

CONFLICTING PURPOSES IN U.S. SCHOOL REFORM: THE PARADOXES OF ARNE DUNCAN'S EDUCATIONAL RHETORIC

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In this essay, we examine the complete published speeches of Arne Duncan from his seven years (2009–2015) as Barack Obama's secretary of education, to understand how his language both defined problems and promoted solutions for our nation's schools. By looking at Duncan's rhetoric through close readings and computer-aided textual analyses, we find that his discourse contained paradoxes, particularly through a notion of schooling as a means of achieving both social justice and economic growth, by framing education as both a private and public good, and through assertions about the need for government both to centralize authority over schooling and promote a global educational marketplace. In essence, Duncan used a both/and approach to these purposes, adding to our understandings of the character and functions of educational rhetoric and showing how critical it is for scholars to recognize that such tensions exist in language about what education policy should do. Ultimately, we conclude that Duncan's rhetoric obscures historic tensions in

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the purpose of education and highlights the way that policy rhetoric may saddle public education with responsibilities beyond its capacities.

Educational rhetoric matters. It plays a critical role in forming public perceptions and policies, and can frame problems and identify solutions in ways that circumscribe an issue—elevating certain ideas while eliminating others.¹ This is particularly true in the realm of education at the federal level, as schools and schooling remain national concerns even as most educational policy decisions continue to occur locally.

Rhetoric scholars have studied how national documents such as *A Nation at Risk* set the agenda for educational policy options for decades, especially in shifting “the focus of education discourse from education as a means of social and political equalization to education as a means of economic prosperity.”² Further work has analyzed how narrow representations of school teachers in public texts can oversimplify systemic educational factors and downplay the role of federal policy in creating change, the key tropes and myths underlying schooling decisions and structures, the role of particular figures in creating or undermining reforms, and the negative role that market logics have played in public education more generally.³

Throughout this work, researchers have focused on the norms that rhetors construct for educational policy, especially as they articulate certain framings of the individual in relation to communities, and the role of capitalism in democracies. Rebecca Kuehl concludes “that an emphasis on individual accountability and personal responsibility continues to shape education reform and public policy across partisan lines” and “prevents education reform that focuses on increasing equality for students in the United States.”⁴ Yet in focusing exclusively on the ways educational rhetoric has seemingly set the stage for particular market-based, individualistic, and managerial education policies and reforms, this scholarship has perhaps oversimplified or ignored long-standing tensions in both the purposes ascribed to education and the ways that figures have performed those tensions in public discourse.

Words direct us toward what is permissible and what kinds of claims and evidence matter for public schools,⁵ constituting the educational realities in which citizens come to live. This makes the rhetoric of prominent

educational figures especially critical to analyze in their entirety. This study contributes an examination of the rhetorical character and operations of a key figure in educational policymaking, former U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, whose complete body of speeches both add to and invite some modification of our understandings of educational rhetoric. During the Obama administration, scholars and pundits alike paid close attention to the rhetoric of Duncan, who during his seven-year tenure arguably became the most powerful U.S. secretary of education in history. Observers analyzed Duncan's public discourse not only for what his words signaled about the administration's policy priorities, but, parallel to the concerns of rhetorical scholars, for how Duncan, his Department of Education, and President Obama framed both the purpose of education and how to best improve U.S. schools.⁶

Yet most existing accounts of Duncan's rhetoric draw from selective snippets of his language, often to support a critique of his policies or persona, and frequently with the charge that his discourse reveals his "neoliberalism," or the reduction of education to market-based, capitalistic modes of engagement in both outlook and practice.⁷ While much of this work is instructive, with both the tools of textual criticism and the emerging digital humanities at hand,⁸ rhetoricians now have a means to study larger bodies of texts deeply and broadly, across time, with an ability to make stronger claims about the complete, official language policymakers such as Duncan actually use. With so much political rhetoric now taking place through a variety of channels, rhetorical scholars could further benefit from greater attention to the ways that cabinet secretaries use their public platforms to promote policy change.

This study examines all of Duncan's published speeches during his tenure in the Obama administration (2009–2015) to explore how he constructed an educational worldview, and how he drew on that worldview to both define problems and promote solutions for our nation's schools. While paying attention to context, we conducted close readings to examine language choices and patterns in Duncan's rhetoric. Since these were such a large body of speeches, we then used computer-aided textual analyses (CATA) to capture elements of the discourse systematically and provide a perspective on the whole body of rhetoric relative to emerging themes from our close readings. By focusing on Duncan's language across all of his published speeches,⁹ and his specific word choices and phrases in context, we found his rhetoric manifested and sustained long-standing historical

tensions ascribed to the purposes of education. Specifically, Duncan's rhetoric paradoxically asked schools to solve social and economic inequalities while also righting and then expanding the economy, framed education in individualistic terms while emphasizing its public purposes and our collective responsibility to improve it, and claimed a need for both centralized accountability in education and market-based competition.

Over the past few decades rhetoric and education scholars have noted an elision of these historic tensions in the purpose of education, arguing that both rhetorically and in practice U.S. leaders have elevated market-based, individualistic, and economic objectives of schooling over democratic, moralistic, or pluralistic goals.¹⁰ Yet our analysis suggests otherwise, inviting some modification of existing views of the character of this type of rhetoric and how it works. At least rhetorically, Duncan's language did not present a dominant and subordinate relationship between these ideals but rather took on a "both/and" quality. Duncan's willingness to promote these seemingly conflicting purposes of education may not have aligned well with his policy agenda, but as an espoused means toward his goals, it is critical to recognize that Duncan's discourse paradoxically maintained that such goals could and should work together. In essence, Duncan's paradoxes speak to scholarly and public debates about the role of public education in U.S. society, inviting examinations of larger bodies of discourse to accurately characterize educational rhetoric and its functions. Overall, we conclude that Duncan's rhetoric obscures historic tensions in the purpose of education, and, building upon extant lines of rhetorical inquiry, spotlights the way that policy rhetoric may saddle public education with responsibilities beyond its capacities.

We first provide some political and historical context for Duncan's tenure as secretary of education. Second, we explain our research methods and report our findings from Duncan's texts through three paradoxes, using analysis from both our close readings and the CATA programs. Last, we consider how Duncan's both/and orientation toward longstanding tensions in the purpose of education helps us to make sense of the Obama administration's educational legacy.

DUNCAN'S CONTEXT

From the outset, the selection of Duncan as President Obama's secretary of education was rife with controversy. While many of Obama's supporters on

the left had hoped that the administration would redirect federal education priorities away from the test-based accountability measures embodied in the already unpopular No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and toward a focus on increased resources, school desegregation, and direct efforts to reduce poverty, Obama's selection of Duncan as secretary seemed to suggest otherwise.¹¹ Critics pointed to Duncan's record as CEO of Chicago Public Schools and warned that he would likely bring a "corporate model of schooling" to the national stage.¹² Indeed, as secretary of education Duncan implemented Race to the Top (RTTT), a competitive grant that required states to prioritize a managerial view of teacher quality and the use of test-based performance measures to evaluate schools and educators. RTTT, and the NCLB waivers that Duncan later offered states struggling under the Bush-era law, also required states to adopt a set of common learning standards—otherwise known as the "Common Core"—and to sign on to a testing regime based on those standards. Duncan's Department of Education supported the expansion of charters and other school choice policies, and in the realm of higher education oversaw the creation of a "College Scorecard" that included factors such as the average salaries of different institutions' graduates, so that prospective students could make more informed decisions as consumers in the educational marketplace.¹³

