ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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DEDICATION

To Ruth, I love you more than I can express. Your selflessness has made our family stronger and I am grateful for your love. You have made me a better person and I am looking forward to the rest of our lives together.

To Griffin, Ryland, and Asher, you have given me more happiness than one person could expect in a lifetime. I am proud to be your father and I love you.

To Mom, Dad, and Jason, thank you for always supporting me unconditionally.

To Vernon Young, I miss you and think of you often.

To John, Joe, and Barry, thank you for all the good times.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION........................................................................................................ iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................................................................................. v

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................... x

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................... xi

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................ xii

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1

   Anti-Intellectualism in Higher Education Discourse .............................................. 2
   Liberal Indoctrination .......................................................................................... 3
   Practical Education ............................................................................................... 4
   The Problem of Tenure ......................................................................................... 6
   McCarthyism ......................................................................................................... 7
   Intellectualism and the Academy ......................................................................... 8
   Summary ............................................................................................................... 9

   Positionality ......................................................................................................... 10
   Personal Connection to the Research Problem ................................................... 10
   Professional Connection to the Research Problem ............................................. 13
   Role as a Researcher ............................................................................................. 17
   Statement of the Problem .................................................................................... 18
   Research Question ............................................................................................... 20

2. POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND DISCOURSE THEORY ........................................... 22

   Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................... 23
   Discourse Theory ................................................................................................. 24
   Critical Discourse Analysis Theory .................................................................... 27
# TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis and Power</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis and Ideology</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis and Hegemony</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Context of Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marxism</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconstruction</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Dissertation</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. RESEARCH APPROACH</th>
<th>47</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis Approach</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Problem and Justification of Approach</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media as Discourse</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronic Cut</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Standards of Excellence</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Participants</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Corpus</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis Data</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Analysis of the Discourse Strand</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed Analysis of a Discourse Fragment</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synoptic Analysis</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Standards of Excellence</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Data</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. DATA ANALYSIS</th>
<th>68</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Analysis of the Discourse Strand</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliographical Information</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of a Typical Article</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtopics</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission in the Subtopics</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission in the Subtopics</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse Entanglements</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed Analysis of the Discourse Fragments</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education as Career Training</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Funding</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Costs and Debt</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Policy</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education as College Preparation</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synoptic Analysis</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interview Data</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education as Career Training</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Standards</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Performance Standards</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Standards of Excellence</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Analysis</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene’s Consciousness Model</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple’s Institutional Analysis</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. DISCUSSION | 114 |

| Theory Revisited | 114 |
| Productive Nature of Discourse | 115 |
| Legitimation of Power | 116 |
| Positionality | 117 |
| Intellectualism | 119 |
| Data Analysis Conclusions | 122 |
| Critical Pedagogy | 126 |
| Critical State Standards | 129 |
| Future of Higher Education | 131 |
| Future Research | 133 |
| Summary | 134 |

REFERENCES | 136 |
TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>APPENDICES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>TEXT CORPUS FOR CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>MERCER IRB APPROVAL</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Considerations for Each Step of the CDA based on Jäger and Maier (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Representative Articles for Each Discourse Fragment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emergent Themes from the Text Corpus
ABSTRACT

JARRETT D. MOORE
ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
Under the Direction of VINCENT W. YOUNGBAUER, Ph.D.

American discourse is increasingly anti-intellectual and public discourse has colonized educational institutions from P-12 through higher education. Through a poststructural theoretical framework and using multiple methods, this qualitative study investigated the extent to which public discourse on higher education impacts the decision making of secondary students regarding college matriculation plans. This study utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA), student interviews, and standards analysis to examine anti-intellectualism in American educational institutions.

The text corpus was developed through ProQuest Newspapers and Lexis Nexis search engines and was comprised of American newspaper articles and government documents from June 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016. This text corpus was analyzed through a three-step process adapted from Jäger and Maier (2016). Gifted students from a Middle Georgia high school were interviewed and the interview transcripts were coded, analyzed, and compared to the CDA results. The Georgia Standards of Excellence for US History were analyzed to determine whether state
standards are conducive to creating an educational environment devoted to the
development of the intellect.

The data analysis found the discourse on higher education in America to be
framed almost exclusively in economic terms. The three main themes from the CDA
were economics, higher education policy, and P-12 college preparation. The interview
data confirmed that this discourse had infiltrated the thinking of gifted secondary students
as their visions of higher education were almost exclusively framed through career and
job training opportunities. The standards analysis showed that the state of Georgia
provides few opportunities to develop the intellect through its course content. Future
studies should track the changes in discourse through the Trump administration, new
media sources, and the influence of private interests in higher education.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As one of the founding principles of our republic and articulated in the Constitution, the president of the United States has relatively little power that does not require the consent of other branches of government. However, the office of the president carries significant weight when it comes to the public discourse, especially in the modern era of ubiquitous media. The twenty-four hour news cycle has had a significant impact on public consciousness and the president or a presidential candidate has full access to the public discourse to drive a narrative in any direction. The primaries leading to the 2016 presidential election, particularly within the Republican Party, reflected a debasing of discourse to the point that machismo, insults, xenophobia, and implicit racism were normalized.

While nativism is not new, the “us versus them” politics of the last decade in many senses is a relatively recent phenomenon. One of the most famous presidential debates of the last century involved Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice-President Richard Nixon. Though the debate is more famous for the impact of television on how we pick our president, a quote from Nixon is worth noting. At the end of his opening statement, Nixon offered, “Let us understand throughout this campaign that his motives and mine are sincere….our disagreement is not about the goals for America but only about the means to reach those goals” (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2015, para. 4). Remembering this debate was in the general election makes the level of civility even
more astounding by today’s political standards. This is not to subscribe to either candidate’s politics, rather to illustrate that in the not too distant past, important political debates could be conducted in a respectful, productive manner. Certainly, the proliferation of cable news, social media, and blogs has impacted public discourse about serious matters, but the level of public discourse seems to be more attributable to American anti-intellectualism than the medium through which information is consumed. Therefore, while Americans have more access to media, we still seem to lack the ability to navigate the media in a constructive manner.

Anti-Intellectualism in Higher Education Discourse

Anti-intellectualism is not new to the United States and not new to presidential politics. Hofstadter (1962) recounted several examples of the Eisenhower administration showing disdain for intellectuals individually and intellectualism as a whole. By using terms like egghead and explaining the distance of intellectual thought from mainstream Americans, intellectuals were successfully linked in the public discourse to communism, immorality, and a host of other nefarious values that were considered anti-American (Hofstadter, 1962). Combining a general mistrust of intellectuals with a fear of communism, McCarthyism left a dubious legacy on American higher education, one in which education in general became the target of anti-intellectual discourse in America.

This study proposes to use critical discourse analysis (CDA) and interviews to investigate how American anti-intellectualism impacts secondary students and their perceptions of higher education. Part of the approach to this study required a synchronic cut to determine the current state of the discourse. Since all discourse strands have a past,
present, and future (Jäger, 2001), it is useful here to inquire as to how the discourse arrived at its current state. This brief diachronic view of the discourse on higher education will provide context to the synchronic cut of discourse explicated in Chapter 3.

Liberal Indoctrination

The root of the narrative of higher education as a bastion for liberal, left wing socialism is relatively elusive, but probably originated from the Cold War era of American politics. The McCarthyism of the 1950s and the student activism of the 1960s spurred much of the narrative and it is now conventional wisdom to view colleges and universities as the vehicle through which professors indoctrinate young men and women. While the tenor of the narrative fluctuates regarding the imminent danger of the professors, it has become an accepted fact that the majority of college professors in the United States range from liberal to socialist (Adams, 2004; Anderson, 1992; Riley, 2011; Shapiro, 2004; Smith, 1990). As evidence for this claim, Riley (2011) used political donations in the 2008 presidential election and posited the professors themselves had no inkling of their own radicalness as compared to mainstream Americans. Shapiro (2004) cited voting in the 2000 presidential election by Ivy League liberal arts and social science departments and for comparison offered “the percentage of Democrats teaching in university system closely parallels the percentage of communists in the Cuban government” (p. 5). While there is a dearth of evidence to determine when exactly the university became the site for liberal indoctrination, several argued it is based on professorial allegiance to Marxism (Horowitz, 2006, 2007; Shapiro, 2004). According to Horowitz (2007), this indoctrination has occurred because university administrators have
focused their attention on finances and added that education programs focused on social justice have the most radical agendas. It is interesting to note the conflation of Democrat, socialist, and radical throughout these texts. Though one’s politics is a personal matter, it seems to be a bit dishonest to represent the whole of academia through such a narrow ideological lens. I do not doubt the existence of extremism on either side of the political spectrum, but I also believe that if college campuses are not the place for all sides to be heard, then such a place may not exist in America.

Practical Education

Perhaps the larger, more pertinent dispute is defining the role of higher education in America and determining if there ever was a time in American culture when higher education was not at odds with mainstream culture. In other words, determining the golden age of academia when intellectuals and mainstream Americans were in harmony is an area worth examining. One way to approach this matter is to try to define the purpose of higher education. As Rudolph (1990) chronicled the history of the American university, he encountered the issue of the practicality of knowledge as early as the colonial times. In these early days of higher education, Rudolph found no evidence that colleges would become the significant institutions they are today and that individuals seeking education for practical means would probably not see the value in college curriculum. Thelin (2011) agreed citing the apprentice model as the prevalent path to legal practice and that college degrees were not necessary for entry into professional life during the early years of the university. While many theorists and educators have written about epistemology in terms of practicality, Bloom (1987) succinctly posited “the deepest
intellectual weakness of democracy is its lack of taste or gift for the theoretical life” (p. 252). Therefore, if higher education does not train citizens in practical skills and the citizens of a democracy have little to no use for intellectualism, colleges seem to be stuck in an area that makes their curriculum only useful for a small number of people, presumably those whom Hofstadter (1962) would consider intellectuals. Hofstadter posited the intellectual as one who does not seek to possess truth, but to seek new uncertainties without concern for their practical purposes. Bloom proffered specialized degree programs, such as the MBA, as an example of the antithesis of a liberal education. By marketing these programs as a way to be financially successful, Bloom argued a diploma does not reflect scholarship, but redefines higher education as a professional training ground. In many ways, the articulation, or lack thereof, of the purpose of higher education is the nexus of the conflicts regarding colleges and universities. As Bloom (1987) continued along this line of thought, he posited, “the university has to stand for something” (p. 337).

One of the largest expansions of the university was during the post-World War II era and the advent of the GI Bill. Within two years of its passage, college campuses saw an enormous increase in applicants and enrollees. There are many long-term effects of the GI Bill and among them are changes to admission policies, increased use of standardized test scores, and major infrastructure projects on college campuses (Thelin, 2011). Perhaps the most far-reaching effect of the GI Bill was the entry of federal money into university research and federal financial aid. As most of the veterans who took advantage of this entitlement were older than the traditional college freshman, college life
was changed as well. Married men moved onto campuses and most were attempting to graduate as quickly as possible (Humes, 2006). This time period seems to mark a significant turning point in the history of American higher education because college became not only more accessible but began to be viewed as a requirement for professional life. Certainly colleges enjoyed the guaranteed federal tuition money and the resulting infrastructure improvements and Humes (2006) noted that the GI Bill returned seven times the initial investment back into the economy.

The Problem of Tenure

An interesting criticism of higher education is that professors are most interested in attaining tenure and leaving the college classroom. Rudolph (1990) posited Johns Hopkins University as the first institution to encourage professors to minimize their role as teachers and this focus on research began to spread throughout academia. In this narrative, professors, rather than focusing on the needs of the student, focus on gaining the job security found in tenure. Riley (2011) cited studies showing that some professors get financial benefit from teaching less and their professional motivation is to contribute to scholarly literature rather than to teach. Tenure and academic freedom seem to go together within this narrative and Rudolph pointed to the controversies regarding Darwinism as the impetus for professors to demand academic freedom. Tenure seems to have been an outgrowth of the ideal university setting where professors were free to pursue areas that may not have been popular, especially topics concerning religion or politics. Riley argued academic freedom and tenure were not necessary for professors to do their jobs and believed there should be accountability to the taxpayers who fund public
colleges and universities. While this is perhaps ancillary to the main focus of this project, it is interesting that professors are at once criticized for indoctrinating students to a liberal worldview and also being absent from the college classroom. While the strands of this discourse would need to be untangled further, there is little doubt that the caricature of the socialist professor is prevalent in contemporary discourse.

McCarthyism

The impact of McCarthyism on university campuses is somewhat contested. Bloom (1987) argued that McCarthyism had no real impact on higher education faculty and if there was an effect, it was to galvanize faculty against the intrusion upon academic freedom. Schrecker (1986) articulated an entirely different reality of academia during the 1950s. Far from galvanizing the academic community, Schrecker described an almost accommodating view of universities when it came to McCarthyism. Thelin (2011) argued that McCarthyism caught campuses by surprise because they saw themselves as part of the solution rather than the problem. He went on to suggest that the more pressing issue of the time period was increased university accountability for federal research money resulting from intense scrutiny of higher education. Jacoby (1987) maintained this era silenced any form of dissent among academics and in effect, created a mainstream academic class less interested in speaking to a wider public audience. While there are several reasons ranging from patriotism to intimidation to self-preservation, the academic and intellectual freedom of university professors was compromised and academia as a whole was complicit (Schrecker, 1986). While the communist purge of the McCarthy era seems difficult to evaluate, Schrecker posited the untold amount of self-
censoring by professors to be the most long-lasting impact. The end of ideology as described by Bell (1960) is perhaps the result of the assault on intellectuals. The turbulence of the 1960s may have precluded a true termination of ideology in the strictest sense, but the process of intellectual consensus leading to an ending of ideology seems to stand. If nothing else is certain about the Cold War era of higher education, it seems tenable to state that American political institutions can overpower the intellectual institutions and that intellectual work requires a formidable tension of ideas to be productive.

Intellectualism and the Academy

While colleges and universities are now home to many intellectuals, that was not always the case. Jacoby (1987) provided a comprehensive account of the intellectual retreat towards academia. As he pointed out, the public intellectual of the first half of the 20th century does not exist in contemporary public discourse. Among the most compelling reasons for the decline are the disappearance of urban bohemian culture, the stability of academic life, and the narrowing of their audiences to other experts in their respective fields (Jacoby, 1987). Posner (2004) echoed this idea by positing that intellectuals now had a career path that allowed them to leave the public spaces in favor of speaking and writing to a specialized audience. The effect of the intellectual retreat to academia was to depoliticize thinking and writing in favor of citations and publications for tenure thereby reducing one’s audience to other members of academia. The specialization of knowledge has also precipitated the deterioration of public intellectuals (Posner, 2004) signaling a beginning of the conflation of the terms academic and
intellectual. Whatever sway public intellectuals had in political debates was lost as the writing became more technical and inaccessible to the common citizen (Jacoby, 1987).

Interestingly, Posner (2004) lamented the retreat of the public intellectual for another reason. He argued that while the normalization of all types of people will make the public happy, it will also take some of the edge off of intellectual thought by removing the outsider’s view. As stated earlier, a certain amount of tension is needed for the proliferation of intellectual thought and Posner makes the case that whatever gains are made in equality will be lost in intellectual thought. Additionally, he pointed to the mainstreaming of economic intellectuals as a sign of the technical nature of contemporary thought. As will be argued later in this paper, economic discourses have colonized all of schooling and education and perhaps it is because our society lacks the frame of reference to understand ideas outside of their economic impact. The larger significance of this phenomenon is a decline in public critical consciousness. In other words, the space that was once filled with independent, critical thought was replaced with punditry and theatrical televised debates void of substance.

Summary

This brief, diachronic view of higher education is meant to provide context to the CDA that will be performed in this study. The discourse on higher education is generally an entanglement of many discourse fragments (Jäger & Maier, 2016), ranging from economics and political ideology to the practicality of education and other social concerns. Chomsky (1967) argued the intellectual should not shy away from the responsibility to question the dominant discourses and St. Pierre (2011) urged researchers
not to capitulate to anti-intellectualism. There is no doubt as to the existence of genuine political differences in America, but these differences should refine debates and strengthen the educational and political system rather than degrade it.

**Positionality**

As this project is one of analysis, specifically CDA, it is necessary to make my biases known prior to engaging in a subjective examination of text. As I will argue in this project, discourse creates reality (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 2010; Jäger, 2001; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008) and I have to position myself within the discourse or my attempts to analyze the discourse will lack genuine reflexivity. In fact, one of the criticisms of CDA in professional journals is the untenable positionality of researchers outside of texts (Rogers, Malanchuruvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005).

**Personal Connection to the Research Problem**

On a personal and demographic level, I identify as a white, heterosexual male; I am a husband and a father of three sons. I was born a little over a decade after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed and grew up in Macon, GA, knowing only one house. The middle class neighborhood in which I grew up was kid friendly and anecdotes about playing war in the woods and being home when the street lights came on would accurately describe my childhood as well. While I did not know the violence of a segregated South during the Jim Crow era, I grew up in its shadow. I lived in an essentially all-white neighborhood and growing up in North Macon, experienced a minimum amount of diversity throughout all of my childhood interactions. As I think
back, I can now understand what may be described as the soft racism of my youth as racial comments and racist jokes were not uncommon. Outside of my experience at a public elementary school, I attended a private high school that grew from a Baptist church. As was common in Macon, this school was founded in 1969 out of concern for impending integration and remained well over 90% white into the 21st century (Manis, 2004). My experience in high school would also be considered a middle class experience as most of the students were products of middle to upper middle class parents. I continued my education at a private undergraduate college founded by the Episcopal Church. My college experience would be my first with peers from wealthy families and certainly provided me with some invaluable experiences, specifically being around other white kids to whom I could not relate.

Politically, I am liberal in many ways, especially social issues; however, I do not, nor have I ever belonged to a political party. I believe demanding more individual freedoms for all people strengthens our republic and improves the potential for progress in our society. Religiously, I am atheist and this is perhaps where I am most at odds with the South of my youth. My household was not religious, but I attended a high school in an environment with weekly, required chapel services and a required class on Christian ethics and this experience undoubtedly impacted my consciousness. Though I am not necessarily anti-religious, I do believe that religion has been used worldwide for centuries to subjugate people and ideas. When faith can override evidence, science, and logic, it is decidedly anti-intellectual. When a social institution provides easy, commonsensical answers that do not require and even discourage intellectual activity, it is problematic.
To fail to acknowledge intellectual work done within religious settings would be a mistake and I am certain there has been and continues to be rigorous academic and intellectual work being done at religiously affiliated institutions in America. While I was not at a place in high school to think for myself, I can say my experiences in college were never compromised by the affiliation with the Episcopal Church. However, from my perspective, within public discourse, whether it is concerning Protestant denominations common in the South or the nationwide discourse on Islam, people use religion as a way to prevent others from living in a way that is not condoned by their beliefs. Within the last year, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal vetoed a religious liberty bill that critics claimed would legalize discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Aside from significant civil rights issues, from an intellectual perspective, proposed laws such as these serve only to cut off new sources of knowledge and ways of knowing the world. While religion is unlikely to be a significant part of this research, it is an area where I have strong feelings that may bias my analysis.

One of the major theoretical beliefs I will argue throughout this analysis is that discourse creates reality (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 2010; Jäger, 2001; Pinar et al., 2008), but I am personally conflicted in my understanding of this statement. My belief system and ideology is neither native to, nor encouraged in, the local community where I have lived for at least three quarters of my life. In other words, if discourse creates reality, how are my beliefs so outside the mainstream of the local discourse? The obvious answer based on the discourse is my time at a liberal arts college indoctrinated me to the left wing discourse. However, my time in undergraduate studies was neither
one of enlightenment, nor indoctrination. I would describe myself as apolitical entering and leaving college, which is to say I did not follow or participate in politics during my undergraduate years. To provide context, the Cold War ended when I was a freshman in high school and I entered college as O. J. Simpson was being found not guilty of murder. As I graduated from college, we were starting to hear more about a White House intern, but my concerns as an undergraduate were decidedly more social than academic or political. As van Dijk (1995) described ideology, the same forces that create the dominant discourse create the opposing discourse. While I never had a revolutionary moment reading a controversial author, perhaps my personal connection to the discourse is a better indication of how discourse works. Instead of forming my ideology through preconceived family traditions or religious institutions, maybe ideology works slowly, without notice until it can be articulated at some place and time. Tuchman (1991) acknowledged the rejection of some discourses, but theorized any view of discourse is framed by media. While this line of thought is an area of autobiography I will continue to explore, I can confidently say that while I have grown cynical and pessimistic about many of our social institutions, I remain optimistic about people. The current xenophobic characteristic of our national discourse is the most pessimistic view of human beings. While the political discourse seems impossible to change, Jäger (2001) posited unraveling power from knowledge weakens the power and allows the discourse to die.

