

UNIVERSAL PRE-K AS A VEHICLE FOR REVERSING THE IMPACT OF HISTORIC
RACIAL SEGREGATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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Not all children begin their educational journey on equal footing. The purpose of this study is to investigate how universal prekindergarten (UPK) can serve as a key to remedying issues surrounding educational inequity. In order to understand educational inequity, I dive into the history of neighborhood racial segregation in the United States, and how it led to our currently unjust system. Racial segregation, specifically city zoning laws, created racially separate neighborhoods that are still relatively homogenous to this day. In order to ascertain how UPK could combat these issues stemming from historic racial segregation, I evaluate programs in three states to highlight the approach to UPK that each has implemented: New York, Georgia, and Oklahoma. Program features in Oklahoma have produced high-quality standards and the program has reached a larger percentage of 4-year-olds. I discuss multiple dimensions of proposed education reform, particularly for students of color, including the culturally-situated nature of high-stakes testing and its inability to fully capture student and school progress. I propose a culturally empowering approach to UPK, situated within the Dallas community, as a solution to current educational inequity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How does a former aspiring journalist wind up teaching preschool? In the midst of deadlines and interviews, my time spent volunteering at the Boys & Girls Club opened my eyes to the fact that I actually enjoyed working with children, and that many need support and encouragement to succeed in life. Engaging with children recommended to the program by social workers challenged my world-view. Exposed to a completely different reality, I realized I wanted to do more with my life than just pursue the next byline. I shifted into the world of education, with the specific goal of working with children from under-resourced backgrounds.

Even while still in my undergraduate education program, I strategically chose placements in under-resourced neighborhood schools. I was struck with the constant pressure to spontaneously cause children to perform on high-stakes tests, thoroughly neglecting their emotional needs and cultural backgrounds. Over and over again, I watched children melt into feelings of defeat and inferiority, simply because they didn't measure up to what was expected of them on a standardized test. I just couldn't stand it anymore, so I ran away to private education.

Fast-forward to my current situation of teaching preschool at a private school that serves an extremely affluent population. I love having an abundance of resources. I love having a child psychologist on-staff, ready to help me reach students struggling with anything, and ready to coach parents through what to do at home. I love teaching a room full of children who always get enough sleep, always have healthy food to eat at home, and always see the doctor or the dentist as soon as they need it (or maybe before!). What I don't love is that not all

children have those same chances. And I can't help but notice the mostly monochromatic nature of their skin color.

Which matches the similar monochromatic nature of my neighborhood, University Park. Whether I'm shopping at a grocery store, eating at a restaurant, or going for a run in my neighborhood, I can't help but notice the lack of diversity. Even in my own apartment building, every single tenant is white. Noticing these details caused me to want to research the history of Dallas, Texas, and what I discovered inspired this project.

While public education is guaranteed for all students in this country, the words fair and equal seem yet distant, utopian adjectives for describing American education. My home city of Dallas has vastly different educational experiences for children depending on income status, and after taking a look around the room, the issue of race is striking. Dallas Independent School District (DISD), the second-largest school district in the state of Texas, serving approximately 155,000 students, is comprised of primarily Latino and African-American children, many of whom live in low income neighborhoods. According to the fact sheet for the Dallas Independent School District for the 2017-2018 school year, 70.06% of students were Latino, 22.46% were African-American, and only 4.97% were white ("Dallas ISD," 2019). Yet white families have been grossly overrepresented in the Highland Park Independent School District, a small neighborhood north of downtown Dallas, serving an affluent population, with a median household income of \$189,485, according to 2016 data ("Highland Park," 2016). Latino students make up 5% of the student population, African-American students comprise 0.4%, and white students make up 88% of enrolled students, based on 2015-2016 school year ("Highland Park," 2018). Due to extravagant housing costs in the neighborhood, entrance to the schools is cost-

prohibitive. Yet because of the current school district zoning, the exorbitant property taxes are contained within one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city, despite the fact that HPISD is literally enveloped within the DISD zoning.

This racial and socioeconomic segregation is disturbing. The present-day inequity between DISD and HPISD serves to illustrate before my eyes the systemic racism still in place within the American education system. This problem in Dallas has fueled my desire to seek justice and equity for African-American and Latino children, among other racial and ethnic groups. It bothers me that a school so predominantly white receives such a targeted abundance of resources, with the system in place designed to keep the privilege within the homogenous bubble.

While policies and procedures within schools are important, fiscal policies, like allocation of funds according to neighborhood zoning, are catalytic for perpetuating poverty. Changes are necessary if we want to provide fair and equal education for all students within the public school system. And while certain initiatives like charter and magnet schools have proven to be helpful for specific children, primarily the children who show the greatest academic potential and need the fewest supports for heightened success, the neighborhood public schools required to provide services to children with special needs, ranging from autism to emotional disturbance issues, are racked with high-stakes testing pressure despite minimal funding support.

Conceptual Framework

This thesis works within the following assumptions around education:

- The United States government forced neighborhood racial segregation, leading to

racially homogenous communities, and ultimately schools (Rothstein, 2017; Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018; Phillips, 2006).

- Schools in predominantly African-American communities were under-resourced by the United States government, leading to inequity in educational opportunities (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018; Phillips, 2006).
- Economic policies, specifically public school funding structures, are instrumental for either perpetuating or eradicating poverty (Anyon, 2014).
- Providing high-quality universal pre-k to all children in all school districts, with an abundance of economic resources, is one way to reverse the effects of historic racial segregation.

Richard Rothstein captured the attention of the nation with his recent book, *The Color of Law*.

When slavery was abolished in 1866, all “badges of slavery,” or any remnant of unfair treatment due to race, were to be legally obliterated. Essentially, the government was to treat all people equally, regardless of race. Yet the American government maintained segregated, unfair, and unequal structures and practices for nearly a century after slavery was abolished. Rothstein makes a few major claims in his book: first, neighborhood racial segregation was legally imposed by the United States government. Second, this legally sanctioned segregation was unconstitutional due to the 13th amendment abolishing slavery and all “badges” of slavery. Third, these unjust laws led to limited opportunities for African-Americans. Fourth, because the American government created the current situation of inequity, it is the job of the government to provide a solution to the current inequity.

These structures of inequity are investigated in Jean Anyon’s book, *Radical Possibilities*. Anyon reinforces Rothstein’s claims, mentioning segregation and historically unjust allocations of resources, yet she focuses on the modern-day plight of inner-city neighborhoods, explaining that current governmental structures are perpetuating social injustice. Anyon’s major argument

in *Radical Possibilities* is that economic policies and structures implemented by the United States government are perpetuating poverty within urban neighborhoods. These macroeconomic policies have created the current problems within inner-city schools, that no amount of education reform can surmount. Anyon argues that first, improving the economic situation of the community itself will lead to better schools and improved academic outcomes. Second, the current academic structure measures children according to white middle-class cultural standards and perceives other races and cultures through a deficit lens, despite the fact that African-American and Latino children represent a disproportionately high percentage of children in poverty. Third, because more affluent school districts consistently perform better academically, this proves that economic resources produce improved academic performance.

These economic inequities plaguing urban neighborhoods and predominantly African-American communities are investigated on a specific city level in Eve Ewing's book, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*. Ewing chronicles systemic racist practices within Chicago public schools, further reinforcing many claims made by Anyon. Ewing draws several conclusions concerning government practices: first, how can a city official blame a school for being under-resourced when it is the government's job to provide the resources for public schools? Second, the schools receiving limited resources and experiencing forced closures are predominantly African-American, reinforcing the fact that the current system in place is racist. Third, the current segregated nature of public schools is a result of our country's history of "separate but equal" provision of services within the Jim Crow legal era. And fourth, racism hides within the structures of our American society, regardless of how individuals feel, and despite the fact that racist laws are currently "off the books."

The book *White Metropolis*, written by Michael Phillips, details the founding of the city of Dallas. *The Color of Law* becomes local, as white business elites purposefully separate themselves from the growing “colored” population in Dallas. This racism trickles down into the education system, as Dallas schools remained segregated years after *Brown vs. the Board of Education* was implemented nationally.

I evaluate pre-kindergarten policy in light of its powerful impact on future academic success, seen through these assumptions that I’ve evaluated and synthesized from the works of Rothstein, Anyon, Ewing, and Phillips. How are educational opportunities limited by skin color, and, ultimately, by zip code? If the current structure remains in place, primarily the reality of a large percentage of African-American children attending under-resourced public schools and low-quality childcare centers, systemic racism and educational inequity will continue. Universal pre-k seeks to level the educational playing field by providing high-quality early childhood education to all children regardless of race, income, or zip code. Specifically, rather than maintain a neighborhood-specific approach to early childhood education access, high-quality, culturally-empowered universal prekindergarten (UPK) can provide educational equity in communities previously neglected by the system, communities historically underserved due to racist structural practices. In this study, I pose the following research questions:

- What contributes to systemic racial segregation and income inequity within neighborhoods?
- What role does UPK play within this larger system of inequity? What can we learn from existing UPK programs?
- What steps could be taken to level the educational playing field for children in the United States of America?

Methods

This thesis offers an argument for universal pre-kindergarten's role within systems of inequality. I have developed this position as a result of a critical review of multiple bodies of literature: historical literature on school inequality and specific literature around different UPK programs. The UPK programs in New York, Georgia, and Oklahoma is evaluated in terms of how well or how poorly they foster educational equity for all children. I evaluate structural features, through the lens of Rothstein, Anyon, and Ewing, to ascertain how well they reverse systemic racism and segregation. Ultimately, a superior solution must be found, in order to empower all children to have an equal start in life.

I have organized this thesis into five chapters. In this first chapter I explain the problem, elaborate on my conceptual lens, and explain my research approach. In chapter 2, I dive into the United States government's history of forced racial segregation, and how that segregation led to current day structures of inequity. I focus on Dallas as a way to localize a national problem. In chapter 3, I document the importance of preschool for future academic success, and how different approaches to UPK policy can reverse our current-day inequity. In chapter 4, I discuss elements within the education system that need to be addressed to bring about further educational equity, specifically for African-American children, along with the political realities that need to be considered in order to implement UPK. In chapter 5, I wrap things up with my conclusion, discussing what needs to be done to improve educational outcomes for children of color.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF FORCED SEGREGATION IN DALLAS, TEXAS AND THE US

Now that I have explained my conceptual framework and my research agenda, in this chapter, I investigate our country's history of forced segregation, addressing the first research question: what contributes to racial segregation and income inequity within neighborhoods? I take a closer look at how legal policies limited opportunities among African-American citizens and within their communities. I focus on Dallas in particular in order to localize a national problem. I then move onto taking a closer look at the system in place today, analyzing it in light of its power at perpetuating inequity and racism. I specifically investigate the culturally-situated nature of our current structure of high-stakes testing, and how it positions white middle-class values as the standard and views other cultures through a deficit lens. I also look at the specifics within Chicago Public Schools, and how those policies specifically perpetuated racism within the city. I also look at our country's efforts to enculturate the Native American population, as historic proof of a white supremacist approach to education and American culture.

Government History of Forced Segregation

In an effort to more fully understand what has led to our current day situation of educational inequity, this section investigates the realities of historic segregation in the United States of America. In her book *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*, Eve Ewing makes a tragic and poetic statement about the reality of African-American life in this country:

Whether children were taken from their parents during slavery or parents were taken from their children by mass incarceration, black families in the United States have been forced to weather injustice after injustice, and ... schools can sometimes play a malignant role, (p. 110).

Rothstein (2017) highlighted that only recently have government policies been re-written to prohibit segregation and racist housing practices. Throughout most of the twentieth century, either legally-sanctioned segregation practices or racially charged prejudice have separated white and African-American communities. These legal practices existed throughout the Federal, state, and local governments. In reality, all of these laws and practices were unconstitutional. Because the United States constitution guarantees fair and equal treatment of all citizens, as soon as slavery was abolished in the 13th amendment, all legal policies upholding segregation were, in fact, unconstitutional.

As I cannot help but observe how systemic segregation has impacted my home city of Dallas, it is clear that white supremacy reigned supreme from the establishment of the city. Phillipps (2006) chronicled the story of a white business elite named Philip Sanger—he advocated using the educational system in Dallas to cultivate a ready and willing pool of laborers. He proposed that working-class children needed less exposure to intellectual pursuits and more emphasis on craftsman-oriented trade skills. Through a more simplistic education, children of middle-class families would be content to maintain their working-class status, without any ambition to participate in the political process. The white capitalist culture in Dallas sought to maintain governmental rule by white upper-class individuals.

