was a growing sense of the shared experience of precarity and disposability, especially when schools were closed, and a shared sense of outrage and urgency to take back control over their schools.

Clemente, a Latinx father who helped to found OPEN when the district decided to close Lakeview Elementary, shared how he came to lead the organizing against school closures. He expressed a perspective that was widely shared by other activist teachers, parents, and community members that the district decision to close his children's school was an insult. Though the district portrayed the school as failing because of low test scores, he and other parents appreciated that the school had caring teachers and delivered a culturally relevant pedagogy. He explained,

> Closing a school is you know, it's not just judgmental...It's so much deeper than that. And you're basically telling that community that they're not good enough that they don't deserve the things that we've been fighting so hard just to get like basic resources ….So, you know, just being part of that, and struggling so hard and trying to improve that school, which it was, it was constantly improving year after year after year on paper... That is the ultimate slap in the face when you take people that are like teachers and staff that care not just about the well-being of their students at that site, but about people in their city…And to see that taken away when you've already been stripped of resources by the district is more than insulting.

Edwin was another father who spoke extensively about the disdain and disrespect he felt from district leaders who would not be moved by any evidence that closing Kaiser would not only not save money, but that it was a school worth saving. He explained,

> And it seems to me just seeing the way the school board operated, even at the very first meeting I went, I could see that there was a contempt for people, a contempt for those who spoke out in public comments. A contempt for educators and a kind of contempt for the whole process of public education they didn't like. You know, it was very clear to me that these are, these were people who didn't want to be challenged. And they were people who believed they knew best. Anyone challenging them was just kind of in their way... I thought the contempt would happen behind closed doors. I thought it would be very kind of open and understanding to people's faces and then maybe, you know, vote the way they

> wanted to vote and try and justify what they did. But the hostility that the district had towards people of Oakland was very strange to me.

Edwin was also moved by seeing the way the district mistreated his school's teachers. As a parent volunteer, he had come to know his son's teacher and appreciated the role she played in students' lives. At one school board meeting, this teacher was hit by police who attempted to shut down a protest led by the Kaiser community. About that incident, Edwin said, "seeing the harm that had been done against her has been a bit of a motivating factor." Later in the interview, he added that "one of the reasons why the fire is still in me to keep fighting this is because if they can do it to my school, they can do it to anyone's school!" This feeling of disposability cut across teachers, parents, students, and community members who saw that the district was insistent on closing schools, no matter the harm and hurt they caused.

Edwin and Issa, a young teacher at Roots at the time of its closure, spoke with outrage about how the district informed Roots families, through a recorded phone call delivered during a holiday break, that they would be closing their school at the end of that year. Edwin explained, "the call was from John Sasaki and started with 'congratulations families, we are halfway through the year!' then he said, your school will be closing at the end of the year." Issa further explained how the process was rushed and the district would not give Roots a phase out year as they tended to give other schools. As Roots students, teachers, and families organized against the district, other Oakland teachers and community activists became aware of the particularly harsh and inconsiderate way in which the district was pushing a swift closure for Roots. Community members and activists argued that the district treated Roots with such disregard for their students because they were all poor Black and Brown youth who the district deemed disposable.

Just months after the district announced their plans to close Roots, teacher and community activists who had been fighting privatization and school closures helped to elevate the issue of racist school closures during the Oakland teachers strike. They made visible and audible the calls for 'No Cuts and No Closures' across picket lines and coordinated citywide events that took place each day of the strike. One day, the citywide noon time action was a two mile march to Roots that culminated with a rally in front of the school. The timing of the strike and the district decision to close Roots created an opportunity for teachers, families, and students to express and channel their outrage at the disregard and the disdain they felt from the district.

Converging on a racial justice analysis and framing

Over years of organizing, teacher and community leaders had gained critical knowledge about what drives and enables market reforms, who stands to gain, and who stands to lose from these policies. With years of experience, activists developed a more thorough analysis of the racial justice implications of market reforms. They had learned the importance of addressing racial inequities in all schools and of being more intentional about engaging progressive leaders of color in dialogue about the racialized impacts of privatization. As Krista explained, this was part of the reason they formed SOSD.

> It was just a bunch of us who were really like, wanted to talk about privatization in a way that centered race and racial justice, and who were the people who were like, frustrated with it always being the white people talking about charters. And so yeah, so we just kind of put out a call. And then it was really beautiful.

Krista went on to explain that many parents and community leaders of color attended the SOSD gathering. Facilitators led the group in a discussion about the ways in which public schools needed to be transformed to fully support all students. Krista and her colleagues also organized SOSD to educate progressive community leaders of color who fought for racial and economic justice but were not taking a stand against privatization. They made sure that it was teachers and activists of color that led this political education, understanding that pro-market reformers had been winning the battle over narratives partly using civil rights language.

SOSD leaders and their allies in Classroom Struggle, another group comprised mostly of teachers but also parents, also worked to promote more teachers of color to key organizing roles and leadership positions within the union. The union leaders they elected, including Keith Brown as the union president, understood that it was important not only to frame the movement against privatization and school closures as a racial justice issue, but that it was also necessary to have teachers of color and women teachers helping to spread this narrative. Keith explained,

> a lot of our key spokes people were people of color…they spoke in the media and they spoke about you know the effects of unregulated charter growth, so I think the strike was a moment where now it's no longer just an issue brought up by white males and not just about anti-school privatization but an issue of looking at race and privatization, and privatization's impact on students of color.

They also intentionally and explicitly centered the leadership of women of color. As Gina explained,

> Among leadership, I feel like something that Keith does a lot is lift up the fact that so many leaders in OEA are women of color, and he says it all the time. So that's really awesome and really true and even when they just do trainings and stuff like that, I swear every single time he's probably gonna say like, isn't it so cool that almost everyone in here is a woman of color! Because we're mostly women and a lot of women who are participating in the organizing efforts are women of color.