Professional Connection to the Research Problem

My professional career in education began at my high school alma mater. Perhaps paradoxically, most of the tacit knowledge I use in my current classroom came
from my time at this small, private, Baptist P-12 school. It was there I began experimenting with student engagement and critical thinking and conceivably, it was the lack of state-mandated testing that allowed me the freedom to develop my own teaching style. It was not until I became a public school teacher that I began to comprehend the anti-intellectual state of education. First, standards-based classrooms, while they sound rigorous in a soundbite or a catchphrase, are anti-intellectual. Ontologically and epistemologically, there is no way for a teacher to know the results of academic study in advance (Pinar, 2012). The evaluation of students and teachers based on standards presents a multitude of issues, not the least of which is the political implications of these assessments. Georgia teachers are evaluated based on a program called Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). Based on TKES, teachers are evaluated on 10 performance standards, student surveys of instructional practices, and student growth (Georgia Department of Education, 2015b). An excerpt from the TKES Implementation Handbook reads “the overall TAPS rating and the overall Student Growth rating will be combined using the TEM matrix to determine a teacher’s final Teacher Effectiveness Measure rating” (Georgia Department of Education, 2015b, p. 19). TKES is explicated as way for administrators to provide feedback to teachers who can then improve their practice, which in turn improves student performance. Further, the measurements and matrices are constantly changed and tweaked adding to the confusion surrounding the system. Regardless, as illustrated in the excerpt above, this rating is not easily accessible to teachers. I do not know what the TAPS rating or TEM matrix is and I do not care to know because there is no aspect of this measure that improves my classroom instruction.
As others have argued, Pinar (2012) targeted the accountability movement as a way to teacher-proof education and the TKES system of evaluation seems to fit into the ahistorical idea that teachers are the reason for the mediocrity of American schools. Recently, the superintendent of the school system in which I work discussed his goal of creating a culture of accountability for administrators, teachers, and students (Timmerman, 2016). Perhaps I am speaking from too narrow of a view to understand the entire district’s vision, but I do not see accountability as the key to our success in the future. I envision a school culture rooted in critical thinking and empathy as the way forward, but accountability and all of its assumptions about teachers remain a durable narrative.

Student assessment and standards are another area of anti-intellectualism in secondary education. While not typically viewed as such, standards are essentially a political document. The state of Georgia is telling students and teachers what a student should know in order to demonstrate proficient knowledge in a subject area. While this is not necessarily uncommon or controversial in a vacuum, there are many issues with the standards movement. As it applies to the student at the point of delivery, there are many options that exist for teacher and student; however, to limit the student and teacher to what will be tested, especially in classes with Georgia Milestones assessments, seems to be antithetical to the spirit of intellectual development and exploration. Students can learn many things in schools, but the end of course assessments check to see if they learned the correct information and enough of it in the span of one academic year. While the road to standardization is a long and well documented one, there are other aspects of
schools that are anti-intellectual. The physical space, delineated by disciplines, creates the notion that knowledge is to be compartmentalized and social studies knowledge does not travel upstairs to the science hall. The alienation of subject areas from one another dissuades the student and teacher from collaborating across disciplines and enforces the differentiation of practical subjects from impractical subjects. Various federal and state initiatives drive the focus on certain disciplines, sacrificing others, and reinforcing the notion that certain subjects, like math or science, are more necessary for academic success. The day-to-day functioning of the schools is akin to any production line factory or farm. Students and teachers react to bells regardless of if they are finished with the class and teachers are expected to complete extra duties, such as parking lot duties, hall duties, faculty meetings, or parent-teacher conferences, during unpaid time. A teacher’s classroom time is generally scripted as well. In my district, we are to have an opening, mini lesson, student work, and closing scripted every day. There is seemingly no harm in having a plan for a lesson or unit, but the narrowing of focus makes it difficult to delve into anything beyond the superficial.

Considering that education is a reserved power in the Constitution, states are well within their right to regulate secondary schools as they see fit. However, the implications of what students learn and how they are taught are wide ranging. Regardless of one’s views on the purpose of P-12 schools, the intellect must be nurtured. Whether one expects to be career ready or college ready when they leave high school, the expectations of a majority of students will probably not be met. There is little evidence in the contemporary labor market to support students leaving high school with any particular
skills to market to potential employers. Additionally, the state of Georgia projects that by 2020, over half of the jobs available in Georgia will require certification or an advanced degree (University System of Georgia, 2011). Preparing students for college seems to be a mixed bag as well. The state of Georgia reported that roughly half of the students entering the university system of Georgia in a two- or four-year college require remediation (University System of Georgia, 2011). Based on precedent, it will probably be incumbent on P-12 schools to do more to prepare students for careers and college. Perhaps secondary school teachers are doing a poor job or maybe schools as they are currently constituted are not capable of fulfilling their mission statement for the majority of their students. This section is not meant to be a list of grievances against the operation of Georgia public schools but to serve as a reference point to understanding the role of discourse in social institutions. Many educators and researchers have pointed to the launching of Sputnik 1 and the publishing of A Nation at Risk as having a profound impact on the standardization of schooling and educational outcomes (Urban & Wagoner, 2014). Pinar (2012) argued the crisis of schooling was manufactured and illegitimately placed on teachers and schools; however, the notion of school failure and reform has remained a viable part of political and educational discourse. As theorists maintain, discourse is durable and has a material existence (Fairclough, 2003) and impacts students, educators, and society at large.

Role as a Researcher

As a researcher, I must acknowledge that my theoretical positioning, my epistemological beliefs, and my paradigmatic worldview impact how I will conduct
research. From a poststructural standpoint, I accept the subjectivity of the researcher and instead of attempting to become an objective observer, I acknowledge my biases and will account for them in my analysis. My theoretical framework is elucidated in Chapter 2, but there are two aspects of the researcher’s role that need to be illuminated. First, I have been associated with education either as a student, teacher, or both each year of my life since entering kindergarten in 1981. Therefore, I am a product of educational discourse, and I cannot exist as a researcher outside of educational discourse (Rogers et al., 2005). Second, while I was not the valedictorian of my graduating classes, I have been successful as a student and a teacher and these experiences will impact my analysis. Fairclough (2015) identified the inside knowledge of researchers with the research site as member resources (MR). The aspect of MR that is difficult to grasp is that the social interactions with the discourse are generally not realized by the individual, so they may be unaware of the effects of the inside information they possess (Fairclough, 2015). According to Fairclough, the assumptions made by the members of a certain discourse are a form of ideology in that the resources affect the frame of reference and interpretations of research phenomenon. Conducting the research I propose requires one to constantly grapple with notions such as MR and other biases I may have. The point of this self-reflection is not to remove the self from the research, but to contemplate the ways in which my ideology impacts my analysis.

Statement of the Problem

On many levels, American society is anti-intellectual. Whether one is discussing climate change or the rights of same sex couples to marry or adopt, it is increasingly
difficult to engage in productive discourse. One characteristic of living in a free society is that people have the right to abstain from intellectual activities and debates. However, if the time and space for intellectualism is limited or eliminated from society, then progress will cease. Just as some Americans disagree with foreign wars, some Americans do not believe in expanding marriage to include same sex couples. All of these views should be debated in public so the ideas may be sharpened, understood, and judged on their merits. The emerging method of debate seems to be to delegitimize the arguments of others rather than to defend your own beliefs with evidence and reason.

The problem is that we seem to be in peril of losing a space for ideas to be debated. Giroux (2014) lamented the loss of public spaces and the lack of a critical language with which to evaluate and criticize forms of power in society. As practicality of education has become the dominant discourse and mistrust of higher education has remained a resilient discourse, political debates have also turned coarse and relatively useless.

In the 2009 State of the Union address, President Obama asked every citizen “to commit to at least one year of higher education or career training” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2009, para. 65). I have worked at two schools in my professional teaching career and both of the mission statements revolved around college or career preparation. So it is clear that from the president to public and private secondary schools, our P-12 education system is designed with college in mind. At the same time, there exists a discourse that our institutions of higher learning across the country are lacking practicality, but are also the only path to careers and prosperity. There is an incongruity between the purported purpose of P-12 and higher education
institutions and intellectual stimulation and development of students. One of the reasons for this incongruity is that the pervasive American anti-intellectual discourse has entered the mainstream of educational discourse.

There is a scene in *The Wire* in which a university researcher is working with students in an urban school in Baltimore. The research involves pulling the lowest performing students out of regular classrooms into small groups and using targeted interventions to engage the students. As one student goes on a rampage, the retired police officer turned social worker looks at the researcher exasperated and the researcher simply comments on the fascinating data he was collecting. This view of a large gulf between academia and the real world is a product of public discourse and runs throughout our society. While academic debates or university research may not produce immediate impact on a classroom, the process of interrogating and defending new ideas is essential to our progress as a species. The intellect is the life of the mind and we need time and space for people to develop their intellect. Unfortunately, I believe this time and space are being colonized by other interests and I intend to inquire into the public discourse, the college preparatory standards, and the individual, lived experiences of the products of this P-12 system on the cusp of higher education.

**Research Question**

CDA is an inductive approach to research and is always open to refining the question and the analysis. At this particular stage in the research design, the main research question for this analysis is: How does societal anti-intellectualism impact secondary students and their perceptions of higher education? As I have discussed above,
there is an incongruity between the aims of P-12 education and the discourse on higher education. While I have proposed some ways in which higher education is viewed negatively in public discourse, the approach I have chosen does not allow any truth to be understood without analysis. As Chapter 3 will explain, I will take a synchronic cut of the current discourse on higher education to understand and attempt to unravel the power inherent in the discourse. I will also consider the diachronic view of higher education when analyzing the current state of the discourse to gain an understanding of what factors contributed to the discourse appearing in its present state.

As I will explain in Chapter 2, discourse theory is important to this approach as it is the site of the functioning of power that creates the reality in which we live. As such, I will also argue that discourse has a productive and material existence. One’s access to the discourse is a determining factor in how one views the discourse and concepts of power, ideology, and hegemony are significant to this analysis. This approach is based heavily in theory (Fairclough, 2003) and resembles the hermeneutic process in several significant ways (Meyer, 2001; Tuchman, 1991). Though this method is not designed to propose a solution, it will hopefully add context to the discourse and help understand how power functions through discourse.
CHAPTER 2
POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND DISCOURSE THEORY

Narrowing the poststructuralism paradigm to a single theoretical framework is difficult because it does not represent a single body of thought (Lee, 1992; Peters & Burbules, 2004) and seems to resist labels and categorization. However, poststructuralist thought must be delineated in some general way to undertake the difficult work of understanding power relations through sociological inquiry and avoiding absolute relativism (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Poststructuralism rejects notions of reality that fail to recognize the significance of language (Lee, 1992) in the production of truth and understanding of the world. In part because of the linguistic turn, language began to be contextualized outside of a transcendent meaning and opportunities to critically study discourse became available (Howarth, 2013). The common thread throughout this poststructuralist framework is discourse theory and the idea that reality is not just mediated and constructed through language, but that discourse serves to create reality (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 2010; Jäger, 2001; Pinar et al., 2008). By considering reality in historical context, poststructuralism is able to challenge the universality of truth (Peters & Burbules, 2004). The contingent and partial nature of our understanding of reality (Fairclough, 2003) makes localized ideas of reality of greater interest to this framework which can be elusive to the researcher based on the hegemonic role of discourse (Erickson, 2011).
While many of the epistemological beliefs of poststructuralism are interwoven with historical context and ontology, there seems to be an agreement that discourse and power produce knowledge (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Specifically, poststructuralists are concerned with how power functions and the conditions in which power is reproduced (Pinar et al., 2008). The legitimation and naturalization of knowledge through discourse is also a concern for poststructuralist research (Erickson, 2011; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) and aligns with the ontological idea of discourse creating reality.

Theoretical Framework

Fairclough (2003) posited the interconnectedness of society through varying social practices and studying societal discourse allows for the entry of poststructuralist inquiry to critique power relations interwoven in discourse (Bové, 1995). Specifically, the totalizing and productive nature of discourse creates space for a poststructural investigation into how the discourse is created, regulated, and linked to power and social institutions (Bové, 1995). Further, an examination of power through discourse analysis generally takes place at a societal level and studies the relationships of groups and the legitimation of power (van Dijk, 1990). Access to discourse translates into access to power and the same is true for the lack of access to discourse, as it represents a lack of access to power (van Dijk, 1993). CDA as an approach to the critical study of discourse and power seeks to understand how individuals or groups with access to the public discourse make use of this power (Baker et al., 2008). Ideology and hegemony are integral parts of the overall functioning of discourse and sustain the normality of the discourse and limit the questioning of the discourse (Bové, 1995; Fairclough, 2001).
Through a broader poststructuralist paradigm, this theoretical framework uses discourse and CDA theory to create a lens through which to examine the functioning of power in society and higher education.

Discourse Theory

While discourse as a concept resists universal definition, it seems to be rather inconsequential to even pursue a definition for the purposes of this project. Bové (1995) posited that the more relevant inquiries into discourse address how it functions and how it is produced and regulated. In the most general sense, discourse can be found in what “passes for more or less orderly thought” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 2) and located in all forms text and talk, including narratives and policies (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). However, the productive nature of discourse is what makes it a pertinent area of research in general and for a poststructuralist framework in particular. Foucault is a central figure in discourse theory and his thesis that discourse creates the objects and realities (Foucault, 2010; Jäger, 2001) has been built upon to create new ways of understanding power relations through CDA and other research approaches. Complicating matters, the realities created by discourse typically occur anonymously (Bové, 1995), in combination with other discourses (Fairclough, 2003), and as a part of an invisible power dynamic (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). While discourse theory intends to explain the structuring power of discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Meyer, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009), the role of the consumer of discourse does not seem to be as clear. For example, Fairclough (2003) referred to individual choice in the interpretive nature of meaning-making, whereas Wodak and Meyer (2009) compared the individual to a participant in a game where the
rules are not known. Van Dijk (1993) strikes a middle ground between subjugation and free will by positing that the structure of the discourse serves mainly to limit an individual’s ability to choose. Discourse is characteristically positioned (Fairclough, 2001) according to social hierarchy and some combinations of discourse are not related, but the discourse forms a coherence which becomes social reality (Bové, 1995; Jäger, 2001). The power that is inherent to the naturalized discourse is what poststructuralism and CDA attempt to interrogate, disentangle, and disrupt.

Central to discourse theory is the belief and understanding that discourse is a constitutive and productive element of society (Fairclough, 2001, 2003; van Dijk, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In general and on a large scale, discourse allows for the creation of subjects (Jäger, 2001), the construction and confirmation of ideologies (van Dijk, 1990, 1995), and the shaping of identity (Fairclough, 2003). The effect on society is the legitimation of power (van Dijk, 1990) and the institutionalization of discourse (Bové, 1995). The productive power of discourse is perhaps misunderstood. Fairclough (2001) attributed productive qualities to all social practice and van Dijk (1993) posited the manipulative power of discourse as mainly cognitive in nature. While CDA is concerned with those subjugated by power and discourse, Bové (1995) warned against proclaiming all effects of power as negative, for the productive nature of discourse has the potential to open up areas of inquiry and new ways of knowing. Again, the functioning of power and discourse is the concern of discourse theory and using a genealogical method allows the inquirer to understand the meanings produced by various discourses (Bové, 1995). The productive nature of discourse contributes to the shaping
of society and therefore can be conceptualized as constituting a material reality based on historical and contemporary discourses (Jäger, 2001). Linking the structuring of realities to an individual’s social relationship to the world, Fairclough (2003) posited texts as the causal effect upon identity, action, and the material world. The materiality of discourse should be interrogated to understand how discourses sustain themselves and how they impact the action of other individuals (Bové, 1995).

One of the main concerns for CDA is the functioning of power within discourse. While power is an elusive concept, there are several characteristics that allow power to function within discourse. The first characteristic is context and controlling context is essentially an embodiment of power (van Dijk, 1993). The power of context allows the discourse to make the historical ahistorical (Meyer, 2001) and functions to determine the possibilities of social action (Fairclough, 2003). Those who control the context of the discourse structure regulate the possibilities of social actors (van Dijk, 1993). Given the relative nature of truth, the discourse constitutes reality interwoven with the position of the dominant discourse (Bové, 1995; Jäger, 2001). The second characteristic of power functioning in discourse is the naturalization of the language of the discourse, especially when articulated from a supposed neutral standpoint. In particular, media has a large impact on what is considered natural and while the reporting of news through various texts is often purported to be objective, the discourse is anything but unbiased (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). While power has become less overt, it is the implicit and mundane appearance of text that makes it seem so natural (van Dijk, 1993). A third characteristic of power in discourse is the historical nature of discursive practices. Jäger (2001)
claimed that many discourses come to the individual as products of the meanings assigned by families and in the process become independent of historicity. Therefore, the unhinging of discourse and discourse strands from their historical context allows for the discourse to be unchallenged and evolve independently of its original context. Finally, the regulating power of discourse is tied to access to the dominating discourse. Jäger postulated discourse as not only a regulatory power in society, but as the determining factor in the forming of consciousness. The power of social institutions (e.g., government, schools, etc.) is partly determined by their ability to limit access to discourse and maintain control through elements of talk and text (van Dijk, 1993). The institutionalization of discourse results in the productive power to regulate and sustain the dominant discourse, thereby producing and reproducing a particular social order (Fairclough, 2001, 2003).

Critical Discourse Analysis Theory

Though initiated over thirty years ago, CDA should still be considered to be emerging in qualitative research. In fact, Wodak and Meyer (2009) posited CDA as a multidisciplinary approach rather than a method. While no single theoretical position aligns exclusively with CDA, it is innately based in theory (Fairclough, 2001; Meyer, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). There are many theorists who influenced the CDA framework and Foucault is described as one of the most influential (Fairclough, 2003; Jäger, 2001). Though the focus of a specific inquiry may vary based on the problem, CDA views each text as an interwoven part of society, representing social and political context as well as the opinions and interests of social groups (Baker et al., 2008; van
Dijk, 1995). Semiotics is an integral part of CDA, but the focus tends to be on the use of language as the location of social practice (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Fairclough (2001) described the interaction of language and social practice as a dialectical relationship fluctuating “between a focus on structure and a focus on action” (p. 124). It is perhaps this dialectic relationship that makes theory significant to the approach. As Wodak and Meyer (2009) recognized, this social practice determines, stabilizes, and changes social structure at the same time.

Regardless of specific methods, CDA concerns itself with power relations, specifically those deemed unjust and subjugating (Baker et al., 2008; Bové, 1995; Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In particular, CDA aims to make plain those power relations that are hidden or mystified (Meyer, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Additionally, the material effects of power as seen in ideology and cultural hegemony are critiqued to understand the processes legitimating the discourse (van Dijk, 1993). Perhaps the central concern to CDA is to understand how power functions within discourse to restrain or repress the populace (Bové, 1995). Therefore, those individuals and social institutions who have access to the public discourse are of the most interest to CDA (Baker et al., 2008) because they provide the most insight into the discourse that produces and reproduces inequality (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Specifically, in the tradition of Foucault, Fairclough (2003) posited the main concern of this analysis is to delineate the rules governing the discourse to better understand the reproduction of power in society. Also, in the tradition of Nietzsche and Foucault, Bové (1995) proposed a
genealogical study of discourse to understand the conditions necessary for the formation of discursive power and its ability to constitute social order.

Given the theoretical position of CDA theory, determining the location and functioning of power can be difficult. Moreover, the researcher cannot exist outside of the dominant discourse which serves to further problematize the efforts of CDA (Jäger, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Therefore, an objective or neutral positioning of a researcher in CDA is not possible (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1993) and one must be explicit as to their relation to power and access in their analysis of the structure of discourse. Meyer (2001) posited CDA as a hermeneutic approach whereby one can only understand the problem by fluctuating between an analysis of the whole and from its constituent parts. In this process, the analysis should always connect with theory and interpret the discourse as to the intentions of those controlling access to the discourse (Fairclough, 2003).

To find and analyze the discourse, one can generally look to mass media, but the interconnectedness of all types of discourse can be difficult to untangle and generally leads to a study of broader social institutions (Bové, 1995; Fairclough, 2003; Jäger, 2001). Once the discourse is located, the task then turns to analysis for the purpose of troubling the assumptions of truth in discourse and understanding how these discourses legitimate and maintain power in society (Jäger, 2001). In general, CDA is an inductive process and is willing to investigate any social action that may influence texts (Meyer, 2001). While some CDA theorists and methodologists see the analysis as the action of CDA, Jäger (2001) posited exposing the dominant ideologies as the way to weaken the
ideology whereby it loses the power, identity, and the material existence previously held. Bové (1995) posited analysis as having material effects on individuals by including the potential for “self-determination inherent in a recognition that truth is made by humans as the result of very specific material practices” (Bové, 1995, p. 55). Therefore, the task of CDA is to denaturalize specific discourses that exercise subjugating power to help extend freedom and choice to the oppressed.

Critical discourse analysis and power. Much of Foucault’s writings addressed institutions of power and how they function through the use of language and discourse. The main targets of Foucault’s critique were the ahistorical nature and political neutrality of dominant discourses (Cherryholmes, 1988). While inquiring into the particular institutions that wielded the power to influence discourse, Foucault was concerned with the normalizing function of discourse and its ability to shape normal and abnormal within society (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Understanding the conditions in which concepts are formed must take place in a broader consideration of the historical conditions that led to their formation (Foucault, 1982). Cherryholmes (1988) concluded the historical nature of discourse cannot be separated from the power formations that enacted the contingent truths of the discourse. Similar to Bové (1995), Foucault (1982) did not see his analysis as an indictment of power or any particular social institution, but “rather a technique, a form of power” (p. 212). Of particular concern was the interrelatedness of power and discourse and how this can lead to the legitimation of the dominant discourse (Pinar et al., 2008). Foucault also commented on the productive nature and material existence of power. Rather than an abstract or theoretical notion,
power “is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege,’ acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic position” (Foucault, 1995, pp. 26-27). Continuing his analysis, Foucault (1995) concluded the effects of power exist in the subject viewing power as a natural state and in his or her own best interest.