Duncan spent much of his seven-year tenure promoting (and later defending) these reforms, and in this light it is understandable that scholars analyzed how his rhetoric seemed both to reflect and even to amplify the managerial, corporate, and individualistic rhetorical trends that preceded him. Pauline Lipman, for example, documents an evolution in how presidential administrations have characterized education as a national good:

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, under the Reagan administration, there has been an evolving shift in federal education policy from a focus on equity to economic competitiveness, markets, standards, and top-down accountability. This agenda was articulated in Bill Clinton's Goals 2000 and encoded in George W. Bush's NCLB legislation, ushering in an era of high-stakes testing, privatization, and "school choice."¹⁴

By pointing to *A Nation at Risk*, an influential report not attached to any federal legislation, and Goals 2000, a document articulating priorities but not any real policies, Lipman highlights how rhetoric shaped a political

context that made the enactment of NCLB possible. She then extends her analysis to the educational rhetoric and policies of the Obama administration, and, as a type of representative anecdote for how Duncan's context has been framed, notes that the first action Duncan took as secretary of education was to travel "to Detroit and tell that economically floundering city that the federal government was there to help Detroit's ailing schools . . . if they would follow the Chicago model: close 'failing' schools, expand privately-run charter schools, institute mayoral control and [the] business management of schools."¹⁵

This analysis of Duncan's speech in Detroit is instructive and captures the way that he employed market-based, managerial rhetoric to set boundaries around what education is and should do. But we also find characterizations such as these incomplete. Looking at more than just snippets of his rhetoric, our analysis of Duncan's complete published speeches reveals that while Duncan articulated a market-based perspective of education that emphasized competition, individualism, and the economic purposes of schooling, he also evoked education as a means of achieving social justice and equality, often framing schooling as a public good and collective responsibility. And this wasn't simply symbolic posturing: the Department of Education's (DOE) Office of Civil Rights did take steps to try to safeguard civil rights in schools and address the U.S. educational system's inequities during the Obama administration, especially in the realm of racial disparities in discipline and discrimination based on gender identity or expression.¹⁶

With this background and particularly the critiques launched against Duncan in mind, we turn to his speeches. Contrary to many extant accounts that Duncan was only interested in forwarding market-based discourses, we find that Duncan adopts a "both/and" perspective promoting competing purposes in education.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

We first conducted a close reading of all of Duncan's speeches between 2009 and 2015 to identify themes. We used the "intensity and frequency" of key words and phrasings as criteria to gauge preliminary linguistic patterns.¹⁷ Drawing on our different backgrounds in rhetoric and educational policy scholarship, we read all of the speeches and had a series of conversations to identify the remarkable features and functions of the rhetoric in context. For

a higher-level analysis and way of operationalizing Duncan's rhetoric, we then used two established CATA programs, DICTION 7.0 and Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), to examine relevant general concepts emerging from our close readings. Both programs have a large number of dictionary-based, thematic variables that highlight language patterns in large groups of texts. While our research design focused almost wholly on our close readings and relevant variables from the CATA programs, as a third layer of analysis, we also searched for descriptive counts of key terms that arose in the course of our study to get a glimpse of how Duncan weighted particular words with relevance to our first two analytic procedures.

Toggleing between close readings and a larger, thematic analysis of Duncan's language allowed us to remain sensitive to the historical context(s) in which these speeches took place, while taking a systematic look at the complete population of data to capture patterns not made readily apparent by selective analyses that draw interpretations from thin slices of data. Since rhetorical practices tend to be habitual, we examine Duncan's rhetoric in whole and part to reveal what Richard Weaver called "characteristic ways of thinking" about politics, policy, and the social world.¹⁸ This approach draws attention to the content and form of the discourse from a variety of viewpoints, uses the type of methodological framework increasingly being promoted across interdisciplinary scholarship,¹⁹ and provides insight into the overall rhetorical vision for education that Duncan set forth during his tenure in the Obama administration.

Based on our first close readings, we were struck by the extent to which Duncan advocated for education as a means of promoting both social justice and economic mobility, how he framed education as both an individual and collective good, and his arguments for both more centralized regulation and market-based competition. We subsequently approached the CATA programs with these larger themes and discussions in mind, while remaining open to what was actually manifest across Duncan's discourse.

We selected variables from the CATA programs that connected with the specific themes identified from our close readings, but also others that we thought might be relevant to Duncan's tenure and educational policy developments during his administration in general. Both DICTION and LIWC are dictionary-based programs, meaning that the words in a text are compared to and incremented against baseline values through categories/variables that contain lists of words in each. Terms in the category of "self-

reference,” for example, contain words such as “I,” “me,” “my,” and more, allowing researchers to examine a speaker’s reliance on terms that characterize her or his own role within the discourse.

DICTION has mostly been used to examine political and ideological discourses.²⁰ It searches for approximately 10,000 terms, measuring 35 categories/variables such as linguistic “certainty” (the absoluteness rather than uncertainty of one’s language), “realism” (the tangibility rather than abstractness of the discourse) “numerical terms,” or “present tense” terms (words having do with the here and now, instead of the past or future). Five of these are “master variables,” which are composites of the other variables that share no statistical relationship with one another.²¹ DICTION has been used in about 500 studies to examine the “distinctive tone and tenor” of communication, noticing “things that ordinary observers cannot notice, an especially useful approach for examining a large number of texts.”²²

Drawing from about 50,000 textual samples from speeches, reports, newspapers, and more, each linguistic variable has “low” and “high” baseline numerical values—or norms for public discourse that have been developed across nearly three decades of the program’s iterations—that underscore what typically low, high, and outlier scores look like in any text when compared to these averages in common language use.²³ The category/variable of “optimism,” or “language endorsing some person, group, concept or event or highlighting their positive entailments,”²⁴ for instance, contains lists of terms such as “successful,” “faithful,” “delightful,” “excited,” “celebrating,” and more, which are searched for, incremented within this category, and compared to the norms in common language use for analysis.

From our close readings, we selected 21 of the DICTION variables that most related to the discourse manifest from our initial close readings. For example, given Duncan’s language about schooling as a public good and collective responsibility, the master variable of “commonality” was generally relevant to the analysis for capturing the degree of social or communal language. Through Duncan’s efforts to try to persuade audiences to his cause and attempts to build support for policies such as Common Core, with varying degrees of success, we also selected variables such as “familiarity” (how much common language a speaker uses), which can tell us about how “connected” such language might be to an audience’s familiar terms.²⁵

LIWC focuses more on the connections between language and psychology than political discourse, but given some of its variables, the program was useful for a secondary level of analysis.²⁶ The LIWC program “captures, on average, over 86 percent of the words people use in writing or speech,”²⁷ coding approximately 80 language categories/variables to produce analyses of, for instance, “causal words,” “function words,” or even terms having to do with power or rewards.²⁸ Beyond the variables DICTION generated, we selected 16 LIWC variables with relevance to analyzing the political dimensions of Duncan’s speech.²⁹ Overall, the two programs have approximately 140 variables, so we worked with the variables closest to the terms arising from our readings and related scholarly and public discussions. For example, the LIWC variables for “work” and “money” were relevant to the economic and market-based themes arising from our first close readings. The variables for “biological processes” and “ingestion” were not (see Table 1 and Table 2 below for the complete lists of selected variables and their results).³⁰ Since our analysis alternated between close readings of the data and the dictionary-based programs, below we integrate our findings into one discussion, offering a general picture and specific examples of the central paradoxes in Duncan’s rhetoric.