These activists saw leaders of color, and women of color, as instrumental to building community support for the movement to stop school closures. Teachers of color were credible messengers and bridge builders (Pham & Phillip, 2020) who could connect the dangers of market reforms to racial injustice in ways that addressed concerns of community members about racism in schooling. At the same time, they helped to push their fellow teachers to acknowledge the reality of longstanding racial inequities in schooling. Through political education, organizing, and elevating leaders of color, activists in SOSD and Classroom Struggle helped to turn the tables on market reformers, who for decades had successfully advocated for charter schools and school choice as a civil rights and racial justice issue (Scott, 2011, 2013). By connecting charter schools, privatization, school closures, and austerity, these activists expanded the possibility for collaboration between teachers who had been organizing against privatization as a neoliberal reform that benefitted billionaires and community organizers who advocated for the importance of also addressing not only the racial disparities that resulted from market reforms, but the broader patterns of racial inequity and injustice in Oakland schools.

Aligning on demands for accountability, leadership, and community control

Though some activists were still divided on questions of analysis and strategy, over time they largely came to agree on the need for accountability, leadership, and community control over their schools. This shared vision presented another opportunity for expanding collaboration among groups to elect more responsive school board members. Most activist groups pointed to the lack of accountability for school district leaders who had absolved their responsibilities to protect the most vulnerable students and communities. As part of the racial justice framing, they also brought into focus how the district and billionaires were enacting reforms upon communities of color. Clemente said, "And even when you ask the board members will, can you explain this? They didn't have clear answers. At the end of the day, I feel it was just to pacify us but they were going to do it. They voted on it, and they just pushed through what they had originally planned." Many other organizers shared this sentiment that district leaders were simply not interested in listening to the community and that they were largely in the pockets of the elites who were intent on controlling Oakland schools.

The combination of a racial justice analysis with calls for accountability and leadership from the district were most clearly captured in a series of infographics posted to social media by the coalition Justice for Oakland Students (J4OS). In these infographics, J4OS consistently pointed to statistics demonstrating the disproportionate impact of school closures on Black and Brown students in flatland schools, especially those with a student body that were over 60% Black and poor. J4OS infographics argued that "decades of disinvestment, closing 16 historically 'Black' schools, and a culture of anti-Black racism has led to push out and generations of harm." They also stressed the responsibility the district leadership has to create a sustainable plan for student success, particularly for Black students. As an example, a graphic titled "Demand a Real Plan for Black Students," posted September 10, 2019, stated:

> Having no plan for Black students leads to push out
> "Hey hey, ho ho, where did all the Black students go?"
> Decades of disinvestment- stacking schools; starving schools, shrinking schools, breaking promises, closing schools, displacing low-income Black students

In a brief paragraph, the infographic elaborated on these ideas with the following narrative:

> The enrollment policy (segregates/concentrates) stacks neighborhood schools with highest-need students-without providing the resources they need to support those students. Charters drain resources and kids away from our neighborhood schools. High turn-over and destabilizing conditions harm students, lowers quality of teaching/learning, and sets schools up to fail. In addition, the district will engage schools in a redesign process only to take away or never give the resources promised. Instability and uncertainty lead to low enrollment, which the district uses to justify school closures.

Through this J4OS infographic, activists were able to accomplish at least two major goals. First, they articulated in plain and clear language how district policies, including those that reproduced segregation and allowed charter schools to proliferate in Oakland, took resources from public schools, led to inequities, and displaced Black students. Second, they placed responsibility for these policies on the school board and demanded accountability from district leadership. This educational and mobilizing campaign helped to generate the political will in Oakland to demand

real changes in leadership and policymaking. Initially, the campaign focused on hiring a superintendent who was from Oakland and not a Broad trained reformer.

Moreover, through years of organizing, activists had built up pressure that impacted local decision makers. For the first time in years, none of the four incumbent school board directors decided to run for re-election. This meant that four school board seats would be open, creating the opportunity to elect four progressive leaders who would vote against the continued imposition of market reforms, privatization, and school closures. With this important opportunity on the horizon coming on the heels of an energetic teachers strike, activist groups coordinated efforts to flip the school board. For Jax and Clemente, as leaders of OPEN, it was critical to strengthen community alliances with OEA because the union had resources, organizational capacity, and after their strike, political weight that would be critical to electing more progressive candidates. Clemente argued, "the next election cycle is in four years, it might be too late then, how many schools will they shut down between now and the next four years? That could be the end of our school district? So I think it's critical."

Every group leader I interviewed focused on the importance of these upcoming elections and the need to collaborate across teacher and community groups. Some longtime activists formed Action 2020 as a coalition of community groups and the teachers' union to focus on recruiting and supporting candidates for the school board who would take a firm stance against privatization. It included activists from all the different groups that had formed to fight privatization and school closures in Oakland, along with a caucus from the DSA. For most of 2019 through the elections in November of 2020, these different groups collaborated through Action 2020 to discuss the best strategies for winning all four open seats. They organized community forums with candidates and a forum with activists from Denver who had a successful campaign to flip their board.

Discussion

Studies of movements for educational equity and justice often point to the need for community groups and teachers to work together in order to have a meaningful impact. Yet, there are many factors that have impeded greater collaboration between the two groups (Perlstein, 2004; Perrillo, 2012; Warren, 2010; Wells et al., 2020). Historically, racial, class, and gender differences and dynamics have tended to elevate divisions and undermine sustained collaboration, though activists' reflections and research tend to focus on racial politics over gender and class based dynamics (Brown & Stern, 2018). Fragmentation within and across groups and limited capacity have historically also impeded sustained collaboration. In the neoliberal era, these challenges persist and are even intensified, making it hard for teachers and community activists to form effective coalitions with enough power to counter the wealth and political influence of an elite class that pushes for market reforms. This study of the movement to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland illuminates how these tensions impact collaboration between groups of community and teacher activists.