Fairbanks (1999) explains that white business elites amended a city charter in 1907 to racially segregate neighborhoods, churches, and public venues. In an effort to maintain high property values and prevent civil unrest, segregation was legally imposed by the city of Dallas in 1916. City zoning laws were re-written to include stipulations regarding racial segregation. City blocks were designated white, black, and open blocks. African-Americans were prohibited from

moving into “white” blocks, and whites were unable to move into “black” blocks. Only blocks that were already integrated were open to either race. Dallas became the first city in Texas to legally force racial segregation. While the zoning ordinance addressed other things, such as business and residence projects remaining separate, it sought to alleviate concerns regarding integration (Fairbanks, 1999). City officials were concerned that African-Americans moving into white neighborhoods would cause turmoil. The law was overturned by the Texas Supreme Court in 1917, but in 1921 the Dallas City Council passed a law allowing residents to request racial segregation within their own communities. The racial assignment of a neighborhood could only be changed if an agreement was reached by at least three-fourths of residents (Phillips, 2006).

Even more concerning is the creation of the city of Highland Park. Highland Park was established in 1907 as a way for white business elites to escape the increasingly diverse and “colored” population of Dallas. Residents of Highland Park paid lower taxes and were charged lower utility costs. The cities of Highland Park and University Park fought to maintain independent police departments and schools, and resisted all attempts at racial integration (Phillips, 2006). A harmful and antiquated governmental policy of racism and segregation still affects the culture of Dallas in 2019, as is evident in the racial breakdown of students in Dallas ISD as compared to students in Highland Park ISD.

Shifting the focus from how segregation affected Dallas specifically to how it impacted the nation, Rothstein (2017) explains that several consequences of unfair treatment had a trickle-down effect, leading to current-day inequity. For example, because African-American veterans of World War II were not given government-guaranteed mortgages, there was less

wealth to pass down to following generations from home equity. Children and grandchildren were unable to reap the same financial benefits, limiting advantages like college attendance. Were these grandchildren to realize that this inequity is a direct result of an illegal government policy, they would have grounds to file a lawsuit. However, there is no legal avenue for avenging a policy that the Supreme Court has approved. It is the responsibility of the people, by urging elected officials, to remedy the situation through improved public policy.

Anyon (2014) further explains that during the financial “golden years” of the United States, African-Americans were excluded from many of the legal provisions to eliminate poverty, such as minimum wage, social security, and welfare. Because many of the provisions in the 1930s were left to local governments to enact, many southern communities excluded agricultural and domestic employees, which were predominantly filled by African-American citizens. This lack of provision created further barriers to upward social mobility among the African-American community.

Unfortunately, a philosophy prone to “colorblind” rhetoric and the avoidance of unpleasant subjects makes this problem more difficult to overcome. Rothstein (2017) highlights the treatment of the word “ghetto.” It was clearly and correctly used to define neighborhoods designated for Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, which were under-resourced and often maintained several barriers for departure. While Elvis Presley was able to embrace the term, current discourse often gingerly replaces it with the delicate word “inner-city,” yet no white families moving to gentrified neighborhoods are referred to as “inner-city” families. If we continue to tiptoe around the issue of race, segregation, and inequity in our country, nothing will improve.

The reality is that segregated neighborhoods lead to segregated schools, due to our current structure of neighborhood matriculation and funding (Ewing, 2018; Anyon, 2014). While *Brown vs. the Board of Education* sought to integrate neighborhood schools across the country, Dallas ISD was reluctant to implement the change. In 1961, the Dallas School Board announced a plan to introduce gradual integration. The plan would not be fully realized until the mid-1970s. For the 1961-1962 school year, a total of eighteen African-American children were escorted by police to be enrolled in eight schools that had been previously all-white. By 1964, this slow process had supposedly integrated three grades. While there were 9,400 African-American children in those grade levels, only 131 of those children were in integrated classrooms. In the midst of the growing trend of white flight to the suburbs, at the end of the 1969-1970 school year, 113 DISD campuses remained all-white (Phillips, 2006).

In 1970, Eddie Mitchell Tasby, an African-American man, decided to take matters into his own hands and file a lawsuit demanding his children be allowed into predominantly white schools (Hobbs & Grobmeier, 2018). Because the Texas political structure had remained so resistant to integration, the federal courts were called upon to exact justice for African-American students in DISD. Even after the case was dismissed in 2003, due to the state's compliance with federal mandates (Sanders, 2003), Dallas schools remain disproportionately segregated. White flight to the suburbs, alongside wealthy families choosing to pay for expensive private education, has created a racially and socioeconomically homogenous culture within DISD (Phillips, 2006). Because these inequities were created by government policy, it makes logical sense that it is the government's responsibility to correct the problem. African-

Americans were legally barred from entrance to middle-class neighborhoods; it is the government's obligation to take steps to bring about equitable opportunities (Rothstein, 2017).

Current Structures/Economic Policies Perpetuating Segregation and Poverty

This section explores current governmental structures that perpetuate racism, segregation, and inequity among schools and communities. While many issues regarding urban education reform are certainly important, broad macroeconomic issues and policies are creating an economic environment that is virtually impossible to surmount (Anyon, 2014). The reality is that racism hides within societal structures that the American government put into practice (Ewing, 2018). No amount of teacher preparation, high-stakes testing reform, pedagogical metamorphosis, or family support can fully circumvent a culture saturated in under-resourced social structures. Current federal, state, and local laws are maintaining the current situation of economic inequity. If racial and socioeconomic segregation is legally allowed to continue, urban education reform will continue to fall short of fully encompassing the issues that need to be addressed (Anyon, 2014).

The privatization of education has not served to alleviate problems surrounding segregation and inequity. Many governmental agencies have been privatized to certain degrees, and education is no exception. Anyon (2014) explains that legal language following World War II sought to democratize education and level the playing field, yet more recent legislation has taken education into the private sphere. Hursh (2007) describes the process that began in the 1980s: Neoliberal educational policies have sought to improve educational outcomes through increased competition. High-stakes testing has served as the quantifiable measure through which all children are judged. Neoliberalism also holds individuals solely

responsible for their success or failure—society is never to blame. In this way, standardized testing sees all children as equally able to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” if only they apply themselves with the appropriate gusto (Hursh, 2007). The No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and Race to the Top in 2009 ushered K-12 public education in the United States into arenas of increased accountability through high-stakes testing and more business-oriented practices aimed at increasing efficiency, building on this philosophy of neoliberal practices. States implemented their own plans for testing and accountability, following the Federal laws (Anyon, 2014).

Ewing’s work (2018) highlights the fact that neoliberal efforts like charter and magnet schools siphon precious funding away from neighborhood schools. This practice comes from the philosophy that the market will create higher quality. The highest-functioning schools will cause the lower-performing schools to improve or close. This maintains the idea that a private company will be more effective at delivering educational services than a governmental agency can. The people with the most potential will thrive and succeed in a marketplace built on competition (Ewing, 2018). This builds on the assumption that in order for America to succeed in the global marketplace, children must gain the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. The assumption is that standardized testing will capture whether or not those skills have been gained. However, standardized testing seems less effective at improving public education and more effective at ushering in the privatization of American education (Hursh, 2007).

We are not talking about goods, services, and products. We are talking about children. Anyone who has spent time in a preschool classroom can vouch for the fact that young children are not always efficient. Working with them, nurturing them, providing an environment where

they can grow, takes more than simply an increased output of efficiency. Children develop within their own time frame and at their own pace, a pace that cannot be hastened by stressed out educators. When we talk about “winners” and “losers,” we are talking about children who do not start out at an equal place. In a privatized educational system, children who are perceived to cause inefficiency are abandoned (Ewing, 2018).

This abandonment is particularly disturbing, given the lower percentage of children with special needs in charter schools. Charter schools are required to provide services for students with special needs; they are required to comply with mandates laid out in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Yet children with special needs apply to charter schools less frequently (Winters, 2015). Many are concerned that charter schools are unable to fulfill the mandates outlined in IDEA, citing that charter schools have the potential to discriminate against students with special needs, that they are ill-equipped to actually provide the services, and that they do not allocate appropriate funding to properly serve them (Estes, 2004). It seems another law is being broken under our watch.

Chicago: Racism in City Practices

Chicago city policies perpetuated racism, segregation, and inequity in an extreme way. It is a perfect example of neoliberal practices in urban education reform backfiring spectacularly, where African-American children are blamed for failing to “perform” in an under-resourced school (Ewing, 2018; Anyon, 2014). In 2013, Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced that 49 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) would be closed. These closures were a result of the schools being “under-utilized and under-resourced.” In this wave of closures, 90% of the schools had a majority of African-American students and 71% had primarily African-American teachers. While some

students are able to leave “failing” schools to find sanctuary in better schools, this only happens for a small percentage of children who ultimately end up in top-tier schools. Because historic segregation has caused neighborhoods to remain racially and socioeconomically homogenous, school closures rarely place at-risk students in better-resourced schools (Ewing, 2018).

Because the framework of American society was built during a time when “separate but equal” legal rhetoric divided the nation by race, structures remain today that maintain this separation (Anyon, 2014). This means that racism inevitably hides within structures, even if it has been obliterated from within individual hearts. Therefore, school closures that disproportionately affect African-American children are racist, because they are rooted in systemic segregation. Current policies fail to redeem the root of the problem (Ewing, 2018).

While privatization efforts were creating magnet schools, drawing in the most promising students in the community, with costly facilities and renovations, efforts at gentrification were eroding affordable housing. Many African-American families were displaced from their homes and turned away by closing schools. All these infrastructure changes were an effort to make the neighborhoods more attractive to white residents, set within a larger goal of reclaiming the city of Chicago as a world-class urban center (Ewing, 2018).

Public hearings took place in regards to the school closings, yet seemingly untouchable school and city officials remained unfazed by the emotional protests of many community members. Despite many parents appearing visibly distressed by the thought of their children crossing treacherous gang boundary lines to travel to their new schools, city officials cited quantitative statistics detailing low standardized test scores, numbers coldly detached from the human beings impacted by the changes. Residents received the news like one more sweeping

attempt to eradicate the city of its African-American population, continuing the historic pattern of rendering the city essentially uninhabitable. A history of legally forced segregation was followed by racist practices within the real-estate industry, leading to congested communities where African-Americans were forced to remain. Schools that were over-crowded were also receiving less money. (Ewing, 2018).

It seems ironic that city and school officials blamed the schools for a lack of resources, when it is the government's job to provide resources to public schools. In a community that cultivated a thriving pride for African-American culture and ideals, despite over-crowding of neighborhoods and under-funding of public services, the identity of the residents was fundamentally ignored by the system in place. Gentrification has pushed them from their homes, and school closures have taken away their schools.

Economic Structures

Poorly funded, under-resourced schools are a result of the poverty of the families and communities where they are located. It is less widely acknowledged that governmental policies perpetuate this issue. Often there are not enough jobs available close to communities where people in poverty live, along with a lack of sufficient public transit to travel to suburban areas with more entry-level service industry positions (Anyon, 2014). If we know that children with families who are more economically advantaged tend to do better academically, why has the emphasis of urban education reform continued to focus on privatization efforts like charter schools, high-stakes testing, and school closures? If we know that economic deficits have created the problems, why are we seeking solutions that further exacerbate issues of income inequity and racial segregation? We already know that test scores almost perfectly mirror the

income distribution. Solely focusing on curriculum issues or teacher quality is failing to address the heart of the problem (Hursh, 2007; Anyon, 2014).

Upon investigation of statistics surrounding test scores, academic achievement almost exactly mirrors income distribution. This makes even more sense after further analysis of the current trend for more affluent families to seek increased academic supports. Additional enrichment classes and private lessons, along with personal tutors for high-stakes assessments, have further widened the achievement gap between children in poverty and those in affluent families. Computers, sporting events, music lessons, and “play dates” with peers cultivate a thriving exposure to academic pursuits. Parents with more resources like time and money to invest in their children’s academic success nurture higher academic performance (Anyon, 2014). This privileged upbringing allows for greater success within the school structure of high-stakes testing performance. Because these children are uninhibited from passing the tests themselves, they are able to focus on more enriching academic activities, which can be better preparation for life outside of school (Hursh, 2007). An investigation into the practices of more affluent schools and families is a good barometer for what is necessary for academic excellence. Clearly, economic dynamics are highly influential for academic success (Anyon, 2014).