THE PARADOXES OF DUNCAN’S RHETORIC

Alternating between our close readings of all of Duncan’s speeches and the CATA findings led us to identify three prominent paradoxes in Duncan’s rhetoric: a notion of schooling as a means of achieving both social justice and economic growth, a framing of education as both a private and public good, and assertions about the need for government to both centralize authority over schooling and promote a global educational marketplace. For Duncan, these concepts coexist productively, but we explore the key affordances and pressures between each. We underscore some key examples from the speech texts, drawing on our CATA analysis to place our examples within Duncan’s larger speech universe.

The notion that U.S. schools are asked to serve multiple, and at times competing, purposes has been a defining feature of public education in this country. David Labaree framed the tensions inherent in our schools in terms of contradictory goals: we ask schools to promote *democratic equality* by preparing all youth for the responsibilities of citizenship in a

Table 1. DICTION Results for Complete Duncan Speeches 2009–2015

Relevant Diction Variables	Variable Score	Variable Low/High*
Self-Reference	8.35	−1.18/15.10
Collectives	6.3	4.04/14.46
Satisfaction	7.33**	0.47/6.09
Aggression	1.37	1.07/9.79
Accomplishment	14.98	4.96/23.76
Cognition	12.92	4.43/14.27
Passivity	0.87**	2.10/8.08
Familiarity	122.98	117.87/147.19
Centrality	2.09	1.18/7.54
Inspiration	3.86	1.56/11.12
Rapport	3.04	0.42/4.26
Cooperation	4.33	0.36/8.44
Diversity	3.23	0.07/3.81
Exclusion	0.59	0.03/4.31
Liberation	0.91	−0.46/4.72
Denial	10.81**	2.57/10.35
Variety	0.49	0.45/0.53
Complexity	4.39	4.31/4.91
Optimism	50.56	46.37/52.25
Realism	51.51	46.10/52.62
Commonality	50.12	46.86/52.28

* The three selected DICTION Master Variables are at the bottom of this table; DICTION's output lists "low" and "high" ranges for each variable, which are provided in the far-right hand column of the table.

** Indicates that the variable is beyond one standard deviation from the norm.

democracy; we ask schools to promote *social efficiency* by training youth for their future economic role in society; and we ask schools to promote *social mobility* by providing a commodity (educational credentials) that can be used for competitive advantage within a system that recognizes and rewards individual merit, however defined.³¹

Table 2. LIWC Results for Complete Duncan Speeches 2009–2015

Relevant LIWC Variables	Variable Score	Variable Mean/SD Values*
Analytic**	84.57	56.34/17.58
Authentic	29.53	49.17/20.92
First-person singular (I)**	1.19	4.99/2.46
First-person plural (We)**	1.96	0.72/0.83
Social processes	9.27	9.74/3.38
Drives**	14.37	6.93/2.03
Affiliation**	3.57	2.05/1.28
Achieve**	3.79	1.30/0.82
Power**	6.73	2.35/1.22
Reward	2.04	1.46/0.81
Risk	0.49	0.47/0.41
Work**	10.83	2.56/1.81
Home	0.30	0.55/0.63
Money	1.38	0.68/0.83
Informal**	0.22	2.52/1.65

* LIWC lists unweighted “Mean” and “Standard Deviation” (SD) values for each variable (Pennebaker et al., 2015a, p. 12),⁹⁸ which are provided in the far-right hand column of the table.

** Indicates that the variable is beyond one standard deviation from the norm.

Other scholars have characterized these tensions in similar terms. David Cohen and Barbara Neufeld framed schools’ conflicting missions more specifically as between education and capitalism, arguing:

Schools are a public institution oriented to equality in a society dominated by private institutions oriented to the market. In the schools America seeks to foster equality—and individual Americans seek to realize it. But in the market, Americans seek to maintain or improve their economic and social position, thereby contributing to inequality, even if they individually wish the reverse.³²

Much of this scholarship asserts that, although tensions exist, in the last few decades the more individualistic, economic, and market-based goals of education have been winning out over others, both rhetorically and in practice. For instance, Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe find that in the nineteenth century Horace Mann promoted the economic purposes of schooling for political means even though so much of his rhetoric, and one presumes his beliefs, were about education's moral objectives.³³ They maintain that while arguments about the moral and civic ends of schooling have not gone away, in recent decades these goals "have been increasingly subordinated to the notion that the primary purpose of education is to equip students with the skills they presumably need to improve their own economic opportunities and to make the nation more prosperous and secure."³⁴

Our analysis of Duncan's rhetoric provides a different viewpoint. While we identified an articulation of the same general tensions in the purpose of schooling that scholars have previously documented, we also found that Duncan did not portray these goals as competing. Indeed, he even asserted in the context of arguments about preparing students for either careers or college that this must be "both/and," not "either/or."³⁵ We draw out the ways in which this approach worked across his three paradoxes.

SCHOOLS AS LOCI FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

With an unrelenting investment, Duncan's language focused on both the economic and social justice purposes of education. In a speech delivered at the 91st annual meeting of the American Council on Education in 2009, Duncan outlined how the stimulus package before Congress at the time (later passed as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) would aid the nation's schools, arguing: "This is not just good education policy. It's good economic policy."³⁶ His argument was both about jobs—much of the money would be used to stave off budgetary cuts by states and districts—and about the larger purpose of schooling:

Providing every child in America with a good education is both a moral imperative and an economic imperative. It's also a matter of social justice. It is the civil rights issue of our generation—the one and only way to overcome

the differences of wealth, background and race that divide us and deny us our future.³⁷

In this passage, Duncan positions “a good education” as a foundation from which the equal terms of morality, social justice, and civil rights stem and coexist with economic outcomes.

One could argue that Duncan was simply mystifying his ultimate economic goals. Indeed, our CATA findings supported the idea that his rhetoric used many terms commonly associated with an economic or corporate mentality. The LIWC program’s very high “work,” “drive,” “money,” “power,” and “achieve” terms, as well as high “affiliation,” “reward,” and moderate “risk” terms, suggest an entrepreneurial and managerial outlook (as illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2 above, we use “very” to indicate above or below one standard deviation). Moreover, basic counts show that he often employed business terms, for example, using the word “career” 768 times and “skill” 525 times in his speeches.

Yet the sheer volume of discourse emphasizing equity and social justice strewn through Duncan’s speeches, and the way he situated these terms as parallel rather than in a dominant/subordinate relationship on the whole, pit each idea in service of the other. Duncan’s rhetoric about education as the “great equalizer,” a construction he used 75 times across all the speeches, prioritizes equity and equality in learning with market values, as did the CATA findings showing high “diversity” terms, or “words describing individuals or groups of individuals differing from the norm.”³⁸

Duncan frequently evoked racial justice in the context of the economic purposes of schooling. He mixed language about social justice, equality, and redistributive policies with notions of education’s work-related and economic purposes in a speech to the Congressional Caucus Hispanic Institute, stating, “sadly, today hundreds of thousands of jobs across this country are going unfilled because employers simply can’t find workers with the necessary skills and education,” and adding that “Hispanics can and should be filling these jobs, the same as any other American.”³⁹ Here education and work go hand in hand, with an assumption that getting all on a broad, equal economic footing (“same as any other American”) requires deep attention to justice for particular racial and ethnic communities (“Hispanics can and should be filling these jobs”). After detailing the

ways that the Obama administration opened access to educational opportunities for Latino youth, he also argued: “No one individual and no single agency working in isolation can accomplish this task. It will take all of us working together to set high expectations, raise the bar, and cross the finish line.”⁴⁰ Note how Duncan asserts that equity and access to education and work constitute an endeavor that all can accomplish collectively, but also uses terms of achievement and the metaphor of a race (“cross the finish line”)—a competitive activity that typically involves winners and losers—to signal how this will be accomplished.