From the start of the neoliberal era, the racial, class, and gender differences between teachers and the community they serve have been exploited to further drive a wedge between these two groups of stakeholders, making it more possible for neoliberal reformers to impose austerity measures and market reforms that exacerbate educational inequities (Perrillo, 2012; Weiner, 2012). Many of the same racial dynamics that have long undermined teacher and community solidarity are intensified in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism, where the intersections of racial oppression and capitalism are rendered more obscure by official state anti-

racism (Melamed, 2006). Though there have been debates within social movements over class-based versus a race-based analyses of social inequities, these debates have taken new dimensions with neoliberalism. On one hand, the elimination of many legal codifications of white supremacy, starting with *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, helped to promote the idea that race is no longer a primary determinant of inequities. At the same time the state and elites began to co-opt the language of anti-racism, giving birth to what Melamed (2006) has coined *neoliberal multiculturalism* and which is central to the project of neoliberalization (Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020). By taking this position, they can charge those who oppose their policies with being racist (Scott, 2011). This dynamic can lend itself to supporting activists who prefer not to make race central to an analysis of the capitalist political economy as the primary driver of social inequities. In the case of Oakland, we see this in the way that Rob and others in the leftist caucus insisted on a power analysis that centered the billionaire takeover of public education, while they also resisted the shift to elevating a racial justice analysis of privatization.

At the same time, another tendency of neoliberal multiculturalism is to promote a racial politics of representation that call for inequities to be addressed by having more representation of people of color in leadership positions. This representation, in turn, is used to further promote the notion that race and racism are no longer barriers to equity and justice (Scott, 2011, 2013). Representation is also used to facilitate the capitalist accumulation through dispossession with the complicity of people of color in key positions (Coulthard, 2014). In the realm of neoliberal school reform, these dynamics have facilitated a racial politics of advocacy where demands from community leaders and families of color for educational equity are used to promote market oriented policies, like school choice (Scott, 2011, 2013). Going further, neoliberal reformers intentionally put Black and Brown people in key leadership positions within their advocacy networks, further bolstering the notion that market-oriented policies advance racial equity and justice. In this context, it became necessary for those fighting neoliberalization and privatization to counter by also putting people of color into leadership positions in their organizing movements. As seen in Oakland and other cities (Lipman, 2017; Pham & Phillip, 2020), this strategy has been effective at combatting the notion that market reforms advance racial justice and changing the narrative that only whites or those with class privilege oppose reforms like school choice and charter schools.

However, this strategy can still play into the politics of representation in ways that can impede real efforts toward equity and justice. In Oakland, for example, activists were inconsistent in addressing the political and economic drivers of market reforms in where an elite class seeks to profit from marketization and privatization through land deals and contracts, but also by narrowing the liberatory and transformational potential of a democratic and equitable public education system. The politics of representation also limited the movement against privatization and school closures when community and teacher activists advocated for the union to be led by teachers of color, and for the district to hire a Black or Brown superintendent from Oakland. Activists may not have foreseen how having people of color in these key leadership positions might undermine their own efforts to hold this leadership accountable or push them to take more radical positions. They had to contend with a messy political terrain where criticism could be used by their opponents to undermine or discredit the leadership of people of color or to undermine or discredit movement leaders for being racist because they criticized leaders of color.

The politics of neoliberal multiculturalism also discouraged activists from struggling through tensions within the group about whether to center a class-based or race-based analysis. Activists of color felt they did not have the capacity to organize with white allies who were not

fully on board with the shift to a racial justice analysis, but who nevertheless shared a lot of the same progressive values and who had knowledge, experience, and capacity to contribute to the movement. The activists of color preferred to organize in other spaces that felt less toxic because they did not have to confront these issues. As a result, the activist group dissolved and the movement lost an organizing space that had been open to teachers, families, and community members, and that had pushed for radical transformation of the public school system.

However, this is not to say that race and racism are no longer central dynamics in movements. Activists of color and teachers of color continue to experience racism and white privilege in their groups. One example of this can be seen in the resistance of Oakland teachers to the political education created by the Race and Privatization committee of the OEA that sought to illuminate how longstanding racial inequities and racism that students of color experience in Oakland schools fueled the demand for charter schools and expanded privatization.

Fragmentation within and across activist groups has also been an ongoing challenge to collaboration between teacher and community groups. In the neoliberal era, fragmentation, especially between groups, can increase based on differing analyses and strategies because the new political context is itself fragmented and complex. As Henig (2011) notes, it can be challenging for activists to know which level of government or political actors to target in campaigns to end market reforms. This was seen in the case of organizing in Oakland, as groups were divided based on competing power analysis. While some wanted to focus on mobilizing to recapture local control over the school district, others wanted to target the state and FCMAT. All these actors were proper targets for the campaigns to end privatization and school closures, as they all played important roles in facilitating market reforms. However, when it came to translating their differing analysis to actual strategies and campaigns, the different camps did not always join forces because they saw each other's strategies as directly undermining what the other felt was needed.

Finally, having limited capacity and resources to support movement building and collaboration across stakeholders presents another challenge. This too is made particularly acute because the interaction of austerity and precarity limit the ability of individuals to engage in activist work. First, families, community members, and teachers all find themselves in more precarious financial positions, causing them to work more and to feel more depleted (Blanc, 2019; Stern & Brown, 2016). As Amada noted, she saw fewer parents volunteer in her kindergarten class because more mothers were having to work to support their families. Thus, teachers had less support during and after instructional hours. Because they had more children and families living in poverty, teachers and school personnel also had more work to do to support families who faced housing and food insecurity. Also, more teachers had to take on part time work just to be able to afford living in the Bay Area. All these factors limited the capacity of individual teachers and parents to give afterschool time to engage in activism.

Those engaged in activist groups found themselves spread very thin and expressed not being able to organize in the ways they felt were necessary. Others found that they had limited capacity to continue some of the coalitional efforts they had started. Within coalitions, the limited capacity of participating groups and individuals meant that they sometimes lacked leadership or direction, which undermined the ability to sustain the coalition or coalitional campaigns. Also undermining the ability to sustain coalitions and activist spaces was the lack of funding available for this work. Besides the resources and organizational capacity of the union, activists working to stop privatization and school closures had very limited resources to support their efforts. With most foundation resources going toward supporting charter schools, groups

that wanted to build movements against market reforms could not count on philanthropic money to support their work (Lipman, 2011, 2015).