Despite the apparent success of affluent children in the world of academics, the number of K-12 students enrolled in high-poverty schools increased by 42% between 2000 and 2009, with almost half of African-American and Latino students in high-poverty schools, and only 5% of white students. The percentage of African-American children living in poverty is disproportionately high; 65% of African-American children live in poverty, compared to 31% of white children. The rates of unemployment and underemployment for African-American and

Latino workers is almost double what it is for whites, and if incarcerated African-Americans were included into the figure, the amount would be even higher—about two-thirds of incarcerated individuals in the United States are African-American or Latino (Anyon, 2014).

The reality is that many people of color are employed by companies who pay their employees minimum wage, which is not enough for someone to live on, factoring for the cost of living in this country. Because companies are not required to pay employees a decent living wage, the government subsidizes corrupt business practices, through programs like welfare, food stamps, and subsidized housing. And while education can be a ticket for upwards social mobility, African-Americans and Latinos with master's degrees earn no more than whites with bachelor's degrees throughout their lifetime. This can be explained through an investigation of prejudiced hiring practices for many high-wage jobs (Anyon, 2014). While education reform must be addressed, we must admit that even if children are able to graduate from a high-quality public education, they will enter a world that still maintains racism within policies and practices.

Culturally Situated Nature of High-Stakes Testing

Another structure perpetuating inequity is the current culture of assessment in American public schools, which involves high-stakes testing as a means of measuring student learning and teacher success. This is a system set in place by the American government that is serving to further perpetuate inequity within the education system. Anyon (2014) describes that standardized assessments are culturally situated instruments, using white middle-class cultural norms as a baseline for academic achievement. Standardized assessments fail to capture the full extent of knowledge and language that African-American children bring to the

table. Essentially, American public schools train children into the language and culture necessary to succeed in white middle-class society. Because of this, rather than teaching a balanced view of the world and exposing children to the wealth of knowledge available from all cultures, children are taught to “codeswitch” into the language and culture of the test. African-American children, and children from under-resourced backgrounds, have a wide array of knowledge and experience that should be seen as an asset (Anyon, 2014). Because of the current structure of mandated curriculums solely focused on standardized test preparation, creative teachers are unable to tailor educational experiences to reflect the cultures and assets of the children in the classroom. Rather than create a rich curriculum, celebrating linguistic and experiential differences, children must be taught to speak the language of the test (Hursh, 2007). Instead of creating a culture that celebrates the African-American experience, such as the case in southern Chicago neighborhoods, American schools center white experiences and middle-class values (Ewing, 2018).

Because of the culturally situated nature of high-stakes testing, and because it measures so few learning styles, it is limited at evaluating the impact of UPK programs. While quantitative studies have a more concrete means of assessing a program’s effect, they do nothing to address the issues surrounding the current culture and structure of public schools. Essentially, quantitative studies are simply measuring how effective a school is at preparing children for a culturally situated high-stakes test.

Unfortunately, the American education system is deeply reliant on numerical data from high-stakes testing. Most policy decisions are made based on charts and graphs that are created based on multiple choice questions answered by children in hushed classrooms. Few

policymakers seem equipped to discern the limiting nature of cold data and high-stakes testing. Children are more than what they can bubble in on a page or click on a screen. Children can be deeply successful in ways no standardized test can capture (Ewing, 2018). Additionally, an emphasis on high-stakes testing as a means of measuring academic excellence tends to “push down” academic standards to younger and younger grades. If pre-k maintains an emphasis on activities more suited for kindergarten or first grade, developmentally appropriate activities can be lost in the shuffle and children may develop a sense of learned helplessness, as they are expected to do things their minds are not yet ready to do. Preschool children need freedom to move, explore, create, and socialize (Wright, 2011).

Ultimately, focusing on rote memorization of skills in preparation for a paper and pencil test greatly stifles intellectual development in young children. The culture of high-stakes testing does not prepare children for a dynamic, innovative, fulfilling life in the ever-evolving world of the 21st century. Children need to be prepared for critical thinking, innovation, problem-solving, and ideation. The fact that public schools as a whole currently fail to cultivate 21st century thinkers is especially harmful to children from under-resourced backgrounds (Wright, 2011). In order to become 21st century scholars, schools would need to focus resources and curriculum to innovative and expressive educational pursuits, such as the arts and sciences. Schools are unable to cultivate critical thinkers if their hands are tied in a district-mandated curriculum aligned with standardized testing goals, which siphons away precious instructional time and resource funding (Hursh, 2007). Clearly this neoliberal focus of education reform has served only to destroy American education, creating a pool of government-chosen “losers.”

Lesson Learned: Native American Heritage Stolen by American Education

One need only look to our nation's history of cultural indoctrination of the Native American population to understand the foundational belief of white supremacy. During the 1800s, Native American children were forced to learn English, rather than continue to speak in their first language. Because they were different than white European settlers, they were seen as threatening; they were forced to comply to cultural norms (Ewing, 2018).

Adams (1995) described the practice of boarding schools, which were used to "acculturate" Native American children to white European standards of proper living. Schools were created to completely sever children from their cultural heritage. The Federal government sought to eradicate the Native American problem by destroying them. The white Americans' desire to acquire land completely sidestepped any right of the Native American population to anything. Because everything that defined Native American culture was so different from western European ideals, they were seen as inferior and in need of saving. Therefore, Native Americans were forced to become "civilized" or be extinguished. Native American schools forced children to adopt European language, religion, and culture (Adams, 1995).

Yet in our present-day reality, a more culturally empowered curriculum has replaced the cruel oppression of the past. A peek inside a school on the Yurok reservation in northern California shows children learning their indigenous language, being immersed in their cultural heritage, and learning from one of the elders of their village, within the course of the normal school day. It is possible to achieve a culturally-empowering stance on education (Ewing, 2018).

CHAPTER 3

WHY PRESCHOOL IS SO IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Now that I have explained the American history of racial segregation, which led to current-day structures of inequity, in this chapter, I investigate why preschool is so important for future academic success. I address the second research question: what role does UPK play within this larger system of inequity? And what can we learn from existing universal prekindergarten (UPK) programs? I analyze UPK in light of its power at reversing inequity within communities. I specifically compare universal approaches with more targeted approaches, seeking to understand which approach is better at reversing the effects of historic segregation. I then move onto evaluating the approaches to UPK in New York, Georgia, and Oklahoma, in order to determine which approach does a better job at reversing educational inequity. I also evaluate how UPK can impact specific groups of children.

Benefits of Preschool and UPK in General

This section seeks to investigate what role UPK can play within the current system of inequity. How can we reverse the evils caused by government-sanctioned racial segregation (Rothstein, 2017)? And how can we go about transforming current structures that perpetuate inequity and racism (Anyon, 2014)? Clearly many problems exist within the universe of urban education reform. Yet when looking to the practices of wealthy Americans, high-quality preschool experiences are a given. If we want to create an educational system that elevates all races to an equal footing, providing high-quality, universal prekindergarten programs is essential.

It has been well-documented that universal, state-funded pre-k boosts cognitive results

on test scores. Gormley, Phillips & Anderson (2018) explained that several studies have been conducted on universal programs in Oklahoma, Georgia, and Boston, alongside targeted programs in New Jersey, New Mexico, and North Carolina, all of which have shown that children receive cognitive gains through preschool, at least in short-term outcomes.

Many long-term studies, such as the Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Project, have shown that high-quality preschool experiences produce long-term positive effects in several domains, including educational success, socio-emotional skills, improved health, and reduced crime rates, tens of years after the preschool experience has concluded (Gormley, et al., 2018). Derman-Sparks (2016) described the Perry Preschool Project, which occurred from 1962-1967, and focused on a preschool that served an African-American population exclusively. The children were of an under-resourced background, and most of the families in Ypsilanti, Michigan lived in government-subsidized housing. The longitudinal study found that the preschool program had significant long-term impacts on the lives of the children enrolled; this led to a positive impact on the surrounding community as well. The full effect of the program was evident once the children entered high-school. The children continued into life with increased resilience (Derman-Sparks, 2016). However, the program served a specific group of children under conditions not always present within American public schools.

The Abecedarian Project is another long-term study that showed the benefits of early childhood education. Children in the Abecedarian Project were placed into treatment and control groups in a randomized trial. They were chosen for the program because they were deemed “at-risk” for academic failure or developmental delay, due to their low-income status. The children in the treatment group received early intervention from infancy through entrance

into kindergarten. The program significantly improved the children's cognitive and academic skills, and the benefits persisted into elementary years. Follow-up studies found positive outcomes at age 15 and into young adulthood, with program participants significantly more likely to be enrolled in college (Campbell, Pungello, Burchinal, Kainz, Pan, Wasik, Sparling, Barbarin, & Ramey, 2012). However, again, this study chose a very specific group of children based on low-income status, and therefore is limited in scope and generalizability.

Studies of the effects of UPK are beginning to emerge, showing increasing long-term positive outcomes for alumni of UPK, with academic success in the elementary years. However, some of these studies have used methods that are limited in terms of controlling for outside factors (Gormley et al., 2018). Additionally, it has been suggested that long-term effects emerging from exposure to high-quality preschool experiences may be rooted in a variety of positive influences. Some studies have found correlations with reduced crime rates and higher wage potential. Perhaps preschool programs are instilling cognitive alongside non-cognitive skills (Fitzpatrick, 2008). This would insinuate that only high-quality programs will be powerful enough to bring systemic change. UPK programs have led to an increase in academic achievement among children in urban fringe and rural areas in particular, according to findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. These areas benefit the most from such a program, due to increased availability; there may not have been options for preschool education beforehand (Fitzpatrick, 2008). If we want to level the educational playing field, access to high-quality pre-k must be available to all geographic locales, from urban apartment buildings to homes rising from amidst corn fields.

Anyon (2014) explains that high-quality preschool programs are an essential experience for affluent families. Many high-quality preschools are extremely competitive. Often, the cost of such programs can surpass state school college tuition. We must find a way to alter the current structure, in order to bring that level of quality to the entire American public, given the injustice that brought privileged families to their current position of power (Anyon, 2014). Wright (2011) elaborates on the fact that lower quality and more affordable early childhood opportunities tend to score lower on elements such as teacher/child ratio, focus on academic activities, and professional development requirements. In fact, children in families of highest poverty have been found to have the least educated preschool teachers. This inequity and disparity essentially sets children on course for less educational opportunity throughout their academic careers. Upon further investigation, the vocabulary of children at three years old mirrors the eventual rate of high school graduation. And unfortunately, achievement mirrors the economic advantages of the community where the school is located.

When children are constantly surrounded by peers and even teachers who are of the same socioeconomic class and culture, children are missing out on a dynamic opportunity to be exposed to diversity. Additionally, when children are in academically homogenous environments, lower achieving students are unable to receive feedback from more advanced peers, and more advanced students don't learn how to have patience and empathy for different types of children. Essentially, a crucial layer of social and emotional development is lost when children are in strictly homogenous settings (Wright, 2011).

Yet certain groups of children benefit more from enrollment in UPK. In one study by Fitzpatrick (2008), children from under-resourced backgrounds in both small towns and rural

areas showed increases in math and reading skills, because of the availability of UPK. Improvements were as high as 12% of a standard deviation. Additionally, the largest gains were seen among Latino and African-American children; white children did not improve much. While it is very evident that UPK has impacted short-term goals like immediate test scores, it remains unclear whether or not it has an impact on long-term goals such as high school graduation rates. However, because high school graduation happens after so much time has passed, it may be influenced by many other factors. It would be nearly impossible to control for all the variables present (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

Considering the incredible power of early childhood education, what is the best way to implement public access to pre-k? What new system would set out to eradicate injustice and inequity founded in historic racial segregation (Rothstein, 2017)? What current structure founded in racism must be abolished in order to provide equal opportunities to all children, regardless of background (Anyon, 2014)?