This mix of civil rights language and competition may seem typical, but critics of current educational policy often argue that a “neoliberal” emphasis on competition, personal gain, and economic development tends to ignore histories of institutional racism,⁴¹ as public discourse constructs, reproduces, and controls racial notions of citizenship.⁴² Robert Asen highlights how neoliberal rhetoric forwards an atomized individualism and “erasure of public language,” a purposeful ignorance about “the role of race and racism on the formation and agency of public subjectivities,” and a “turning of social commitments inward.”⁴³ To Duncan, however, schools are engines of both economic and social reform, as evidenced by his repeated statements of “we need to educate our way to a better economy,”⁴⁴ and discourse framing education as the “civil rights issue of our generation” and “the one and only way to overcome the differences of wealth, background and race that divide us and deny us our future.”⁴⁵ Duncan fashions an expectation that schools can and should accomplish both goals simultaneously.

In our close readings, we were struck by the emphases in Duncan’s discourse on race and ethnicity. In fact, the term “social justice” came up 28 times, “civil right” 228 times, and “race” 178 times across all the speeches.⁴⁶ Duncan often evoked the Civil Rights movement and the nation’s history of racial oppression directly, from referencing the election of Barack Obama as the first African American president to naming and quoting civil rights leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King Jr. (whom he named 42 times).⁴⁷ In a speech at the Harlem Children’s Zone, a charter school that Duncan characterized as an “anti-poverty community program,” he quoted Lyndon B. Johnson’s famous commencement speech at Howard University highlighting the need for compensatory and

redistributive policies to achieve equality: “it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity—all our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.”⁴⁸ The importance of using these figures and tropes lies in the way in which schools become the primary locus for social justice work.

Duncan’s rhetoric often conflated rather than separated social justice and economic growth. In another speech Duncan asserted:

If we want our children to compete in the global economy, we cannot tolerate failure any longer. We must demand excellence and not get sidetracked by ideology or politics. . . . This is a daily fight for social justice. No other issue offers the same promise of equality as education. No other issue can end the cycle of poverty . . . and the social sickness plaguing broken communities. . . . This is not just a moral obligation. It’s an economic imperative.⁴⁹

In this passage, Duncan positions vertical, competitive economic obligations with a horizontal allegiance to social and communal norms. The appeals to social justice link equality with the opportunity to compete on the global stage. There’s little sense that competition, by its very nature an activity that promotes inequality and hierarchy, could fail to upend the cycle of poverty and forms of social sickness that Duncan asks his audience to address. To the secretary of education, both of these obligations are simply true and synchronous. Even “great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice.”⁵⁰ That the work of public schools is “more than education” highlights a tendency in this body of speechmaking: to broaden the functions and services accomplished in schools, or at a minimum, to forgo the possibility that schools may not be able to do all at once.

Scholars have argued that some forms of discourse may recognize the value of social justice or equality while framing the path to achieving this goal in market-based terms. This has been seen as a narrow notion of “empowerment” by many measures, or simply a cooptation of civil rights discourse.⁵¹ Whether or not Duncan limits the goals of social justice through his economic rhetoric, we find more remarkable his paradoxical, continuous attention to issues of civil rights and equity and equality, in a way that can’t simply be read as mystification or as easily folded into a

vision of market dominance. This paradoxical approach is only deepened by Duncan's view of the public and private, or individual and common, purposes of education, to which we'll turn next.

EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC AND PRIVATE GOOD

Deeply connected to Duncan's notion of education as both a means of achieving social justice and economic prosperity, we found that he often framed the benefits of education in both individualistic and communal terms, as private and public goods. In other words, he characterized education as a means of improving one's position in society and as a means of improving society as a whole. In one speech he outlined the stakes for educational failure along these lines:

Consider the lost opportunity for those kids—our kids—1.3 million of them every year. Consider the staggering economic cost to our nation when one in four of our students don't get a high school diploma. It's a drain on our labor market, our housing market, our criminal justice system, and our tax base. When we fail to properly educate on the front end, we all pay, and pay dearly, on the back end.⁵²

In this passage, the costs of students dropping out of high school are a communal, public problem in the long-term effects on the "tax base" and potential criminality later in life. But Duncan also couches these costs in relation to the private goals of the labor and economic markets, as well as the individual costs incurred by the students themselves. Moreover, he emphasizes that "those kids" not completing high school are "our kids" to highlight the problem as a collective responsibility, while declaring that "we all pay" for these children's lack of education down the line, further mixing the collective social and economic costs of a system of educational failure.

In the same speech Duncan contrasts the individual concerns he had for his own children's education with concerns he has for all of the nation's children. He shares that, "With a fourth grade daughter and a second grade son at home, I'm as concerned as any parent or teacher about over-testing and teaching to the test," yet "I'm equally concerned about kids slipping through the cracks if we aren't keeping track of their progress and holding

adults accountable for helping them learn. There is a common sense middle ground here that we're striving for."⁵³ The last line focuses Duncan's assessment that his own individual goals for his children's education should be matched with a sane educational policy for all children as a larger community. In a rare move, he also tacitly acknowledges the burden that testing potentially places on his children but argues that testing systems are to our collective benefit, holding adults accountable for all children's learning.

It may seem that there's little to debate here, until Duncan's paradoxical discourse is compared to common characterizations of this type of rhetoric. Rhetoric and education scholars maintain that while there have historically been tensions between the competing or contested purposes of education, the neoliberal reforms of today "refocus the purpose of education" away from service to society at-large and toward "the cultivation of [an] individual's capacity to compete in today's economic climate."⁵⁴ Such discourse frames the goal of schooling as producing globally competitive workers who meet the interests of the marketplace rather than the needs of society and its citizens. We certainly find such ideas in Duncan's speeches, but they were matched with attention to citizens' communal responsibility toward education.

Indeed, our CATA analyses found Duncan's speeches were above average in communal language. For example, in DICTION the master variable of "commonality" was mostly medium to high. "Liberation" terms that describe "the maximizing of individual choice . . . and the rejection of social conventions" were low, supporting the idea that this language does not rely solely on a narrow individualism. This finding is also supported by low "exclusion" ("a dictionary describing the sources and effects of social isolation") terms in DICTION, as well as medium "cooperation" and high "rapport" terms.⁵⁵ At the very least, when pitted against LIWC's results and upon closer readings of this rhetoric, we found emphases of both individualism and, consistent with the CATA results, plenty of communal language and references to collective action. These results comport with the LIWC program's low "I"- and very high "we"-related terms. While DICTION highlights Duncan's medium "self-reference" terms and LIWC highlights medium "social processes"; we also did an ad hoc, descriptive count showing the number of times the word "we" (5,438), "they" (2,905), "you" (3,479), and "I" (3,944) terms came up across the total speeches.

Unlike how *A Nation at Risk* has been characterized, where “in the end, education is defined as an individual good,”⁵⁶ the picture here is of a “both/and” language.

We found through close readings that Duncan even defines the collective, public benefit of education as beyond the national interest that he and the DOE represent. In a speech at the U.S.–India Higher Education Summit in 2011, for example, Duncan argues that “education is a public good unconstrained by national boundaries. Innovation, manufacturing, and research and development are now borderless—to the mutual benefit of all.”⁵⁷ In this rhetorical vision, private purposes and public goods interact in a symbiotic manner, equating education with the development of global business, and vice versa. Yet it’s not public schools in India or Denmark or South Africa that Duncan is in charge of fixing or transforming, underscoring a certain effacement of national solutions (including his own and the DOE’s roles) to the national problems (such as the advancement of civil rights, or the end of poverty) the rest of his rhetoric generates.