These issues also undermined the ability of activists to maintain an inside/outside strategy (Brogan, 2014; Weiner, 2012). As I argue in the previous article, teachers and community activists felt that they had to channel their limited time, energy, and resources into specific efforts or groups. For many teachers, in felt easier and more promising to focus on building power within the union. Among groups fighting school closures, parent leaders found that other parents and teachers gave up fighting, and they themselves had to pull back from all the hours they were putting into the organizing. The combination of the effects of precarity and austerity on teachers and families, leaving them with less time and energy, undercut the capacity of activists to engage in collaboration across groups.

Despite all the challenges to building a movement against privatization and school closures, this study of organizing in Oakland reveals some of the opportunities and possibilities that exist in the current socio-political context. The neoliberal policies that have undermined educational equity have also created conditions that propel teachers and community groups to work together to fight these reforms (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Brown & Stern, 2018). Market reforms have made teaching and learning harder, particularly in urban districts where many schools are labeled as failing based on standardized test scores and public schools have been starved of resources. These hardships have inspired a growing number of organized efforts to overturn market reforms, including the use of high stakes accountability, the expansion of charter schools, and school closures (Ferman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020).

In Oakland, the convergence of the teacher strike and the fight to keep Roots open was both an effect of the years of organizing, and an opportunity for more solidarity among groups. The wide community support for striking teachers bolstered the unified demands for an end to funding cuts and school closures. Though at the end of the strike teachers were divided on the tentative agreement, ironically, the sense of victory and solidarity between teachers and community groups was strong.

Through their collaboration before, during, and after the strike, teacher and community activists highlighted the shared experience of precarity and disposability that educators, students, and families faced. While in past decades reformers successfully framed teachers as an interest group opposed to racial justice (Perrillo, 2012; Shelton, 2017), the austerity measures imposed on school districts, and especially the closing of schools, engendered a widespread feeling of being disposable. Across school communities, people saw that district leaders did not care about teachers, students, or families and would not be moved by neither data nor emotional pleas to keep their schools open. Their experiences of trying in vain to stop the school closures also led to a shared sense of outrage and common struggle that helped fuel broad support for the strike and lasted through the months after the strike. This shared sense of disposability and outrage has fueled teacher and community resistance to market reforms across the nation (Ferman, 2017; Mayorga et al., 2020; Warren, 2010).

Another opportunity for greater collaboration between teachers and activists became evident as movement activists refined their understanding of the deeply racialized impact of market reforms and began to elevate a racial justice analysis and framing of their efforts. Though not universally accepted or uncontested, the shift to a racial justice framing, and more specifically to highlighting the disproportionate burden of privatization and school closures on Oakland's Black community, was broadly deployed and embraced. This follows the pattern seen in other cities as well (Maton, 2018), and as in other cities, this racial justice analysis and

framing expanded support for the movement, allowing activists to build solidarity with other community based and social justice groups who had not engaged in the movement to end privatization.

The prior emphasis that activists placed on the political economic drivers of these reforms did not resonate as widely with Oakland's Black and Brown community. In fact, many progressive community leaders had abstained from taking a position against charters because the pro-charter and pro-market reformers had successfully painted charters as a vehicle for racial justice and equity in schooling (Hernández, 2016; Scott, 2009, 2011, 2013). As explained by leaders of parent organizing and community organizing groups, even if they themselves opposed market reforms and privatizations, too many Black and Brown families enrolled their children in charter schools, preventing them from taking a stance against the expansion of charter schools. But with the outreach and political education efforts of groups like Classroom Struggle and SOSD, the J4OS coalition eventually played a key role in connecting privatization, charters, school closures, and austerity in a way that facilitated more community based racial justice groups joining the calls to stop these policies. The shift to elevating a racial justice analysis did not eradicate the racial politics that still divided the movement, but it helped to counteract the racial politics of advocacy that had largely shaped the political terrain.

Another critical opportunity for sustaining and building more collaboration between teachers and community activist groups is the impact that the movement has had on local policymakers. After years of continuous pressure, local organizers had significantly weakened school board members who supported privatization and school closures. They had started to unify in calling for greater accountability for local elected and appointed officials for their complicity with policies known to exacerbate inequities and displace many Black families from the city. This helped to channel energies toward a clear target, which had been missing previously (Su, 2011; Wells et al., 2010). In 2019, after the generally successful teacher strike and a re-energized movement to stop school closures, the four school board members up for re-election the following year decided not to run to keep their seat on the school board. As Henig (2011) suggested, ad hoc coalitions facilitated disparate groups coming together to achieve a common goal, even when they were not totally aligned in their analyses and strategies. This opened the possibility of flipping the school board by electing four new school board directors that might be able to stop the imposition of market reforms and austerity measures. Though many teacher and community leaders were drained after the grueling intensity of the strike, the upcoming school board races reenergized many of them and gave them a reason and a campaign in which to channel the momentum from the strike and the movement to stop school closures.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that though there are persisting challenges to building alliances across teacher and community activist groups, there also opportunities and conditions in the neoliberal terrain that facilitate collaboration between these groups. Given the ways that neoliberalization and marketization have intensified educational and social inequities, and the power that elite reformers have had to reshape public education, it is imperative that grassroots movements have enough solidarity across stakeholders to demand an end to these policies. This study reminds us that social justice movements can channel the shared sense of precarity and disposability among educators, students, and families to build bridges across activist groups. It also shows how the movement has already expanded the opportunities for collaboration by shifting the political terrain, and how these shifts can create a new opening in the political

opportunity structure with the possibility for coalescing around the next campaign. Finally, we see how a racial justice framework for organizing against privatization and school closures can lead to greater solidarity between teachers and the community serve and increasing the power of a unified front against marketization.

These findings suggest several important implications for educational justice movements. First, one way to build collaboration despite the challenges posed by fragmentation and limited capacity is to pursue ad hoc coalitions that can join forces in particular campaigns. As Henig (2011) argues, this will allow for some sharing of resources and capacity without requiring total alignment on a particular power analysis or strategy, which can be harder to achieve with the complicated neoliberal political grid. Henig argues that ad hoc coalitions of groups "linked by a long-term vision of increased public engagement, could allow member groups the autonomy to develop expertise and focus on specific issues, venues, and tactics. At the same time, ongoing relationships can establish mechanisms and traditions for regular and coordinated ad hoc coalitions when conditions make pooling their efforts worthwhile" (p. 79). While conditions in the political context may make sustained coalitional work more challenging, they can also nurture enough solidarity to support ad hoc collaboration.