Targeted vs. Universal

Thus far in education policy, structure for public preschool has been either targeted or universal in access. Both targeted and universal approaches to preschool policy have proven to produce academic benefits for children from under-resourced backgrounds. An article by Hinitz (2014) describes that Head Start was founded in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. Head Start services were targeted to children in under-resourced backgrounds as a way to equalize access to education services. Yet Head Start was designed to target the whole child: medical, dental, psychological, and nutritional support was provided for children and their families. In fact, Head Start is legally required to implement curricula that targets the

whole child approach to instruction. While whole-child approaches to curricula have produced higher quality programs, they are not as impactful on improving performance on high-stakes tests. (Jenkins, Duncan, Auger, Bitler, Domina, & Burchinal, 2018). This approach to early childhood education is better for children overall. Only focusing on high-stakes testing as a measure of success is an inferior approach to school, student, and teacher evaluation. Failing to acknowledge holistic aspects of child development is ultimately limiting how we view early childhood education (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018).

Head Start was also founded with parent and community involvement in mind. Many facilities invited parents to be deeply involved with running multiple aspects of the program. Leaders who embraced poverty as a systemic issue were most supportive of deep parental involvement (Hinitz, 2014). This view of involving parents in the governance of a school supports the view that parents and community members are seen as assets. This asset-minded view is more powerful at erasing deficit-minded views of families from under-resourced neighborhoods, and ultimately would lead to a more empowered stance on school improvement (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018).

Barnett (2010) explained a national randomized trial conducted in 2010, which found that Head Start produced small benefits beyond preschool programs in general, yet no persisting academic advantages lasted beyond kindergarten and first grade. Research has shown that children from under-resourced backgrounds benefit greatly from being exposed to more advantaged peers, yet Head Start limits that exposure due to its exclusive focus on children in poverty. Middle-class children also benefit from access to UPK; their gains may not be as drastic as those found among children from under-resourced backgrounds, yet they are

still significant. Additionally, many families may refuse to enroll their children in programs aimed at children in poverty due to the stigma associated with such a service. This stigma is erased in the presence of a universal approach. Although a universal program may cost more, its benefits far outweigh the costs (Barnett, 2010). Bartik (2011) further explored the fact that many people believe that targeted pre-k programs will be most effective at assisting children from under-resourced backgrounds. Many policymakers are interested in assisting families from lower socioeconomic echelons. However, those that advocate a more universal approach claim that middle class children will also benefit, therefore justifying the cost. The reality is that children from middle class families also enter school far behind their financially privileged peers. If this is the case, why should funding only be directed to children in low-income neighborhoods? While those children may benefit more, middle-class children also benefit to a statistically significant level. The benefit of UPK outweighs the cost, even on a purely economic basis. Perhaps a universal approach with additional supports for under-resourced communities would be the most effective at leveling the academic playing field (Bartik, 2011).

Yet which approach is superior at eliminating systemic inequity stemming from historic racial segregation (Rothstein, 2017)? Perhaps a peek into a few targeted approaches can shed light on the subject. New Jersey has implemented a targeted pre-k program, in order to direct funding to the neediest children. Gomez-Velez (2015) detailed the fact that the State Supreme Court has mandated that high-quality, public school district pre-k be provided in urban districts labeled as “high need.” These policies have come about as a result of educational finance cases dating as far back as the 1970s. New Jersey is an example of a comprehensive pre-k program targeted at the most at-risk children. These policies have been established in response to

remedying the problems caused by government-mandated segregation policies which were set in place before the Civil Rights Movement. Because of efforts to maintain high-quality educational services, New Jersey's program is one of the best in the country (Gomez-Velez, 2015).

Chicago Child Parent Centers (CPC) provided a preschool program to Chicago Public School children who were primarily African-American and from under-resourced backgrounds (Magnusun & Waldfogel, 2005). The program had very high quality structural features. The teachers all had a bachelor's degree and early childhood certification. A large portion of academic time was spent on specific language skills and practice. Much support was given to parents and families, including education, meals, and health screenings. A study compared children in the CPC program with peers who did not attend the program. CPC improved academic results by 0.64% of a standard deviation at the end of kindergarten, and positive effects on math and reading results persisted into elementary school, as well as high school graduation rates (Magnusun & Waldfogel, 2005).

Bartik, Gormley & Adelstein (2012) explained that Tulsa's UPK program has chosen to allocate funding and resources according to neighborhoods with greater need. The state of Oklahoma provides a larger subsidy for full-day programs than half-day, along with a larger subsidy for children eligible for free-lunch. Also, keeping in mind that families of lower income status may benefit from a full-day program, for additional childcare and heightened educational support, Tulsa has chosen to put a higher concentration of full-day programs in under-resourced neighborhoods (Bartik, Gormley, & Adelstein, 2012). If children from under-resourced backgrounds benefit most from UPK, and middle-class children still benefit,

Oklahoma's approach of universal access with additional supports for under-resourced neighborhoods seems most logical at equalizing opportunity.

Yet how can we determine quality? While New Jersey may have set high standards for quality preschool, the federal government does not regulate preschool in any way, and states are free to set their own guidelines. Even within specific districts that offer public school pre-k, schools have a great deal of autonomy in defining practices (Pianta & Howes, 2009). Because quality seems arbitrary in terms of structure and regulation, it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what is leading to various outcomes. To eradicate inequity, high quality must be guaranteed.

This quality is necessary due to the increased likelihood of African-American children to attend preschool; yet the programs they attend may be of lower quality. African-American children are much more likely than white children to attend Head Start programs. While Head Start has made progress at equalizing education, several factors may be inhibiting its impact. In fact, efforts at educational equity could worsen if children are exposed to programs that are less academic in nature, less rigorous, or less diverse (Magnusun & Waldfogel, 2005). While African-American children are more likely to be enrolled in preschool or center-based care, and children in center-based programs are found to be more school-ready overall. When investigating for structural factors like teacher/child ratio, level of teacher education, or academic focus, most center-based programs tend to be mediocre at best. While many Head Start programs do meet National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines, many Head Start programs are more in step with the quality of center-based care (Magnusun & Waldfogel, 2005). Given the mixed and lackluster results of Head Start, is this

Federal program currently in place really elevating children from under-resourced backgrounds to an equal footing with advantaged peers (Anyon, 2014)?

A study comparing Georgia's UPK program with Head Start found higher test score results with the students enrolled in the universal program. However, both the state-funded program and Head Start schools located in under-resourced neighborhoods scored low in terms of quality (Henry, Gordon, & Rickman, 2006). This would suggest that the result of racially segregated neighborhoods still plagues current-day residents (Rothstein, 2017). The UPK classrooms did score better than Head Start in terms of quality, but not to a statistically significant level. However, not all of the teachers working within the UPK program had bachelor's degrees, and 28% of the Head Start programs were NAEYC accredited. All the UPK classes housed within public schools were unable to seek NAEYC accreditation, and 4% of center-based programs received accreditation. In general, more UPK teachers were more highly educated, yet the programs seemed relatively similar. However, children who had attended the UPK classes scored higher on having a positive attitude about school, expressed more curiosity, and showed more advanced social and communication skills. On a pre-test assessment at the beginning of kindergarten, children who had attended UPK scored higher than Head Start alumni on all standardized academic assessments. These data are, of course, taken into consideration alongside the reality that Georgia's UPK program offers spots in public school district schools alongside center-based care (Henry et al., 2006).

An investigation of Tulsa's UPK program by Jenkins, Farkas, Duncan, Burchinal, & Vandell (2016) compared outcomes with Head Start, which showed statistically significant differences between the two groups. One of the major differences between Head Start and Oklahoma's

UPK program is emphasis: Head Start has a more holistic focus which includes social, emotional, and physical wellness, while UPK is directly geared towards improving academic outcomes in preparation for kindergarten. Another important difference is curriculum; however, investigating the specifics of Head Start's curriculum proves to be difficult, given the fact that programs use different curriculum approaches, alongside the reality that teachers may vary in their adherence to particular materials. It is also important to note that Head Start often combines three and four year olds in the same classroom; this can lead to children being exposed to the same content two years in a row, or being limited to the academic capacity of the youngest children in the room. The study set out to determine if children were better prepared for kindergarten after two years in Head Start, or one year in Head Start followed by one year in Tulsa's UPK program. The results showed that children scored higher in early reading skills after spending one year in Tulsa's UPK program, rather than staying in Head Start for a second year. Letter/word identification skills were almost twice as high for children attending UPK. Although both programs produced similar positive results with writing and spelling tasks, and neither program boosted children's math abilities (Jenkins, Farkas, Duncan, Burchinal, & Vandell, 2016).

Overall, UPK programs have higher-quality approaches to process and structure features. Most state-funded programs meet or exceed NAEYC guidelines. The teachers tend to receive higher pay, more professional development, and better resources. Additionally, programs within public school district schools are higher-quality than state funded programs that utilize center-based care, such as the mixed-delivery system implemented by Georgia and New York (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

While UPK programs tend to focus more on academic outcomes, such as improved scores on high-stakes tests in kindergarten and later elementary years, is this focus coming at too high a cost? (Ewing, 2018). While Head Start may not produce the same level of academic outcomes, it is contributing to improvements in holistic, child-centered growth. If we are to look to the practices of wealthy families as a barometer for excellence in early childhood education (Anyon, 2014), we must address academic outcomes alongside whole-child development. Performance on school-related tasks, such as early reading skills and early math skills, is, of course, important. Yet so are physical health, nutritional wellness, physical fitness, psychological wellness, and social/emotional understanding. Ignoring whole-child development for the sake of high performance on high-stakes standardized tests will only prepare children for the standardized test. Perhaps the school and ultimately the people in power within the district will benefit from that increased performance. But the children trapped within the system will ultimately suffer (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018).

Investigation of UPK in Three States: New York, Georgia, and Oklahoma

What can we learn from UPK programs already in existence? This section teases apart how three states have implemented the program. New York, Georgia, and Oklahoma have initiated state-wide UPK in different ways. Which state's approach does a better job at leveling the educational playing field? Both New York and Georgia introduced a mixed-delivery system, placing children in either public school pre-k classrooms or center-based care, depending on availability. Oklahoma's approach features pre-k classrooms housed within public school district schools only, guaranteed for all parents who choose to register their children. While the mixed-delivery system has produced some benefits, Oklahoma's program has provided a higher-

quality program, in terms of structural features. Within the current system of high-stakes testing and quantitative data as a means of assessing impact and quality, which I ultimately believe is a flawed measure for the success of an early childhood education program (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018), Oklahoma's program has produced consistently statistically significant results.

New York

Structural Features

The state of New York began its implementation of UPK in 1997, with the intention to gradually expand access, due to budgetary restrictions. UPK expanded from 25% of 4-year-olds in the state to 30% between 2002 and 2005 (Morrissey, Lekies, & Cochran, 2007). It launched a full-day, fully universal pre-k program for the 2014-2015 school year. The program is funded directly through the state budget. Funding is either directed within the public school district or to a partnering community-based organization (CBO), with at least 10% of the funding budget directed to CBO's. The CBO must meet the standards for quality laid out by the school district ("Prekindergarten Collaboration Requirement," 2018). The CBO's are evaluated with a rubric, which details multiple factors of program quality. New York has developed pre-k standards that align with the Common Core, and UPK classrooms, including those housed within CBOs, must use curriculum materials aligned with the standards. Developmentally appropriate practices must be followed and teachers are required to implement a variety of activities, fostering development in the realms of cognitive, social, and emotional training (Morrissey et al., 2007). Classrooms may not exceed 20 children and there must be at least one lead teacher and two paraprofessionals for 20 children. Lead teachers are required to be certified in early childhood

education or a related field (“NYS Universal Prekindergarten Program,”2018). All teachers in the state of New York must have a master’s degree to become certified in early childhood education (Morrissey et al., 2007).

Upon first glance, New York seems to have a good approach underway. It may have taken over a decade to become universal, but the current implementation is a step in the right direction to equalizing educational opportunities. Funding UPK through the state, rather than through individual neighborhood budgets, is a better approach to funding. CBO’s are held to the same standards of quality as the public-school programs, and it makes sense to partner with already existing structures to allow for faster access. Yet I hope New York will eventually house all classrooms within public school districts. I cannot imagine CBO’s being able to maintain a consistent approach, given the unique culture each type of preschool program likely cultivates.