Perhaps the main contribution to this theoretical framework is Foucault’s genealogical method of analysis. Foucault’s analysis followed Nietzschean genealogy to uncover how discourse creates subjects and regulates society (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2006). Though Nietzsche did not explicitly set out to create a new method of analysis, it seems clear he was positing a more contextual nature to historical analysis. For example, as Nietzsche (2013) examined the formation of the meaning of the word good, he concluded that the accepted historical version of the term likely held no meaningful relationship to the intended usage. He postulated, “it is certainly a shame that they [historians of morality] lack the historical sense itself, that they themselves have been abandoned by all the beneficent spirits of history” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 14). It is from this genealogical perspective that Foucault examined the functioning of power and the discourses that create and sustain the power.

Critical discourse analysis and ideology. The elusive nature of ideology only has material existence through the manner in which it functions (Althusser, 2001) and is similar to Foucault’s (1995) notion of dispersed power. Using the term Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), Althusser (2001) described the manner in which ISAs function by organizing society based on a particular ideology making the ideology seem natural. Similar to Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*, Althusser posited that the ideology of the
ruling class becomes the ideology of society at large. Its subtle nature makes ideology difficult to define, for ideology in a Marxist viewpoint is illusory but also has a material existence (Althusser, 2001). Therefore, ideology functions in discreet ways to normalize thought to the point that the individual does not know he or she is a representation of ideology.

While the functioning of power is the main focus of CDA, ideologies can have a material impact on society in a specific manner. From the view of CDA, ideologies are frameworks for specific groups to understand the world and have a controlling effect on the group members (van Dijk, 1995). Fairclough (2003) viewed ideology as representations of the world contributing to domination and exploitation. He postulated the critical view of ideology as one that positions it within a structure of the exercise of power. The establishment of dominant ideologies is a gradual process and not unique to the power elites; all groups, including the oppressed, materialize ideologies (van Dijk, 1995). Similar to power structures, the naturalization of ideologies makes them seem neutral to society thereby protecting them from critique (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) and allowing the ideologies to maintain specific relations of power. While understanding the characteristics of ideology from a theoretical and historical standpoint are important, CDA is most interested in how ideologies function (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Perhaps the most significant impact is on epistemology because of an ideology’s ability to structure knowledge within specific groups at the level of the individual and their worldview as a whole (van Dijk, 1995). Because of this epistemological power and the resilience of ideologies, Fairclough (2003) advised all analysis to consider the role of specific
representations in the formation of ideologies which contribute to the power relations found in the dominant discourse. Perhaps paradoxically, one must first have access to the discourse to be able to unveil the political implications of ideology and hegemony within society and curriculum. CDA brings action to this theoretical framework by allowing one to uncover the coded meanings of the dominant ideology through an understanding of how it operates.

Critical discourse analysis theory and hegemony. Gramsci (2006) began his analysis of power and hegemony by first addressing ideology which he posited “must be analysed historically, in the terms of the philosophy of praxis, as a superstructure” (p. 15). In this context, he believed that ideas themselves take on a kind of material force (Gramsci, 2006), thereby paving the way for society to act on these ideas. Through Gramsci’s analysis of ideology, he created the term hegemony, thereby making the static idea of Marxist ideology dynamic (Leitch, 2010). Hegemony revolves around power and it began for Gramsci with a standardization of individuals “both psychologically and in terms of individual qualification” (Hoare & Smith, 2014, p. 13). The function of power in Gramscian philosophy served to create conflict and to maintain the power of the ruling class through this conflict. Hegemony as a practice serves to structure the conflict by creating new alliances and dismantling old ones for the purpose of maintaining sway and political power (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The ideology being promoted then becomes what Foucault and others would later call discourse (Walshaw, 2007). As the discourse becomes accepted, the social group controlling the discourse has “already exercise[d] ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power … it subsequently becomes
dominant when it exercises power” (Gramsci, 2006, p. 14). The process is more or less complete when the general public spontaneously consents to the ideals of the dominant group and the state begins to enforce discipline on those groups that do not consent (Hoare & Smith, 2014).

Based on the process, Gramscian hegemony was active, deliberate, purposeful, and seemed to operate within public discourse without the explicit knowledge of society at large. An interesting notion of this theory is the common language that developed through the establishment of hegemony. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) posited collective language as an articulation serving to solidify the dominant ideology as a hegemonic power. The role of these articulations is to produce “unity out of dispersion, identity out of difference, coherence out of apparent randomness” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 124). In other words, hegemony has an energy of its own and the language and articulations that result from hegemony serve to further the ideological power of the dominant group.

The most important characteristics of hegemony from a CDA perspective involve the structuring of societal norms. Particularly, when individuals fail to see or consider alternatives to the dominant discourses, hegemony has been achieved (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The legitimizing aspect of hegemony is considered as well as the structuring impact of the common sense notions of the dominant discourse (Fairclough, 2001, 2003). From a theoretical standpoint, CDA is mainly concerned with the productive nature of hegemony. Van Dijk (1993) posited hegemony as the general acceptance of control and the compelling of individuals to “act in the interest of the powerful out of their own free
will” (p. 255). In this action, ideology, power, and hegemony are intertwined and the task of CDA is to unravel this amalgamation of specific discourses which allow for the exercise of power.

Historical Context of Theoretical Framework

While many of those who are claimed by poststructuralist thought resisted the categorization of their work, much of what currently serves as the theoretical base for the paradigm originated from theorists who began to challenge the determinism associated with Marxist thought (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). While many theorists openly grappled with Marxism and some rejected it outright, Choat (2010) posited that some Marxist themes remain in poststructuralism, such as the historical context of thought and the temporal nature of knowledge. This view is exemplified by Cherryholmes (1988) who concluded “if truth is discursive and discourses are historically situated, then truth cannot be spoken in the absence of power and each historical arrangement of power has its own truths” (p. 34). Peters and Burbules (2004) demarcated the work of Foucault as the transition between structuralism and poststructuralism as he and his contemporaries challenged the scientizing of knowledge. Through the examination of discourse and text, Foucault and Derrida are the basis of much of what now constitutes poststructural thought. The resulting body of knowledge and research paradigm is diverse and not always compatible (Lee, 1992), but does provide a unique framework from which to approach educational research.

While Foucault’s body of work is complicated and applicable to many areas of study, his theorizing on power and the functioning of power relates specifically to
poststructuralist research paradigm. Rejecting positivist ideals of value-free human sciences, Foucault conceived power as a productive and creative force and troubled the notion of a center by theorizing power as dispersed throughout society (Peters & Burbules, 2004; Pinar et al., 2008). Specifically, discourse is the agent through which power is produced and reproduced (Lee, 1992). As an extension of this inquiry, ideology and Gramscian conceptions of cultural hegemony are used to uncover and discover how power functions to rationalize the use of power to reproduce itself (Erickson, 2011). In other words, power functions through discourse which creates reality and naturalizes and naturalizes a specific form of thought that is highly temporal and historically contextual.

While other poststructural theorists contributed to the overall body of thought, Derrida and Lyotard specifically apply to this framework. While Derrida joined Foucault in resisting categorization of his work (St. Pierre, 2011), deconstruction is intricately tied to poststructuralism. In particular, Derrida sought to reveal and undermine the binary oppositions created through textual discourse (Peters & Burbules, 2004). If Cherryholmes’ (1988) postulation that discourse “passes for more or less orderly thought” (p. 2) is accurate, then Derridian deconstruction perhaps opens up an opportunity to critically evaluate the language used in discourse to uncover the underlying meanings. Culler (1982) posited deconstruction as a means to expose domination within larger social institutions. The methods of deconstruction are open to interpretation and experimentation and can be reflexive to the needs of the researcher and those subjugated by the discourse. Lyotard (1984) described the result of discourse as a grand narrative or metanarrative which serves to legitimate a certain type of knowledge.
In this sense, social institutions redefine knowledge and reproduce knowledge thereby legitimating the knowledge (Peters & Burbules, 2004).

The project that poststructuralism undertakes is one of analysis. As a contemporary and emerging method, CDA provides an approach for discovering and dissecting power relations and the effects of power on being and the creation of knowledge. In a Foucauldian sense, CDA serves as a means to scrutinize how power has emerged and its interrelatedness to knowledge (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011).

Defamiliarization is a process espoused by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) and requires an understanding of knowledge as an effect of power through naturalized processes. CDA is an approach that can be used to identify the functioning of power and lead to defamiliarization.

Approaching language and discourse critically requires an understanding of several lines of inquiry from different strands of thought. The sociocultural theories of Marx led to the origins of Gramscian hegemony, the multicultural theories of Hall, and Althusser’s work on ideology. As structuralism gave way to poststructuralism, the ideas of Foucault and a Nietzschean genealogy began to interrogate historical narratives from a different perspective. The poststructural rejection of metanarratives, origins, foundations, and totalizing concepts as a key part of the poststructuralist framework initiates this inquiry into ideology, hegemony, and power (Pinar et al., 2008). In sum, this theoretical framework seeks to bring historical context to the social, cultural, and political implications of the exercise of power.
Marxism

While Foucault, Gramsci, and Althusser are addressed above, to understand this framework, several aspects of Marxism need to be addressed. Though many modern theorists reject much of Marxism because of his failure to address more than just economic capital in the development of society, there remains several aspects of Marxism that are useful as a starting point for developing a theoretical framework aimed at examining power and discourse. Marx began much of his theoretical writings as a response to the idealism of Hegel and while maintaining much of the Hegelian dialectic, Marx rejected the notions of overarching consciousness (Marx & Engels, 2011). The Marxist rejection of transcendent ideas is significant and speaks to the danger of accepting ahistorical narratives that can lead to a loss of the sovereign mind (Pinar et al., 2008). In Marxist theory, the danger of ideology is the loss of independence; he postulated “morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence” (Marx & Engels, 2011, p. 14). As he contemplated the consciousness of man, Marx referred to a man’s relation to material existence as the determining factor in his social existence (Marx & Engels, 1992). In what may be considered a break from Hegel, Marx argued “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Marx & Engels, 2011, p. 15).

Marx’s sociocultural and economic theories were based on class conflict, specifically, as it relates to the historical transformation of the society based on labor and capital accumulation (Marx & Engels, 2011). While neo-Marxist thought updated much
of this theory to include other forms of capital, Marx’s contextual relation to capitalism is significant. The historical context of Marxism is significant because much of the conflict that Marx grapples with is based on changing economic conditions, particularly resulting from the Industrial Revolution and the resulting market economy (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2006). The Marxist idea of class conflict and ideas working within a specific time and historical period cause him to reject much of his previous philosophical views that assume a universality of reality and truth. Though much of Marx’s method of analysis is rooted in Hegel, he posited economic relations were the driver of relations among people (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). In this sense, class relations are productive and an individual’s relation to production was the source of how different classes relate to one another (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Though economic determinism is generally seen as a fault in Marx’s social theory, the productive and material nature of capital, whether economic, political, or social, is still applicable to social theories of power and discourse.

The productivity of capitalism and wealth accumulation lead to a domination of not only economic activity, but also of the collective consciousness of society. Marx posited, “what else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class” (Marx & Engels, 1992, p. 33). He referred to the ruling ideas as ideology and made it clear that those in power used the ideology to create the class conflicts and these conflicts are historically relative. For instance, when a new class comes to power, they present their “interest as the common
interest of all members of society . . . and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones” (Marx & Engels, 2011, p. 41).

Hall (1983) acknowledged the limitations of the determinacy of Marx’s economic theories and offered a different reading of Marx. He argued the market economy represented a first instance of contact between classes and those with nothing to commodify except their labor were exploited by the capitalist system. He acknowledged that no economic theory can account for all of the political and social aspects of culture, but offered Marxism as a starting point for theoretical frameworks by positing that economic ideology provided the raw materials for thought and the conditions of existence for practical thought (Hall, 1983). While some theorists dismiss Marxism as too deterministic, his theories continue to be an integral aspect of beginning an inquiry into modern society.

Combining Marxist ideas on the ahistorical nature of ideology and consciousness, Hall (2001) asserted “the first step toward changing the status quo is consciousness-raising” (p. 78) and also posited the teacher as the way to raise consciousness in a Marxist framework. Finally, Marx also recognized the role of the critic as a force for change and “demands self-awareness on the part of the critic” (Hall, 2001, p. 80) so that the critic is self-reflective about the role of his own ideology. While many consider Marx to be a determinist who ignored the nonmaterial aspects of power (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005), his analysis of societal forces nonetheless set the stage for criticism from future theorists.
For Marx, consciousness began with the man and analysis should be conducted based on the historical context and reject a transcendent, universal narrative. Choat (2010) posited one of Marx’s main contributions to social theory is the introduction of history to philosophical thought and the shifting nature of knowledge. During the time of Marx, the Industrial Revolution expanded the role of capitalism in Western Europe and much of Marx’s commentary on economics was a reaction to the transformative power of the economy (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2006). Making the connection to sociocultural theory, Marx believed that access to capital allowed the dominant class access to the language and discourse and served to reiterate their dominance (Marx & Engels, 1992). In this sense, Marx set the stage for a method of examining conflict and class relations in a new industrial world and a critique of western capitalism.

Deconstruction

Foucault’s genealogical inquiry articulated the idea of power in society and Derrida seems to give a method to expose language as power. Culler (1982) spoke to the difficulties of deconstruction and historical context and concluded that we should “continue to interpret texts, classify speech acts, and attempt to elucidate the conditions of signification” (p. 133). Derrida critiqued the invariability of structuralism and postulated there is not a single original language (Leitch, 2010). The idea that all language has embedded meanings and we make assumptions about words without knowing what the original intent seems to be an extension of a Nietzschean genealogical method. This idea also opens up an opportunity to critically evaluate the language used in discourse to uncover the underlying meanings. The danger in noncritical
interpretations of accepted versions of language is a “deferral of meaning…closely related to dispersal of meaning….One consequence is that we are always waiting for definitive meanings” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 37). Combining a Foucauldian notion of power and a Derridean method of deconstruction, CDA is a line of inquiry that seeks to uncover the underlying power in language and to emancipate those subjugated by the dominant discourse (van Dijk, 1993).

Relationship to Curriculum and Instruction

This theoretical framework is particularly interested in examining the functioning of power and discourse in society and education. Considering the material effects and dissemination of discourse in American society, the role of ideology and cultural hegemony are of great significance to curriculum and instruction. Althusser commented on the role of schools as the dominant ISA in capitalist societies. Considering the dispersed nature of power and the elusive nature of ideology, Althusser (2001) postulated the result of schooling, through direct and indirect indoctrination, is the reproduction of relations to production. The assumed ahistorical and apolitical nature of schools is essential to this reproduction based on the positioning of “school as a neutral environment purged of ideology” (Althusser, 2001, p. 105). Spring (1980) identified the political nature of a clearly defined ideology as a limiting factor on students and citizens. As Horace Mann convinced the wealthy citizens of Massachusetts to finance common schools, he sold the idea as a vehicle to maintain the status quo between socio-economic classes (Urban & Wagoner, 2014). Therefore, schools are not free of ideology; rather they operate implicitly in the production, maintenance, and reproduction of social class.
The effect of hegemony transcends the political and economic and impacts education in a significant and unequivocal manner. Specifically, Gramsci (2006) elaborated on the process of ideology becoming hegemonic by the dominant groups controlling the language of the discourse and regulating what could and could not be considered ideology. As discourse becomes naturalized, the ideology of the dominant group becomes accepted by the public and schools serve as a vehicle for hegemonic groups to extend their reach (Hoare & Smith, 2014). As the dominant discourse becomes commonsensical, education becomes a discourse ripe for colonization (Fairclough, 2001). Whether it is policy documents at the federal, state, or local level, accountability measures, or limitations on student dress codes, these discursive actions are an effect of ideology, hegemony, and ultimately power in educational discourse.

Examining curriculum through the lens of cultural hegemony, ideology, and power provides a unique way to investigate and explore the manner in which societal discourse creates reality as it relates to schools and education. Accepting the notion that discourse creates reality (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 2010; Jäger, 2001; Pinar et al., 2008), this framework allows for CDA to serve as an inductive approach to understanding the perceptions and realities of the discourse on higher education in America. Public discourse on higher education allows researchers to critique the material effect policymakers and news media have on the social institution of higher education. Finally, this framework offers insight into how text impacts the public consciousness of American citizens.
Relationship to Dissertation

The research problem in this dissertation is one of contradictory views about the role of higher education in American life. Many schools districts have mission statements that include the goal of preparing students for college. However, there is evidence that many students are not prepared for college even with a high school diploma and also a prevailing notion that higher education is not pragmatic and too detached from mainstream American life. In other words, if education is too impractical for modern careers, then one has to wonder why college education is still considered to be essential to financial prosperity. A managerial discourse (Fairclough, 2001) has also pervaded higher education illustrated by Ginsberg’s (2011) exploration of the changing landscape of academic freedom in American universities. In sum, there seems to be a discontinuity between the public discourse on higher education and the lived experience of those who attend and work in P-12 and higher education.

Of particular concern is the state of intellectualism in the United States. As political debates become coarser, specific policy debates on education become almost non-existent. Yet statements by political candidates can give insight into their views on intellectualism by implication. For example, at a November 2015 Republican primary debate, Senator Marco Rubio lamented the number of philosophers compared to the number of welders in the United States, implying that potential earnings are paramount to educational success. Besides being factually inaccurate (Youngman, 2015) and grammatically incorrect, Senator Rubio’s proclamation at the Republican primary debate was a powerful statement on the state of intellectualism in the United States. The notion
that practical knowledge makes an individual more valuable to the labor market is not new, not likely to change in the near future, and suggests capitalism is the key driver of education. As a lawyer, member of Congress, and presidential candidate, Senator Rubio has full access to the public discourse and statements like these have powerful immediate and long-term effects on the state of intellectualism in the United States. While academic success is important to all societies from a broad perspective, the impact of intellectualism or lack thereof on families is more significant (Bageant, 2007).

The intellectual has the responsibility to question the representations of history and ideology in society (Chomsky, 1967) and bring a measure of stability and context to public discourse. Hofstadter (1962) postulated the intellectual as part of the struggle against the practicality of knowledge and one who turns answers into more questions. To critically examine ideology and discourse, it is imperative to understand the role of ideology, cultural hegemony, and discursive power. This CDA will target all forms of discourse pertaining to higher education but will proceed inductively beginning with an examination of news media. Another data set will be the lived experience of P-12 students on the cusp of higher education collected through semi-structured interviews. By comparing the public discourse on higher education to that of individuals planning their academic futures, this theoretical framework seeks to create a lens through which to view the development, or lack thereof, of intellectualism in American education.

While the aim of poststructural research is not necessarily revolutionary change, a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis can clarify the manner in which new ways of viewing the world have emerged (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011). The intention of this
CDA is to allow for individuals to understand and critique the current discourse, thereby gaining insight into the power relations between the discourse and those subjects who are created by the discourse (Altheide & Johnson, 2011). The fluidity and inductive nature of this particular qualitative inquiry gives the researcher the ability to be self-reflexive and responsive to the data. In particular, the ability to fluctuate from textual data to theory and refine the research problem gives the research an advantage in critiquing the conditions in which discourse serves to create the reality of higher education in America. While other paradigms may take a less theoretical stance, the poststructural qualitative methods accept “the ambiguity and contingency of human existence” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 617) and struggles to investigate the conditions necessary for the discourse to be subverted.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH APPROACH

The methodology for this study was qualitative and employed several sources of data for analysis. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) espoused a bricolage method to allow the researcher to incorporate and weave several perspectives into an overall approach to the research. In this study, the primary approach for data analysis was CDA. The data were collected from news sources, interview transcripts, and state curriculum standards in an attempt to triangulate data to assess the congruity or incongruity of the various viewpoints on American higher education.

CDA is a relatively new approach to qualitative research. Many of the main tenets of discourse theory and discourse analysis come from the work of Foucault (Fairclough, 2003; Jäger, 2001), specifically his postulation that “we daily reinforce our own repression through the language we use” (Stokes, 2013, p. 46). In terms of delineating the theoretical positioning and a methodological approach, Fairclough’s Language and Power was described as one of the first seminal works in CDA (Rogers et al., 2005). Even from its inception, CDA was described as malleable and responsive to a particular problem rather than an inflexible methodology (Jäger & Maier, 2016). While the targeted sample of discourse will generally be some version of text or talk, the analysis is in relation to the theoretical framework of discourse (van Dijk, 1991).
Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

A qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this investigation, but that is not to suggest a single method of inquiry. A poststructural paradigm and theoretical framework allowed for a diversity of modes of inquiry with the objective to “produce research accounts that embody verisimilitude and that are poetic, transgressive, unfinalizable, and transformative” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 44). The inductive nature of CDA makes it resistant to strict methodological guidelines and commencing a study with predetermined results in mind is inconsistent with the approach (Bucholtz, 2001). Further, Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph (2005) advocated for a diversification of CDA approaches to generate new understandings of research questions. With that in mind, CDA in this framework is more of an approach to a problem rather than a single method (Meyer, 2001). CDA requires innovation and experimentation from its researchers and my approach will draw heavily on Jäger (2001) and Jäger and Maier (2016) but will also utilize other CDA theorists. Fairclough’s (2003) idea of drawing on a wide range of approaches will be employed as well as Jäger and Maier’s customizable approach.