Additionally, to provide some sense of how much publicness and privateness receive attention in Duncan’s rhetoric, we searched for some associated terms. On the one hand, the word “market” is used 89 times, “economy” 470 times, “entrepreneur” 97 times, “invest” 762 times, “competition” 202 times (and “compete” 175 times), and “private” (as in private sector) 97 times across all of his speeches. On the other hand, the term “civic” showed up 178 times, “democracy” 48 times, “government” 359 times, “federal” 671 times, and “public” 974 times, respectively. The term “citizen” arises 96 times, compared to only 26 times for the term “consumer.” While our use of the CATA programs constructs a systematic picture of how Duncan weights, for example, individualistic and communal words, snapshots of key terms too show that public and private terms both appear to receive a fair share of attention across Duncan’s discourse.

Regardless of how connected or disconnected Duncan’s vision was to past policies, it’s critical to note how he viewed this mixture of education as a private and public good as novel. Failing to recognize some of these past debates, he framed his educational policymaking in terms of “a *new* commitment to results that recognizes and rewards success in the classroom and is rooted in our common obligation to children.”⁵⁸ The implication is that education can do far more than it has in the past by bridging an individualistic notion of results in the classroom to common obligations to all

children, across boundaries and borders. In a 2011 town hall forum in Indiana, Duncan told his audience, “If America is about one thing its [sic] equality and if education has one core responsibility—it is to level the playing field so that all of our children have a fair shot at a good life.”⁵⁹ Here he highlights that public (under the terms of equality and collective responsibility) and private (under the terms of a sports metaphor, the playing field and fair shots) boundaries essentially collapse and hybridize—and schools can do it all. Both the reliance on schools as a locus for social justice and economic growth and education as a public and private good come to a head in Duncan’s third paradox, one in which the capacity for learning to be everything to everyone is also forwarded.

LEARNING THROUGH CENTRALIZED ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE FREE MARKET

The third paradox in Duncan’s rhetoric involved his use of both centralized regulation and free market liberalism, often by marrying localized notions of “accountability” with global understandings of market competition. Duncan made clear throughout his speeches that centralized accountability for educational excellence would be part of his agenda, with a simultaneous focus on the need for such accountability to expand improved products and processes, including competition and choice.

This rhetorical paradox has historical antecedents, but in Duncan’s case, with a twist. Tatiana Suspitsyna documents a rhetoric of “accountability” throughout the speeches of Margaret Spellings, secretary of education under George W. Bush, arguing that this form of discourse was “based on the power of the manager and market rather than the bureaucratic or traditional authority.”⁶⁰ Where Spellings located the federal government in support of the national market as the arbiter of educational accountability, however, Duncan refocuses the term through international markets and competitors, pushing authority further away from teachers and educational professionals and, ironically, himself and the DOE.

Some understanding of the meanings the secretary of education provides key terms is first necessary to see how this rhetoric operates. In testimony before the U.S. Senate, Duncan articulated how “standards and assessments are key parts of our effort to redefine accountability,” but also, in a phrasing he used across many speeches, how “we will move from being

a compliance monitor to an engine for innovation.”⁶¹ In a speech to the House Appropriations Committee in 2010 defending Obama’s budget on education and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Duncan expanded on what he meant by “innovation” by explaining that some of the requested budget increase would go “to increase high-quality charter and other autonomous public schools and magnet schools.” Accountability, he said, meant that, “We must embrace new approaches to learning and expand proven models of success.”⁶² The emphasis on new and expansive accountability pushes the rhetoric in a broad, generative direction, a logic that’s easily linked to the international arena.

Duncan forms a rhetorical equation in which the very centralized standards that will make for educational accountability at the local level are derived from and impact globally developed, free-market criteria. He calls for “developing common standards” that will help “our children to compete in the global economy.”⁶³ In a 2011 speech to Iowans about the need for the state to buy into this picture, Duncan stated baldly, “Iowa cannot rest on its laurels . . . The standard of success in the information age has risen dramatically. And today, not enough of Iowa’s children are receiving the world-class education they need to succeed in the global economy. In the knowledge economy, the country that out-educates us will out-compete us.”⁶⁴ To Duncan, Iowans should be doing more to “measure the impact of their programs on student learning”; hence, adopting the “Common Core” would be a “game-changer.”⁶⁵ The speeches articulate a notion of countries competing in a game-like fashion against one another in these constructions, yet such competition derives from the strength of public educational systems.

Duncan’s emphasis on both increased centralized authority and market models of reform was unique neither to him nor the Obama administration. The school choice and accountability movements arose in tandem in the United States (and elsewhere) in the early 1990s and were joined together in formal policy at the federal level in the bipartisan passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. Critics view the two phenomena in tension, with Bruce Fuller characterizing the policymakers who supported these trends as “bordering on schizophrenia.”⁶⁶ Yet Duncan’s rhetoric exemplifies how, at least discursively, they have been made to work together.

Another way into this theme is through some ad hoc, descriptive word counts across all of Duncan's speeches. Aligning centralized accountability with free market values, Duncan used the term "standards" 874 times, "accountability" 253 times, "test" 645 times, "measure" 303 times, "responsibility" 169 times, "achieve" (as in "achieve" or "achievement") 845 times, while terms such as "innovation" came up 498 times (and "innovative" 129 times) across all the speeches. Combined with already mentioned terms such as "competition" and "entrepreneur," Duncan promoted both regulation and deregulation. There's a clear emphasis on following benchmarks and metrics and measures, but for the sake of innovation, these standards and values paradoxically emanate from an unstable free market.

More importantly, what's largely cut out of this rhetoric is the role of federal policy. In Duncan's discourse, globally developed standards become the free-market mechanism for eliminating perceptions that Washington D.C. (including Duncan) bear much responsibility for centralized accountability. This is also a two-way street, with localities and states administering interventions developed from broader, global viewpoints. At least from ad-hoc searches for some key terms, words having to do with the local and global were mentioned nearly five times as much as those regarding the national ("international" came up 195 times, "global" 323, "world" 853, "local" 503, and "state" 3,388 times, while "national" came up 773 times and "Washington" 292 times across the speeches, respectively). At the same time, the notion that the Common Core State Standards were created by using other, more educationally successful nations' content standards as models or "benchmarks" has been highly contested.⁶⁷

In making these word choices, we should recognize that different terms for describing the educational landscape have different policy entailments. Asen, for instance, finds that

President Johnson foregrounded the key policy term of "opportunity," whereas President Bush emphasized the term "accountability." Conveying a confident, forward-looking view of society, opportunity charged the federal government with distributing educational resources among local communities. Replacing confidence with skepticism, accountability shifted the federal role from providing inputs to insisting on outcomes. Accountability situated

the federal government as the ultimate authority that set educational standards and determined if local communities met them.⁶⁸

Duncan's rhetoric highlights an important variation on this theme. He carries Bush's accountability language forward, but positions authority for educational standards with global sources. In a strange paradox, this rhetoric both advances his and the DOE's roles as representatives for this vision, while simultaneously undermining a federal role for bringing into being and enacting educational policies. Duncan promotes both a close attention to working with local educational stakeholders with ideas about the distanced global forces to which these stakeholders will partly be held accountable.

The secretary of education makes these claims explicitly. According to Duncan, "local districts decide the most effective way to intervene in underperforming schools, instead of applying rigid, top-down mandates from Washington."⁶⁹ Additionally, "the fact that 45 states have now adopted internationally benchmarked, college, and career-ready standards is an absolute game-changer."⁷⁰ In both of these lines, Duncan brings the global free-market and expectations for centralized accountability together, but only by attempting to persuade audiences that the negatively characterized metonymy of "Washington" (and by implication, the DOE) will play little role in joining these forces. Given the policy developments of Duncan's tenure, this language might have been perceived by audiences as disingenuous, with "Common Core" as a front for exactly the kind of "rigid, top-down mandates from Washington," Duncan derided.