Program Impact

While New York has implemented UPK, it has earned the infamous reputation of having the most deeply segregated schools in the country, by race and class. Segregation in New York City is extreme (Gomez-Velez, 2015). This segregation has led to inequality in educational opportunities and stark achievement gaps. There is a \$2,152 difference in spending per student in high-poverty districts and low-poverty districts (Anyon, 2014). While some efforts at school improvement have been effective, others have simply exacerbated the problems. UPK programs seek to provide high-quality preschool education to all children, yet providing equal educational opportunities has not yet been realized in New York. *Brown vs. The Board of Education* sought to reverse the segregation that had been forced by the American

government. In the current era of “colorblind” legal rhetoric, a holistic UPK program does not fully right the wrongs committed by the American government. The neediest children are still unable to experience high-quality educational opportunities, with the system in place as it is, perpetuating race and class segregation (Gomez-Velez, 2015).

Unfortunately, extreme segregation has coincided with increased efforts at providing more choice and free-market-based educational options. Because of this, New York has failed to address increased racial and socioeconomic isolation of students, despite diversity and integration initiatives (Gomez-Velez, 2015). The impact of race and class segregation on school quality has been largely ignored within discussions of education reform, as Rothstein would agree. High-stakes testing continues to be a barometer of school effectiveness, despite the fact that it perpetuates racial and cultural bias, yet another example of how neoliberal education policies have simply served to privatize education, not to improve it (Hursh, 2007). Yet because rhetoric must remain “colorblind,” the neutral nature of high-stakes testing remains unquestioned in legal policies. This failure to address issues of bias and segregation has hindered efforts to provide fair and equal access to all students (Gomez-Velez, 2015).

The legal review by Gomez-Velez (2015), documenting the intricacies of the education system in New York City, perfectly encapsulated the issue, stating:

The reduced availability of federal constitutional remedies for the harms to public education wrought by segregation and structural inequality prompted a search over the years for remedies through state constitutional challenges to the equity and/or adequacy of state education funding allocations. Public school funding has long been structured to align with local property taxes, despite an environment of persistent race and income segregation in housing, (p. 326).

Efforts at education reform, aimed at improved struggling schools labeled as “failing,” have neglected to acknowledge the root cause of the issue. Market-based reforms, rather than

alleviating problems, are actually increasing concerns (Gomez-Velez, 2015). Higher quality schools produce higher quality results, and high-quality schools are created through resources, resources which the American government is responsible to provide (Ewing, 2018).

Unfortunately, New York has not yet guaranteed that all children in urban school districts, typically labeled as “failing” will receive pre-kindergarten services through public school districts. Past programs were targeted at providing opportunities for the neediest children, yet more recently have expanded to become more universal. Efforts to provide preschool in New York were struck down due to budgetary issues, yet finally won more political support when services were guaranteed for all children. Because of limited budget, New York’s UPK program was implemented in partnership with community-based organizations, much like the system implemented in Georgia. Unfortunately, many community-based organizations are not held to the same standards of quality and academic rigor as programs housed within public schools (Gomez-Velez, 2015).

This partnership with community-based organizations has created new issues in regards to community impact. Sipple & McCabe (2016) explain that the way schools partner with a community has the power to help or to harm the strength of the community. At times, when schools shy away from engaging with the neighborhood, choosing rather to advance professional and state curriculum goals, the school can become isolated from its community. These sorts of relationships between schools and communities come to view residents through a deficit lens, believing that they have little to offer in the education process. It creates the belief that children need to be “saved” from their communities. Rather than seeing their families as an asset, they are seen as a hindrance to success. New York schools that set out to

partner with families, in a relationship characterized by mutual respect, have been found to bolster the vitality of the neighborhood (Casto, Sipple, & McCabe, 2016).

Because of the intense segregation still present within neighborhood schools in New York, UPK may have difficulties operating within the current geographic structure. Because children tend to go to school close to where they live, deeply segregated communities will lead to deeply segregated schools. Yet in more densely populated areas like New York City, children within a relatively small zone could be integrated with very diverse peers. However, if privatization efforts continue, charter and magnet schools will siphon away funding from neighborhood public schools. If all efforts were redirected to public education alone, neighborhood public schools would have more resources to improve, and could expand in-house efforts like advanced placement courses and enrichment classes. Without the cessation of neoliberal educational philosophies, UPK will fall short of eradicating inequity in New York.

Gaps in Research

Not many studies have reviewed New York's UPK program. There is much left to learn from New York's approach to UPK. This lack of literature is likely due to the recent full implementation of UPK in the state. Further research into New York's program impacts, community impacts, and cultural responsiveness will more accurately guide policy as more states adopt UPK.

Georgia

Structural Features

Georgia implemented a UPK program starting with the academic year of 1995-1996.

They implemented pre-k programs housed within public school districts alongside community-based childcare centers. When space in public school programs was unavailable, vouchers were provided for community organizations. This approach allowed access to pre-k to expand rapidly (Gomez-Velez, 2015). The program is funded by the state through the lottery, and schools may choose whether or not to participate. Because the program is voluntary, both for parents to enroll their children and for school districts to participate, not every child may be able to receive services (“About Georgia’s Pre-K Program,” 2019).

Funding UPK through the state, rather than through property taxes alone, is an improvement from a zip-code oriented fiscal structure. It goes one step in the right direction to upending an economic structure perpetuating poverty (Anyon, 2014). Yet because schools and childcare centers are not required to provide services or space, it seems difficult to believe that the program is universal. Parents may want to enroll their children yet be turned away. I believe this is a flaw within the approach that Georgia has chosen to implement, due to the fact that certain children will not receive services from the educational system—this implies a lack of equitable access (Anyon, 2014).

In 2013, Georgia developed early learning standards for children ages birth through five, called the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS). The goal of the standards is to promote developmentally-appropriate approaches to learning, cultivating what children need at a particular age, aligned with preparing them for the K-12 learning initiatives. The standards were also aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Development milestones addressed by the GELDS standards includes physical development and motor skills, social and emotional development, approaches to play and learning,

communication, language, and literacy, and cognitive development and general knowledge. Specific curriculum materials have been approved and may be chosen by individual schools (“Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards,” 2019).

New teachers in Georgia must have a bachelor’s degree to become a lead teacher in a UPK classroom. Veteran teachers with an associate’s degree were grandfathered into the new system. The pay scale increases with the specificity of degree, but early childhood training must be included, either through the associate’s level or specialized training (Montessori certification, for example) (“Pre-K Providers’ Operating Guidelines,” 2019). However, the pay of UPK teachers does not measure up to the typical pay of an elementary teacher in the state of Georgia (“Salary for Teacher Elementary School in Georgia,” 2019). While the requirement of UPK teachers to have a bachelor’s, degree is a good quality indicator, it seems unlikely that highly-qualified teachers would choose to teach pre-k, rather than kindergarten or first grade, if they can receive up to \$10,000 more per year for simply choosing to teach children who are one or two years older. This pay discrepancy likely limits the quality of teaching within UPK classrooms in Georgia.

Program Impact

A long-term study by Fitzpatrick (2008) found that UPK enrollment had a positive impact on fourth grade math and reading scores in Georgia. It also had positive effects on grade retention, but those results were not statistically significant. The program was found to increase math scores among white children, but not among African-American children. However, when controlling for various locations and specific demographics, children in rural and urban fringe areas were more likely to be performing on grade-level. They made the most

significant gains in those areas, which makes up about 19% of the population of children enrolled in pre-k. African-American children in urban areas who were ineligible for government-subsidized meals scored 8.7 % of a standard deviation higher on reading tests; they were also 6.8% more likely to be on grade level (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

A different study of Georgia's UPK program found that 82% of children enrolled in the program performed better than national norms. Children from under-resourced families scored below national norms for some tests before beginning preschool, yet they scored above average when starting kindergarten (Gormley & Phillips, 2005).

Yet another study of Georgia's UPK program according to NAEP results showed that African American children in urban areas who did not qualify for lunch assistance improved their reading scores by 8.7% of a standard deviation. They were also 6.8% more likely to be performing on grade level. African-American children who did qualify for lunch assistance were also 7% more likely to be on grade level (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

However, because Georgia offers a mixed-delivery system, it is difficult to pin down exactly what may bring about positive or negative impacts. The standards for quality are not as high as Oklahoma's approach, and it is difficult to track quality when some children are placed within center-based programs, which each have their own approach to early childhood education. While there certainly are some very effective center-based programs, they are not all good. And because center-based care does not always lead to academic benefits, it seems a poor choice of public funding, when the funding is designated to raising academic achievement levels among children from under-resourced backgrounds. Georgia's approach is a step in the right direction, but it falls short of equalizing educational opportunity for all children.

Gaps in Research

Georgia's approach to UPK has been studied on a statistical level. However, because so many of Georgia's UPK classrooms are provided through either community based organizations or public school district schools, it is difficult to control for variables present within the different methods of approach. It is also still measuring success based on performance on high-stakes standardized tests, which ultimately, I believe, is an inferior measure. High-stakes testing maintains a systemic oppression that is ultimately racist (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018).

Oklahoma

Structural Features

In 1998 the state of Oklahoma released a comprehensive UPK program. Any family could register a four-year-old child, regardless of income. It is also funded through a state grant program, so it is funded on a state-wide level, not according to local property taxes ("Pre-Kindergarten Program," 2017). This state-wide funding approach is the best solution for systemic overhaul (Anyon, 2014). While other states have offered a more mixed-methods delivery of preschool, such as partnering with community-based care centers, Oklahoma's UPK program is completely provided within public school districts. Because of this, it is considered high-quality. Teachers must have a bachelor's degree, they must be early-childhood certified, and an adult/child ratio of 10/1 is strictly followed. By the year 2017, the program had been in operation for eight years and had enrolled 68% of all four-year-old children in the Tulsa school district (Gormley et. al., 2018).

Teachers have a great deal of autonomy in creating academic activities in the Tulsa UPK program. Teachers may construct their own curriculum, while collaborating with principals and

other administrators. They are unified by their adherence to a state report card with expected benchmarks; aside from that, Tulsa teachers have a great deal of freedom (Gormley & Phillips, 2005).

These high-quality indicators would imply that Oklahoma has taken steps in the right direction. Teachers are paid on an equal level with elementary teachers, the curriculum is academic in nature and aligned with later elementary goals, and all classrooms are housed within public school district schools. These structural features are powerful efforts at equalizing educational opportunities among all children. Yet, Oklahoma's focus on academic standards, at the neglect of holistic child development, falls short of preparing children for lifelong success. While it may prepare children well for high-stakes testing, it does not address every aspect of early childhood education that should be considered. It also does not empower diverse cultures, due to the fact that standardized tests are incapable of capturing the wealth of knowledge children from different cultures bring with them into the classroom (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018).

Program Impact

Several quantitative studies have focused on the results of specific elements of Oklahoma's UPK program. The studies have exclusively focused on Tulsa, due to the large sample size and student demographic diversity, among many other factors. Because the studies are limited to students in Tulsa only, the generalizability of results remains to be seen. I have chosen eight studies to analyze, due to their adherence to quantitative data. One researcher, William T. Gormley, participated in all of the studies, either authoring independently or with co-authors. Given the narrow geographic reach and authorship, the studies are likely evaluating

limited aspects of the program in Oklahoma. There is much more to be done in terms of research in the world of UPK. More studies should focus on different cities or types of communities, for example. Alternative methods of collecting data would also be valuable, perhaps merging more qualitative methods alongside numerical data. Although high-stakes testing and quantitative data is limited in its ability to capture the full depth of student learning and program impact, it is the current structure in place within the American education system. Yet even considering these limitations, these quantitative studies have painted a picture of a high-quality, highly effective program in Oklahoma.

One study found that cognitive performance improved for all children exposed to one year of Oklahoma's UPK program in Tulsa. For all children, cognitive performance improved by 17.2%, motor skills by 8.4%, and language skills by 16.5%. For specific racial groups, African-American children improved by 17.1% overall, 28.1% in cognitive performance, and 15.2% in language skills. They also benefitted more from a full-day program than half-day. Latino children improved by 53.6% overall, 54.3% with cognitive skills, and 58.6% with language skills, and they also benefitted most from a full-day program. However, white children experienced a 19% increase in language skills after exposure to the half-day program; they did not experience any other improvements (Gormley & Phillips, 2005).

When considering socioeconomic status, children who did not qualify for lunch assistance did not improve to a statistically significant level. Children who qualified for reduced-price lunch showed improved language scores by 34.7%. Children who qualified for free lunch improved in all domains: 25.7% total, 31.2% in cognitive skills, 15.4% in motor development, and 18.4% in language skills (Gormley & Phillips, 2005).