However, as noted in Scott (2011), Harvey (2005) offers a different perspective on this dynamic that should give us pause. In his analysis, it is possible that this approach to organizing will

> shift the terrain of political organization away from traditional political parties and labour organizing into a less focused political dynamic of social action across a whole spectrum of civil society. What such movements lose in focus they gain in terms of direct relevance to particular issues and constituencies. They draw strength from being embedded in the nitty-gritty of daily life and struggle, but in so doing they often find it hard to extract themselves from the local and the particular to understand the macro-politics of what neoliberal accumulation by dispossession and its relation to the restoration of class power was and is all about (p. 200).

The tendency to be deeply rooted in the local context and politics while giving less effort to connect with movements across the states and the globe was evident in this study of organizing in Oakland. Even building alliances across different groups and stakeholders proved difficult given the many challenges that activists faced in the social political context. But there were times, as in the 2019 teacher strike, when groups were able to come together to capitalize on the opportunities afforded by a particular moment of crisis. This moment of crisis became not only an opportunity for alliance building and collaboration, but also for the types of intersectional analysis and strategies that are required for expanding the public's understanding of neoliberalization and its dangers. The challenge for activist and scholars committed to educational and social justice is how to harness the momentum that is gained in these moments of mass uprisings and the benefits of ad hoc coalitions in ways that build toward a broader social movement against neoliberal capitalism on the global stage.

A second implication that emanates from this study is that activist teachers, especially women of color, are critical to facilitating ad hoc coalitions and other alliances that connect community groups and teachers' unions, thereby infusing additional capacity into grassroots movements. However, movement leaders must be adept at navigating challenging racial and

identity politics. As racism and racial dynamics continue to present a challenge to collaboration across groups, it is incumbent on movement leaders to beware of the potential traps of the politics of representation that are endemic within neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2006). This means that activists and organizers must not allow race-based analyses of marketization and privatization to mystify the political and economic drivers and mechanism behind these processes of accumulation through dispossession (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015; Mayorga et al., 2020). It also means that movement leaders, especially activist teachers working within their unions, must be prepared to address continued resistance among many teachers to confronting racism and white supremacy. A social movement for educational justice will not improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students in school today if it cannot impact the racist practices and orientations of teachers and schools. If students and families of color have to confront hostile learning environments in public schools, they will likely continue to seek alternative educational options through charter schools.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

With this dissertation project, I sought to contribute to the literature on community and teacher activism to stop privatization and school closures and how activists navigate the complicated politics of market oriented reforms. I also pursued this line of inquiry with the hope of learning lessons that could make educational justice movements stronger and more resistant to the traps of neoliberal multiculturalism and the racial politics of advocacy. As the assault on public education is part of a global effort to consolidate power through privatizing education and other social services and public resources, local organizing efforts against market reforms in education have implications far beyond local school districts. Weiner (2012) noted that "a new movement of teachers can help spearhead the development of the broad political and social resistance needed to reverse the tidal wave destroying public education" (p. 36). Teachers and community activists fighting against these policies are social movement leaders engaged in a global struggle against neoliberal capitalism and for a more just society.

By studying teacher and community organizing through a framework that applied social movement concepts to examine different aspects of activists' praxis, the lessons learned here can inform social movements of educators and community leaders who are organizing not only to resist privatization and school closures, but also for the radical transformations needed to make our public education system more equitable and just. I review here my findings across the three articles and how they contribute to the research as well as the implications for policy and practice.

My findings show how though grassroots organizers faced many challenges to fighting back market reforms, including having limited capacity and having to navigate a new political grid, over time they have built a formidable opposition to privatization, school closures, and the unfettered expansion of the charter sector. In Oakland, as in other cities across the U.S., community and teacher organizers have achieved meaningful victories, demonstrating that though neoliberal reformers exert outsized influence in education policy, money does not always rule the day. Groups of teachers and community activists have significantly altered the politics of market reforms in Oakland in their favor. This was most clear in the broad public support for striking teachers in 2019 and the election of new school board members in 2020 who oppose privatization and school closures. It is important to recognize these gains that are the fruit of the free labor of parents, teachers, and community activists, and to gain insights about how they navigated the tensions and expanded on opportunities in a political context that has strongly favored privatization and neoliberalization.

In the first article, I asked: *How did activist teachers reflect on their organizing to stop privatization and school closures in Oakland?* I focused this article on Oakland's activist teachers because the teacher strike of February 2019 was a pivotal moment that catapulted the movement against privatization and school closures to new levels of community support. In the years prior to the strike, teacher activists in Oakland had made strategic decisions as social movement leaders (Johnston & Noakes, 2005) that simultaneously bolstered the movement against privatization and school closures and increased community support for teachers' demands to end the disinvestment of public education. These activist teachers had laid the groundwork for union leaders to take on school closures and privatization as important issues that needed to be addressed together with the issues of low wages, large class sizes, and decreased funding for Oakland's public schools.

By taking power in their union and elevating the leadership of teachers of color within the union, these teachers helped to connect privatization and school closures to the austerity policies that diminished funding for public schools and led them to strike. Through these strategies, activist teachers helped to shift the terrain of struggle and were able to grow support for their movement. After being on the defensive for so many years, teacher and community activists were able to shift the narrative that to critique school choice and charter schools was to be in opposition to racial justice. This took power away from the neoliberal reformers who had taken control of the racial politics of advocacy by deploying civil rights and racial justice rhetoric to build consent for their privatizing schemes.

Yet, the activist teachers faced new challenges to building on the momentum after the strike. When one teacher and community activist group dissolved, Oakland's activist teachers lost a space where they could continue to develop their praxis by engaging in critical reflections with other leftist teachers and organizers. I argue that as activist teachers gain power within their unions, activist groups that function independently from the union provide a critical outside space where teachers can develop an intersectional and transformative praxis that helps them better strategize against the optics of a racial politics of advocacy in the neoliberal context and maintain fidelity to their transformative goals.

