

**A CONTENT ANALYSIS COMPARING TEACHER ORGANIZATION  
REPRESENTATION OF THEIR POLICY-RELATED ACTIONS WITH  
PORTRAYAL OF THESE ACTIONS IN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS**

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This study is a critical content analysis interpreting how the policy-related actions of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers are portrayed in the national newspaper discourse and how these portrayals compare/contrast with the way in which the two teacher organizations would like for their policy-related actions to be portrayed, as evidenced by each organization's news releases. This analysis concludes that the National Education Association more often receives a negative portrayal in the national newspaper discourse than the American Federation of Teachers, and links this difference to numerous advantages, demonstrated by the AFT, in communicating its policy-related actions. This study concludes that both organizations, but particularly the National Education Association, would benefit from changes to the way in which they present their policy-related actions, so that each teacher organization may more effectively counter negative media portrayals.

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## **CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 – BACKGROUND**

When the United States government wishes to create a new policy relating to health care, it seems logical that members of Congress or the Executive Branch would consult with physicians. Were they creating new legal code, attorneys are just as likely to be involved. Even when a massive oil well, neglected and improperly maintained by its owners, ruptures in the Gulf of Mexico, creating one of the largest ecological disasters of our time, the government not only consults with the same oil company that is responsible for drilling that well, but leaves them with control over the process of repairing the well. How about education? When the government wishes to create a new law that influences education, do they consult with experienced teachers? Do they invite and/or listen to the opinions of those who are educators; who work where the rubber of education policy meets the road of education reality for millions of young minds daily in the United States? Judging by the de-professionalizing images of teachers portrayed in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the major education law of the current era, my conclusion is a resounding, “NO!”

As a teacher in the modern US education system, I am one of over 4 million professionals who are negatively affected by an ever-increasing set of national education policies that quantify and commodify the practice and outcomes of education. New laws, such as NCLB, are created that ask teachers to think about their students as if they were the end product on a factory line; not the complex, creative, emotional, and diversely intellectual young individuals that show up for class almost everyday. According to these

laws, a well-rounded and culturally sensitive student who is both motivated by curiosity and conscious of the expansive and varied nature of the human condition is no longer desired. Instead, these laws ask that I produce a student who is well-disciplined and who can perform well on a standardized test covering reading, writing, and math. As Henry Giroux (2006) explains, “The type of pedagogy fostered by high-stakes testing is at odds with learning that stresses creativity, critical thinking, leadership skills, autonomy, and self- and social development” (p. 234). In the end, not only do current laws require me to create a student-widget that rolls off the factory line with a grossly limited skill set, they ultimately produce individuals that seem to only possess the skills that would allow them to toil as obedient workers in menial factory settings later in life. When I imagine the United States, I imagine a country founded on the creativity, ingenuity, and hard work of those who came before us. When I picture our future, I struggle to imagine how throngs of silent and obedient test-takers, who struggle to even see, let alone think, outside of the box, can be the answer for continued success and world leadership.

Although I am one of scores in the education system who voice concerns over this development, it often appears as though our voices, and the expertise we bring to the table from many careers’ worth of work in education, fail to issue forth in a manner that is loud enough to be heard by those who make national education policy. In my own work, I have yet to encounter a teacher who thinks current laws are heading in a direction that is beneficial for students, yet all of them have suggestions for ways to improve the education system that fall on deaf ears, even at the local level. Fortunately, some of these teachers have the fortitude to implement what works in spite of the increasingly oppressive nature of current national laws that direct education policy. Additionally, in over five years of

graduate study at a tier-one research university, I have read and encountered a great deal of seemingly useful critiques and suggestions for change from some of the top academic minds in education; yet, I watch our national government engage in a conversation that does not appear even to take notice of the efforts of either academics or educators. Unfortunately, it appears as though those in a position to create meaningful education policy no longer hear the voices of those they call upon, and to whom they will be beholden, in order to implement those same changes.