Elucidating several aspects of CDA is necessary before detailing the specifics of this approach. First and foremost, there is a strong connection to theory in all forms of CDA (Fairclough, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). For this reason, there will not be clearly definable boundaries between theory, data collection, and data analysis as all three of these particulars will be active throughout the research process. Second, CDA is problem-oriented (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) and therefore open to be used concurrently
with other forms of analysis, particularly considering that any single analysis of a text is inherently incomplete (Fairclough, 2003). In this sense, a bricolage of multidisciplinary approaches to CDA (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) will produce a more complete analysis and an oscillation between theory and analysis (Fairclough, 2003) will help to maintain coherence in the approach.

Purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is interested in the functioning of power in society and investigating the environment and discursive practices that led to the ideological and hegemonic power found in discourse. As a theoretical framework, Rogers et al. (2005) posited CDA as “an attempt to bring social theory and discourse analysis together to describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and becomes represented by the social world” (p. 366). The productive and material nature of power is obfuscated in the commonsense notions inherent in naturalized discourse and CDA attempts to uncover the strands of power interwoven in discourse (Jäger & Maier, 2016). As discourse theory explicates, the social and historical context of discourse is significant as is the search for meaning (van Dijk, 1991) and part of CDA is an attempt to bring context to the discourse. As it relates to power, CDA is generally concerned with how particular institutions use discourse to govern social actions (Fairclough, 2003). CDA is also interested in counterhegemonic action and an aspect of this action is illuminating the formation and substantiation of power (Kincheloe et al., 2011). Wodak and Meyer (2009) postulated one of the aspects of a quality CDA is the accessibility of the findings for the groups most impacted or subjugated by the discourse. As CDA
theories and approaches evolve, this may prove to be a more salient point for if the research findings do not reach the intended audience, the approach may fail to have the counterhegemonic effect for which it was developed.

Research Problem and Justification of Approach

Considering that CDA is a problem-oriented approach, Jäger (2001) urged the researcher to first “locate precisely his investigation” (p. 52). The purpose of this investigation is to explore the purpose of American higher education from the vantage point of the news media, secondary students who will soon be matriculating, and the secondary curriculum standards whose task is to prepare students for college. The idea that the purpose of secondary schools to prepare students for college and beyond is deeply entrenched in the American psyche. The formula consisting of high school, college, and then job and family is embedded in the purpose of contemporary American schooling. However, this blueprint seems to be a relatively new phenomenon, associated with economic and social concerns and federal programs beginning with the GI Bill and extending into secondary education through No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). While the public is inundated with an understanding that a college degree is necessary for a productive life, there is little to no mention of higher education as a site or space to develop one’s intellect. This pragmatic view of higher education is evidenced by the recurring statistics from all levels on the economic benefits of a college education and that cannot be denied. However, if we are to progress as a society and uncover, value, and protect new sources of knowledge, a college education must be something more than an avenue towards financial well-being. Hedges (2009) discussed
the recurrence of economic downturns over the last several decades and pinned the blame on the economists who make important decisions for all Americans as being cut from the same cloth. He argued rather convincingly that the economists and politicians that cause the downturns are not prepared to offer alternatives to the current system because all they know how to do is operate and manage the same set of principles that caused the initial problems. If the intellect can be imagined as both critical and expansive (Howley, Pendarvis, & Howley, 1993), the significant political, economic, and social problems of contemporary America can only be solved by cultivating these qualities in our students.

The cycle of American anti-intellectualism feeds upon itself. While colleges are touted as the path to economic prosperity rather than intellectual development, secondary curriculum as the site for college preparation is generally lacking as well. Every aspect of P-12 schools, from the ringing of bells to the physical spaces to the curriculum standards is anti-intellectual. Developing “intellectual mobility [requires the] disposition to imagine and act upon other realities than those that are merely apparent” (Howley et al., 1993, p. 15). Current standards-based classrooms and strict time constraints of pacing guides dissuade most pedagogical or theoretical approaches that do not satiate the constant desire for improved standardized test scores. Curriculum standards represent the school system’s best efforts to accomplish their mission of creating college ready graduates. Based on the remediation rates of incoming freshmen into the University System of Georgia (University System of Georgia, 2011), one can deduce that the secondary schools are failing half of their graduates. However, an analysis of the
curriculum documents in relation to their intellectual goals is necessary to determine if the state mandated curriculum allows the opportunity to be college ready.

CDA as an approach to this problem is appropriate for several reasons. First, power functions through discourse (Pinar et al., 2008; Stokes, 2013) and to a substantial degree, our realities are effects of power (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Specifically as it relates to education, this approach allows the researcher to deconstruct the forms of power and knowledge that pervade education and account for the complex relations of the institution of schooling (Lee, 1992; Peters & Burbules, 2004). Second, once the discourse plane (Jäger, 2001; Jäger & Maier, 2016) has been located, the focus shifts from who has power to the manner in which the power functions. In general, the emphasis of poststructural research is to examine “how, and under what conditions, particular discourses come to shape reality” (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 463). Third, studying the media as a source of the continuations of narratives is appropriate because of the media’s productive nature. Stokes (2013) posited the media as both a producer of subjects and their positions and this relationship of the individual to the discourse forms social relations. In terms of educational research, understanding news and media as discourse helps to give insight into how people make meaning through discourse (Rogers et al., 2005). CDA traditionally takes the side of those subjugated by the discourse and while this study will examine the ways in which higher education is understood through public discourse, there is no specific group of people in need of liberation in the traditional sense. Instead, this study aims to examine how public discourse has systematically created a mistrust of American institutions of higher learning, thereby
creating and promoting an anti-intellectualism that has become impervious to criticism. While this type of research does not necessarily propose fixes to social and educational ills (St. Pierre, 2011), it does intend to uncover the ways in which these particular narratives have maintained their power over the years.

Research Question

A CDA approach can make it difficult to narrow down the inquiry to a succinct question. However, the main research question for this analysis is: How does pervasive anti-intellectualism impact secondary students and their views on P-12 and higher education? Important to the question is analyzing if and how the general public discourse in America is anti-intellectual, specifically examining the public discourse on higher education as a place for career training and credentialing. Further complicating the discussion is the continuing mission of many high schools and the Georgia Department of Education on focusing P-12 education towards preparing students for college and careers. Illustrative of this point is the 2015 rollout of the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) that quantifies a school’s and district’s performance to this end. The CCRPI provides indicators of success at each level of schooling for a total of 56 indicators covering elementary through high school (Georgia Department of Education, 2015a). Whereas the high school has traditionally been seen as a training ground for the next phase of life, the CCRPI seems to be inevitably leading elementary and middle schools to follow the same route of preparing students for the next level rather than focusing on developing the intellect of students. While measuring the readiness of students for college and careers is not necessarily an inherently nefarious activity, the
implications of the index are anti-intellectual. As secondary schools across Georgia, and presumably across the nation, are preparing students for college, the public discourse seems to still tout colleges and universities as a site to gain future earnings rather than a place of intellectual development.

Therefore, the questions that arose were: How do secondary students envision the purpose of their college education? Do these students consider intellectual development as they go through the college application process? Is there a value to higher education beyond the economic factors? Do these students conceive of college as a professional training ground? As the corpus of text was developed and analyzed to establish the current discourse on higher education in the United States, the analysis then turned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence and student interviews, to establish how the current discourse on higher education impacts students and their views of purpose of colleges and universities. Through the student interviews, I compared the lived experiences of secondary students with the dominant public narratives. While the analysis of existing discourse guided the interview questions, a preliminary set of questions was developed to ask students to reflect on their secondary experiences and articulate what they hope to gain from higher education.

The inductive nature of the analysis allowed for more questions to develop throughout the course of the study and allowed for the questions to be fine-tuned (Jäger & Maier, 2016). Because CDA is a problem-based approach to research and the object of analysis lies in the text (Stokes, 2013), the research problem, research question, and approach are aligned, but also malleable enough to respond to the data sources.
Additionally, the intertwining of discourse strands can include a variety of fragments from other areas (Jäger & Maier, 2016) requiring an oscillation between data collection, theory, and analysis. While the course of the analysis was not predetermined, the role of the discourse in reflecting and constructing reality (Rogers et al., 2005) was one of the main concerns for this analysis.

Sample

The data sample was made up of three distinct data points and the description and rationale for each data set follows. The news media as a site of the functioning of power is significant to discourse theory and the method of procuring the text corpus is described. The epistemological views of the state found in content standards impact the teaching and learning environment and is therefore relevant to this study. Lastly, students who have been both subjected to the current secondary school environment and on the cusp of entering college were interviewed to determine the effect of public discourse on their perceptions of higher education.

Media as Discourse

The main sample for this CDA was public discourse found primarily in news media and press releases from governmental agencies. To begin this query, it was imperative to find the location of functioning ideologies (Jäger, 2001) and news media, including webpages, has been routinely recognized as the site of such expressions (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1988, 1991; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). On the surface level, news reflects social, political, and cultural frameworks within a particular discourse and society (van Dijk, 1988). However, more can be determined by news and media than
simple surface level analysis. For instance, news does not necessarily portray reality, but creates a lens through which the world is viewed (van Dijk, 1988) and this lens is not neutral and unbiased, but represents the ideology of the particular discourse and news media (Tuchman, 1991; van Dijk, 1988). The effect of the ideological positioning of news media moves the examination closer to the conditions in which power functions to create reality. On a microlevel, one expects to find language identifying the chosen position of the consumer of text (Tuchman, 1991) and understand the manner in which the news helps to produce and reproduce existing ideologies (van Dijk, 1988). An important consideration for the researcher in this study is to understand that every individual has ideological frameworks for viewing the world and no individual, including myself, has carved out a reality outside of the text. As a research approach, it is wise to consider the unique position of using the media to analyze the media (Stokes, 2013) and include self-reflexivity in the selection of the sample and subsequent analysis.

Synchronic Cut

The ahistorical nature of a dominant discourse makes it difficult to reach a single point in which the discourse was initiated. Therefore, while determining the sample is inherently selective (Fairclough, 2003), there are ways to produce a sample through a synchronic cut. Jäger and Maier (2016) posited the synchronic cut as the most efficient means of identifying the current state of the discourse. Thus, it was appropriate to pick a beginning point from which to build a corpus of discourse for analysis. Within the synchronic cut, it is still possible to consider the historical or diachronic nature of the discourse and combining the diachronic with the synchronic creates a framework to
investigate the stability of the discourse over time (Jäger, 2001). Jäger and Maier recommended narrowing the focus of inquiry to a particular discourse plane and picking the particular news sources and time periods. At this point, the particular media source should be identified by ideological position, readership, and any other pertinent characteristics (Jäger & Maier, 2016). The corpus for the CDA consisted of news media and governmental press releases restricted to the last seven months of 2016 in English language newspapers published in the United States and retrieved from the ProQuest Newspaper and Lexis Nexis databases.

Georgia Standards of Excellence

Starting with the 2017-2018 academic year, the Georgia Department of Education will launch its new social studies standards called the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) (Blackwell, 2016). The standards that have been developed over the last several years were analyzed to determine the extent to which they promote the development of the intellect. The standards are the basis of the epistemological beliefs of the state; that is, the standards are the product of what the state of Georgia believes is worth knowing and how the knowledge is to be structured and constructed. Therefore, state standards are a value judgment and inherently political because they not only decide what knowledge is included, but also what knowledge is omitted. While the standards may or may not impact the pedagogical practices of teachers, they are the basis for the Georgia Milestones, the standardized test by which students, teachers, and schools are judged.

Howley, Pendarvis, and Howley (1993) articulated the conditions and practices needed to stimulate the intellect and I used their criteria to analyze the extent to which the
Georgia Standards of Excellence promote intellectualism. The characteristics and conditions which nurture the intellect include an expansive and critical curriculum, opportunities for inquiry, critical reasoning, interpretation and critique of the larger world, and the ability to see beyond what is readily available (Howley et al., 1993). I also used Greene’s (1977) consciousness model and Apple’s (1977) institutional evaluation model to delve further into the language of the standards and their epistemological statement. Finally, a brief comparison of the new GSE to the previously used Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) was also considered.

Interview Participants

As CDA is a multidisciplinary and multi-methodological approach, Fairclough (2003) encouraged researchers to combine CDA with other analyses. Gaining insight into the college decision making process of high achieving students is a way to determine if the societal discourse on higher education as a means to a career and financial success has infiltrated the decision making process of students who have many options when it comes to higher education. The interview transcripts also provided a third data point to add texture to the CDA and provide a more accurate analysis of the discourse on higher education. This triangulation between CDA, student interviews, and standards analysis allowed the researcher to use multiple data sources to enhance the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the methods (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). The multiple methods also contributed to the depth of the overall analysis and added to the credibility of the study. Additionally, multiple methods allowed for an entry point to collect data about various aspects of the research question (Maxwell, 2013).
The interview participants were chosen from senior students attending a Middle Georgia high school who were identified by their school district as gifted. Convenience sampling (Mertens, 2015) was used to identify three students willing to participate in the interviews. The sample was chosen from the gifted population because these students took a more rigorous course load during secondary school as identified by the state, had an interest in higher education, and had more options in regard to where they could attend college. The number of interviewees was ultimately decided by the saturation of data (Abma & Widdershoven, 2011). While there are limitations to convenience sampling, the students recruited from the sample population were appropriate for the research questions.

Data Collection

Much like other aspects of CDA, data collection is specific to the individual researcher. There is no clear-cut phase of data collection, no exact method of collecting data, and it should be concurrent with analysis (Meyer, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Stokes (2013) advised total immersion in the data and analysis. There were three sources of data for analysis: public discourse primarily found in news media, interview transcripts, and three models of standards analysis and the method is described below.

Text Corpus

The first sample for this analysis was from major news media outlets, both print and press releases, over the final seven months of 2016. All of the searches were conducted online through ProQuest Newspapers and Lexis Nexis and the keywords to find the corpus were refined through preliminary searches. The purpose of the keyword
searches was to hone in on the keywords that will provide a saturation point (Abma & Widdershoven, 2011) in the sample to which no new themes emerge and the addition of new data will provide no further insight. The sample size was also conditional, based on saturation, and Jäger (2001) explained that since the discourse has a limiting effect, the saturation point can be reached rather quickly. All data, including the articles and bibliographic information, were stored electronically. Additionally, a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was maintained to assist in sorting information by date, author, publication, and topic. Diachronic concerns were also addressed in the data collection. For example, any reference to another discourse strand or fragment was included in the analysis and specific references to other events were included in the data collection. Specifically, the time frame for the CDA coincided with the 2016 Presidential election and several articles were framed by the events of the campaign.

Interviews

The interviews took place on the high school campus where the students were enrolled. The interviews transpired shortly after school dismissal and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Student assent and parental consent was acquired before any interviewing took place and students were free to discontinue participation at any point in time without question or penalty. With the permission of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored securely (Harvey, 2011; Stokes, 2013). Student interview data are accessible only by the researcher and student identity has been protected. The data analysis did not require any information linking a student to the data analysis, thereby protecting student anonymity. All interview transcripts and notes are
stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office accessible only to the researcher. The interviews were semi-structured giving me the ability to be responsive to and engage in emergent lines of thought (Glesne, 2011). I also took observational notes during the interview (Stokes, 2013) to compare with the interview transcripts to add texture and depth to the data. Since this approach required self-reflexivity, I also sought feedback from the interviewees at the conclusion of the interview to improve the questions and the articulation of questions (Harvey, 2011). While I sought to gain saturation in data (Abma & Widdershoven, 2011), I also sought to interview as few people as necessary to gain this saturation point (Stokes, 2013). To ensure credibility of the data, I used member checks to seek confirmation that the emerging themes were consistent with the interviewees’ perceptions (Mertens, 2015).

Data Analysis

CDA does not distinguish between the end of data collection and the beginning of data analysis (Meyer, 2001) because both processes should inform the other and should be carried out simultaneously. The oscillation between data collection and data analysis focused on the action and interaction of discourse and how the discourse functions to create and reflect social events (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The ultimate goal of CDA from a Foucauldian conceptualization is to trace the historicity of discourse to determine how certain modes of knowing developed (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011). As Meyer (2001) and Tuchman (1991) have suggested, CDA may be best described as a hermeneutic circle. In this articulation of CDA, Meyer (2001) posited “the meaning of one part can only be understood in the context of the whole, but that this turn is only
accessible from its component parts” (p. 16). Tuchman (1991) identified news interpretation acting in a hermeneutic circle, concluding “interpretation spawns interpretation; news makes news” (p. 91). In much the same way, Stokes (2013) recognized the duality of being produced by the discourse and using the media to study the media. In other words, there is no neutral position regardless of ideology or position in relation to power. The analysis recognized this location of ideology and accounted for its biases, but did not try to create an objective positionality.

Critical Discourse Analysis Data

Jäger and Maier (2016) articulated a three-step analysis of discourse that constitutes the base of the method I used to explore the research problem. The synchronic cut of public discourse and governmental press releases comprised the text corpus that was analyzed. Each source of data was analyzed according to the following three-step process. The steps included a structural analysis of discourse strands, a detailed analysis of discourse fragments, and a synoptic analysis. Each step is discussed in the following sections.

Structural analysis of the discourse strand. Once the corpus of text was established, the first step in analyzing the text was a structural analysis of the discourse strands and the analysis was guided by the steps found in the list below:

1. A list of all articles of relevance for the discourse strand was compiled, including bibliographical information, topics covered in the articles, and any special characteristics.
2. The analysis attempted to capture the characteristics of the articles on particular aspects of interest and identify forms typical for the newspaper.
3. Since discourse strands encompassed various subtopics, the subtopics were identified and summarized into groups.

4. The frequency of the subtopics was examined with respect to the groups of subtopics and omissions were also considered.

5. Discursive entanglements were then identified (Jäger & Maier, 2016, pp. 128-129).

   The data analysis followed the steps listed above, but remained open to possibility and probability of shifting categories based on new data (Fairclough, 2003). For clarification, a discourse strand represented a more or less “thematically uniform discourse process” (Jäger, 2001, p. 47) and while the discourse strand represented the largest unit of text to be analyzed, the subsequent analysis of subtopics found in step three added depth to the analysis. For example, Fairclough (2003) described the process of nominalization as a common theme in news whereby individuals are removed from the texts and represented as processes. Another possible subtopic was what van Dijk (1991) termed the “strategic use of the irrelevant” (p. 114) that serves as a distraction to the main theme hidden inside the news discourse. Van Dijk also addressed step four by acknowledging the power of omission within a discourse strand. The culmination of the structural analysis was the identification of discourse entanglements. The significance of the discourse entanglements is that they may serve to obfuscate the most important discourse strand located in the article. In this section, the analysis followed the idea of the hermeneutic circle and fluctuated from the part to the whole and back to gain a better understanding of the functioning of the discourse.
Detailed analysis of a discourse fragment. The structural analysis of the corpus led to an overview of the discursive position of the media. As a result of this structural analysis, discourse fragments were identified and designated for a more in-depth analysis. The purpose of the discourse fragment analysis was to consider what makes the article or particular part of the discourse representative of the discourse strand and to study what the fragment implied about the whole (Jäger & Maier, 2016). The contemplation of the discourse fragment was adapted from Jäger and Maier (2016) and appears as part of Table 1 below. The themes and subtopics from the structural analysis were the subject of the discourse fragment analysis and Jäger and Maier advised that if the media in the discourse strand is homogeneous, the detailed analysis could be limited to a single article. In the hermeneutic circle, this phase of the analysis is viewing the whole of the discourse from the particular while the structural analysis is viewing the particular from the whole. The table presented here is a guide and considered a starting point based on the theoretical model presented by Jäger and Maier; however, the categories were conditional and subject to change depending on a variety of factors. Once the discourse fragment was analyzed based on the questions, I also noted any peculiarities within the articles and began to compare the fragments to the previously identified discourse entanglements.

Synoptic analysis. The final step of the process was a synoptic analysis where the structural analysis and the detailed fragment analysis were compared and evaluated in relation to the other (Jäger & Maier, 2016). The ideological position of the individuals and the media (Jäger, 2001) became clearer through step two of the analysis and the synoptic analysis attempted to provide a broader view of the public discourse on higher
education. The sequence of the analysis was fluid (Jäger & Maier, 2016) and refined as the analysis was done simultaneously with the data collection.