In the second article I asked: *How did activists shift their framings in response to the political context, and how did their framings inform their strategies for organizing?* Being strategic about framing is critical to the success of social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000). Yet, within a complicated political terrain, Oakland's activists struggled to frame the issues in ways that resonated with Black and Brown families and community members who experience the harm of a public school system that is not only often culturally irrelevant, but outright subtractive and harmful (Dumas, 2014; Grande, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999).

Findings indicated how activists responded to the challenges and opportunities they perceived in the political context with more nuanced framings to increase their resonance with broader sectors of the community. Based on their assessments of how pro-market reformers had capitalized on civil rights and racial justice narratives to promote charter schools as a solution to community desires for better schools (Scott, 2011, 2013), teacher and community activists in Oakland determined that they needed to change to how they talked about charter schools and who in their movement was best positioned to articulate these critiques. They refined their racial justice framings to add nuance to their critiques of charter schools. They also used narratives that acknowledged how public schools need to be radically transformed to provide all students with a quality and affirming education. Finally, they articulated with more specificity the disproportionate harm that school closures inflict on Black students who are displaced at much higher rates than any other subgroup of students. With these framings, activists helped to make more explicit and tangible the connections between market reforms, privatization, charter schools, and school closures, and in turn, helped to galvanize broader support for the movement to stop privatization and school closures.

This article also illuminated the ongoing challenges to framing the complex and mystified interplay of governance, race, class, and land in the neoliberal context. The move to better articulate the racialized impact of market reforms can sometimes neglect how these neoliberal policies are part of capitalist project to increase the wealth and power of elites (Harvey, 2007; Lipman, 2011, 2015; Rooks, 2017; Weiner, 2012). Racial justice frameworks that draw attention to the disproportionate harm inflicted on poor Black and Brown students can neglect to also articulate how these policies allow for accumulation of public lands and wealth through the

displacement and dispossession of communities of color (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015; Mayorga et al., 2020).

Yet, my findings also showed that activists develop framings through dialectical and development processes (Johnston & Noakes, 2005; Steinberg, 1998; Tarlau, 2014). This suggest that, with time, activists will continue to develop framings that better capture the complexity of racialized dispossession which will lend themselves to intersectional frameworks for building a mass movement for educational justice.

Finally, the third article explored the factors and circumstances that facilitated or limited collaboration between teacher and community activists. Based on studies of community organizing and social movements that point to the need for collaboration between community groups and teachers (Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2010; Wells et al., 2010), I sought to illuminate how the neoliberal policy context might nurture or hinder these types of collaboration. While in past decades, neoliberal reformers had exploited divisions between teachers, especially teachers' unions, and the community they served to facilitate market reforms (Perrillo, 2012; Shelton, 2017), the recent wave of teacher strikes seemed to signal a shift in these political dynamics (Blanc, 2019; Pham & Phillip, 2020). I explored the factors and circumstances that seemed to make this shift possible, enabling a higher degree of community and teacher solidarity since the neoliberal turn.

My findings also showed how issues that had impeded collaboration in the past, such as fragmentation within and across groups and limited capacity, continue to present challenges to greater collaboration in the current context, making it hard for teachers and community activists to form and sustain broader coalitions with enough power to counter the wealth and political influence of an elite class that pushes for market reforms. An additional challenge to collaboration in the neoliberal context is how neoliberal multiculturalism complicates the racial politics of advocacy through a politics of representation and racial optics that can be challenging for activists to navigate. This was evident when, after community and teacher activists advocated for the union to be led by teachers of color and for the district to hire a Black or Brown superintendent with Oakland roots, activists had to reconsider how they engaged this new leadership and held them accountable. Having successfully advocated to have people of color in these key leadership positions, activists had to contend with new political dynamics and racial optics that they were unprepared for and thus lacked a strategy and praxis for navigating. Should activists have critiques of this leadership or want to push them toward more radical positions, these critiques could be used by opponents to undermine or discredit the leadership of people of color or to undermine or discredit movement leaders for being racist because they criticized leaders of color.

Furthermore, the politics of neoliberal multiculturalism may have discouraged activists from struggling through tensions within the group over whether to center a class-based or race-based analysis of privatization and neoliberalization. As a result, one leftist activist group dissolved and the movement lost an outside organizing space that had been open to teachers, families, and community members, and that had pushed for radical transformation of the public school system.

Despite the challenges to having greater solidarity and collaboration across groups and between teachers and community activist groups, this study also revealed some of the opportunities and possibilities in the current socio-political context that nurture collaboration. Neoliberal policies have created conditions that propel teachers and community groups to work together to fight these reforms (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Brown & Stern, 2018; Pham &

Phillip, 2020). Market reforms have made teaching and learning harder, particularly in urban districts where many schools are labeled as failing based on standardized test scores and public schools have been starved of resources. Through their collaboration before, during, and after the strike, teacher and community activists highlighted the shared experience of precarity and disposability that educators, students, and families faced. Their experiences of trying in vain to stop the school closures also led to a shared sense of outrage and common struggle that helped fuel broad support for the strike and lasted through the months after the strike. Another opportunity for greater collaboration was the shift to a racial justice framing, and more specifically to highlighting the disproportionate burden of privatization and school closures on Oakland's Black community. This framework invited greater collaboration between teacher and community groups fighting school closures and groups working for racial equity in the schools. As Henig (2011) suggested, ad hoc coalitions facilitated disparate groups coming together to achieve a common goal, even when they were not totally aligned in their analyses and strategies. As already noted, this was the case in the 2019 teacher strike and in the 2020 school board elections.