For educators, the time has come to turn up the volume, and I believe the way to access the dial is by changing the nature of the public voice and the public perception of educators. In the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an industrial model of labor organization akin to the modern trade union was necessary to protect educators and bring them on par with other laborers of the time. Unfortunately, in the modern era, the perception of teacher organizations as “unions” has now limited their ability to participate in the national discourse surrounding education. Currently, the two largest teacher organizations engage in a variety of positive reform efforts, often willing to trade traditional union security for more professional input in education policy-making contexts. However, a variety of popular media sources continue to portray an image of teacher organizations as obstacles in the way of positive school reforms and as self-serving protectors of the worst members of their profession. If teacher organizations wish to become meaningful participants in future education policy-creation and decision-making, they need not only to act, but also to be perceived by the public as professionals whose primary concern is the betterment of our nation’s public education system. If the public believes that teacher organizations desire first-and-foremost to improve our education system and that these organizations have the

creativity and the willingness to carry out this objective, then our elected officials will follow suit.

## **1.2 – IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY**

American Federation of Teachers (AFT): The AFT is the nation’s second largest teacher organization. This organization was founded in 1916 and currently represents 1.5 million members across the United States, including; pre-K to 12 teachers, higher education faculty, government employees at the local, state, and national level of US Government, as well as nurses and other healthcare professionals (American Federation of Teachers, 2011). This organization is an affiliate of the AFL-CIO, which is a much larger union organization that represents a variety of different trades. The current president of the AFT is Randi Weingarten. Notable previous presidents whose work is featured in this study include Sandra Feldman and Albert Shanker.

Commodification/Commodify: This verb is rooted in the Marxist sense of commodity. Marx argued that “commodity” exists as an object that is necessarily not a part of a human, but rather, was an object that satisfies some human want, complete with both a use-value for the individual wanting and an exchange value for which the object can be bought and sold (Marx, 1978). In this case, the verb is used to imply the action of turning a process that ought not to be thought of as commodity production into the production of commodity.

National Education Association (NEA): The NEA is the nation’s largest teacher organization. The organization that became the NEA was founded in 1857 and the organization currently



represents 3.2 million members, including pre-K to 12 teachers, students, substitute teachers, education support professionals, higher education faculty, and school administrators (National Education Association, 2011a). The current president of the NEA is Dennis Van Roekel; A notable previous president whose work is featured in this study is Reg Weaver.

Organization: This term is used within this study to represent a group of people who share a similar type of employment and who assemble along similar ideological lines to press for similar workplace issues and reforms. I am using this term as a replacement for the labels “professional association” and “union,” which are commonly used in other literature, because those terms often include preconceived notions about the way in which an organization functions.

Professional: The term “professional” is highly contested within the field of sociology, a discipline this study draws upon heavily. Often the term is used both to describe the type of work people do and the ways in which people carry out their work, and while scholars use the term freely, rarely are they able to agree with other scholars about how to define this term. For this study, the term “professional” relates to the perception of certain occupational groups, and relates to notions of status, standing, expertise, and reward (Hargreaves, 2000). It denotes a separation from other types of work and a perception of specialized expertise and service to the public.

Professional Association: This term is used in common lexicon to define organizations that represent the “learned” or skilled professions, such as physicians and attorneys. Groups commonly referred to as professional associations tend to display particular characteristics, such as a proactive approach to policy formation and a reliance on the creation of a symbiotic relationship with the public.

Trade Union: This term is used in common lexicon to define organizations that represent craftspeople or industrial labor, such as carpenters or steel workers. Groups commonly referred to as unions tend to display particular characteristics, such as a focus on protection of organization members and an oppositional relationship with “management,” that are often mediated by collective bargaining agreements.

### **1.3 – PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Public education is a common and shared experience of most citizens of the United States, and educators are given the major responsibility of shaping the hearts and minds of the future of our country. The educators who facilitate this process both historically and currently make up one of the largest bodies of publicly employed workers in the United States (Rotigel, 1972; United States Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). With participation and purpose such as these, one should expect that individuals at the national level who are concerned with educational policy-making, not to mention the public at large, would be thirsty for constructive input from educators and prepared to listen to such a large body of practicing experts in the field. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case.