Table 1

*Considerations for Each Step of the CDA Based on Jäger and Maier (2016)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural analysis of</td>
<td>-Bibliographical information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse strands</td>
<td>-Characteristics of a typical article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Subtopics and omissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Discourse entanglements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed analysis of</td>
<td>-Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse fragments</td>
<td>-Surface of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Rhetorical means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Ideological statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synoptic analysis</td>
<td>-Structural analysis and detailed fragment analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>compared and evaluated in relation to the other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Georgia Standards of Excellence

The Georgia Standards of Excellence were analyzed to determine the extent to which these standards allow for the intellectual development of students enrolled in U.S. History. This class is required for graduation in Georgia, subject to an end of course
assessment, and generally taken during the junior year of high school. For this analysis, I used the characteristics of the intellect as described in Howley et al. (1993), Greene’s (1977) consciousness model, and Apple’s (1977) institutional evaluation model. The characteristics of an intellectual education include an expansive and critical curriculum, opportunities for inquiry, critical reasoning, interpretation and critique of the larger world, and the ability to see beyond what is readily available. Greene’s model was based on literary analysis of curriculum and consisted of continual reconstructions of knowledge by the learner. Apple’s institutional evaluation was based on analyzing standards to understand the institutional role in evaluation. Based on the standards and any other information gathered from the Georgia Department of Education, the standards were coded and analyzed to decide the extent to which secondary students in Georgia have in-school opportunities to develop their own intellectual capacities.

Interview Data

The interview data sought to uncover themes in student motivations for applying to and attending college after high school graduation. The interviews were transcribed in the order in which the interviews took place and were coded before the next interview session. The interviews were coded using open coding (Mertens, 2015) which allowed for the identification of emergent themes. There were no distinct times for collection and analysis as they took place simultaneously and were consistently reevaluated to ensure the credibility of the data. As themes emerged, I also used member checking (Mertens, 2015) as another safeguard to credibility and also to confirm that the data and themes were consistent with the interviewee’s perceptions. The data and themes were also used
to refine and redirect the later interview sessions as refinement of the method led to better interview data.

Summary

As Jäger and Maier (2016) succinctly stated, “the best way to learn CDA is to do it” (p. 135) and the flexible and iterative nature of the approach allows for constant self-reflection, which leads to a refinement of methods. Though CDA is flexible and encourages experimentation, there remain strong theoretical underpinnings and each choice needs to be justified based on theory. The underlying theory to this project is the material effects of discourse on the reality of higher education in America and the analysis reflected this theoretical positioning. This study incorporated three sets of data: public discourse, interviews, and standards analysis. The data were analyzed based primarily on the model espoused by Jäger and Maier, but incorporated the work of several other CDA theorists.

The results of the analysis could not be determined a priori, but there were standards to assess quality once the analysis was underway. The two main aspects of addressing a quality CDA were completeness and accessibility (Jäger, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). While both are subjective constructs, they were both tenable within the theoretical positioning of CDA and poststructuralism. Completeness indicates the analysis is genuinely representative of the problem and accessibility indicates the population under investigation can access the information to address the problem. This analysis was able to attain both of those markers and each was considered throughout the research process.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

The main purposes of this project are to understand the roots of the anti-intellectual nature of the discourse surrounding education in general and higher education in particular and how this discourse has colonized the decision making of prospective college students. I am also concerned with how an anti-intellectual discourse permeates what students learn in secondary schools and contributes to an uncritical understanding of society. Therefore, there are three main data points in this study. First, a CDA was performed on newspaper articles and government press releases in the final seven months of 2016 representing a synchronic cut of the discourse to analyze the nature of public discourse on higher education. The second data point was student interview data to discover the extent to which the public discourse permeated their ideas about the purpose of higher education in America. The final point of data was a standards analysis of the new GSE for US History to determine to what extent the state standards represent an opportunity for students to develop an intellectual disposition.

As Chapter 2 discussed, poststructuralism is the theoretical framework from which this study proceeded and discourse theory specifically informed the analysis. Particularly, the work of Foucault and Bové is foundational for understanding the impact of discourse on consciousness because it can identify the sources of power inherent in the discourse. As Chapter 3 discussed, the data consisted of news articles published
during a set time frame and proceeded through the CDA method of Jäger and Maier (2016), the interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed, and the GSE were analyzed based on the work of Howley et al. (1993), Greene (1977), and Apple (1977).

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is a method that allows for the investigation into the power inherent in the discourse which pervades society. The site of power is the discourse itself and is presented through common sense notions identified as narratives. By unraveling the discourse strands and discourse fragments, context can be brought to narratives and the power structures of the institutions can be understood. The methodology used in this study was based on Jäger and Maier’s (2016) three-step analysis of a synchronic cut of the discourse. The three steps included a structural analysis of the discourse strand, a detailed analysis of discourse fragments, and a synoptic analysis. The sample for this analysis was accessed through the Lexis Nexis database and the ProQuest Newspapers database. The initial search term was “higher education” and was searched in both databases yielding a total of 238 articles. The search terms were then limited to the dates of June 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016, the newspapers were limited to the United States, and the language was limited to English. The search results were then examined individually to ensure relevance. The most common irrelevant topic was healthcare in which education was a way to prevent high blood pressure or higher instances of diabetes. After checking each article for relevance, a sample of 34 articles was used to constitute the text corpus for this study. All of the articles cited in the following discussion can be found in the references following Chapter 5. A full list of the articles
used in the text corpus can be found in Appendix A. Since the text corpus was developed from two subscription search engines, the references for the articles do not contain a direct link to the articles. According to APA 6th edition, the proper way to cite these articles is through the homepage of the site and that is what is found in the references and Appendix A.

Structural Analysis of the Discourse Strand

As discussed in Chapter 3, the analysis began with a structural analysis of the discourse strand. The five parts to this analysis form the headings that follow and was designed to uncover the underlying themes of the discourse. In the hermeneutic circle, this analysis is viewing the particular from the whole. The strand was also analyzed to identify the discourse fragments that were analyzed further. While giving a broad view of the discourse strands, this analysis also served to identify discourse entanglements to show the interconnectedness of the entirety of the discourse on contemporary higher education. As seen in Figure 1, the three main discourse strands were P-12 education as college preparation, economics, and higher education policy. A cumulative analysis of these discourse strands follows.
Bibliographical information. The text corpus for the CDA portion of the data consisted of 34 newspaper articles published between June 1, 2016 and December 31, 2016. The articles were found through ProQuest Newspapers and Lexis Nexis searches and were limited to English language newspapers published in the United States. Of the 34 articles used for the analysis, 21 were from newspapers associated with large cities and national publishing companies with weekend circulation over 250,000 and 13 were from state and local newspapers with smaller circulations.

All of the articles used in the text corpus had a direct connection to higher education in a meaningful way. Many were directly addressing key issues in contemporary higher education, specifically economic concerns. Chief among the economic concerns were student tuition and debt (e.g., Johnston, 2016; Kelderman, 2016a), funding and austerity measures related to higher education (e.g., Brown, 2016; Hansen, 2016), and post-baccalaureate careers and job opportunities (e.g., Dixon, 2016; Gabriel, 2016). In fact, nearly every article had some form of economic focus, directly or
indirectly. Several articles focused on college preparation at the P-12 level with special emphasis on curriculum and teacher professional development (e.g., Grossman, 2016; “Summer has Different Meaning,” 2016). Since the publishing dates of these articles coincided with the 2016 presidential campaign and election, there was some consideration of educational policy under a Trump administration (e.g., Kelderman, 2016a; Kelderman, 2016b) and discussion of the plight of immigrant and foreign students under the incoming president (e.g., “My Graduation Speech,” 2016; Najar & Saul, 2016). While educational policy was included implicitly in many articles, the explicit discussion of the implications of the most recent presidential election was a feature that may be absent from a future CDA on the same topic.

Characteristics of a typical article. The general structure of the articles was relatively stable. The headlines were rarely noteworthy except in the case of articles based on relevant political discourse of the presidential campaign and particular to the plight of immigrants or foreign students. The headlines for those articles generally conveyed an uncertainty based on the rhetoric emanating from the Republican candidate. For example, Najar and Saul’s (2016) headline read “Is it Safe for me? Foreign Students Consider College in Trump’s U.S.” This headline was the most direct reference to the campaign rhetoric and while this article discussed the plight of foreign students, it spoke directly to the amount of money colleges and universities would potentially lose if foreign students chose not to come to America. The most consistent feature of the articles were signals of authority within the articles, typically in the form of quotes. Three types of authority figures were common in the text corpus. First, politically
affiliated individuals were used in many articles, especially those articles related to the funding of both secondary and higher education programs. Some examples of political authority were the superintendent of state schools (Cano, 2016), elected state officials (Robb, 2016), and Congressional representatives (Nowicki, 2016). Second, think tanks were frequently cited in authoritative roles, particularly in relation to any social institution whether it was colleges and universities or as an authority on the leadership in federal or state governments (e.g., Karr, Strayer, & Gates, 2016; Lipton & Williams, 2016; Marcus, 2016). A particularly stark example was in Marcus’ (2016) article on community colleges. In this article, it was not a representative of a think tank, but the think tank itself, The Institute for College Access and Success, that was cited as evidence for the lower cost and debt associated with community colleges compared to four-year programs. Thirdly, those at risk to be most impacted by proposed immigration restrictions and those who had overcome similar obstacles were cited through personal stories and experiences that impacted their view of the importance of higher education and their view of American values (e.g., “America has Room,” 2016; Roti, 2016). In Roti’s (2016) article, the success of a Vietnamese immigrant was due to Pell grants and working multiple jobs so she could attain a college degree which in turn served as the gateway to future success.

Subtopics. The subtopics present in the text corpus were the basis of the discourse fragments discussed below. As discussed above, the overriding themes of the articles were economic concerns related to higher education. Within the discussion of the economics of higher education, the newspaper articles painted a relatively bleak
perspective of the future of higher education, specifically in relation to the state funding of colleges and universities. For example, Brown (2016) tracked 12 states and their change in investment since the 2008 recession. Ten of the 12 states had decreased higher education funding as much as 54%, while Wyoming and North Dakota were two states that increased funding, largely due to local economic boons tied to the energy sector. Especially within state and local newspapers, a major concern with state institutions of higher education was the alignment of the colleges and universities with the demand of the state labor force (Younker, 2016). As was mentioned explicitly in several articles, state legislators pledged to fund all programs directly related to the school’s mission statements, which invariably led to supplying the state with graduates ready to contribute to the labor force (e.g., Frye, 2016; Karr et al., 2016; Younker, 2016). As colleges and universities are forced to deal with millions and sometimes billions of dollars in austerity measures, a side effect is the increasing of tuition to cover the decrease in state money (Brown, 2016). Considering the prevalence within the discourse of austerity measures and rising tuition, concerns about student debt were surprisingly intermittent within the text corpus (e.g., Johnston, 2016; Kelderman, 2016a). As a reaction to these ideas, the proliferation of community colleges and tuition free or debt free colleges were discussed as ideas whose time was imminent (e.g., Johnston, 2016; Marcus, 2016).

Tied to the economics of higher education was the issue of veterans in higher education. In particular, the post-9/11 GI Bill was mentioned in passing, but it could certainly have a significant impact since it guarantees tuition to veterans who served in the wake of 9/11 for 36 months of tuition up to 15 years after active service (Department
of Veterans Affairs, 2012). The discussion of veterans was a source of pride for colleges in New Jersey (“Middlesex County College,” 2016) and Arizona (White, 2016) as several colleges boasted about being included on a list of the best colleges for veterans. There was a significant portion of this discourse focused on the building of lounges and gathering places for veterans on campus to help these veterans transition back into civilian life (“Middlesex County College,” 2016), including the Pat Tillman Veterans Center (White, 2016).

Secondary education was a topic in relation to the college preparatory mission of many state education departments. The funding of P-12 schools was a subtopic of several of these articles, but was not discussed with urgency when compared to the loss of higher education funding. In fact, the majority of the funding issues in P-12 schools revolved around the economic concerns of the never-ending new initiatives put out by state legislatures as fixes for the numerous issues related to the nation’s high schools (e.g., Cano, 2016; “Making the Grade,” 2016; Robb, 2016). One of the key characteristics of these articles in particular was the slogans that accompany the various new initiatives. A sample of the slogans present in the text corpus included: Classrooms First Initiative Council (Robb, 2016), AZ Kids Can’t Wait (Cano, 2016), America Competes (Dixon, 2016), and Freedom Schools (Hansen, 2016). Teachers were another subtopic that appeared in the articles centered on P-12 schools and were particularly interested in teacher professional development and how teachers improved their practice (Mershon, 2016).
Articles focused on higher education policy were found to have two prevalent subtopics. The first topic was leadership in higher education and the new presidential administration was a specific area of interest (e.g., Kelderman, 2016a; 2016b). Also included within this subtopic was the uncertain future of undocumented immigrants living in the United States and the anxiety of foreign students who were considering pursuing higher education in the United States (e.g., “America has room,” 2016; Najar & Saul, 2016). The positive and negative aspects of diversity were included in this subtopic as well. While discussions of diversity and immigration are not uncommon in almost any discourse strand, specific discussions of these issues in the text corpus were often framed in the context of the presidential campaign or the incoming administration (e.g., “My Graduation Speech,” 2016; Najar & Saul, 2016).

Omission in the subtopics. Most articles, especially those tied to success in the job market or career training, failed to define success. One anecdote discussed the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants using Pell grants and working multiple jobs to graduate from college because she viewed a college degree as the gateway to success (Roti, 2016). However, it seemed as if the college degree was the success, for it made little mention of any post-college success in a particular career field. Another article discussed owning one’s own business as a measure of success (“What’s in Store,” 2016), but failed to define a path that would take one from college to business ownership. If the formula that plays out in this discourse and in secondary schools across the country that a college degree is the pathway to success in career fields or job markets, then it would
stand to reason there would be a multitude of examples and clear paths from one to the
next.

The most glaring omission in the discourse strand and subtopics is there was
absolutely no mention of the intellectual benefits of matriculating and graduating from
college. If this sample of text is representative of the national discourse on college
education, then there would be no other reason to go to college except for economic ones.
Being that the presidential election of 2016 was a topical issue and intertwined with
several policy discussions relating to immigrants and foreign students, an intellectual
framework for evaluating the impact of the Trump administration would be useful.
Beyond the absence of intellectual benefits of higher education, there was only one
mention of the academic rigor of higher education (“Making the Grade,” 2016) and that
was in relation to assisting high school seniors in preparing for the academic rigor of
college.

Discourse entanglements. There were surprisingly few discourse entanglements
within this set of text that were not economic in nature. There were only a thin slice of
news articles that did not have economic concerns, whether for students or the institution
itself, woven throughout the article. Specifically, ties to the business community were
touted in each subtopic and seen as a strength. Whether it be a new administrator on a
college campus (Nowicki, 2016) or a program supported by local or national business
(e.g., Lipton & Williams, 2016; Marcus, 2016), austerity measures were often used as a
way to justify private interests leaking into public institutions of higher education
(Hansen, 2016). What was missing from this particular discourse entanglement was the
influence these business ties would have on the administration and their curricular decisions.

The bureaucratic nature of higher education was another discourse entanglement. Often, committee findings were cited as justifications for particular decisions, but the members of these committees were rarely mentioned (Younker, 2016). The committees themselves carried authority within this discourse, but it was never clear as to the mission, the political leanings, or the specific evidence used by the committees to make recommendations. The reader was to assume the recommendations were made in good faith for the benefit of the entire institution. Similarly, think tanks were cited (e.g., Karr et al., 2016; Lipton & Williams, 2016; Marcus, 2016) and again, one would have to search elsewhere to discover the affiliations of the particular think tank. The committees and think tanks have official sounding names like the Committee on Education and the Workforce (Kelderman, 2016b), The Manhattan Institute (Kelderman, 2016a), or Partnership for a New American Economy (Pruitt, 2016) and these names in and of themselves provided the authority for their decisions.

Detailed Analysis of the Discourse Fragments

The second part of the CDA is to consider the themes of the structural analysis of the discourse strand and study them further. In the hermeneutic circle, this part of the analysis represents viewing the whole from the particular. Three main themes emerged from the structural analysis related to the discourse on higher education and they were economics, higher education policy, and secondary education as college preparation. Within each strand, there were several fragments that are considered below. Table 2
gives examples of articles from the text corpus that represent specific discourse fragments.

### Table 2

**Representative Articles for Each Discourse Fragment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Fragments</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P-12 College Prep</td>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Cano, 2016; Robb, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Mershon, 2016; “Summer has different meaning,” 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career/Job training</td>
<td>Dixon, 2016; Gabriel, 2016; Pruitt, 2016; Roti, 2016; White, 2016; Younker, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Costs/debt</td>
<td>Johnston, 2016; Kelderman, 2016a</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Kelderman, 2016b; Kelderman, 2016c; Nowicki, 2016</td>
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Higher education as career training. The main idea of this fragment was that higher education is essential to a successful career in contemporary America. The line of
argumentation of this fragment was the most clear but provided few details as to how and why a college degree is so valuable to a future career. From an institutional and governmental standpoint, public higher education exists to respond to workforce needs and provide career ready graduates to benefit the state economy. The language of accountability is beginning to creep into this fragment and the accountability is to the maintenance of the state economy (The State of Arkansas, 2016; Younker, 2016). When the term higher education was discussed in the text corpus, it mainly referred to state funded public colleges and universities and when the issue of job training was discussed, community colleges were specifically praised. Based on the text sample, community college graduates make more money and graduate with less debt than those with bachelor’s degrees (Marcus, 2016); however, only vague references were cited with statistics not given in context. Along the same lines and crossing over into the funding fragment, community colleges were also touted as more cost efficient, nimble, and responsive than traditional four-year institutions (Marcus, 2016). Interestingly, the idea that traditional higher education institutions look down upon community colleges was also introduced by stating that community colleges were the “Rodney Dangerfields of American higher education” (Marcus, 2016, para. 7).

There were many allusions made in this discourse fragment and the most subtle one was the threat of more state intervention in public colleges and universities. While austerity cuts were mentioned in this fragment from time to time, the cuts were portrayed as the product of untimely economic downturns (Brown, 2016) and the reason higher education is being cut is portrayed simply as a sign of the economic times. Implicit in
these insinuations was the idea that colleges “can do more with less” (Kelderman, 2016b, para. 19). In general, state budget cuts impact the humanities more than career and technical training, and Missouri has restricted state colleges and universities from adding new degree programs unless they are directly tied to the state’s mission, which is directly tied to the state labor market, and proposed having a limited number of doctoral programs in education and allied health (Younker, 2016). While the austerity measures may be necessary, there is rarely a case to be made for the substantial cuts that have been made to state university systems across the country.

Success in college and post-college life is defined in almost exclusively economic terms. Students are considered to be an investment in the future of the state labor market and high-demand fields are referred to as the future of this job market. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields dominated the fragment when it came to describing the high-demand fields that would determine post-baccalaureate success with ratios up to 10:1 in regard to the jobs available and available candidates (Pruitt, 2016). STEM fields were also touted as the proper mix of academic and real world experience, while insinuating that less technical fields were not of equal value to the job market (Dixon, 2016). While success is ill-defined or defined solely in economic terms, the text made clear that the students most in need of higher education are from the middle class. Over and over again, a college education was discussed in terms of the way up for the middle and lower class (e.g., Pruitt, 2016, Roti, 2016; “What’s in Store,” 2016). What distinguishes one class from another is never clearly articulated, but it was made
clear that middle and lower class success and advancement was intimately tied to a college degree.

Secondarily, it is clear from this fragment that higher education is an industry unto itself. Beyond serving the labor market in the state in which it is located, the industry of higher education is considered to be an economic engine for states. Particularly, West Virginia estimated that the state’s institutions of higher education, including community colleges, brought in seven times more revenue than was spent (Frye, 2016). Further, institutions of higher learning in West Virginia were described as the economic backbone of many communities. One would assume from the discourse fragment that the state is doing such a fine job at producing job and career ready graduates with higher education as the catalyst. However, the focus of the article indicated that the institutions themselves, by bringing in campus jobs and student populations to live on campus, are the source of the economic stimulus. Describing colleges and universities as a source of economic stimulus but also cutting funding in the name of austerity does not make much sense and it seems to describe higher education as both a problem and a solution.

Higher education funding. When it comes to the funding or underfunding of state universities, this particular discourse fragment is closely tied to the previous discussion of career and job training. Specifically, the funding of higher education is closely tied to the economic conditions of the state itself and is sensitive to economic downturns. Again, the discourse on austerity measures is not explicated clearly and there is a general acceptance of a status quo when it comes to measures to cut funding from public state
universities. While the funding cuts are presented as neutral and apolitical, there is a more nefarious part of this discourse fragment that is worthy of attention. The massive amount of money being cut from higher education has not received the proper treatment. Arizona has seen as much as $99 million cut in a single budget year across the three major state universities (Hansen, 2016) and the repercussions may be immense. Budget shortfalls lead to an increase in student tuition and therefore a corresponding increase in student debt. Additionally, more state universities are recruiting out-of-state students because of the higher tuition that can be charged to these students (Karr et al., 2016). In fact, as the number of full time faculty decreases, the number of recruiters, especially those recruiting out of state, increases. Recalling that state universities are generally regarded as important to supplying labor to the home state, there does not seem to be a concern that students will move to a state for college and then return to their home state after graduation. One would assume this would be a more pressing concern considering that the narrative has been one of college graduates providing labor for that state. Furthermore, many of the out of state students are being recruited with reciprocity agreements that guarantee lower tuition rates than normal for out-of-state students (Brown, 2016). Again, this seems to run counter to the argument of investing in state students for the future of the job market. Foreign students have also been a source of additional funding for higher education and have helped to fund middle and lower class American students’ education, since they pay a higher tuition (Najar & Saul, 2016). As an additional entanglement and as further proof that the toxicity of the 2016 presidential campaign may have a long term impact, a new concern is that foreign students will
choose more welcoming locales around the globe to seek higher education. With as much as $32 billion in foreign tuition (Najar & Saul, 2016) at stake, the xenophobic nature of Trump’s campaign could have long-term effects on the funding of higher education in the United States.