Contributions to Research

Together, the three articles reveal important lessons that build on the emerging body of literature on teacher and community activism against neoliberal and market oriented reforms. First, this study examines organizing through a social movement lens to delve deeper into the dynamics and challenges that activist face as they try to build a counter movement strong enough to fight the power of neoliberal reformers. By bringing attention to how activists reflect on their praxis, this study contributes to our understanding of the tradeoffs that they consider in the context of scarcity and neoliberal attacks on education. The teachers in this study, like those in teacher activist groups in other cities (Blanc, 2019; Karvelis, 2019; Maton, 2018; Pham & Phillip, 2020; Picower, 2012, 2013; Stern & Brown, 2016) were intentional about engaging in study and reflection to learn how they could build a movement in Oakland to achieve what CORE was able to do in Chicago. They worked to have an outside/inside strategy and to organize alongside community activists and families (Brogan, 2014). However, the challenges presented by limited organizational and individual capacity and the racial politics of advocacy made it so that activist teachers eventually channeled their energies where they were experiencing the most success: building power within their union. As a result, they lost an outside organizing space that had been instrumental in propelling their movement forward and setting up the conditions for a teacher strike that had wide community support and that also addressed the issue of privatization and school closures. This illuminates how the political economic structure continues to constrain what even the most determined and committed movement leaders can achieve.

Another contribution the literature on teacher and community organizing is a deeper understanding of how and why teacher and community activists have shifted the narratives around market reforms as furthering the cause of civil rights and racial justice. Much like activists in other cities (Brown & Stern, 2018; Maton, 2018; Pham & Phillip, 2020), movement leaders in Oakland began to frame their efforts to stop privatization and school closures as a racial justice issue due to the disproportionate impact that closures have on Black and Brown students, families, and teachers (Mayorga et al., 2020; White, 2020). In Oakland, this reframing explicitly articulated how it was especially poor Black students and families that had been displaced by school closures, and how charters that opened in the place of shuttered district

schools did not enroll all the displaced students. Activists also shifted the way they framed their critiques of charter schools and acknowledged the need to transform public schools. Through their reflections, we learn that activists' framings evolved as they gained experience and noticed important shifts in the political terrain that were a direct result of their organizing over many years. Their reflections illuminate the dialectical and developmental dimensions of framing.

With more nuanced framings, activists gained momentum in their organizing and found common ground among disparate groups, yet they also continued to struggle with framing in clear and concise messages how race, space, and profit motive drive privatization and school closures. While Maton's (2018) study showed how and why one activist group made the shift to a racial justice framing, the present study showed some of the unintended consequences of this shift that might undermine activists' efforts in the long run. The movement advanced by adopting a racial justice analysis and framework for organizing, yet activists had to navigate new challenges that came with having a progressive leadership of color. The racial politics of representation in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism (Coulthard, 2014; Melamed, 2006) could limit how far activists can push to hold leaders accountable to a radical vision for transforming schools. This was new terrain that activists struggled to navigate, and they had to figure out a strategy without the benefit of having outside organizing spaces where they could develop an intersectional framework and strategy.

Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings suggest several implications for education policy. Though the new political grid is complex and fragmented, teacher and community activists have developed a robust countermovement to neoliberalization and privatization. This movement has already dramatically slowed the expansion of the charter school sector and helped to pass state legislation to hold charter schools more accountable and to give local districts greater power to determine whether new charter schools should be approved. The movement in Oakland has also begun to undermine the power of wealthy venture philanthropists to determine who gets elected to the local school board.

All these findings point to the possibility that neoliberalism's hegemony in education policy may be waning. Yet, it remains unclear what new threats or new paradigms may come to dominate. The shifts underway present a critical moment for educators and activists committed to educational equity and justice to push for policies that will redistribute resources and make schools more equitable and just.

Findings also point to several important implications for educational justice movements. First, one way to build collaboration despite the challenges posed by fragmentation, limited capacity, and racial politics is to pursue ad hoc coalitions that can join forces in particular campaigns. As Henig (2011) argues, this will allow for some sharing of resources and capacity without requiring total alignment on a particular power analysis or strategy, which can be harder to achieve in the complicated neoliberal political grid. Henig argues that ad hoc coalitions of groups "linked by a long-term vision of increased public engagement, could allow member groups the autonomy to develop expertise and focus on specific issues, venues, and tactics. At the same time, ongoing relationships can establish mechanisms and traditions for regular and coordinated ad hoc coalitions when conditions make pooling their efforts worthwhile" (p. 79). While conditions in the political context may make sustained coalitional work more challenging, they can also nurture enough solidarity to support ad hoc collaboration. As evidenced in

Oakland, these ad hoc coalitions can be effective at winning campaigns. What remains to be seen is whether they can amount to a broad and sustained social movement that can topple neoliberalism's hegemony over education policy and the greater political economic system.

Second, activist teachers, especially women of color, are critical to facilitating ad hoc coalitions and other alliances that connect community groups and teachers' unions, thereby infusing additional capacity into grassroots movements. However, activists must be adept at navigating challenging racial and identity politics. As racism and racial dynamics continue to present a challenge to collaboration across groups, it is incumbent on movement leaders to beware of the potential traps of the politics of representation that are endemic within the current political context (Melamed, 2006). This means that activists and organizers must not allow race-based analyses of marketization and privatization to mystify the political and economic drivers and mechanism behind these processes of accumulation through dispossession (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015; Mayorga et al., 2020). It also means that movement leaders, especially activist teachers working within their unions, must be prepared to address continued resistance among many teachers to confronting racism and white supremacy. A social movement for educational justice will not improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students in school today if it cannot impact the racist practices and orientations of teachers and schools. As long as students and families of color have to confront hostile learning environments in their schools, they will likely continue to seek alternative educational options through school choice policies and charter schools, even though students of color are subjected to racist teaching, practices, and policies in charters just as in traditional public schools.

There are also implications for how movements frame their efforts. Clarifying a racial analysis of neoliberal policies that undermine public education and exacerbate educational inequities can mean that activists inadvertently sideline an analysis of the political economy that drives the neoliberalization of education (Scott & Holmes, 2016; Lipman, 2011; Mayorga et al., 2020). Focusing on the racialized impact of privatization can obscure the interaction of privatization and school closures with gentrification and land grabs. As is often the case, narrowly attending to dynamics of racial politics can lead us to forget that what drives these reforms is the capitalist pursuit of accumulation by dispossession (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011, 2015). The implications are that activists may inadvertently pursue strategies that only target some of the mechanisms through which market reforms undermine educational and social equity, rather than mount a coordinated attack on the root causes of educational and social injustice-racial capitalism (Mayorga et al., 2020).