Currently, national education policy is being progressively more controlled by outsiders to education, and the profession of educator is increasingly being commodified and relegated to the status and function of that of a semi-skilled laborer in a mass-production factory (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Ingersoll, 2003; Luke, 2004; Spring, 2005b). This de-skilling of the professionals who work in education is a problem that I feel is linked to a growing public sense that the organizations that represent teachers have self-serving interests in mind, rather than the improvement of the education system.

When it comes to organizing, the two largest teachers' organizations (The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers) are highly complex, multi-tiered bureaucracies that each exhibit different characteristics at different levels. Most citizens in the US encounter the local level of these organizations, which often make headlines for their adversarial union-like behaviors, such as contract negotiations and strikes. Naturally, individuals might assume that the national levels of the teacher organizations may function in a similar way. While the national levels of each of the two major teacher organizations actually behave in a manner that is quite different from the local organizations, including extensive efforts to shape policy and collaborate with education stakeholders, these groups struggle to portray the reality of their policy-related actions to the public. The "union" label seems to inspire a public perception of these organizations as concerned with simply protecting their members, rather than concern with more progressive professional issues, such as positive school reforms. Apple's assertion that "teachers' unions are relatively weak at a national level" (Apple, 2006, p. 51) may, in large part, be related to a level of distrust created by a negative perception of their organizational behaviors, by the public.

Public perception is largely influenced by national media sources, the most influential of which comes from popular news coverage. Unfortunately, national teacher organizations are being negatively characterized in major national news outlets as organizations that are attempting to stymie positive school reforms. Here is just a sample of some of those headlines. An editorial in *The Washington Post* recently carried the title “Charter Success; Poor children learn. Teachers unions are not pleased” (Washington Post, 2009). From the *New York Times*, “Union Tries to Weaken Bloomberg on Schools” (Medina, 2009). From the *Wall Street Journal*, “The Union War on Charter Schools” (Greene, 2009), and “Republicans Sell Out Chicago Schoolkids; In Illinois, GOP legislators side with teachers unions” (McGurn, 2010). It seems clear that the image of the teacher organizations that these articles wish to convey is that of corrupt union members who wish to stand in the way of positive school reforms.

It is my belief that both of the major national teacher organizations have the capacity to increase their ability to influence the national education policy-making process. However, their inability to successfully communicate both the methods and goals of their policy-related actions in a way that resonates with national news sources prevents these organizations from effectively controlling their public image. As a consequence, alternative narratives exist that frame the work of the national teacher organizations as self-serving and obstructionist, preventing educators from rising to the rank of publicly respected-professionals and preventing them from having meaningful opportunities for participation in the creation of national public policy. In their absence, outsiders to education are able to step in and influence education policy in ways that serve their interests and takes away from the humanistic purposes that have historically characterized much of the US

education system. As an example of the outsiders to education that fill the vacuum left by ineffective national level teacher organizations, Apple argues that current education policy is now highly influenced by four groups outside of education: Neo-liberals who wish to privatize education; Neoconservatives who wish to return to a distorted view of the past characterized by a militarily strong and dominant United States; Authoritarian Populists who wish to merge evangelical interpretations of Christianity with public schooling; and a professional and managerial middle class that wishes to see business practices dominate school settings (Apple, 2006). While others might simplify Apple's argument or place different groups in the void created by the inability of educators to influence national education policy-making, it is hard to argue that recent major national education policies are ones that bear the fingerprint of individuals who teach in today's public classrooms. The problem is that none of the four ideologies that currently influence education policy appear to value the input of the national teacher organizations into their reform efforts.

#### **1.4 – PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The intention of this study is to use a content analysis approach to uncover the dissonance that exists between the national newspaper portrayal of the policy-related actions of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the way these organizations wish to be portrayed, as evidenced by news releases published on their websites.

This study begins with a content analysis of top-tier newspaper sources, which examines how the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT are portrayed to the public. Four top-tier national newspapers – the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The*

*Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* – will be the media focus because of their nature as defining sources for news at all levels of US society (Herman & Chomsky, 2006). This content analysis looks for ways in which each newspaper portrays traits, methods, and goals they associate with the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations and whether this coverage is neutral, favorable, or unfavorable.