Perhaps the most concerning effect of austerity in higher education is the opening for private interests to begin funding for programs at state universities. While it is already more prevalent than most realize, it is seemingly just beginning. For example, the Koch family is funding Freedom Schools at universities in Arizona that promote free enterprise (Hansen, 2016). As budget concerns become more important for colleges and universities, there is no way to know what kind of control these private entities will have on the institutions of higher education. In fact, many colleges and universities have adopted a more business-centered approach to higher education. As financially struggling universities become the norm, balancing the books becomes more than a glib phrase; it becomes almost the raison d’être. Additionally, school culture and particularly successful athletic programs continue to get the full support of university administration and state legislators because they are considered to be a recruiting tool. So, while the university must do more with less, the sacrifice must be borne in the areas that are considered non-revenue producing, such as the classroom. As college football and men’s basketball coaches are the highest paid state employees in 39 states (Gaines, 2016), the financial burdens of austerity are seen in the cutting of African American studies, music, and sign language programs (Brown, 2016).
One segment of higher education has remained immune to the austerity measures and continues to get full and, in some cases, expanded funding is community colleges. A similar discourse plays out in relation to funding as played out in the career training fragment. First, community college graduates are almost ubiquitously seen as job ready upon graduation, whereas students with a baccalaureate degree are not (Marcus, 2016). One strategy that has been used in some states is to offer tuition discounts to students who maintain a full academic load and graduate on time (Brown, 2016). Another idea that came through the Arkansas state legislature was to change the funding formula for state colleges and universities from enrollment-based to outcomes-based (The State of Arkansas, 2016), whereby funding would be increased for those institutions that get students graduated in a timely manner. While it is clear, if not disturbing, that an economic discourse has replaced an effort to promote higher education as a center for the development of the intellect, a new emphasis on getting students in and out of college as quickly as possible calls to mind a factory system where efficiency is the key to success. Remembering that time and space are needed for transformational learning to take place, it is difficult to maintain a positive feeling about the future of higher education.

If one sees America’s problems as technical problems then a formulaic solution would probably be appropriate; however, if we expect our next generation to solve dynamic problems, then cycling young minds through the educational system is not the solution. Hedges (2009) tangentially addressed a similar issue when he discussed the seemingly endless financial crises in the United States. If we are teaching students the same ideas at all major universities and these universities supply each subsequent round of economists,
they will never be tenable solutions because they see each issue as a technical problem that can be solved by applying the same principles that got us into each crisis. So, when it comes to the business model of higher education, there will be no solutions, just the application of recycled ideas presented as solutions to problems the business model is not designed to correct.

Austerity is interwoven through each discourse fragment as an innocuous issue and is never treated critically. In other words, the text corpus does not question why austerity cuts are necessary. One could argue that austerity cuts are necessary because of state tax cuts for the wealthy and the decreased revenue always seems to be a mystery for the trickle-down economists in state governorships. The state of Kansas is a prime example for the misery that can be wrought by decreasing tax revenues precipitated by massive tax breaks for the wealthy. Kansas governor Brownback has finally admitted to the funding issues his state is facing and has even had to propose raising taxes, which has been an anathema to Kansas Republicans for quite some time (Lowry & Woodall, 2017). What was rarely, if ever, mentioned in the discourse on austerity, especially when it comes to school funding, is that the weight is shifted to the backs for the lower and middle class. Even in the case of Kansas, Brownback proposed raising tobacco taxes and consolidating the state school’s health plan while preserving tax exemptions for limited liability corporations and S corporations. Applied to higher education, the upper class families can still pay for full price tuition, but those students dependent on grants and financial aid have to bear higher student debt and meet stringent grade and hours
requirements to maintain the financial aid. Assuming student loan debt without the
guarantee of a diploma or gainful employment after college is a large burden to bear.

Student costs and debt. As Bernie Sanders gained momentum in the 2016
Democratic primary, tuition-free and debt-free college became a mainstream idea
(Johnston, 2016). While the idea has retained a modicum of momentum from the past
year, it is still not a reality. Rising student costs and debt was a fragment that was
surprisingly thin in the discourse strand. Certainly, it was a topic that crossed over
several fragments, but politicians and university administrators seem rather comfortable
ignoring this issue. Besides Sanders’ insistence on debt- or tuition-free college, there
have been exceedingly few serious policy proposals to account for the high amount of
student debt being incurred by college students. One of the main reasons for this is the
students most burdened by student debt have little political clout. Middle and lower class
families use financial aid in the form of student loans much more than students from
upper class families. An interesting phenomenon in this discourse fragment was the
evidence showed that institutional endowments are increasing at the same time tuition
costs are increasing (“Wisdom from Warren Buffett,” 2016). It was never clearly
articulated what the endowment money goes toward, but it is clear that it does not go to
financial aid for the lower and middle class in any meaningful amount. Even if tuition-
free college is not considered to be a radical idea, it still does not seem ready to be
delivered in the short term, especially with a unified Republican federal government and
Republican control of a majority of governorships. In contrast to both Sanders and
Clinton, the 2016 GOP platform had no serious plan to address college costs and student debt (Kelderman, 2016a).

This discourse fragment is particularly illuminating for myriad reasons. The narrative that college is necessary for economic success and future happiness is firmly entrenched throughout higher education discourse. The sometimes massive state disinvestment of higher education is equally represented in the national discourse. However, rising student costs and mounting student debt only constituted a thin slice of the discourse. It is interesting that the narrative makes college essentially mandatory, but one has to sacrifice greatly to achieve this opportunity for financial success. Moreover, those students that are not as financially advantaged are forced to make even more sacrifices for their college degree. The idea that poor and middle class students should be required to work harder for their college and ultimately financial success is implicit in this discussion. If education is truly the way up and out and is the path towards breaking the poverty cycle, then colleges and universities are going to have to either make some major changes to make this equation plausible or abandon this narrative altogether.

Higher education policy. The two main foci of the policy fragment were leadership and diversity. The general argument was that the federal Department of Education has little concern for higher education based on the fact that fewer people go to college than P-12 schools and that states control most of the policy and funding for state institutions (Kelderman, 2016c). There were several allusions to the presidential campaign and election results that were seen as a cause for concern (e.g., Johnston, 2016; Kelderman, 2016b; Najar & Saul, 2016). Interestingly, the idea that the Secretary of
Education nominee has never worked in schools or in education was not one of these concerns. In fact, this post was described in historical terms as a position for important campaign donors or supporters who needed an appointment (Kelderman, 2016c) and also that a lack of experience in education could be seen as a positive since the anti-expert climate is also on the rise in government. The main concern was that higher education research was being ostracized from policy debates in favor of think tanks. Think tanks were described as “universities without students” (Lipton & Williams, 2016, para. 6) and more swayed by the political positions of their funders. The more narrow interests of think tanks and their ability to engage with national media and legislators has been seen as a way to decrease the influence of higher education in policy debates. The insinuation is that the research taking place at think tanks is motivated by an agenda often related to the groups funding the research.

The second policy fragment was based on looking at diversity in higher education, mainly students who live in the United States but are not citizens and the ill-defined nature of the concept of diversity. The 2016 primary season and general election campaign rhetoric was featured in this area and has potentially long-term effects on institutions of higher education. In some ways, the discourse in this fragment was the most broad and far-reaching. The articles that made up this fragment looked at immigration and diversity from a societal standpoint in discussing equity and the future. The broad questions revolved around the purpose of public education, discussion of education as a right, and what it means to be culturally American (“America has Room,” 2016). The question that arose from this fragment is how an immigrant or any
marginalized person would have the ability to take advantage of an upwardly mobile system if they are denied access to the system. Further, the ideas of equality and equity were flirted with but never fully addressed. In other words, equitable access to the higher education system requires that some students get more economic and academic support to be successful, but generally the discussion revolved around limiting this type of support for immigrants. This discourse fragment also never fully developed the idea of being culturally American. It seemed to indicate that many of these students had been in America for a long period of time, perhaps arriving as children, but beyond the time lived in America, what it means to be an American is vague. This fragment was odd because it spoke to the hope of immigrants who arrive seeking the American dream for their children, but also spoke to their fear of reprisal and demonization. After all, someone whose only crime is living in America without permission has had their entire existence criminalized, but the hope that remains is palpable.

Secondary education as college preparation. The final discourse strand was centered on secondary education as college preparation and included fragments related to funding issues, secondary curriculum, and teacher preparation and development. The entirety of the discourse on funding was intertwined with the gridlock of political debates. The urgency of the debates were usually articulated through slogans like the Classrooms First initiative (Robb, 2016), which provided no specific methods for improving P-12 education. However, all debates eventually got back to funding and assigning blame. Whether there are too many standardized tests or not enough, teacher and system wide accountability for standardized tests was a matter of politics (Cano,
2016; Robb, 2016). Not surprisingly, articles were generally focused on how to best prepare students to go into and be successful in higher education but did not articulate exactly how the testing would assist students in this endeavor or even why higher education was the goal. What was clear is that funding for P-12 schools is a rich area for political debate and money and the allocation of money is the key sticking point, but no clear distinction is drawn between the two sides. Also, the bureaucracy of the school systems were a source of gridlock considering the governor, state superintendent, and state secretary of education have to garner the political will to move forward in one direction and that seemed to be an exercise in futility.

The P-12 curriculum was also a topic of general discussion in this strand and the consensus was that high school graduates are not being academically prepared for college. College dropout rates and ACT scores were mentioned as evidence for this claim (“Making the Grade,” 2016) but the idea that the P-12 curriculum bears the burden for these failures was not made clear. Failing schools were blamed but again there was no clear measure for where these schools came up short. The allusion was that schools bear the burden for preparing students for college and that is backed up by many school system’s mission statements, but it was generally described as a poor return on the public school investment. An aspect of this fragment that was never considered was the actual student. Students were referred to as investments and future problem solvers (Grossman, 2016), but mainly discussed in terms of preparation for the next phase. The P-12 curriculum is failing at preparing students for college and colleges are failing at preparing students for jobs. Similar to many other areas, the problem was never fully developed or
when it was discussed, it was discussed as a technical problem whose single answer is out there somewhere and needs to be found. Since public education is tied to politicians who cannot agree on the problem, the solutions continue to be elusive and seemingly based on nameless, faceless policy proposals while the students who are never discussed are the ones who suffer.

The final fragment in this strand was based on the individual classroom teacher and their effect on secondary schools. Teachers were treated quite differently than funding and curriculum debates. First, teachers are always expected to do more (e.g., Mershon, 2016; “Summer has Different Meaning,” 2016). Whether it be working on professional development during summers or using personal money to buy school supplies, teachers are expected to sacrifice. Though there was some praise for teachers who sacrifice, it was seen as an expectation rather than an anomaly. One article hearkened back to the days of one-room schoolhouses and pondered whether teaching in modern classrooms is more difficult than the good old days of education (Mershon, 2016). This was the only location of discussion of behavior of P-12 students and the discussion was framed with the notion that teachers and schools should return to a focus on behavior. Whether or not behavior is worse now than the utopian past is not clear, but the notion is that teachers need to work harder to cultivate more appropriate behavior from students. According to this part of the fragment, the future of teaching and curriculum is going to be based on coding and technical education (“Summer has Different Meaning,” 2016). In an odd way, this may be the most cogent part of the fragment because if our entire educational system is to be used for job and career
training, at least these areas can focus on one specific skill. The danger in this route is
that it does not create public space for the discussion, debate, and reflection that is
necessary for the molding of the intellect and the local, state, and national decisions we
make concerning this question will determine a large part of our future.

Synoptic Analysis

After analyzing the discourse strands and fragments, several conclusions became
clear. First, economics was the main focus of all current higher education discourse (e.g.,
Brown, 2016; Dixon, 2016; Johnston, 2016). Whether it was state funding for colleges
and universities, student costs, or career and job training, it was implicit in the text corpus
that financial concerns dominate the discourse. As evidence of how an economic
discourse has become entangled in every aspect of the discourse, one only needs to
examine the articles on foreign students who may suffer from immigration restrictions
under the new presidential administration (e.g., “America has Room,” 2016; Najar &
Saul, 2016). Though there was some evidence of empathy in the articles, the focus was
on how much foreign students contribute to the funding of the university because they
typically pay full tuition. The point here is that even when discussing humanitarian
concerns, the discourse always led back to financial concerns. Second, the text presented
technical problems, which is to say, problems that can be named and solved easily. For
example, if you are looking for better real world training and higher paying jobs without
a four-year degree, then community college is the answer (Marcus, 2016). If students in
a state are leaving the state, then recruit out-of-state students. If the state is implementing
austerity cuts, then procure private funding. In this case, there was no institutional
criticism of higher education or government policy and certainly no consideration of why austerity measures would be needed in the first place. Thirdly, while not being critical, the journalists spoke with authority, helping to maintain and strengthen the narratives they wrote. Finally, there was no concern about the curriculum being taught at any level of schooling and certainly no expectations that a college education would be valuable to one’s career without a job at the end. The only mentions of specific curriculum ideas were in what programs would be cut from struggling university systems and what type of college preparatory programs would lead to future success.

Student Interview Data

Three students were interviewed to gain insight as to why they desired a college education. The purpose of the interviews was to determine the extent to which the public discourse on higher education has permeated the decision making of secondary students. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. There was no script of questions, but four questions were prepared in advance to guide the interview process. These questions included inquiries into the students’ college plans, what factors influenced their perceptions of college, the perceived benefits of college, and who influenced their college decisions. These questions can be found in Appendix B.

All three students were seniors who take the most rigorous course load and planned to enroll in college the fall after their high school graduation. All three students were female and are referred to by pseudonyms in the data that follows. LT was a white female who is taking joint enrollment classes at a local college, KM is an African-American female who is socially active and led a voter registration drive at her school
during the presidential election season, and MF is an Asian-American who is the Valedictorian and earned the highest SAT score among the Honor Graduates of her graduating class. After interviewing the students, transcribing the audio, and coding the interviews, several themes emerged and they are discussed below. As an additional check on the credibility of the interview data, I used member checking as described by Mertens (2015). Individually, I discussed my interview notes and emergent themes with the interview participants to ensure my interpretation was consistent with their perceptions.

Higher Education as Career Training

All three interview subjects have taken the most rigorous course of study at their high school and have an impressive list of accomplishments. These students are involved in the Fine Arts, student council, and hold student leadership positions in various in-school and community service clubs. These students have also applied to some of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the United States; among these are Georgetown, Columbia, Duke, University of Chicago, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and various other smaller, private, liberal arts colleges. Based on the schools listed, it was fairly surprising that most of the conversation regarding the schools centered on gaining access to jobs and careers. Further, most of the commentary centered on the financial security that could be gained from attaining a degree. For instance, LT stated bluntly, “You have to have the degree to be successful and have a job later.” All three subjects also discussed the limiting nature of not having a college degree with MF stating, “If you don’t go to college, you’ll be very limited in where you can work.” The
idea of higher education as a gateway to high paying jobs was also evident through the interview data with KM offering, “I could go to work for Google, or just a profitable business.”

Ancillary to the idea that higher education is a gateway to gainful employment, satisfying career, and financial stability is the notion that all three of these students have already planned their graduate course of study. Each participant indicated with varying degrees of comfort the idea that they would be willing to switch routes if they were not happy with their present plan of action. However, the undergraduate degree was presented on the whole as a stepping stone to the next round of schooling. The interview participants were interested in attaining Juris Doctor (JD), Medical Doctor, and Masters in International Business Administration degrees. LT stated plainly in regard to an undergraduate degree that she would prefer to “get it over with.” The planned majors were also impacted by the economics of life after college. Passion for a particular course of study was mentioned several times throughout the interviews, but was tempered when put into economic terms. KM was originally interested in International Affairs, but has since changed her mind because she believed she “couldn’t really do much with that.” MF was passionate about science and specifically astrophysics, but was planning on attending medical school because it would provide “more security.” Interestingly, this same student described her time at the Georgia Governor’s Honors Program, a selective summer program for gifted underclassmen, as the most fulfilling, stimulating learning environment she had ever encountered. While describing her time there, she discussed the freedom to read whatever she chose, having access to lab time, and participating in
the lead professor’s research. She mentioned applying to schools that could offer similar conditions, but believed she would choose medicine over astrophysics because of the perceived monetary advantages it would provide. In general, it is concerning, but not surprising, that these students would emphasize career paths in their understanding of higher education, but the general disregard for the opportunities for growth, exploration, and fulfillment was unexpected.

Expectations

For each student, there was no question that they would attend and graduate from college. None of the students described this expectation as pressure and stated that they enjoyed school and saw college as a more autonomous version of high school with more emphasis on specific courses of study. All three interview participants had at least one parent that had graduated from college and the degrees ranged from Associate’s degree to a JD. The expectations generally arose from similar economic concerns, with KM stating her father wanted for her to have a “better paying job, so [she] can have a better life.” This same student also felt a debt to her parents and family that she “owed it to the people who came before me.” Beyond the economic aspects of higher education, there was simply an unstated understanding that college was going to be the next step and it would come directly after high school. LT was the most direct in answering questions and stated, “it was never a question.” When asked about alternatives, there were none: College was next. MF stated a similar idea, but that her parents consistently “drove that it was important.” While none of these students were dismayed about not having other options, the idea that college was the next step and it was not debatable is interesting. It
was also somewhat baffling to them when I asked if there was another option besides college. One student mentioned a gap year, but was not interested because she did not want to delay going to college. For these students, the expectation they had internalized and ultimately agreed with was that college was necessary and expected.

The expectation of these students’ families relies on their own education, but also follows the CDA findings that students are expected to follow secondary education with a college education. While each of these students would probably go to college regardless of their families’ expectations, the notion that college is necessary to success and future stability is seen in this data as well.

Decision Making

While the overwhelming theme of going to college was for financial gain and career preparation, the decision making process was another interesting source of data. The cost of attendance was a relatively smaller part of the decision making process than I had expected. One student specifically mentioned available scholarship money and reciprocal tuition agreements as a major factor in her college decision, while another student had access to a tuition exchange program through her father’s work. All three students mentioned proximity to home as a factor in their college decision, but were willing to travel farther from home if they were accepted into some of the more prestigious universities like Georgetown or Columbia. Interestingly, each student specifically responded that extracurricular factors such as nicer dormitory rooms, social life, and other campus perks were not enticing to them. MF said, “I just thought I would live in the dorms,” while KM said, “I’ll probably just be eating scraps” when asked about
living and dining arrangements. With colleges and universities investing more money in recruiting efforts and dorms with amenities (Carlson, 2014), it was interesting that none of these students, who have highly competitive resumes, were interested in amenities, including living and dining arrangements.

In general, family was described as their main influences, particularly their parents advising them on the benefits and expectations of attending college. Beyond the expectations of matriculation, each student cited their parents and siblings as positive influences on their views of higher education. Whether their siblings were older or younger, they viewed attaining a college education as either influenced by older siblings or as positive role modeling for younger siblings. Interestingly, all three students had traveled abroad at some point in their lives and all pointed to having been influenced by being exposed to the larger world. While one student mentioned in passing that she would like to have a positive impact on the world and another student mentioned the significance of multiculturalism, the impact of their travel to foreign countries was not discussed in the vernacular of having opened up new sources of knowledge or ways of thinking, but rather simply as an exposure to other cultures.

Interestingly, only one student had visited a college campus of an institution to which they were applying. KM had traveled to one college campus, but had only taken a general campus tour. She had received most of her information about the colleges she was considering through the school website and another student whom she had met at a youth conference. MF stated casually that she had looked at campus maps online and “they all looked nice, I guess.” LT, who has access to the tuition exchange program
through her father’s work stated “I have never been to any of these schools ever.” There is certainly much to be learned about any subject through the internet, but it was almost overwhelming to hear that these students would be making these decisions without firsthand information about these college campuses. Especially based on the emphasis of career training they expected from these colleges, not having seen laboratories, classrooms, and libraries was astonishing. From the tenor of the interviews, it seemed as if these colleges’ reputations preceded them.

The main focus of the interview questions was about their views on higher education and what motivated them to want to attend college, but the final question of each interview was about their relationship to the news media and their feelings on media literacy. At the time of the interviews, one of the major storylines was that of fake news and the Pizzagate incident (Fisher, Cox, & Hermann, 2016) was a recurring headline. This conspiracy theory was linked to the leaked emails from Clinton’s campaign manager, John Podesta. In this theory, the Clinton’s were behind a human trafficking operation through a pizzeria in Washington, D.C. The Pizzagate incident happened when a man drove from his home in North Carolina to investigate for himself and discharged his weapon inside the restaurant. All three interview subjects admitted they had a general sense of current events, but did not make a habit of keeping up with the dominant storylines. When asked about any particular new outlets, they identified national newspapers, such as the New York Times and Washington Post, television news outlets, such as CBS and CNN, and they usually accessed these stories through social media, such as Snapchat or Twitter. Of note, LT emphasized that Fox News was not a media
outlet that was respected in her household. The students indicated varying degrees of comfort with media literacy, but were not sure how to vet information they read on social media sites. For instance, KM and LT both said they would vet information through other media sources, but would not feel comfortable pointing to aspects of a story that would seem unconfirmed. MF was plain in saying that she was not comfortable with media literacy and the vetting of news. However, none of the students seemed to be concerned with media literacy and were only vaguely familiar with the idea of fake news.