The secretary of education ultimately conflates local/state and global centralized accountability with free-market mechanisms. One issue is Duncan's substitution of "competitors" for "countries," as in his phrase: "we're behind our international competitors in so many important ways."⁷¹ He constructs global standards as the point from which accountability derives, but the use of "competitors" situates international free markets as the source from which these standards emanate. These terms reflected President Obama's educational priorities, as in Obama's speech arguing that, "If we want to win the global competition for new jobs and industries, we've got to win the global competition to educate our people."⁷² This blending indicates that neither Duncan nor Obama saw a problem with thinking about education in terms

of both centralized accountability and free market values, ultimately attempting a reconciliation.

A rhetoric of state-driven standards locates accountability in terms of local/state and international standards, and the federal government as a spur for corporate-driven excellence in education on both of these fronts. Duncan uses business language to talk about large-scale federal programs: “We also changed the way we do business at the Department of Education. Instead of issuing top-down edicts, we provided incentives and support for states, districts, schools and local communities to undertake reform themselves, including offering more flexibility to states.”⁷³ One problem is that Duncan leaves centralized accountability a diffuse and ambiguous concept; at least in his rhetoric, removing the federal role of delivering “top-down edicts” begs the question of where centralized accountability resides. What Duncan makes clear is that local communities, states, and schools, which may have differing visions of what constitute “benchmarks,” can determine that for themselves.

Simultaneously, that the free market—which is the epitome of change and variability—is positioned as a means of accountability calls into question what exactly is centralized, as the gist of free markets is to resist centralized government planning. Duncan made clear that “we can’t rebuild public education on the same old system of rules and regulations,” explaining that the federal government could minimally encourage, or, in a turn to more corporate language, “incentivize” local reform such as the adoption of “state driven college and career-ready standards,” and support for “some of the most innovative projects in the education field.”⁷⁴ A larger difficulty is that in fact the DOE under Duncan did issue “top-down edicts,” from *Race to the Top* to the NCLB waivers. And while Duncan resisted the characterization, because his administration promoted them so heavily, the Common Core State Standards were largely viewed as a federal initiative, even though they were technically adopted at the state level.⁷⁵

Perhaps due to the centripetal and centrifugal emphases put in motion by his discourse of centralized accountability and international free market values, a general sense of fracture and fragmentation manifests across Duncan’s speeches. Despite appeals to common values, these breaches can be seen in his low “centrality” terms “denoting institutional regularities and/or substantive agreement on core values,” and low to medium “inspiration” terms or “abstract virtues deserving of universal respect,” perhaps

because of the ruptures felt from public feedback on his policies, or as the “Common Core” became a target. Duncan’s rhetoric appears to be relatively optimistic (see DICTION’s above-average “optimism” score) and specific (through high master variable “realism” and medium “variety” terms that indicate “a speaker’s avoidance of overstatement and a preference for precise, molecular statements”⁷⁶), suggesting attempts to draw close to and identify with audiences. But he’s generally a very satisfied speaker (as indicated by DICTION’s “satisfaction” terms), which, in sum, may have constructed a perception of Duncan as a distanced, guarded, proud elitist whose discourse hid his true interest in promoting the power of national educational policies through the veneer of local and global rhetoric.

At odds with the idea that creating identification with audiences is critical to persuasion,⁷⁷ Duncan’s speeches paradoxically combined appeals to commonality with a kind of formal, distanced discourse. His rhetoric had low identifying terms, and his low use of “familiarity” words (those most common in the English language⁷⁸) suggests a certain aloofness, especially when combined with his cognitive and formal language—see the very low “informal,” very high “analytical” (describing formal, legal, and hierarchical language) and high “cognition” term results, with the exception of low to medium language “complexity.” The LIWC program’s “authenticity” variable is very low for the complete body of speeches, suggesting a “guarded and distanced form of discourse.”⁷⁹ Overall, we observe the same kind of both/and emphases in this discourse that has manifested in the three paradoxes across all his speeches as a whole.

Locating centralized accountability with free market mechanisms, Duncan did not appear to see any tensions between these types of constructs. In our final section, we draw some implications for this finding and the paradoxical tensions we found throughout his language, especially in their relevance to educational policy developments during his tenure and beyond.

CONCLUSION

One goal of educational rhetoric is to make policy developments seem natural and inexorable, forging a need to think about attempts at persuasion in other than the most fleeting of ways. Duncan even said that “education

must be the one issue that we can all agree should transcend politics,”⁸⁰ disavowing his own rhetoric. We thus took a broad and deep look at the contours and functions of Duncan’s complete body of speeches while he was the U.S. secretary of education. Two main implications follow from our analysis.

First, recognizing tensions in the purposes of education invites a more encompassing theory of how educational rhetoric and policymaking can work. In particular, the “both/and” paradoxes we identified in Duncan’s speeches point to the affordances and limitations of characterizing his language, and perhaps his administration, solely through individualistic, managerial, and market-based conceptions. Given that U.S. education for decades has been propelled by discourses that clearly have such emphases, it is critical to highlight the functions these market-based discourses serve in creating perceptions and policies. Of no small consequence, McIntush clarifies how, for instance, “If education is defined as an *individual* good that helps a person to *compete* in the *free market* system,” then “the individual, and the governments closest to that individual (students, then parents, then teachers, then school administration, then local government, then state, then national) should be held responsible for school reform and the financing of that reform.”⁸¹ In the language of market-based rationales, we found similarly that Duncan’s rhetoric often erased the role of federal policy from reform, positioning educational agency in the hands of local and international entities, creating a paradox that undermined both his and his department’s responsibility for change.

At the same time, to fold all educational administrations onto the same individualistic, managerial, and market-based track risks glossing over important communal distinctions within and between the rhetoric of key figures. Duncan’s language about civil rights, social justice, and equity did appear to matter for many policy developments.⁸² If Duncan obscured historical tensions in the purposes of education through his paradoxical rhetoric, then scholarship can end up compounding this problem when it also obscures critical parts of a figure’s language. The ways in which a complete body of rhetoric works may differ substantially from common renderings, so rhetoricians should use both the tools of close reading and CATA to underscore these types of distinctions in future analyses of educational language.

Along these lines, both rhetoric and education scholars have rightly paid much attention to wholly market-based or “neoliberal” advances in U.S. education and around the world. Yet some have begun to call into question the use of the term “neoliberal” as a “catch all for something negative,” particularly in the context of schools,⁸³ where the term at times seems to have become a caricature, or contributed to the creation of “linguistic echo-chambers” that exclude scholars from “policy discussions that can effect substantive change.”⁸⁴ Others maintain that “there is simply nothing else as succinct and precise to describe the seismic shift that has occurred in the world political economy since the 1970s,”⁸⁵ specifically, the dominant view that the state’s role in society is chiefly to sustain and expand “free” markets for private exchanges, while a “public good” becomes defined as the aggregate of individual preferences.

We remain sympathetic to both of these views, seeing both the nuances possibly deflected by a catch-all use of the term neoliberalism, and the critical purchase it provides for so many developments on the world-stage. Yet, if the term is to retain utility, Duncan’s paradoxical rhetoric highlights that a broader theory of how neoliberalism operates through cabinet figures clearly committed to social justice and similar issues is needed. Following calls for more “precision” about neoliberalism and related concepts,⁸⁶ broad examinations of policy rhetoric can at least play a role in showing the weight afforded to terms associated with the concept, so that it doesn’t simply become a pejorative or signaling device that eschews the complexity of a complete population of discourse.