Next, my content analysis shifts to the two major national teacher organizations to gain insight into how each group would like for their policy-related actions to be portrayed to the public. This analysis follows the same process as the newspaper analysis, but this stage, instead, focuses on news releases posted by the NEA and the AFT on their teacher organization websites. These news releases are written in a way that closely resembles the articles found in the national newspapers, with the exception that, because they are written and posted by the teacher organizations, they present policy-related actions in a way that always favors the teacher organization and demonstrates their ideal representation to the public.

With the content analysis of both the national newspapers and the teacher organizations complete, my overall focus will shift to a comparison between the two different types of portrayals of the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations. This comparison is designed to expose levels and manners of dissonance between the way in which the teacher organizations would like their policy-related actions portrayed and the way in which they are actually portrayed in the national newspapers. I believe that this dissonance in portrayal inhibits the ability of both the NEA and the AFT to influence national education policy-making by helping to generate a negative public opinion of the two teacher organizations. Countering this negative media portrayal is essential for

improving the public perception of teacher organizations, which might allow these organizations to increase their ability to influence national education policy-making contexts. To this end, this study concludes with suggestions designed to improve the way in which the NEA and the AFT present their policy-related actions so that they are able to better frame their future actions in ways that find increased traction within national news media sources.

In the end, this study accomplishes four goals. First, it develops a rich contextual understanding of the ways in which national newspapers regularly portray the policy-related actions of both the NEA and the AFT, suggesting the presence of an unfavorable bias and demonstrating how this negative media image is constructed. Second, this study develops an equally rich understanding of the ways in which the NEA and the AFT wish to have their policy-related actions portrayed. Third, it will illuminate the dissonance that exists between the national newspaper portrayal and the way in which the NEA and the AFT would prefer for their policy-related actions to be portrayed. Lastly, this study will make suggestions for how the NEA and the AFT can improve the way in which they communicate their policy-related actions so that their messages can effectively counter negative news media portrayals as well as increase the accuracy and frequency of positive news coverage of the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations.

### **1.5 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The three research questions below were designed to guide this research to a conclusion that analyzes the dissonance between teacher organizations' representation of their policy-related actions and the portrayal of these actions in national newspapers. Additionally,

these questions are designed to provide enough information to allow for changes to be suggested that might allow the teacher organizations to communicate their policy-related actions in a manner that news media outlets may be more likely to duplicate.

1. How are the policy-related actions of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers portrayed in national newspapers, following the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act?
2. How do the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers present their policy-related actions in their current news releases?
3. How do the National Education Association's and the American Federation of Teachers' presentations of their policy-related actions compare with those found in recent national newspapers?

### **1.6 – THEORETICAL PARADIGM**

This study emerges from my own transformative paradigm based largely in critical theory. Philosophically, my critical approach is rooted in the traditional Frankfurt School of critical theorists, built on the ideas of Hegel and Marx and drawing most heavily on the works of Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. “Central to the work of the Frankfurt School is an examination of the degree to which the logic of domination has been extended into the sphere of everyday life, the public sphere, and the mode of production itself “ (Giroux, 2001, p. 5). Beyond traditional critical theory, my theoretical view is also



guided by critical media study, a mixture of critical theory, cultural studies and media literacy envisioned by Kellner (2000). He advocates for critical reading of media sources to determine explicit and implicit messages that contribute to unbalanced power relationships in society. I also derive inspiration from the closely-related liberation theory found in Freire's pivotal and transforming work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), both in my personal work as a teacher and as a scholar. To expand on my theoretical positioning, I find it useful to explain why I have chosen to adopt a critical theory perspective for my research.

For me, a professional career in education was a path I was driven toward in life by a desire to help people to develop an ability to question the things in their lives they see as wrong. My hope is that my students will become empowered to alter the world for the better by standing up for what is right and standing up against oppression. Freire reminds us that it is the job of the educator to free others, to enable them to extend their hands less in supplication and more in an attempt to work and transform the world around them (Freire, 1970). The longer I have taught, the more I have come to realize that it is not just my students who need a means to transform their world, but teachers do as well. In critical theory, I find this means for transformation.