Georgia Standards

The final data point was an analysis of US History state standards that all students in Georgia are required to learn typically during their junior year of high school. This analysis is essential for triangulation and to understand how the epistemological views of the state. For the purposes of this study, the standards analysis was to determine if the state standards provide explicit opportunities for students to develop their intellect and critical reasoning skills. If we are to understand the discourse in this country, it is essential to understand how students are taught to conceptualize the content of these courses.

While broader political debates are outside the scope of this study, they are entangled within current discourse on education. The population seems to have a healthy distrust of federal government and states’ rights arguments are common as a buffer to the fear of federal encroachment into the business of the state. Since education is considered to be a reserved power under the US Constitution, students are much more likely to come in contact with state governments rather than the hulking federal government. However,
besides simply attending public schools, it is necessary to try to locate the exact point of contact between state ideology and the student. In other words, if our skepticism of federal power is warranted, then is skepticism of state power also warranted and, if so, at what point is the student directly subjected to state power? The entirety of a pre-structured curriculum is too broad for a student to comprehend, so the one point at which all secondary students who take US History contact state power is through state standards. The cumulative, standardized end of course test gives students and teachers a definitive time frame in which to have mastered the content and it is substantially weighted in their final course grade. It is within these standards that social studies teachers are told what to teach to their students indicating a type of epistemological control over teachers and students. Individual pedagogy is typically not mandated at the state level, but could be more controlled at the district level through documents such as pacing guides or mandatory remediation for students who are not progressing at an acceptable rate. The US History standards are a political statement and an epistemological statement and therefore represent an important piece of information by which to judge the state’s goals for social studies. Recently, the state of Georgia has announced a new set of US History standards that will be implemented starting with the 2017-2018 academic year. While schools are certainly not the only place where an individual can develop an intellectual disposition, the standards represent on some level the state’s best ideas on ideology and epistemology. Further, among the main academic disciplines under which the secondary course of study is developed, social studies and literature present perhaps the best content from which students can develop an intellectual
disposition. This data is framed by Howley et al. (1993), Greene (1977), and Apple’s (1977) writings. Each analysis has a slightly different focus and by combining the analyses, the data served as a reference point to understand what kind of student the state of Georgia proposes to produce and if there is time and space to develop an intellectual disposition.

Georgia Performance Standards

The GPS for US History were last updated in 2012 (Georgia Department of Education, 2012) and have been used to direct the US History curriculum and summative, standardized tests. It is useful to begin with a description of these standards to compare to the new GSE and to give a reference point from which to analyze the new standards. The document begins with a short course description that outlines the scope of the class and describes the course as “a comprehensive, intensive study of major events and themes in United States history” (Georgia Department of Education, 2012, p. 1). This description is rather ambitious given the time constraints of the academic year and the entry point into the content is with the English settlement of Jamestown in 1607. Considering the endpoint of the course is the War on Terror resulting from the 9/11 attacks, chronologically, the course covers almost 300 years of history in approximately 10 months. Compared to a World History class, that is not a significant amount of time, but to describe a comprehensive and intensive course in that fixed time period can present some challenges.
Georgia Standards of Excellence

The GSE will begin implementation during the 2017-2018 academic school year after soliciting input from many stakeholders including teachers, parents, and educational institutions (Blackwell, 2016). The first interesting aspect of the new standards is that comprehensive, intensive study of US History has been removed from the course description in favor of “a survey of major events and themes in United States history” (Georgia Department of Education, 2016, p. 1). From a social studies perspective, it may not be seen as positive to take comprehensive and intensive out of a course description because these descriptors indicate a deeper level of understanding, historical analysis, and interpretation are expected. However, it seems to be a more accurate version of how the content will be delivered in the given time frame.

Intellectual analysis. The first analysis of the GSE is based on a study of anti-intellectualism in American schools by Howley et al. (1993). In their work, the anti-intellectual climate of schools is the product of schools servicing the political economy rather than the nurturing of the intellect. Therefore, to build an intellectual disposition, a curriculum and standards would have to be expansive and critical, have opportunities for critical reasoning and inquiry, and allow students to both interpret and critique the larger world and see beyond what is readily available. The standards were read and analyzed through this lens and the results are discussed below.

From a critical and expansive point of view, these standards seem to be improved in comparison to the GPS. The verbs contained in the standards have changed from primarily describe, explain, and identify to investigate, analyze, and assess. There are
several instances where the standards ask students to explore relationships and analyze aspects of certain events, such as the American Revolution or the antebellum time period. In this case, especially from a relational standpoint, the GSE are more aligned to the idea of criticality. However, one area that will be discussed in Chapter 5 is the lack of context and frame of reference with which to study these relationships.

With respect to critical reasoning and opportunities for inquiry, the GSE is better when compared to GPS, but still probably falls short as written. The change in verbs as discussed above makes the standards more conducive to an intellectual disposition, but the standards and elements are written in a way that assumes one correct answer. For example, standard 17, element a) reads “Describe the causes, including overproduction, underconsumption, and stock market speculation that led to the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression” (Georgia Department of Education, 2016, p. 5). In this case, the answer is already there for the student and teacher, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it frames the question in such a way that no other inquiry is necessary. While the element does say including and implies not limited to as well, the point remains that if one can remember, overproduction, underconsumption, and stock market speculation, then he or she has mastered this element of the standard. The standard itself makes further inquiry unnecessary.

The final category for analysis under this framework is in regard to interpretation, critique, and looking beyond what is readily available. Considering the social context that each student brings to school, it is interesting to note the ways in which groups are labeled. Surprisingly, the Native Americans from the GPS are now known as American
Indians in the GSE and since the standards begin with the English settlement of Jamestown, there is no treatment of Native Americans in the pre-colonial time period, especially in regard to Columbus and Spanish exploration and colonization. One feature of the GSE is that the standards are written in generally broader terms and fewer individuals are mentioned by name; however, the majority of the founding fathers and presidents are still discussed by name. Of particular note, there is only one woman and two people of color named in the GSE. Eleanor Roosevelt is the only woman mentioned by name and it is in regard to her role as First Lady. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez are the only two people of color mentioned by name and they are in the same element under the same standard. Roosevelt is located in standard 18 and King, Jr. and Chavez are located in standard 21. Considering these individuals are located in the last quartile of the standards, it is conceivable that a student would only hear about any non-white person in history as simply part of a group of people during the first semester of this course. This is important because it seems clear that students are less likely to feel ostracized from a group when they recognize themselves in the content and more likely to make meaning when presented with scenarios and events in which people that share their culture are reflected in a positive light. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that these standards would be more inclusive if individuals like Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who were included in the GPS and not included in GSE, were recognized. Certainly, an individual classroom teacher would still probably recognize these individuals and their contribution to US History, but the individuals have been replaced by group names, such as the abolitionist or women’s suffrage movement.
When viewing these standards from the point of view of a critique of the larger world, the ability to see oneself in the content and have the framework with which to identify oneself is significant when trying to develop an intellectual disposition.

Greene’s consciousness model. Greene’s (1977) consciousness model focused on literary criticism as a point of reference for understanding the impact of curriculum on the consciousness. The link between consciousness, curriculum, and an intellectual disposition is a direct one. An intellectual disposition requires one to constantly integrate new learning into an existing framework, which in turn, impacts his or her consciousness. When it comes to schooling, the curriculum has a direct effect on both intellectual development and consciousness. However, there is little that a student can glean from the curriculum because “curriculum, from the learner’s standpoint, ordinarily represents little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure of socially prescribed knowledge” (Greene, 1977, p. 237). Greene also provided an apt metaphor for a student entering a curriculum by comparing the student to a stranger arriving in a town and handed a map for which he does not know how to orient himself. In this case, the student is the stranger entering a content area or standards with no orientation on how to proceed or for what purpose and there can be no grasp of the content without the proper orientation. Taken from this work, curriculum standards that can positively impact a student’s consciousness allow students to continually reconstruct themselves, allow for the possibility that his or her daily life is alterable, and prepare the student to act upon the world (Greene, 1977).

With most of the criteria stated above, the conditions are generally not met by the GSE as written. The caveat is that to meet these criteria, it would require a critical
pedagogy that is not conducive to a course with a summative, cumulative, standardized exam at the end of the course. This idea will be discussed more in Chapter 5, but it is an important mediator between the state standards and the student. Greene’s (1977) model is based on a subjective view of an individual and the compartmentalizing of information makes the idea of continual reconstructions difficult. The chronological nature of the course makes themes difficult to tease out. For instance, if one considers the ideas of social justice, besides Shays’ Rebellion, there is no resistance to the American political or societal norms until standard 7 and that is mentioned as collective movements described as slave rebellions and the rise of abolitionism. Interestingly, this is the same standard in which the GPS mentioned Nat Turner, but is now under the umbrella of abolition.

One of Greene’s (1977) main themes throughout this model is students are in a position to learn when they are prepared to act upon the world. Based on what the state of Georgia has planned for the students to understand, there is little evidence to show a student who has mastered the concepts in GSE will be prepared to alter their own circumstances. As noted above, Nat Turner was removed from the standards during their transition from GPS to GSE. The only two people who appear in the GSE who opposed slavery are John Brown and Abraham Lincoln. They have three things in common when it comes to these standards: they were both killed, they are both white, and the standard aligns them with vague notions of being against slavery. While this is only one example, there is a dearth of specific names and historical figures that opposed the dominant norms of society in these standards. There are exceedingly few opportunities for non-white
Americans to establish any precedent for making change to our society and, even if they do, it requires a Herculean effort and usually results in violent death.

The final point for this portion of the analysis is that the standards are presented as neutral and objective. As Greene (1977) discussed disclosure, reconstruction, and generation as the main drivers of learning and consciousness, it is difficult to see a student leaving this class after learning these standards and seeing anything that can be reconstructed and then generated. For example, if one follows the standards chronologically, they would be surprised when they arrived at the Progressive Era and there were so many societal ills to clean up, for there is nothing in the standard on industrialization to indicate that there was any problems with the rise of big business. In fact, the period of industrialization sounds nice because there are now railroads, telephones, and light bulbs. Trusts and monopolies are in the standard as well, but robber barons are not mentioned. The rise of the labor movement is mentioned and the term “tactics” is associated with it. Interestingly, there are eight wars covered in the GSE and the word tactic appears only in relation to labor unions and the Civil Rights movements. By comparison, the Ku Klux Klan is presented as a “resistance” to racial equality. The only other use of the term resistance is in relation to the Plains Indians during Manifest Destiny. The terms tactic and resistance have radically different overtones with resistance implying a righteous movement to stand for one’s beliefs while tactics implies aggressive, offensive maneuvering. This is not to imply the state of Georgia approves of the Ku Klux Klan, but to comment on the nature of the language used to represent this group and it hearkens to the ideas promoted by the Confederacy and the Lost Cause.
While all human activities have the power to impact consciousness in some way, the idea that Greene is describing that students have the opportunity to reconstruct and generate is largely absent based on the GSE standards.

Apple’s institutional evaluation. The work of Apple (1977) was the framework for the final analysis of the GSE. This analysis is from an institutional standpoint and frames the idea of evaluation as a reflection of what the institution or the system values. Apple described the state of evaluation as rather deterministic and dependent almost entirely on social constructs. In the end, the evaluations themselves serve to shield the institution from criticism because the institutions themselves often define the problem to be evaluated. This model is based on Apple’s postulations about how to respond to the self-serving, positivistic evaluations that schools had been implementing. The defining, negative characteristics of the evaluation model Apple was criticizing were that ambiguity and uncertainty are removed from the evaluation, human interactions are depersonalized, and the quasi-neutrality of the evaluation.

In general and in particular, the GSE could be described as having all of these negative characteristics. From an epistemological standpoint, the GSE presents discrete facts to know and then tests the students’ ability to remember them at the end of an academic year. Based on the test scores, there is a clear evaluation of whether the teacher and student succeeded. This is similar to Apple’s (1977) criticism of the institution providing the problem to be evaluated and the answer to the problem. The implicit fact here is that the game and the rules are already made and known in advance and the learning is not emphasized or evaluated, rather one’s ability and desire to play this game
is rewarded or penalized. While that is a larger criticism of the system, it is also part of Apple’s point that the success and failure of students, teachers, and schools are the result of rules that have little to do with learning.

Ambiguity and uncertainty are also almost completely eliminated from the GSE. There are moments, like the 1960s, that are described with words like turmoil, but there are few other mentions of times of tumult. The Reconstruction time period is instructive here because it is presented in an orderly fashion with only a passing mention of disorder. There are five elements in this standard and they are specific content including: differing Reconstruction plans, the assassination of Lincoln, Johnson’s impeachment, the efforts of the Freedman’s Bureau, the civil rights amendments, Black Codes, and the election of 1876. Besides the political turmoil alluded to following the assassination of Lincoln, there is much omitted here that could be useful to students, especially in Georgia, to orient themselves to race relations as they are playing out today. While it is understood this course is now described as a survey course, specific content could be added to this standard to add texture to the time period. Simply adding the convict-lease system, sharecropping and tenant farming, southern military districts, Radical Republicans, and the Compromise of 1877 would not be burdensome to the content and add a framework for understanding much of what is important to race relations in contemporary America. However, if Apple’s (1977) model is useful in this instance, it is to understand that this is done purposefully to order the content.

The final two aspects of this model can be framed as the method by which ambiguity and uncertainty are removed from the GSE. One of the main differences
between the GPS and GSE are the removal of specific names from the standards. This has the effect of depersonalizing and grouping people by race and gender to present history from a neutral, detached position. The main issue in this case is that history is emotional, personal, and subjective. For example, Standard 2 is about early English colonization and element b) reads in part, “describe the Middle Passage, the growth of the African population and their contributions” (Georgia Department of Education, 2016, p. 1). The introduction of the first Africans onto the American continent under the heading of English colonial society is a neutral way to describe the forced importation and sale of humans into subjugation and slavery. Further, the Middle Passage sounds like a part of a normal trade route that may have been common for the time period. Rather than present a problem to the students, the introduction of slaves is presented in a neutral and depersonalized manner. Related to the plight of African slaves, the entirety of the Native American experience prior to 1607 is missing from the standards. While there are time constraints for a survey course, the total omission of the Native American experience before Jamestown does not allow the student to make connections or have a framework to understand how Europeans viewed and treated Native Americans during the pre-colonial time period. Part of depersonalizing and presenting history as neutral involves removing tools that students can use to make meaning of difference in their own lives or society at large.

Summary

The three data sources were a CDA of public discourse on higher education, secondary student interview data on their perceptions of higher education, and standards
analyses. The data were analyzed to get a snapshot of the current discourse and to determine to what extent the discourse effects student decision making in terms of their college choices. The standards were analyzed to determine if secondary schools provide opportunities to develop an intellectual disposition with which to view the world. Chapter 5 will discuss the data points and make conclusions based on the data.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

In this project, I have attempted to understand the current state of discourse on higher education in the United States and how this discourse impacts the decision making of high school students. Through a poststructural framework that focuses on the role of discourse in creating reality, a research approach was developed using several qualitative methods. A synchronic cut of the discourse was analyzed, high school seniors were interviewed, and Georgia state standards for US History were analyzed to determine if, at the point of contact between the state and the student, there is an opportunity to develop an intellectual disposition. The results of my inquiry were detailed in Chapter 4 and this chapter will serve as further discussion on the intersectionality of the data and suggestions to stem the tide of anti-intellectual discourse in the United States.

Theory Revisited

CDA is heavily rooted in theory and Chapter 2 explained the framework for understanding the research approach and findings of this study. It is useful here to return to underlying theories to give context to the discussion in this chapter. From the broadest perspective, this project was based on the idea that discourse creates reality and there are several specific areas where the data strongly reflected the theoretical position of this paper.
Productive Nature of Discourse

Discourse has a material impact on the individual and society (Foucault, 2010; Jäger, 2001). In discussing curriculum theory, Pinar (2012) succinctly summed up much of the data in this paper by stating “whatever language we employ, we become the language” (p. 35). Whether accessed through media, school, or family, the discourse is productive in our lives. The clearest examples in this study are the comparisons between the CDA and the student interview data. It seems to have reached the point where college as job and career training has reached the level of Lyotard’s (1984) metanarrative. This idea is portrayed in the media and through student data as simply the way to gain access to the job market. In fact, one could argue that the only reason for secondary and higher education to exist from both the government and student perspective is to train the labor force. The interviewees could not fathom a successful future without a college diploma and the idea of incurring student debt was shrugged off as the price to pay for a degree.

If discourse creates the reality in which we live, then there is clearly power operating in this space. It is worth noting again that productive power is not inherently negative towards students or society. Bové (1995) posited that the productivity of discourse can be positive and open up new ways of thinking and this idea holds even when the nature of the discourse is questioned. If students do follow the narrative and perform well on tests in high school and graduate with a college degree, there will be many doors opened for them. Along the way, many new ideas and ways of thinking and questioning may be opened, so, in this way, the power of the discourse can result in
positive, material gains for the students. However, this is not the most relevant question. The formula clearly works, but is that for any reason other than it is the formula? A better way to approach the productivity of the discourse is to ask whether or not it should be the formula in the first place. Further, the narrative should be studied to see if it is equitable or simply another way society replicates and reproduces itself. Van Dijk (1993) postulated that the power of discourse limits individuals and this too is a better way to approach the discourse. In the case of the student interview participants, it is clear that their options are limited. If they or their parents want for them a financially successful future, they will have to go to college. Extending beyond higher education and careers, the limitations on choice can have greater long-term effects on society. Inherent in the freedoms we venerate as a country is the idea that we are free to choose. The most obvious of these freedoms and most accessible are the ones found in the first amendment; however, they only exist if we exercise them and are legally protected to exercise them.

When students are limited in their educational choices, they become more comfortable with the hegemonic forces creating their reality and when citizens become comfortable with limitations, our democracy and freedoms suffer. Wodak and Meyer (2009) encapsulated this point by describing the discourse as both stabilizing and changing social structures simultaneously thereby entrenching hegemonic power.

Legitimation of Power

One of the remarkable aspects of the CDA data is the quoting of experts without vetting. Most of the individuals quoted in the articles on higher education were people with impressive titles. Many were affiliated at some level of government or independent
group while educators and professors were rarely heard from in the discourse. The effect of this aspect of the discourse is that the authority names itself. In other words, the reader was expected to defer to the authority of the person quoted and accept their conclusions as fact without evidence. This finding is reminiscent of Bové’s (1995) discussion of the naturalization of power through discourse. The power of the discourse is based on these nameless, faceless people representing agencies or groups whose ideology and values are not made plain. Therefore, the power of the discourse is legitimated (van Dijk, 1990) when viewed uncritically. This idea also applies to the standards analysis. Based on the idea that knowledge has to be tested at the end of a course to know if teachers and students have succeeded, the epistemological statement of the state is significant. Success, whether through test scores or monetary advancement after college, is defined and labeled for us. Not only are students limited in their ability to choose their own measures of success, teachers are deprofessionalized by having content choices and assessment measures dictated to them. Schools are also evaluated on these test scores and so the cycle turns back towards incentivizing teaching the test and in turn limits the students’ ability to learn in school. In this case, the institutional power of government and specific government departments is legitimated and naturalized through the discourse. The effect of limiting individual freedoms of students and professional freedoms of teachers is a major cause for concern.

Positionality

One of the questions I posited at the beginning of this project is that if the discourse creates reality, how is my belief system so different from the dominant
discourse to which I have been subjected? While this question remains unanswered, van Dijk (1995) postulated the same processes are at work in both the dominant discourse and the alternative, but this is still unsatisfying. The answer from a broad level is that one cannot be outside the discourse (Jäger, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) and I still cannot identify why I came to oppose to the dominant discourse, especially from a local standpoint, while so many others did not. I have undoubtedly benefitted from higher education and one of the reasons I entered this program was to attempt to gain access to a career as a college professor. However, my criticism is not necessarily of the discourse linking higher education to careers, but that it limits students to one path and is inequitable in practice.

There are likely many reasons for my antagonism towards my own local heritage, but for the purposes of this paper, it is probably not important. The critique of the discourse is important and needs to be debated in terms that everyone can understand. We need to return to or reach for the first time a more critical view of power and authority by asking better questions of the discourse and the state. The cumulative effect is to create a specialized society in which knowledge is compartmentalized and citizens lack the skills to understand the unmanageable amounts of information they consume on a daily basis. The discourse becomes anti-intellectual when all considerations of the mind and inquiry are removed. Higher education becomes transactional in a way that does not facilitate more understanding or questioning, but only in terms of pragmatism. Matters of the humanities become irrelevant because there is not a direct correlation to economic engines of capitalism.
Intellectualism

Intellectual is an elusive term and one that not only is difficult to define, but seems to resist definition. As I set out on this project, I was inspired by Gramsci (2006) and his discussion of an organic intellectual as one that does not have to possess great intelligence, but be someone who is a clarion call for a particular set of people. It is stirring to think of a person wholly committed to seeking justice and articulating the reasons for their cause. As I moved farther into the literature, it became more and more difficult to pin down what it means to be an intellectual. It is clear that neither intelligence nor academic success makes one an intellectual, nor does any amount of financial or political success. It seems clear now that intellectualism is a disposition that encourages diversity of thought and does not accept assumptions without evidence. Intellectualism reflects a consciousness that seeks understanding and nuance rather than simplicity. Perhaps anti-intellectualism takes root in the fact that many parts of life and society cannot be explained in clear terms and people will seek the easiest explanation of the conditions that plague certain populations. When intellectual thought cannot explain life clearly enough, the easiest answer suffices.