On first glance, this study shows that Latino children benefit the most from Oklahoma's UPK program, followed by African-American children. Benefits increase as socioeconomic status decreases. Even though white children seem to benefit the least, they still benefit, in one domain. This implies that Oklahoma's approach is leveling the educational playing field for a diverse population of students. Diverse racial groups and socioeconomic echelons are experiencing increased academic performance from exposure to Oklahoma's UPK program.

This study was further teasing apart results found by a prior study, which did not fully address issues related to selection bias. This first study also found positive impacts on cognitive results. Children overall benefitted in three out of four tests. Socioemotional development did not improve to a statistically significant level. Latino children received higher scores in cognitive and motor skills after exposure to a full-day program. African-American children received higher scores in language and cognitive skills after experiencing a full-day program. However, African-American children received lower socioemotional scores after attending a half-day program. Large, statistically significant improvements were evident in all testing domains for children who qualified for free lunch. No statistically significant gains were made by children who did not qualify for free lunch, yet this research design suffered from issues neglecting selection bias (Gormley & Gayer, 2005).

Another study focusing on cognitive development impacts, focusing on a different academic calendar year and using a different test to measure student performance, found increases among different racial and socioeconomic groups. African-American and Latino children experienced gains in all domains of the test. White children only improved their language scores. Children receiving full-price lunch and free-lunch improved their test scores in

all domains. Children eligible for reduced-price lunch improved their language scores only. Both full-day and half-day programs experienced statistically significant positive impacts on all three subtests, including race-ethnicity brackets in both full-day and half-day programs (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005). These results are incredibly powerful—children from racially diverse groups are positively impacted by the program. And children from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds also benefit. This study implies that children from all backgrounds are able to start their educational journey on an equal footing (Anyon, 2014).

Another study, which focused on program impacts on Latino students alone, found that Latino students exposed to Tulsa’s UPK program improved their language scores by statistically significant levels. Children whose primary language in the home is Spanish received statistically significant improvements in all three domains, but children whose families speak English in the home did not improve. Children whose parents were born in Mexico and whose parents speak Spanish in the home experienced considerable cognitive benefits (Gormley, 2008). This would imply that children whose families are immigrants benefit greatly from UPK. Of course, increased exposure to the English language would be helpful for children who are entering into an education system that expects them to communicate primarily in English. Whether or not children should be forced to speak in English to be successful is another matter entirely. Yet within the structure currently in place in American education, Oklahoma’s UPK was successful at improving results for children whose families are immigrants.

Another study investigated the long-term impacts of UPK. Tulsa UPK alumni were evaluated in middle school. Students overall improved their standardized math scores and were more likely to be enrolled in honors courses. They were less likely to be retained. For boys only,

placement in honors courses doubled. For girls only, they improved their math scores and were less likely to receive special education services, but only to marginal levels. Results according to free lunch status varied widely, and may have been affected by small sample sizes and imprecise estimates. English Language Learner (ELL) students reached marginally higher math test scores. They were also more likely to be enrolled in honors courses and half as likely to be retained one grade. White students improved their standardized math scores to statistically significant levels. Latino students marginally improved their reading test scores and increased placement in honors courses (Gormley, et al., 2018).

Another study looked at how UPK could impact future earning potential into adulthood. Based on a study that looked at historic outcomes from the Perry Preschool Project, the results in Tulsa forecast future earnings at age 25-27 to increase annually by \$73 for each percentile increase in test scores. Because income tends to increase with age, the baseline wage could increase to \$1502 in adult earnings for each percentile boost. With these figures, the Tulsa UPK program is estimated to increase future earnings of full-day pre-k alumni eligible for free lunch by 10.4%, those eligible for reduced-price lunch by 8.9%, and those receiving full-price lunch by 5.5%. The program in Tulsa has an extremely productive return on investment due to its relatively low cost yet high quality, quality which almost matches that of the Perry Preschool Project, which was much more expensive per student. The Tulsa program costs \$4403 per child for the half-day program, and \$8806 for the full-day; Perry Preschool cost \$17,526 per child (Bartik, Gormley, & Adelstein, 2012). These projected results are powerful—Oklahoma's UPK program has the potential to reverse poverty. Children formerly trapped within systemic under-

resourced environments would have the potential to achieve at an equal footing with more advantaged peers (Anyon, 2014).

Another study looked into how the program affected socioemotional outcomes. Children who participated in Tulsa's UPK program were rated as less timid and more attentive, but did not show improvements in the domains of disobedience, aggression, attention-seeking, or apathy. When limiting the results to children from under-resourced backgrounds, Tulsa UPK alumni received a reduction in timidity and an increase in attentiveness, whereas Head Start alumni did not experience any significant gains. When classroom contexts were analyzed, Tulsa UPK classrooms showed fewer teacher interaction problems, yet Head Start showed no significant differences (Gormley, Phillips, Welti, Newmark & Adelstein, 2011). These results seem minimal, yet because Oklahoma's UPK program is geared toward academic outcomes alone, it makes sense that it would have limited impact on socioemotional development. Because social and emotional skills are so important later in life, hopefully Oklahoma can find ways to address this. Better yet, if neoliberal educational structures are eliminated, like an over-emphasis on high-stakes testing, schools will have more time to implement a more balanced, holistic curriculum (Hursh, 2007).

Another study considered the quality of the classroom climate in Tulsa's UPK program. Head Start was taken into consideration because it is now held to very similar quality standards, in order to stay competitive with UPK classrooms. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was used to assess the quality of instructional and emotional effects in each classroom, the teacher's management and organizational skills, and student engagement. It addresses 11 domains of classroom climate, scored on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the

highest. The Child Engagement section of the Emerging Academic Snapshot (CE-EAS) was used to ascertain the amount of exposure to academic content. The CE-EAS provides detailed accounts of how much time is spent in specific types of academic engagement according to each child. Both Tulsa's UPK and Head Start programs tended to fall in the middle to high range in terms of quality overall. Only the instructional support domain accounted for relatively lower scores. In regards to academic instruction in both TPS and Head Start programs, the largest percentage of time was spent in language activities. At least 10% of classroom time was spent in activities that addressed social studies, science, math, and aesthetics. Of the three curriculums included in the study, TPS teachers tended to rely more on the Integrated Thematic Instruction curriculum and a bit less on Direct Instruction. Head Start teachers favored the Creative Curriculum. Most reported using the curriculum almost daily but also varied in how exclusively they used it; some switched from one to the other from time to time. When compared to the control group on CLASS dimensions, classrooms in Tulsa scored significantly higher in the domains of Productivity, Instructional Learning Formats, Concept Development, and Quality of Feedback. Differences between school-based and Head Start classrooms were not statistically significant. In the CE-EAS assessment, children in Tulsa classrooms experienced more exposure to Literacy Activities, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Aesthetics. Writing is the only domain that did not show much difference. Teachers in school-based programs spent more time on math, and Head Start teachers spent more time with Social Studies. Tulsa Head Start programs also spent more time on Aesthetics than the national control group (Phillips, Gormley, & Lowenstein, 2009).

In the end, as UPK programs mature, they may produce heightened results. Once a

program has had time to learn from prior mistakes, implement improved professional development, develop a more strategic curriculum, and cultivate a rich foundation of experienced teachers, results may continue to improve. The program will also have a greater opportunity to reach a higher concentration of children. This increased quality and rigor could continue to improve elementary test scores, as upper elementary teachers are able to introduce more challenging content. In the end, the UPK program in Oklahoma has only begun its journey to improving educational outcomes for all students (Gormley et. al., 2018).

Discussion

Because Oklahoma's UPK program is just entering into maturity, many questions remain unanswered in regards to long-term impact. However, the current body of research has shown gains in test score results for African-American children, Latino children, low-income children and middle-class children. Positive results have been found to persist through middle school and these positive results can be forecast to produce long-term financial gains into adulthood. These gains outpace Head Start, due to the exclusive focus on high-stakes standardized testing as a measure of success. Yet Head Start in Oklahoma has adopted the same standards for quality, so the results for Head Start in Oklahoma are also improving in regards to testing outcomes.

Considering the program in Oklahoma overall, it is extremely high-quality in terms of structural features. All children are eligible to be registered for a UPK spot housed within a public school district school. Because it is funded on a state-wide level, it eradicates the issues surrounding zip-code oriented funding practices. This approach levels the academic playing field. While many other factors need to be considered in terms of overall education reform,

Oklahoma's approach to UPK is one step in the right direction to eradicating the inequity stemming from historic racial segregation.

Gaps in Research

The bulk of studies conducted on Oklahoma's UPK program have emphasized quantitative analyses of high-stakes standardized test scores. Maintaining a focus on numerical data alone will serve to perpetuate systemic oppression (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018). More studies should be conducted, evaluating culturally responsive practices in particular. More qualitative studies would speak to the stories of individuals within the system, shedding light on exactly what Oklahoma's approach is accomplishing.

How UPK Impacts Specific Groups of Children

This section explores how UPK affects specific groups of children. The reality is that UPK benefits different groups of children in different ways. As more test scores are disclosed to the public, perhaps policy will be altered in order to provide high-quality academic experiences too all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. More American children are currently enrolled in UPK programs than in Head Start (Gormley, 2008). This implies that improving the approach to UPK has the power to equalize educational opportunity.

Latino Students

Latino students have gained the most ground on improved test scores through UPK programs, in both long-term and short-term gains (Gormley et al., 2018). Early childhood experiences are often the first-time Latino children are exposed to the English language and to American culture. While a more culturally-empowered approach to education would more

appropriately foster equity (Anyon, 2014; Ewing, 2018), including a more specific focus on using Spanish within the classroom (Irizarry, 2007), the current system in place requires Spanish-speaking children to assimilate into the English language. When focusing on Tulsa's UPK program, Latino children scored higher on third-grade reading and math tests, and achieved higher year-end grades, when compared with children receiving center-based care. Latino children were also found to avoid the "fadeout" effect seen among other demographic groups (Ansari, Manfra, Hartman, Lopez, Bleiker, Dinehart, & Winsler, 2017). Overall, Latino students received the sharpest test score gains from Tulsa's UPK program. Yet they did not all benefit equally. Children from families who speak Spanish in the home and children whose parents were born in Mexico benefitted most from Tulsa's UPK program. However, because the testing was not conducted in Spanish, it is impossible to discern whether the gains occurred because of language acquisition or cognitive development (Gormley & Phillips, 2005). Yet clearly Latino children experienced improved test scores through access to UPK. It is allowing for equal opportunity for educational advancement.

White Students

White children were found to make no statistically significant gains as a result of Tulsa's UPK program, when focusing on pre-test/post-test scores during the year of pre-k. (Gormley & Phillips, 2005). This leads me to believe that white children have not been injured by the current system in place. The educational structures were made to cater to their cultural lens and background knowledge. The lack of improvement by white children is particularly disturbing to me, because it speaks to the slanted nature of the American education system as a whole. It seems as though other races of children must "catch up" to where white children

are already performing. Yet if the structure of high-stakes testing and public school culture caters to white middle-class values, other demographics of children are simply being coerced into a white-centered society.

Gifted and Talented Students

Much of the focus of education reform has centered on supporting children who are lagging behind their grade-level peers. Meanwhile, high-achieving students have been neglected. During the era of the No Child Left Behind Act, achievement gaps have emerged among racial groups, low-socioeconomic populations, and English-language learners. Children from different racial, ethnic, and financial backgrounds may enter school at the same level as their peers, yet fall behind through middle and high school. This may be due to the fact that African-American, Latino, and economically-disadvantaged students are more likely to attend struggling schools that are inferior in multiple dimensions. Due to this problem, it is important for schools to provide equitable access to challenging and rigorous gifted and talented programs (Lu & Weinberg, 2016).