Lukacs, building on the work of Marx, points out that one of the most salient aspects of Marx's view is a sense of "consciousness as 'practical political activity' with the task of 'changing the world'" (Lukacs, 1971). By creating an increase in the consciousness of those I wish to help – in this case teachers – they become able to affect the kind of change in our situation that may liberate education from the production of human capital and return education to its rightful place as a humanistic endeavor. "To surmount the situation of

oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Freire here explains that to change a situation that is disempowering, one must first apply a critical lens to the situation to recognize its origins. Adorno reminds us that, “The only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection” (Adorno, 2005). Therefore, to engage in the type of “practical political activity” that may lead to empowerment for teachers, I make use of a critical lens both to examine the current position of my profession and to suggest a means for reform.

### **1.7 – ASSUMPTIONS**

Before I present my assumptions, it might be helpful if I briefly explain my experiences; that way it is easier to understand how I came to my assumptions. As of the writing of this dissertation, I am in my tenth year of professional teaching. The first of my teaching years was spent at a Federal Job Corps Center, in the City of Pittsburgh, teaching inner-city students who had dropped out of public school earlier in their lives, and were now getting a “second chance” to finish. The remaining nine years of my teaching career have been spent as a middle school social studies teacher in a small, suburban school district just outside of Pittsburgh, PA. In addition to my duties as teacher, I am also the head of our social studies department in our building and one of the two union (NEA) representatives for our middle school. During this time, I have been a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh for more than six of those nine years, so the many instructors and classmates I have experienced within the University’s School of Education also heavily influence my

thoughts and opinions. All of these components play into how I arrive at my assumptions about this study, and education in general.

As a current teacher, I see myself and other teachers as professionals who work in an environment that currently does not acknowledge our professional status and neither desires nor highly regards our opinions.

I see teachers as professionals for a number of reasons. First, many of them possess graduate degrees in their disciplines, suggesting that as a group they are highly motivated, intellectual, and possess a specialized knowledge. Second, the nature of their work is public-service oriented, organic and largely abstract in nature, as one might imagine the task of teaching a large group of diverse children might be. Third, the ability to teach well seems to be largely dependent on a teacher's mental faculty and creativity, rather than skilled labor. Lastly, and on a more personal note, throughout my childhood my family always spoke of teachers with the same level of respect and reverence that they afforded to members of other professions, including business managers, physicians and attorneys, so I have come to view them similarly.

The current education environment I experience, both in my own workplace and in my research, is one that de-professionalizes teachers. Managed time and surveillance by administrators has reduced professional autonomy. Government attempts to quantify the act of learning for our children, through the passage of laws such as No Child Left Behind, reduce the art of teaching to a discussion of production and quotas. The increasing input of outsiders to education, and even the co-opting of the language of education by nonmembers, gives the perception that almost anyone has the right and ability to tell educators how to do their job. Additionally, the constant onslaught and hype about new

education technology, without any meaningful discussion of pedagogy, reminds me of a factory upgrade rather than betterment of a profession. Lastly, the tendency for local teacher organizations to restrict their interactions to ones dealing with working conditions, rather than providing input on local education policies that influence curriculum and instruction, appears to play into the image of teacher as skilled-laborer rather than as professional.

I believe that both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers regularly attempt to engage in education reforms that would be beneficial to the public education system. However, I believe the general public equates these organizations to other trade unions, and, consequently, associates these organizations with protectionism and obstructionism, causing distrust in these organizations that inhibits their ability to guide education policy-making. A lot of the public's perception likely stems from negative portrayals of the teacher organizations found within a variety of popular media sources. Because teacher strikes often grab the most salacious local headlines, this likely reinforces the image of teacher organizations as trade unions; and for the public, any distinctions between their local organizations and the national organizations might not be obvious ones. In reality, the local organizations often (but not always) function in a "union-like" manner, engaging in collective bargaining, and seeing their existence as adversarial to local management, whereas the national level organizations function in a more professional manner, proactively attempting to influence policy, engaging in research to guide their policy efforts, endeavoring to build collaborative relationships with education stakeholders, and trying to build symbiotic relationships with the public.