This follows Jeffrey St. Onge’s argument that “neoliberalism maintains its influence on political culture in large part because of its deep embeddedness in political language.”⁸⁷ As rhetoricians have highlighted, certain forms of public discourse can subjugate through their both/and qualities,⁸⁸ and Duncan’s paradoxes operate in a similar fashion by failing to acknowledge the potential tradeoffs at play in each of his linguistic emphases. From our analysis, however, we are ultimately left with the idea that charges of Duncan’s single-minded pro-market, managerial, capitalistic notions of education do not get us very far in understanding his rhetoric or the Obama administration’s educational legacy.

We make this claim without suggesting that Duncan and Obama always pursued a civil rights agenda in the educational realm. Katie Garahan highlights how “despite the dissimilar ideologies between the Bush and Obama

administrations, Obama's education reform plan echoed and intensified components of NCLB, particularly accountability."⁸⁹ Moreover, while the DOE joined with the Department of Justice to reduce inequalities in school discipline and to protect the rights of LGBTQ students, RTTT and the NCLB waivers offered by the administration in general ignored problems of poverty and racial and ethnic inequality, and did little to promote desegregation or address the unequal distribution of resources in and across schools. As Richard Rothstein argued, while the secretary of education often spoke about the concrete ways poverty can hamper students' ability to learn,

Duncan proposed a "blueprint" for re-authorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would hold schools accountable for getting all children "college- and career-ready" by 2020, whether they can see the blackboard, come to school hungry every day, or eat over the weekend. He designed and implemented the competitive grant program, Race to the Top, in which states earned points for expanding the charter school sector, developing data systems to tie teacher performance to student test scores, and making other educational changes. But no points were awarded for providing eyeglasses or food, or for implementing any of the multitude of practical programs that might actually improve disadvantaged youths' school readiness and thus their chances of college or career success.⁹⁰

We are not making a case that Duncan's rhetoric matched the reality of many of his policy outcomes, but rather that the rhetoric communicated an important set of values about education worth taking seriously on its own terms. At a minimum, knowing that Duncan weighted his language in this way begs greater public accountability for why his agenda in this area often did not match his rhetoric, or if Duncan even recognized how partial his educational policies became given the sum of his word choices.

Second, Duncan's speeches highlight the way that that policy rhetoric may saddle public education with responsibilities beyond its capacities. As David Tyack and Larry Cuban have noted in the history of U.S. education, "Americans have used discourse about education to articulate and instill a sense of the common good. But overpromising has often led to disillusionment and to blaming the schools for not solving problems beyond their

reach.”⁹¹ Indeed, in asking schools to solve the economic crisis of the Obama administration’s first term, both the president and his secretary of education likely drew attention away from labor and housing policies that may have had a more immediate effect on struggling families and industries.

In this sense, Duncan follows a long tradition of political leaders asking schools to remedy societal ills. Praising and blaming educators and educational institutions have a long history in U.S. public discourse.⁹² What is notable about Duncan’s discourse is the degree to which he asked schools to do everything at once. While Tyack and Cuban describe “cycles of policy talk” in which rhetorical emphases about the purpose of education shift back and forth through time (excellence versus equality, for example, or pluralism versus unity),⁹³ Duncan’s discourse asked schools to do it all: improve the economy and make society more equal, serve both public and private interests, and abide by centralized standards while competing in a global marketplace. In doing so, he ignored substantive tensions between these purposes in favor of adopting a “both/and” perspective that perhaps set up his school reform agenda in a way that dissatisfied many.

In this context, our work links into themes explored by other scholars, inviting further explorations of how paradoxes may actually be central to *sustaining* many educational conditions writ large. Luke Winslow found that educational language can work to solve apparent, similar paradoxes, such as the value placed in higher education in the United States versus the willingness of politicians to fund it.⁹⁴ Language urging a neoliberal reinvention of universities has functioned to “align with preexisting public vocabularies and socially shared orientations reflected in images of the Deserving and Undeserving Poor,” with, for example, the “Undeserving Professor” emerging as a key symbol holding paradoxes in place while advancing market-based actions in higher education.⁹⁵ Michael Steudeman also finds that “the heroic teacher myth functions as depoliticized speech; it reconciles the competing egalitarian and individualistic components of the American Dream by providing a heroic resolution to indissoluble tensions,” often making it seem like good teachers can and should do everything, including curing poverty.⁹⁶ While educational debates continue unabated in U.S. public culture, we should “nevertheless inquire into the quality and character of such debate.”⁹⁷ Looking to the paradoxical character of Duncan’s speeches reveals a rhetoric of both mixed purposes and quality.

In light of our first implication, policy rhetoric that may reach beyond its capacities surfaces the question of to what extent any attempt to solve social justice, poverty, and other related issues through education could be considered a market-based maneuver. We cannot bring finality to this question, but can reasonably surmise that using a both/and approach that shifts other domains of holistic support to the classroom could be seen as enacting a neoliberal logic, and also explain why critiques of Duncan so often miss the prevalence of communal and similar themes in his language. Where the incursions and overreach of one sphere of influence (the market) upon another (education) are cause for concern, then at least one of the ways this can be captured and theorized is through paradoxical rhetorics that fuse together seemingly opposing forces.

Having surveyed all of Duncan's speeches during the Obama administration through a variety of methods, we urge rhetorical scholars to continue examining texts by cabinet figures in part and whole, applying abductive criticism by zooming in and out on the discourse each step of the way. These types of texts ultimately attempt to address the question of what systems of learning a society should most hope to create, and who will be responsible for such efforts and how. With a critical eye on how such rhetoric works and what it does, we hope to have contributed to these debates, pointing toward paradoxes with consequential features and functions in the evolving politics of U.S. education.

NOTES

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 21. Terms are matched in each dictionary so that, for example, the “optimism” score increases with each word that fits into this variable category. Texts of any length or size

can be meaningfully compared, as the program counts words in each 500 word text segment and averages the results, standardizing the scores.

22. Roderick P. Hart, "The People's Voice during the 2016 Presidential Campaign," *American Behavioral Scientist* 61 (2017): 2, 4. One of the reasons we chose to conduct both CATA and close readings of the speeches was to offset some of the limitations of both approaches. Hart makes clear that if a word is used many times, of course, it does not necessarily make the term more meaningful. But he urges readers to recognize that "computerized language analysis makes quantitative what others would leave qualitative, and this is both its strength and weakness." Hart, "Redeveloping," 52. Another limitation is that CATA programs like DICTION associate words in a text that they search for with a composite databank that makes sentences like "the dog bit the man" and "the man bit the dog" become lexically identical. The "co-occurrence" of animals and people in these sentences is highlighted, however, so that scholars can examine what contextualists may ignore: "that people more often take their dogs to the park than their microwave ovens." Context becomes evanescent from this perspective, so that "each encounter with a text is a nonreplicating event; each textual inspection is a maiden voyage; each new text becomes nestled in a matrix of other texts (as the Rodney King videos so vividly remind us)," demonstrating how people, contexts, and texts shift. By operationalizing terms, however, some "conceptual stability across rhetorical forms" is gained, to "reproduce context post hoc." Hart, "Redeveloping," 53–56.
23. Roderick P. Hart and Colene J. Lind, "The Blended Language of Partisanship in the 2012 Presidential Campaign," *American Behavioral Scientist* 58 (2013): 594; Roderick P. Hart and Craig Carroll, "Help Manual," Diction 7.0., 2014, www.dictionsoftware.com/download.php?file=wp-content/uploads/2014/02/DICTION-7-Manual-2-26-14.pdf; Don J. Waisanen, "Satirical Visions with Public Consequence? Dennis Miller's Ranting Rhetorical Persona," *American Communication Journal* 13 (2011): 24–44.
24. Hart and Carroll, "Help Manual," 10.
25. Roderick P. Hart, *Campaign Talk* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 66.
26. For studies that have used LIWC with political discourse, see Richard B. Slatcher, Cindy K. Chung, James W. Pennebaker, and Lori D. Stone, "Winning Words: Individual Differences in Linguistic Style among US Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates," *Journal of Research in Personality* 41 (2007): 63–75; James W. Pennebaker and Thomas C. Lay, "Language Use and Personality during Crises: Analyses of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's Press Conferences," *Journal of Research in Personality* 36 (2002): 271–282; Kayla N. Jordan, James W. Pennebaker, and Chase Ehrig, "The 2016 US Presidential Candidates and How People Tweeted About Them," *SAGE Open* 8 (2018): 1–8.