The study by Lu & Weinberg (2016) found that the likelihood of taking the gifted and talented test varied widely based on demographic characteristics. Latino students were 45% less likely to take the test, African-American students were 35% less likely, and Asian students were 32% more likely to take the test by kindergarten. Children who qualify for free and reduced lunch were 46% less likely to take the test. Similarly, when looking at neighborhood census data, for every 10% increase in African-American families in a neighborhood, there was a 3% decrease in the odds of a student taking the test. For every 10% increase in Latino families, there was a 2% decrease. However, for every 10% increase in the number of

community members with college degrees, there was a 15% increase in the likelihood of a child taking the test. Clearly, not every child has a fair and equal chance of entering a gifted and talented program. Where you were born leads to educational opportunity or limitation, and where you were born was historically dictated by the American government (Rothstein, 2017). This lack of diversity in gifted and talented placement is due in part to the current system of parent/teacher referrals (Lu & Weinberg, 2016). Children can be tested for gifted and talented programs at a very young age. Children are evaluated based on their learning potential, found through assessments of their cognitive ability and school readiness. African-American and Latino children are much more likely to be tested into gifted and talented programs after enrollment into public school pre-k programs, due to greater access to information regarding gifted and talented services. One study found that children attending full-time public-school pre-k were 4.8 times more likely to be tested for gifted and talented programs (Lu & Weinberg, 2016). This increase in exposure suggests that UPK is extremely helpful at bringing diverse groups of children into gifted and talented programs, providing another avenue for eradicating inequity.

Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs were also impacted by UPK. Phillips & Meloy (2012) explained that when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was renewed in 1986, it provided financial incentives for districts to provide comprehensive preventative services for children with special needs. Preschool has been known to be a strong protective factor for children struggling with environmental or biological issues. Many studies have shown that early childhood programs can vastly improve long-term outcomes for children with special needs. In

fact, it has also been shown that children from under-resourced backgrounds, who are typically largely represented in special needs services during elementary years, experience fewer special education placements after exposure to a high-quality early childhood learning environment. Additionally, children who are identified with special needs experience greater benefits when they are able to transition smoothly into kindergarten, which is enabled when a child is already attending a pre-k program housed within the same school. Because the program in Oklahoma is fully inclusive of all special-needs children, it addresses many of these realities. Children with special needs within the UPK program in Tulsa experienced statistically significant gains in two areas: letter-word identification and spelling test scores. The program brought special-needs children onto an equal footing with their typically developing peers. While the program did not impact math scores, this may be due to increased instruction time spent on language skills (Phillips & Meloy, 2012).

Yet with these results, were these children from under-resourced backgrounds really “special needs”? Or were they simply starting their educational journey at a different starting point than their advantaged peers? Because UPK decreases the number of children receiving special education services, one would assume that the children did not need special education services to begin with. They just needed what all children need: an opportunity to grow.

CHAPTER 4

ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

Now that I have explained historic racial segregation, and the resulting current-day structures of inequity perpetuating racism and poverty, I have also shed light on how UPK can take us one step closer to equalizing educational advancement. In this chapter, I address additional improvements that should be made to enhance the educational system, and ultimately universal prekindergarten (UPK), for African-American children. I discuss the importance of an anti-bias curricular approach, as it de-centers white middle-class culture and values and empowers other races and cultures. I investigate specific elements of the educational experience that should be improved for African-American children, including an emotionally-responsive academic environment and limited exposure to low-quality center-based care. I then move onto the political climate surrounding UPK policy, and what must be done to accomplish the implementation of UPK.

Anti-Bias Curriculum

It is not only “quality” that needs to be addressed. What defines quality? What do we expect children to know in order to be considered “well-educated”? Are we providing diverse and culturally rich academic experiences? In order to de-center white middle-class values, anti-bias curriculum efforts must be embraced. While many schools and districts have already taken steps towards a culturally diverse curriculum, much is left to be done. Many teachers are stifled from their attempts at cultural diversity due to a lack of time—they must devote all instructional focus to standardized test preparation, housed within the district-mandated curriculum. In one school, attempts at including the students’ unique cultural background are

thwarted by district goals (Hursh, 2007). One study of teachers' attempts at providing anti-bias curriculum exposure gives a glimpse into the realities surrounding our current curricular approach. When asked about inclusion of multicultural issues, such as civil rights dilemmas and divergent historical perspectives, teachers cited limited time for such efforts. Because the district expects a strict adherence to a unified curriculum, primarily focusing on standardized test results, issues of cultural diversity are neglected. This is especially troubling, considering that many studies have found a reluctance to discuss issues of race, especially among white households. Children are left to come to their own conclusions, through the media, peers, or outside sources. The media frequently portrays minority individuals in harmful ways, including an overrepresentation of African-Americans and Latinos in low-wage jobs and impoverished neighborhoods. When teachers and parents remain silent, children are left to discover racial issues in a world rife with inequity and injustice (Vittrup, 2016).

Yet one simple act can change a child's perception of race and value. I recently engaged in a coloring activity with my preschool students. Two children were depicted on the coloring page, and I started coloring one's skin brown. One student asked, "Why are you making her skin dirty?" I answered, "I'm coloring her skin brown. Different people have different skin colors. I want my girl to have brown skin." The rest of the children erupted with responses such as, "I want my girl to have brown skin, too!" and we started discussing how different people look. In one moment, their eyes were opened to see someone who looks different in a positive light. Who knew that crayons could become vehicles for positive social change!

Impacts of Improved Quality

If we continue the present course of funding structures within the educational system,

inequity will persist. While sweeping improvements of public education are needed, providing high-quality preschool learning experiences is essential to bringing about social equity. In fact, if public school districts begin to provide high-quality programs as a matter of course, middle and upper-class families will have an incentive to rejoin public education. Essentially, if we as the American people are committed to democratic ideals, high-quality early childhood education is essential, including racial and socioeconomic integration within the public schools (Wright, 2011). In considering quality, it is not always best to assume improved curriculums or assessments will solve the problem. It is not just the quality of the curriculum, but the teacher is responsible to implement the curriculum in such a way that cultivates a rich classroom climate. Positive social engagement and challenging intellectual activities are essential for a high-quality preschool experience (Phillips et al., 2009). Yet this quality cannot improve without resources, which the government doles out as it chooses (Ewing, 2018).

Funding UPK at the state level is a better approach to eradicating inequity. Allowing all children to have a seat in a UPK classroom housed within a neighborhood public school will produce better results. Maintaining high-quality structural features, like requiring all teachers to have a bachelor's degree and paying them at an equal level with upper elementary teachers, will empower more students to succeed. If privatization efforts are limited, with funding redirected to neighborhood schools, those schools will have more resources to provide a thriving academic environment, including reintroducing programs focused on the arts and sciences.

Impacts for African-American Students

Yet another aspect to providing a high-quality learning environment is cultivating an

emotionally responsive classroom climate. Many studies have found healthy relationships with peers and teachers to be extremely important to academic success. In particular, close relationships with teachers have been found to be a protective factor for future emotional stability. Unfortunately, one study found teachers reporting less close relationships with African-American students. African-American children were also found to have limited emotional self-regulation within the school. This lack of emotional response towards African-American children could be extremely detrimental in the long run (Barbarin, 2013). Emotional intelligence is important for academic and lifelong success. Children with the ability to emotionally self-regulate pay better attention in school, are more engaged with the academic process, have more positive social relationships and are able to empathize better, and ultimately earn better grades (Tominey, O'Bryon, Rivers, & Shapses, 2017). Teachers must cultivate a caring and emotionally responsive classroom culture that responds to African-American students in a culturally empowering way. Reversing inequity includes responding to all children with empathy and concern.

Studies have also found adverse effects associated with attending center-based care at an early age. Observational studies have found increased behavior problems in children who received care from someone other than their mother, including children placed in childcare centers. The effects are more pointed with children who entered non-maternal care at an early age and/or who spent longer amounts of time in non-maternal care. While the effects are small, they are consistent, yet researchers are unclear of the cause due to the nature of observational data. However, considering the increased likelihood of African-American children to receive non-maternal care, the implications of such a study are important to consider

(Magnusun & Waldfogel, 2005). If center-based care can be detrimental to children’s emotional development, exposure to center-based care should be limited if at all possible. Of course, working parents must use daycare from time to time—yet access to UPK would eliminate the exclusive reliance on childcare centers for at least one year.

“Fadeout” Could Be Limited by Improving Schools Overall

While African-American children were found to benefit from Head Start, the results were not sustained long-term. One study found that children who attended Head Start scored seven percentile points higher on a vocabulary test than siblings who did not attend preschool at all. However, this academic advantage did not last throughout their academic career. While white and Latino children continued to have an advantage, African-American children equalized with their siblings who did not attend the program. However, all children who attended Head Start were found to be less likely to have criminal records into adulthood, suggesting the program may provide social/emotional benefits, although it may provide fewer academic gains (Magnusun & Waldfogel, 2005).

African-American students have been found to benefit less from UPK in long-term academic success. However, this may be due to other factors, including limited access to higher-quality schools and more effective teachers. This is likely due to where they live and a lack of funding for neighborhood schools (Gormley et. al., 2018). Of course, the ultimate goal of high school graduation remains at the forefront of early childhood education. One would hope that a child receiving UPK services would succeed long into elementary, middle, and high-school, and into further schooling and/or a career. However, because high school graduation happens so much later in life, it can be hard to control for other factors. It may be impossible to

judge how much of an impact UPK would have on a goal as long-term as high school graduation (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

Yet across the board, studies have found that African-American children receive lower-quality early childhood care, whether they are in center-based preschool programs or other types of services. They may also attend lower-quality pre-k programs. If the quality of Head Start is limited, especially factoring for less focus on academic activities, it may be doing little to actually equalize educational opportunity (Magnusun & Waldfogel, 2005). How can this be related to anything other than the negative consequences resulting from historic racial segregation? However, research has shown that high-quality universal programs produce the greatest impact for children from under-resourced backgrounds and from diverse families (Gormley et al., 2005). Because of this, it seems obvious that it is the government's responsibility to provide high-quality preschool experiences for all children (Rothstein, 2017; Ewing, 2018).

Return of Programs Formerly Cut Due to Budget Restrictions

Public school teachers are all too familiar with beloved programs being cut due to budget restrictions. When a school is forced with the awful decision of firing teachers or eliminating programs, electives like art, music, and physical education are often the first to go. State testing does not cover the arts or physical education, so they seem to be logical programs to sacrifice (Shaw, 2018). Yet art, music, and physical education classes can bring so much life into a school building. Color and rhythm and motion add a vibrant echo into an otherwise grey monotony. Can a school really be high-quality if it forsakes so much beauty? Bringing back art, music, and physical education should accompany universal access to preschool.

Political Realities of UPK

The popularity of UPK as a political agenda has risen to fame primarily because of public dissatisfaction with public education. However, rather than giving up on public schools, like many privatization efforts seem to do, UPK maintains hope for public education, with the perspective that it can succeed if only it is given proper care and adequate resources (Gormley, 2005). Because neoliberal educational practices did not serve to improve American education, and only ushered in privatization efforts that served to hinder public schools (Hursh, 2007), they must be reversed.

A massive amount of research has shown the importance of early childhood education due to brain development, emphasizing the need for cognitive stimulation before the first day of kindergarten. Oklahoma took advantage of a financial opportunity: due to the declining enrollment of children in public schools, funding was available to expand UPK. Teachers were able to keep their jobs and children were able to receive improved services (Gormley, 2005).

Brown and Wright (2011) explained that because UPK is seen as an important issue in education policy, it is a hot topic in the world of politics. Political “spectacles” are conjured in the American news media. These spectacles target a program aimed at assisting a small demographic, while claiming to meet the needs of the larger community as a whole. Upon investigation of major news sources, UPK political rhetoric is primarily aimed at the state level and is almost completely housed within the liberal, democratic political platform. Liberal politicians are drawn as allies of UPK, while conservative candidates are portrayed as enemies. UPK is typically cast in a positive light through economic advantages. Business leaders speak to the benefits of UPK and serve as “experts” for the program. Unfortunately, debate surrounding

UPK seems to peak during political campaigns then fade into the background afterward (Brown & Wright, 2011).

The study by Chetty, Friedman, Hilger, Saez, Schanzenbach, and Yagan (2011) found a link between what a child scores on standardized tests and future earnings into adulthood. Because of this, the financial impact of UPK can be hypothesized. However, because Tulsa's UPK program has been found to improve non-cognitive skills as well, specifically social skills, it may have even greater impact. In light of the study, annual earnings for the children are projected to increase as they enter adulthood and continue to age. The study of scores in Tulsa found that children of disadvantaged backgrounds would experience the largest gain in future earnings (Bartik et al., 2012). Yet while model programs like Perry Preschool have shown stronger effects than most universal state programs, Tulsa's program is much more cost-effective (Gormley et al., 2005).