One way that activists can tackle this challenge is to prioritize political education to examine and understand the complexity of neoliberal reforms, how they shift over time, and how they work to facilitate accumulation through dispossession (Buras, 2015; Harvey, 2007; Lipman, 2011, 2015). Through political education, activists can deepen their analysis, thus allowing them to articulate framings that more adequately capture the racial and political economic dimensions of neoliberal reforms (Tarlau, 2014). As Tarlau notes, engaging in political education adds intentionality and elevates the pedagogical aspects of social movements and how involvement in movements can become educational experiences of consciousness-raising and empowerment. But it is important to note that movement leaders must engage in political education not only for themselves, but also organize political education campaigns for the public they aim to mobilize and organize.

Moreover, with a deeper commitment to political education as part of their praxis, activists can develop framings that not only resonate with the public, but that are rooted in

intersectional frameworks. As examples, Ferman (2021) argues that social justice frameworks allow youth organizers to counter neoliberal reforms by connecting disparate issues and struggles with broader social justice movements. Rooks' (2017) elaboration of a segrenomics framework is especially useful for articulating the intersections of race and capitalism in the privatization of public education and school closures. Brown and Stern (2018) add that including an analysis of gender dynamics and feminist perspectives can further deepen an intersectional framework for understanding and articulating the neoliberal threats to public education, helping movement leaders to develop the most robust challenges to these threats.

Finally, this study demonstrated that though there are persisting challenges to building alliances across teacher and community activist groups, there also opportunities and conditions in the neoliberal terrain that facilitate collaboration between these groups. Given the ways that neoliberalization and marketization have intensified educational and social inequities, and the power that elite reformers have had to reshape public education, it is imperative that grassroots movements have enough solidarity across stakeholders to not only demand an end to these policies, but also build a broad based movement toward a new paradigm for educational and social justice. This study reminds us that social justice movements can channel the shared sense of precarity and disposability among educators, students, and families to build bridges across activist groups.

The Covid-19 pandemic makes these efforts even more urgent, as organizers must mount a movement capable of protecting public institutions and vulnerable communities from those who seek to exploit this crisis for their own gain. The pandemic has made abundantly clear that public schools are vital institutions that serve important functions in our society beyond education. Teachers and school staff play critical roles in supporting the most vulnerable communities, particularly when the state is not prepared or is unwilling to provide the types of safety nets that communities need when facing a crisis. Teacher and community activists can turn this into an opportunity for movement building by exposing racial capitalism as the real global pandemic.

Future Research

While analyzing the data, I encountered new questions that future researchers may pursue in order to continue building our understanding of the politics of market reforms. Future research projects could more deeply explore the sense-making and pedagogical processes and dynamics within activist groups. Other studies could also delve deeper into the gender and class dynamics between and within groups. My study focused on racial dynamics and politics because these were the most visible in the organizing, yet the less visible or acknowledged dynamics related to class, gender, citizenship, and other axes of power and privilege are also at play in movement building and merit scholarly attention. There is much more to understand about the factors that facilitate or hamper coalition building between stakeholders. In particular, more work can be done to examine relationships between teachers unions and other sectors of organized labor, particularly with regard to fighting privatization.

There are also additional social movement concepts and theories that can help scholars examine other aspects of teacher and community organizing. For example, studies can explore more in depth the role of funding, organizational capacity, and institutions in organizing against market reforms. While the present study focused on the dynamics of the movement within the

city, future research could examine the factors that facilitate or undermine collaboration across cities, states, and nations.

It would also be useful to assess the impact of grassroots teacher and community organizing in different cities and across place. To what degree are these movements threatening the hegemony of neoliberalism in education? Is neoliberalism simply shifting and adapting to the opposition? What types of reforms may replace charter schools as a major threat to educational equity and justice? How might neoliberals or the elite class be co-opting the resistance of communities and teachers? There is little doubt that the global pandemic caused by the Covid virus will leave a lasting imprint on schools and work, and future research can help to illuminate in what ways social justice movements have attempted to push a liberatory agenda against the threat of more neoliberalization.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Guide

Title: **Teacher and Community Activism for Educational Justice in a Neoliberal Context**

Interviewer/Researcher: Frances Free Ramos, PhD Student
UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education
Principal Investigator: Professor Daniel Persltein
Contact Info: tel. (510) 932-8317, freeramos@berkeley.edu

Tentative interview questions (participant may suggest changes or new questions)

1. Please tell us your name, your occupation, and a little about yourself.
2. What is your connection to public education? Are you a teacher, staff, parent, school leader, and/or community member?
3. Please describe your activism and organizing work, in education? Outside of education?
4. When did you become involved in community activism? How did you decide to put your energy into the type of work that you do?
5. How did your educational experiences shape you as a person? As an activist? What was school like for you?
6. How do you see schools today as different or similar from when you were in school?
7. Tell me about what social justice means to you? How does your work pursue or promote social justice?
8. What do you see as the role of public education in our city, state, nation? What do you see as the value of public education? Of local school districts?
9. What are the most pressing issues in our public school system? How can public education be improved?
10. (Parents) What is important for you when you think about your child's/children's education or the education of youth in your community?
11. (Parents) How do you think the personal educational choices you make for your child/children connect with your vision of social justice?
12. What organizing groups are you affiliated with and in what capacity?
13. What do you think are the goals of each group? How are the goals defined (explicitly and/or implicitly)?
14. What are your personal goals in this work?
15. How do the groups you work with frame the work they do? What are their guiding missions and visions, or the goals they have for change?
16. How do the groups you work with aim to carry out their mission and achieve their goals? What are their key strategies? Whom do they aim to mobilize and why?
17. How effective do you think your group(s) is/are at achieving their goals? What factors facilitate greater success? What factors, challenges, or barriers do you have to work with?
18. How do you think the February 2019 strike was impacted by the organizing efforts of different groups? Do you think the strike had a meaningful impact on your efforts? Why/ not? How?
19. What changes have you seen in Oakland school policies and politics? Do you think your efforts have made an impact? What do you think has caused the changes you see? Or, if you don't see any changes, why do you think that's the case?