27. James W. Pennebaker, Cindy K. Chung, Molly Ireland, Amy Gonzales, and Roger J. Booth, "The Development and Psychometric Properties of LIWC2007," LIWC, 2007, www.liwc.net/LIWC2007LanguageManual.pdf. The reasoning behind this phenomenon is simple. Programs such as LIWC capture such a large portion of public discourse because most people, most of the time, use common terms with some statistical regularity. In terms of U.S. public discourse, it's far more likely that, for instance, an individual will on average use the term "happy" rather than "jubilant" to describe a state of well-being.
28. James W. Pennebaker, Roger J. Booth, Ryan L. Boyd, and Martha E. Francis, "Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count: LIWC 2015 Operator's Manual," LIWC, 2015, https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/downloads.liwc.net/LIWC2015_OperatorManual.pdf.
29. Different than DICTION, the LIWC dictionaries are used to increment the number of words in each text in each variable category, subsequently converting each raw count into a total percentage of words in a final output (the program hence always presents scores between 0 and 100, which allows useful comparisons between texts). LIWC provides high and low norms for each of these variables too, however, making the type of categorical/variable-driven analysis the same. The norms, definitions, and descriptions of each variable for both programs can be found in their instruction manuals. Hart & Carroll, "Help Manual"; Pennebaker et. al, "The Development."
30. We excluded from our results DICTION and LIWC variables having to do with ambivalence, certainty, clout, and similar terms. We couldn't get a consistent read on these type of variables' results from both CATA programs. At the same time, from both the CATA categories and our close readings, we didn't see these variables as having much bearing on our overall inquiry and analysis.
31. Labaree, "Public Goods."
32. David K. Cohen and Barbara Neufeld, "The Failure of High Schools and the Progress of Education," *Daedalus* 110 (1981): 69–89. See also Jennifer L. Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 70.
33. Kantor and Lowe, "The Price of Human Capital."
34. Kantor and Lowe, "The Price of Human Capital," 76.
35. Arne Duncan, "The New CTE: Secretary Duncan's Remarks on Career and Technical Education," U.S. Department of Education, February 2, 2011, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/new-cte-secretary-duncans-remarks-career-and-technical-education, par. 13.
36. Arne Duncan, "Secretary Arne Duncan speaks at the 91st Annual Meeting of the American Council on Education," U.S. Department of Education, February 9, 2009,

- www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncan-speaks-91st-annual-meeting-american-council-education, par. 21.
37. Duncan, "Secretary Arne Duncan speaks," pars. 67–68.
 38. Hart and Carroll, "Help Manual," 10.
 39. Arne Duncan, "Remarks of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to the Congressional Caucus Hispanic Institute," U.S. Department of Education, September 30, 2013, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/remarks-us-secretary-education-arne-duncan-congressional-caucus-hispanic-institute, par. 20.
 40. Duncan, "Remarks of U.S.," par. 37.
 41. Sharon Subreenduth, "Theorizing Social Justice Ambiguities in an Era of Neoliberalism: The Case of Postapartheid South Africa," *Educational Theory* 63 (2013): 581–600.
 42. Candace Epps-Robertson, "The Race to Erase Brown v. Board of Education: The Virginia Way and the Rhetoric of Massive Resistance," *Rhetoric Review* 35 (2016): 108–120.
 43. Robert Asen, "Neoliberalism, The Public Sphere, and a Public Good," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 103 (2017): 10–12.
 44. Arne Duncan, "Secretary Arne Duncan's remarks at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, Virginia," U.S. Department of Education, March 14, 2011, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-kenmore-middle-school-arlington-virginia, par. 9.
 45. Duncan, "Secretary Arne Duncan Speaks at the 91st."
 46. One caveat here: an additional 309 references to "race" across the speeches were for the "Race to the Top" initiative.
 47. Duncan, "Secretary Arne Duncan Speaks at the 91st."
 48. Arne Duncan, "The Promise of Promise Neighborhoods: Beyond Good Intentions," U.S. Department of Education, November 10, 2009, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/promise-promise-neighborhoods-beyond-good-intentions, par. 3.
 49. Arne Duncan, "Equity and Education Reform: Secretary Arne Duncan's Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)," U.S. Department of Education, July 14, 2010, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/equity-and-education-reform-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-annual-meeting-national-association-advancement-colored-people-naacp, pars. 90, 97–98.
 50. Arne Duncan, "A Call to Teaching," U.S. Department of Education, October 9, 2009, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/call-teaching, par. 10.
 51. Au and Ferrare, *Mapping Corporate*; Lipman, *The New Political Economy*; Christopher Lubienski, "School Choice and Privatization in Education: An Alternative Analytical

- Framework,” *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 4 (2006): 244–93; Scott, “School Choice.”
52. Arne Duncan, “The Obama Record in Education,” U.S. Department of Education, April 30, 2012, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/obama-record-education, par. 20
 53. Duncan, “The Obama,” par. 55.
 54. Kelly P. Vaughan and Rhoda Rae Gutierrez, “Desire for Democracy: Perspectives of Parents Impacted by 2013 Chicago School Closings,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 25 (2017): 6–7; Hermansen, “There was No One.”
 55. Hart and Carroll, “Help Manual,” 10.
 56. McIntush, “Defining Education,” 429.
 57. Arne Duncan, “Remarks of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to the Closing Plenary of the U.S.-India Higher Education Summit, Georgetown University,” U.S. Department of Education, October 13, 2011, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/remarks-us-secretary-education-arne-duncan-closing-plenary-us-india-higher-education-s, par. 13.
 58. Arne Duncan, “Secretary Duncan Challenges National Education Association to Accelerate School Reforms,” U.S. Department of Education, July 2, 2009, www2.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/07/07022009.html, par. 7, italics added.
 59. Arne Duncan, “Opening Remarks of Arne Duncan at Indiana Town Hall with Governor Mitch Daniels,” U.S. Department of Education, April 15, 2011, www.ed.gov/news/speeches/opening-remarks-arne-duncan-indiana-town-hall-governor-mitch-daniels, par. 6.
 60. Tatiana Suspitsyna, “Accountability in American Education as a Rhetoric and a Technology of Governmentality,” *Journal of Education Policy* 25 (2010): 567.
 61. Arne Duncan, “Secretary Arne Duncan’s Testimony before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and the House Education and Labor Committee on the Obama Administration’s Blueprint for Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA),” U.S. Department of Education, March 17, 2011, www2.ed.gov/news/speeches/2010/03/03172010.html, pars. 20, 43.
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