Recently, as President Obama was set to leave office, he was asked about his reading habits and his answer was illuminating. Among others, Obama listed Mandela, Lincoln, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Shakespeare as writers he leaned on as president (Kakutani, 2017). He went on to discuss reading authors with whom he disagreed, having lunch with his favorite novelists, and his own journaling and writing habits. Disregarding other factors, Obama’s intellectualism helped him make decisions
as president and also ostracized him from certain segments of society. It did not serve Obama well to be known as an intellectual because it portrayed a personal aloofness and notion of superiority, but it need not. In this paper, especially when discussing the state standards to which we subject our youth, I have described intellectualism as a disposition and it makes sense in this context to apply the term to a way of thinking. In this conceptualization, intellectualism is a disposition that requires an openness to change and a willingness to accept that knowledge is contingent and subjective. Further, the development of this consciousness requires time, space, and language.

When I broached this topic, I was fairly certain that the CDA would produce a substantial amount of handwringing about the state of higher education as it relates to liberal brainwashing. In fact, there was not even a trace of this line of thought in any article I analyzed from the text corpus. Certainly the pro-business side of funding and the business model of the modern university could be considered to be right wing, but that does not seem to be solely the territory of conservatives anymore. Regardless, Chapter 1 lays out a sort of paradox between the ideas that all students need to go to college and that colleges are incubators for left wing ideology. It is clear that authors like Horowitz (2006, 2007) and Shapiro (2004) are not making serious attempts to analyze the workings of higher education and their books represent a sort of propaganda; however, their work, no matter how unserious, does represent a version of popular culture that is inundated with anti-intellectual discourse and anti-expert ideology. The results of the CDA showed a definite anti-intellectual climate in higher education discourse, but from a different perspective. The economic model of funding, attaining degrees, and attempts to make
oneself marketable to employers represents a distinct anti-intellectual climate. The factory model of P-12 education has been lamented for decades and the idea of getting students enrolled and graduated as quickly as possible has crept into higher education as well. The proposed Arkansas funding formula incentivizes students taking full loads and graduating in a finite time period (The State of Arkansas, 2016) and this was echoed in the student interviews by LT who stated that she wanted to get her undergraduate degree finished as soon as possible. While not anti-intellectual in the way I imagined at the inception of this project, there is a danger that this type of anti-intellectualism is more virulent and could do irreparable harm to our institutions. In other words, this is a prime example of the metanarratives described by Lyotard (1984) and a naturalized discourse as described by Fairclough (2001, 2003) in which the assumptions remain unquestioned. It stems from a larger societal discourse whereby all success is defined in terms of financial success, bigger houses, newer smartphones, and an upward career arc. When one steps back from this narrowly defined notion of success, it is ridiculous to think of how a successful student who is open to new ideas and expands his or her ways of understanding the world could ever be guaranteed financial success. The credential at the end of a successful college career should be evidence of learning rather than a ticket to another round of schooling or financial success.

Perhaps the root of the anti-intellectualism of higher education discourse is the fact that societal problems are described as technical problems. This idea was discussed in Chapter 4, but bears a bit of expansion here. Throughout the CDA and in particular the fragment on higher education as career and job training, the mission of many state
colleges and universities was described in terms of the economic concerns of the state labor force. It remains unclear how a college degree specifically prepares one for the workforce, but it seems that universities remain agreeable to allowing their missions to be defined in these terms. The end result of this discourse is to describe every issue as a technical problem that can be defined and solved by applying a formula. The trouble here is that the discourse takes away any nuance and interconnectedness of the issues plaguing higher education. In fact, the text corpus failed to explain how any of the issues facing institutions of higher education are the fault of the institutions themselves. The main driver of the funding issues is never broached and austerity cuts are just to be accepted and dealt with by doing more with less. This narrative is illogical in both a literal and figurative sense. The technical problem of austerity and the solution of doing more with less eats away at the reason higher education is deemed emancipatory because the cuts trickle down to the middle and lower classes. The final consideration for this aspect of the CDA is that one needs to consider if all of this is the result of incompetence at the state level or done purposefully. Both are plausible and deserve consideration.

Data Analysis Conclusions

While this project was open to any conclusions that could be made based on the data, the theoretical framework posited that discourse creates reality (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 2010; Jäger, 2001; Pinar et al., 2008) and so it was not surprising that the CDA and student interview data flowed together rather seamlessly. The first area where the data overlapped was college as career training. The student interview data echoed much of what was found in the CDA and the interview participants could not fathom a
successful future without a college degree. Perhaps one could make a living as a welder or through some other technical skill, but the idea one could have career mobility or opportunities to advance was not something that seemed rational to the students.

Returning to the idea of success, neither the students nor the CDA data could define success without returning to some version of economic success or credentialing that accompanied matriculation. In fact, LT intimated that attending college would be worthless without a degree. Not only was success narrowly defined, but epistemology was almost absent from any discussion of higher education. When knowledge was mentioned in the interviews, it was largely discussed as a commodity or in pragmatic, strategic terms. The nature of knowledge and sources of knowledge were largely absent from the higher education discourse as well and only discussed in terms of what type of high school curriculum could prepare students for college. Along these same lines, the interview participants thought strategically about what type of degrees they would attain to set them up for future graduate schools. Lost in all of this discussion is learning and contemplating new ideas, meeting new people, integrating points of view into a larger heuristic, and enjoying the present. Again, there is evidence that this is part of a broader economic view of education and along the lines of a factory where time is managed and efficiency is promoted. Certainly, there may be times of reflection and free time to develop an intellectual disposition, but it does not seem clear that students or the discourse puts a premium on time and space to fully develop the intellect.

It is easy to trace the students’ ideas about college as a career training ground because like many school districts, the mission of their local school district is for students
to be “college or career ready.” With these mission statements published in many classrooms and schools across the district, students know from an early age that the next step is college. With that in mind, the third data point was designed to determine how much opportunity the students would have to develop an intellectual consciousness. Described in Chapter 4 as the main point of contact between the state and the student, there is little to no area of the US History standards that allows for students to make new connections and gain access to other sources of knowledge. The summative test at the end of this course keeps both students and teachers focused on what exactly it will take to achieve a desirable score on the assessment. Students are certainly free to explore other sources of knowledge on their own time, but the classroom environment tends to be geared towards success on the tests. Additionally, not only are the students evaluated on their test scores, the teachers, principals, and schools themselves are assigned rating points based on the results. On a macro and micro scale, the emphasis is on the results of these tests.

Specifically, the standards represent other issues even for teachers who are not as inclined to spend their careers preparing students to take tests. As has been discussed earlier, knowledge is compartmentalized within departments as most schools use the structure of the disciplines approach to not only content, but physical layout of school buildings. There are science, math, English, and social studies halls and what is learned in one hall stays on that hall. In the case of the GSE, knowledge is confined to each individual standard as well. As discussed earlier, the Progressive movement would come as a surprise to those faithfully following the standards. While the verbs of the standards
have been updated to provide for analysis, the students and the teachers are set up to fail from an intellectual standpoint. The compartmentalization of knowledge in the standards does not allow students to develop a frame of reference with which to analyze any content. This is exactly the problem with the Progressive standard; nothing about the previous standards ever indicates any problems with industrialization. Therefore, there is little from which a student can draw to analyze the origins, goals, successes, and failures of the Progressive movement. There are parallels to the previous discussion on the presentation of problems as technical in nature and that by the end of the Progressive era, the problems are solved and there is no need for further consideration.

The final area of the GSE that should be considered is the lack of subjectivity. If nothing else, history is contested, subjective, and inviting of interpretation. Again, there are issues here with summative, standardized tests. Even if a student were to inquire into areas and begin to understand history as a nuanced subject, there is still a matter of making a desirable grade on the test which will require a student to pick the correct answer to a closed-ended question. Therefore, there is actually a disincentive to explore content in depth. One of the changes from the GPS to GSE that solidified the objectivity of the content was the removal of specific names of women and people of color. As the analysis showed, there is a chance that only white males would be mentioned in this course until at least the second semester of the course. The lack of consideration for internalizing identity and seeing oneself in these historical figures is a major failing on the part of these standards.
In summary, it is clear that an economic discourse has colonized the strands and fragments of higher education discourse. It seems as if this discourse has defied physics and trickled up from secondary education to colleges and universities. One’s academic life must be managed to get the most out of each opportunity so that it may set them up and prepare them for the next opportunity. With success narrowly defined in terms of money at the career level, the success of secondary students is defined through grades which represents a different economy in itself. The standards analysis makes it clear that the state either had no intention of developing student intellect or did a poor job of setting up the content through the standards. Both conclusions are unacceptable for if the school is not there to nurture the intellect, its very existence should come into question. While students do not need schools to cultivate their intellect, it is unclear in what other environment they will have the opportunity.

Critical Pedagogy

The GSE analysis was conceived as a way to triangulate the data from the CDA and student interviews. The goal as espoused by Glesne (2011) and Maxwell (2013) was to maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the data. As the project progressed, the idea of weaving the GSE analysis into the other two data sources became less interesting. What emerged through the analysis was more of a genealogical view (Bové, 1995; Foucault, 2010; Nietzsche, 2013) of the way power operates and how students’ views of the world are molded through institutions. In other words, the GSE analysis in this project is not to be viewed necessarily in the traditional sense of triangulation and weaving a third data point into the other two, but from the standpoint of
illuminating how and why we train young people to view the world with a narrow framework. In the section below, I discuss ways individual teachers can begin to create alternative spaces through critical pedagogy with the goal of unraveling power from knowledge (Jäger, 2001) and creating an environment conducive to cultivating student intellect.

Au (2012) argued rather convincingly that individual classrooms at the school level are relatively autonomous. As a classroom teacher for 18 years, I agree with this notion and except for a few evaluations from time to time, I have almost complete control over my classroom environment. Though teachers have myriad challenges to overcome, there is hope that the classroom can be a site of resistance to the dominant narratives in education. By engaging in any form of critical pedagogy, teachers, especially social studies teachers, have a forum to bring intellectual practices into their classroom. However, before a teacher can engage in an effective form of critical pedagogy, there are prerequisites. The teacher must have a strong pedagogical content knowledge and Anderson (2009) described this as a synthesis of craft knowledge, disciplinary knowledge, and understanding of human development. The craft knowledge here is essentially tacit knowledge of how to structure a learning environment conducive to intellectual development and this takes time and experience. It also requires an environment that allows a teacher to be innovative, fail, and reflect on his or her experiences. Another prerequisite to implementing a critical pedagogy is that the teacher must feel comfortable making his or her thinking public. To be able to implement a critical pedagogy, the teachers must be able to broach difficult topics and model critical
reasoning skills. Implicit in this disposition is the need to eschew objectivity, especially in social studies, because it is akin to prescribing “color blindness” as the best way to deal with racism. There is no objectivity to studying history and social studies and to feign objectivity is to reject a critical pedagogy. This is not to suggest a teacher should use the classroom as a place to indoctrinate captive students, but it does suggest that the teacher should make plain his or her personal subjectivities in regard to society. It need not be controversial for a teacher to be anti-racist, advocate for human rights, or discuss social issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion. Modeling intellectual thought and critical reasoning is the cornerstone to implementing a critical pedagogy into a classroom.

Freire (2004, 2012) can be a model for developing a critical pedagogy, but teachers must also have the time and space to develop their own identity and their own critical consciousness. Secondary education seems to be a regional phenomenon with certain parts of the country guarding their history more closely than others. Recently, a new student enrolled in my US History class who had lived his whole life in Brooklyn. The assignment for the day was to practice yellow journalism as it was used by Pulitzer and Hearst prior to the Spanish-American War. The students were to take a current event and create a sensationalist headline, a visual, and an opening paragraph all designed to appeal to a potential customer. The headline du jour was Dylann Roof’s death sentence for murder in South Carolina and this student was looking for ideas on how to portray this in a visual. As we hashed out ideas, he decided he wanted to use a cross to represent the murdered but did not know how to portray Roof’s white supremacy. I suggested a Confederate flag because of the pictures of Roof that had accompanied many news
stories. After spending a few minutes at his desk, he returned to ask me to show him a Confederate flag because he did not know what it looked like. This floored me for two reasons. First, having spent the vast majority of my life in the South, I had no conception that a student would not know what a Confederate flag looked like. Second, I was even more disappointed in myself to realize I had failed to consider this student’s social context when talking with him about white supremacy. While he understood what white supremacy was, he had not grown up in an environment where that was part of his understanding of social context. So, while previous theorists and educators can offer models for critical pedagogy, it is imperative to the individual teacher to develop his or her own pedagogy incorporating student identity, content, and local understandings of history to be effective.

Critical State Standards

By positing the autonomy of a classroom as a site of resistance to dominant narratives, it deserves consideration as to how the teacher is to deal with state curricular mandates and introduce a critical pedagogy. Teachers are currently, and will probably remain, responsible for teaching the state standards. The GSE were designed to open up a more inquiry-based classroom with the students having more freedom to explore within the standards. While my analysis contends the standards themselves fall far short of this goal, I am also maintaining that teachers can introduce a critical pedagogy to help students understand social studies better. However, the content of the standards must be considered as an epistemological statement by the state and can also be the site of resistance by the teacher. I am proposing the creation at the classroom level of a set of
critical state standards. Since Georgia is now advocating an inquiry-based classroom in social studies, teachers should make available a wide range of resources from which students can direct their inquiries and add context to their findings. Though this paper is not the place to unveil a set of critical standards, I would postulate some general recommendations for their creation. First, students should not be bound to textbooks, but should use primary, secondary, and tertiary sources to drive their learning. Without going into all the pitfalls of textbooks (Loewen, 1995), they frame history in a way that is not conducive to a critical pedagogy. This use of documents will also allow students the time and space to understand media and be better consumers of information in their own lives. Second, the voyages and colonization efforts of Columbus should be included in all US History classes to give a better frame of reference from which to evaluate and analyze European colonization. Third, the history of marginalized people should not be marginalized in the standards. There should be opportunities for students to understand how this country was built and what interests drove thought and action when it comes to economic, social, and political activities. Finally, egalitarian and democratic values should be taught and experienced in the classroom. If we are going to reverse the anti-intellectual discourse, students must understand that they have agency and can make changes to their present conditions. We must no longer expect students to realize that democracy is participatory only when they turn 18; it must be taught and experienced in their schooling.
Future of Higher Education

The CDA performed for this study reveals a disheartening present for higher education. Based on the diachronic and synchronic discourse, there are several narratives that are available to the public. First, in popular media, such as that endorsed by authors like Horowitz (2006, 2007) and Shapiro (2004), colleges are sites of leftist indoctrination preying upon the children of conservatives. Second, based on secondary schools’ missions, the entire reason for going to school is to prepare students for college. Thirdly, the entire mission of higher education is to prepare students for jobs and careers. In fact, the sooner you get finished with college, the better. Fourth, it will take sacrifice in the form of student loans and student debt to be able to achieve this life requirement. Success depends on a college education and you cannot have one without paying large sums of money and the less wealth your family has, the more you have to sacrifice. Fifth, because of austerity measures, uncertain funding for institutions of higher learning will probably require funding from other sources. If that is not enough, the new president is reportedly calling on Jerry Falwell, Jr. to lead a task force on higher education policy (Blumenstyk, 2017). Public discourse on higher education has many moving parts and it would be helpful to repeat this study periodically over the next few years. One of the entanglements in this discourse is that a college diploma must be marketable and that business degrees and STEM fields are the most employable. This notion is to the detriment of humanities. While I have approached much of this paper from a social studies perspective, all of the humanities, including literature, philosophy, and the arts are crucial to reversing the anti-intellectual discourse. The most optimistic outlook for
higher education is that its future is uncertain. As STEM and business degrees become more entrenched and have more enrollees, the humanities must be defended to save intellectualism. As Giroux (2014) discussed, a new critical language must be developed and as Wodak and Meyer (2009) postulated, for language to be emancipatory, it must be accessible. One of the challenges for intellectuals is to present nuanced views in accessible language and to do so without patronization. It is in the language that this condition was developed and it will be through the language this condition is reversed.

One particular threat to institutions of higher education is that of think tanks. As discussed in Chapter 4, think tanks represent narrow interests and provide tailored research to meet the needs of their clients. While there is nothing inherently nefarious about this activity, colleges and universities run the risk of becoming obsolete in broader debates. As Jacoby (1987) outlined, the academization of intellectuals has cut them off from mainstream debates. He goes on to describe the publishing habits of academic intellectuals being tailored towards tenure and academic capital effectively creating separation between the academy and the general public. As media has been tailored to fit a certain worldview, the privatization of research through think tanks has the potential to permanently remove academic intellectuals from the public sphere. As discussed in Chapter 4, the authority of think tanks is assumed and their names create the illusion of authority and independence. McGann (2016) reported the number of think tanks in the United States alone to be over 1800 and with names like Center for American Progress, Cato Institute, Brookings Institute, Heritage Foundation, and Freedom House, these groups all appear to be neutral and objective. I have advocated in this paper that
subjectivity is important, but I also argue that positionality should be made plain. The appearance of neutrality is much worse than bias and the work of think tanks has the potential to pass for nonpartisan, authoritative research. Funding is an issue for colleges and universities, but think tanks are even more vulnerable to funding shortages. McGann posited that the number of new think tanks has declined because investments in these think tanks is usually short term and on a per project basis. Non-university affiliated think tanks are completely dependent on private funding and therefore typically beholden to the private interests of their clients. While university research need not be immediately beneficial to political debates, the commodification of research and its use as authority in policy debates is concerning. If intellectuals retreating to the academy signaled the beginning of the death of intellectualism, think tanks filling the void may signal the completion of the decline.

Future Research

This research has focused on how anti-intellectual discourse on higher education has colonized secondary students’ beliefs about higher education. The nature of CDA is temporal, so monitoring the discourse over time would be instructive, especially as the new presidential administration makes changes to secondary and higher education policy. The growth of specific right wing media outlets, with editors and writers from outlets such as Breitbart gaining inside access to presidential politics, opens another venue for research and comparison to what are considered mainstream media outlets. The impact of austerity measures on higher education funding opens a void that can easily be filled by private interests. A systematic study of outside, private investments in public higher
education institutions and the impact on curriculum and degree programs would be illuminating.

Much of the data in this paper has essentially been about success and how we as a society define success. In regard to academics and based on the CDA and student interview data, success is clearly defined in economic terms. From a student perspective, success is defined by a degree and how much economic mobility and financial stability that degree can provide. From an institutional standpoint, success is based on how much the school’s graduates can contribute to the labor market. From the state’s perspective and based on the GSE and the end of course test, success is defined for the student, teacher, and school based on the scores from the test. Further research should be done on the link between academics, career and life satisfaction, and changing definitions of success.

Summary

Teaching can be burdensome in many ways, but one of the fantastic things about teaching is that I get paid to read and discuss history and society. The Declaration of Independence is arguably the most hallowed document in our history and the statement that “all men are created equal” is probably the most revered quote. The burden of knowing and understanding history makes me understand how trivial this is from an historical and sociological point of view. The founders did not believe it and if they did it was in the context of being politically equal to the exclusion of women, Native Americans, and slaves. I prefer to focus on the phrase from the Constitution which requires our nation to strive to be “a more perfect union.” This idea gives hope to me for
a more inclusive future where all of humanity is treated with dignity and respect. Like
Coates (2013), I do not believe in any kind of moral arc towards justice. I am also
atheist, so I do not think justice will come to anyone in an afterlife. I have to work to
overcome my cynicism and tendency towards nihilism and though I have resisted
mightily, I do believe critical theory can provide a way forward and that we must seek
out that which is different and frightening to us in order to understand and interpret our
own humanity. My hope for intellectualism is that we become less entrenched in our
beliefs and seek out new evidence and ideas with an openness for change. An intellectual
disposition requires it and so does the progress of civilization.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

TEXT CORPUS FOR CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS


The interviews were semi-structured format and the general outline of questions used to begin each interview follows.

1. What are your college plans?
2. What factors did you consider when making your college decisions?
3. Why do you want to go to college?
4. What are the potential benefits of going to college versus other options?
Monday, November 7, 2016

Jarrett Daughtry Moore
Mercer University
Tift College of Education
1400 Coleman Avenue
Macon, GA 31207

RE: Anti-intellectualism and Student Perceptions of Higher Education (H1611302)

Dear Moore:

On behalf of Mercer University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 28-Oct-2016 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(s): 6.7 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 07-Nov-2016. The protocol expires on 06-Nov-2017. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
- New Mercer Student Minimal Risk application using audio recorded interviews with open-ended interview questions administered to students at Howard High School.

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and ALL accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Ava Chambless-Richardson, M.Ed., CIP, CIM,
Associate Director, Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)
Member, Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization's (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."