In order to provide high-quality UPK services to all children, public and political support must be secured and maintained. While targeted programs, aimed at elevating the neediest children, are more cost-effective, universal programs have proven to gain more political support. Maintaining a political balance is important to ensuring program success (Gomez-Velez, 2015). Yet conservative criticism of UPK efforts is founded upon the reality that more affluent families would not benefit from increased availability of state funded pre-k. Most families who can afford a high-quality program place their children in good educational environments already. Because early childhood educators are among some of the lowest-paid professionals in the country, and because the children who need help the most are often underrepresented in governmental procedures, there is little incentive to expand public

availability of early childhood learning experiences. Conservatives would rather limit government overspending and intrusion, emphasizing the importance of personal choice when it comes to childrearing (Wright, 2011). It is also evident that the large bulk of the taxation burden would fall on the shoulders of the wealthiest families in the country. They themselves would not benefit from a UPK program, considering that their children most likely attend higher-quality private programs, which would de-incentivize them from supporting the initiative (Barnett, 2010).

The reality is that neoliberal education policy has served to undermine the very fabric of democracy upon which our nation was founded. In a democratic society, all citizens must have the tools necessary to make choices for participating in the governmental process. Decisions cannot be made in a democratic fashion if not all children are educated to a level where governmental participation is possible (Hursh, 2007). Because of this, if we believe in maintaining a democratic society, high-quality public education must be guaranteed for all children.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I synthesize my findings and discuss what must be accomplished to advance educational equity among all children, specifically African-American children. I revisit the city of Dallas, and discuss what it would look like to have a culturally empowering classroom in my local community. I take a closer look at how our government has created the current problem of inequity, yet suggest how it can be used to reverse the situation. I conclude by providing hope, that justice and equality is something that can be attained, if only we will join together to fight for the children that deserve the opportunity to succeed.

Synthesis of Research

I have explained how historic racial segregation has led to current-day structures of economic and educational inequity, through the lenses of Rothstein, Anyon, and Ewing. Their work informed my investigation of the culturally situated and ultimately racist structures currently undermining educational advancement among African-American students in the American public school system. This foundation of inequity then served as the basis of my evaluation of universal prekindergarten (UPK) programs to reverse educational inequity. I analyzed the approaches adopted by New York, Georgia, and Oklahoma, evaluating each in regards to how effective they are at equalizing educational advancement among African-American children and other racial and ethnic groups. I then discussed specific improvements that could be made to the education system as a whole, such as anti-bias curriculum and emotionally responsive classroom practices, in order to improve educational outcomes for African-American children. I ended chapter four with an analysis of the political realities

surrounding UPK, and what must be done to ultimately change state education policy through the political process.

Revisiting Dallas

I began this study by focusing on the local realities surrounding public education in Dallas. I want to finish this study by envisioning what it would look like to have a culturally empowering UPK classroom within Dallas public schools. The current racial breakdown of 70.06% Latino students, 22.46% African-American, and 4.97% white (“Dallas ISD,” 2019) speaks to the nature of public schools within the Dallas community. A study by Almond (2012) explains that African-American families are choosing charter schools at a high rate, almost double the rate they are choosing traditional public schools. Charter schools enroll minority students at a high rate overall, with African-American children representing the largest minority group in charter schools. This has led to a high concentration of African-American children in charter schools, often with less racial diversity than the neighborhood public schools they left. Despite the fact that charter schools sometimes fail to produce statistically significant improvements in academic performance, parents feel they are escaping a failing public school system when they enroll their children in charter schools.

An article in the *Dallas Morning News* explained that in 2010, DISD had reached its lowest percentage of African-American students since the year 1965. African-American parents explained their departure from DISD was due to under-performing schools compared with better-resourced suburban districts, a lack of focus on African-American students due to the increase of Latino children in need of English language support, better options within charter schools, middle-class African-American families desiring to escape crime-ridden urban

neighborhoods, and Latino families increasingly moving into historically African-American neighborhoods (Hacker & Hobbs, 2010). Whether African-American families have chosen to enroll their children in charter schools, or have chosen to leave the city of Dallas altogether, the racial breakdown in DISD currently has an overwhelming majority of Latino students.

This overwhelming majority of Latino children speaks to the urgency of a culturally empowering approach to American education. When city blocks in Dallas were separated by race, Latinos were also barred from living within white portions of the community. In particular, they were prohibited from living within Highland Park and University Park. Deep Ellum was a neighborhood historically designated for African-Americans, Latinos, and Eastern-European Jews. The historical facts show a racial prejudice aimed against the Latino community as well (Phillips, 2006). As the government is responsible for righting the wrongs committed against the African-American community, it is also responsible for the injustices committed against the Latino community (Rothstein, 2017).

The current approach to standardized testing and district-wide adoption of curricula reinforces white middle-class cultural standards as the norm. Multicultural values and histories must be incorporated into state standards for equity within education. Because students and teachers within the same cultural group share a mutual understanding that leads to academic achievement, the current overrepresentation of white teachers within public school districts must be addressed (Wiggan & Watson, 2016).

In order to counteract a hegemonic approach to curriculum and education, students must be taught to challenge the systemic reality that marginalizes their experience. Students must be shown how to maintain a positive self-image through understanding the history behind

their current social position, so that they can reject the lies that society as a whole feeds them. Children's individual experiences should be celebrated from a perspective of wealth that empowers their own cultural identity (Liou & Rojas, 2016; Anyon, 2014).

That being said, Irizarry (2007) explains that while racial and cultural identities found within Latino and African-American communities should be considered when constructing an approach to education within a UPK classroom in Dallas, a culture should not be seen through a one-size-fits-all lens. Even within one cultural community, each child and each family bring their own unique experiences that should be incorporated within a classroom environment. This requires each teacher to know his/her students and adapt activities to suit the needs of the room. Culturally responsive teaching should always begin with teachers connecting with students individually (Irizarry, 2007).

Of course Latin American culture should be incorporated within the classroom, but it should be done in a way that acknowledges variations within specific groups. Irizarry (2007) explains that culture is always changing, and teaching in a way that reinforces stereotypes can do more harm than good. More hybrid-styles of cultural identities are emerging within the ever-evolving American community. Yet community connection, language affirmation, and music can serve as important foundational approaches to consider when crafting pedagogy that honors and empowers Latino students.

Many political movements have sought to reinforce an "English-only" approach to American culture, which serves to undermine the importance of the Spanish language within Latin American culture. This comes across as particularly damaging, due to the importance of the Spanish language within the cultural identity of individuals from Latin American countries

(Davis & Moore, 2014). Yet not all Latino children should be presumed to be Spanish speakers. One teacher in particular encountered a group of Latino children who frequently used Ebonics, or African-American vernacular, when communicating within the classroom (Irizarry, 2007).

Because of all these dynamic factors, a one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum and pedagogy should be abandoned. While specific academic standards eventually have to be addressed, such as pre-reading skills and pre-math skills, curricular fluidity should be expected within each UPK classroom in Dallas. Perhaps within one UPK classroom of twenty students, seven are African-American, six are Latino, three are from countries in the Middle-East, and four are white. After getting to know the students and their families personally, more individualized choices can be made for the year's curriculum.

Children would be exposed to picture books representing children who look like them physically, and whose experiences mirror their own. Perhaps one child's grandmother could come teach a cooking lesson and share a traditional Mexican food. Perhaps one child's uncle could come perform a song on the saxophone, describing traditional blues musicians. Maybe one child's mother could come demonstrate a mosaic art project, and the children could learn about mosaic artwork within Muslim communities, and then could create their own project. Children could be encouraged to speak their first language in the classroom, and could teach their classmates how to speak their language. Biographies of children in other countries could be used as read-aloud stories, with pictures of the specific children placed on bulletin boards alongside maps of their countries. Histories of multiple countries could be used in social studies lessons. All these activities could be used to teach language, math, fine motor, social/emotional, and fine arts concepts, all while addressing each child's unique experience

and empowering multiple cultures represented within the Dallas community. Empowering each child's unique cultural experience would upend the systemic problems present due to racial segregation (Anyon, 2014; Rothstein, 2017; Ewing, 2018).

The children's learning and the teacher's effectiveness could be measured by portfolios, documenting growth throughout the year. Video clips, audio recordings, art projects, and photographs could chronicle a child's work throughout the academic term, utilizing both English and the child's first language, whether Spanish or Farsi or something else entirely. A child psychologist on-staff could give valuable insight into the child's social and emotional development, supporting the child's home life and academic experience. These structures and services would support while-child development and would empower individual experiences, valuing all families and cultures for what they bring to the table.

Moving Forward

Many obstacles remain. Yet children are worth the uphill battle. If the perceived American dream of a democratic society is alive and well, all individuals should receive a fair chance at achieving the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If we are a society geared towards upwards social mobility regardless of race, ethnicity, income status, or background, all children must have access to an education of high enough quality to enable them to pursue their dreams. Perhaps some individuals would prefer to enter a more blue-collar lifestyle. That is their right to choose. Yet it should not be the government's prerogative to shuffle children into locked paths, due to limited exposure and underfunding of public schools.

If we allow the free market to steer the ship, the most vulnerable citizens will be

abandoned in pursuit of efficiency. Charter schools are able to find ways to avoid working with children with challenging behavior problems, intense learning differences, or parents who are unwilling to provide additional support. Magnet schools are often only available to children who are already achieving at a high level academically. Vouchers, additionally, allow parents to remove their tax contribution from the neighborhood public schools and redirect it to a location of their choice. Yet charter schools, magnet schools, and vouchers steal away precious funding from the schools charged with serving the most high-needs children. How do we expect children from under-resourced backgrounds to have an opportunity at upwards social mobility if they are given minimal supports for academic success?

Many steps must be taken to level the academic playing field. Re-distribution of funding would be pivotal at reducing issues of inequity stemming from historic systemic racial segregation. If the American government prevented African-American families from living in particular communities, and that historic segregation led to corrupt real-estate practices that lasted well into the Civil Rights Era and beyond, and public schools continue to persist in maintaining a neighborhood approach to student populations and academic funding, how can we claim to have a fair and equal approach to American education? It seems we have chosen to turn a blind eye to the racially charged realities present in the current funding structure in American public schools.

Although universal prekindergarten may still be impacted by current limitations, like racially or socioeconomically homogenous student populations, limited funding, culturally biased curriculums, and an over-emphasis on culturally situated high-stakes testing, striving to provide high-quality early childhood education to all children in the United States of America is

one step in the right direction. We already know that wealthy families enroll their children in high-quality preschool programs as a matter of course. And while low-income children may benefit most from high-quality preschool exposure, middle-class children also benefit, and deserve to start their academic careers at an equally advantaged position.

The other reality is that families who do have the financial means to place their children in alternative environments choose to do so due to low-quality public-school options. This seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy: because public schools are perceived as achieving weaker results, more advantaged families choose to withdraw their children, leaving a very homogenous student population. If the quality of public schools were to improve on a universal, comprehensive level, more advantaged families would have an incentive to re-enter public education. This would create a more diverse student population, creating a host of positive results, particularly for children from more under-resourced backgrounds. If we were to redirect funding to wholeheartedly support public school district schools, and the overall quality improved to a well-respected level, people would have less reason to pursue private options.

While I have loved my time teaching at a highly sought-after private preschool, certain elements haunt me. I love teaching dynamic lessons, utilizing cutting-edge research-based practices. I have infinite access to high-quality resources, from toys that supplement the curriculum to scores of books and lesson ideas in the school library. If I have a child who needs extra help, we have a child psychologist who can step in to observe the student, offering tips and perspectives to me and the child's parents. Yet when I look at the faces of the children in my classroom, I know they are not representative of the population of Dallas. They are

privileged. And while I am thankful that some children in Dallas are able to experience a top-tier early childhood education, it is simply not fair that not all children receive the same opportunity. Changes are necessary to ensure all children are able to reach their full potential, in their academic lives and eventual lifelong careers.

I believe we can do it. I believe we can provide a society where all children have an equal chance to succeed in life. I believe we can cultivate bi-partisan support for public education. I believe that public education can co-exist with strong ideals fostering the free market system, personal accountability, and liberty as a whole. Public education need not threaten the freedom upon which the American fabric is woven. Public education is simply guaranteeing that every citizen born in the United States of America have an equal shot at pursuing his or her dreams. And that is a dream I believe we can all stand behind.

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