My belief is that current public education policies are not always driven by a desire to improve the education system, although it certainly is framed that way. Instead, I believe that politicians use the ever-present education bureaucracy as a target for campaigns in order to unite a voting constituency, and that many policies result from a need to appear to voters to be changing this “broken” system. Instead, if the voting public were united behind a belief that the national teacher organizations should be integral participants in positive education reforms, I think that the current national education discourse would appear differently to all involved. I feel that anyone who is serious about creating education policy that really improves our education system, and not just our standardized test scores, would learn a lot from consulting with the throngs of educators who work in the field and from the massive body of education research conducted every year by members of research institutions throughout our country, such as the University of Pittsburgh. I do not think it is a coincidence that many of the most highly regarded academics, at the University of Pittsburgh and elsewhere, find themselves working with education systems in other countries rather than our own, as I surmise that it is only within foreign education systems that these experts can have a voice that allows them to shape meaningful improvements in education.

If these assumptions seem pessimistic, please do not interpret them in that way. While I do see teachers and the US education system as existing in a dark time, that does not mean there is no hope. As a teacher, researcher, and education activist, I am filled with hope for a better tomorrow. While the task may be daunting, not only am I up to the task of trying to make an improvement in the field; given an opportunity, I believe many other educators would feel the same way.

## **1.8 – IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is significant in at least three major ways. First, the study presents an image of the NEA and AFT as primarily concerned with the betterment of the public education system, even at the cost of some of the traditional job securities that are often associated with collective bargaining. Second, this study seeks to highlight the dissonance that exists between the way influential national newspapers portray the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT, and how these organizations wish to portray their own actions. Last, the study demonstrates the increasing involvement of the US federal government in education policy creation and argues for the need to include teachers in the policy-making process.

### **1.8.1 – Present an image of the NEA and AFT as primarily concerned with the betterment of the public education system**

Teachers in modern US public school classrooms find themselves under assault by a plethora of new educational policies that seek to quantify their work and commodify their profession. This environment is typified by changes to teachers' work that often run counter to their personal motivations for teaching and ideas relating to how best to teach. Valli and Buese, in an examination of the changing roles of teachers in our current era of high stakes testing found that,

...rapid-fire, high-stakes policy directives promote an environment in which teachers are asked to relate to their students differently, enact pedagogies that are often at odds with their vision of best practice, and experience high levels of stress. The summative effect of too many policy demands coming too fast often resulted in

teacher discouragement, role ambiguity, and superficial responses to administrative goals. (Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 520)

Echoing their sentiments, Luke (2004) explained that the increase in standardized testing and pedagogic practices is turning education in the direction of an industrial model of teaching that results in the commodification of the learning process. This direction in education policy takes away from the essential, yet non-quantifiable, aspects of learning that allow our teachers to educate our students into well-rounded and diverse human beings.

This study addresses the increased standardization and commodification of education by providing an alternative view of teachers as knowledgeable and thoughtful potential collaborators for future education policies. By examining the portrayal of policy-related actions by teacher organizations and the way that these groups are portrayed in the influential national newspapers, this study seeks to counter negative media portrayals of teacher organizations as self-serving and obstructionist to school reforms, by presenting the many different ways in which the NEA and the AFT are involved in positive school reforms and collaborative efforts. Additionally, this study seeks to highlight ways in which teacher organizations may be able to improve their public image and increase their ability to collaborate with publicly-elected officials for policy-creation. This echoes Magolda's advice that educators who wish to engage in collaboration must not only be in favor of working with others outside of education, but also have the "technical, political, and cultural frameworks to support these efforts once they cross into new territories" (Magolda, 2000, p. 357). In the end, teacher organizations that wish to form collaborative relationships with education policy-makers need to be conscious of their public image.

Kerchner and Kopich (1993) explain that “In many instances, it is the [teacher] union that is attempting to reestablish the public trust in education by redefining its interest as the public interest” (p. 195). This study provides insight for teacher organizations wishing to find ways to influence their public portrayal and resulting public perception toward one that is concerned with the betterment of the public education system.

### **1.8.2 – Highlight the dissonance that exists between the way influential national newspapers portray the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT, and how these organizations wish to portray their actions.**

People in the United States are consistently surrounded by a large variety of popular media outlets. From newspapers, magazines, news programs, popular television fiction, movies, music and the Internet, individuals are constantly bombarded with a variety of imagery, both positive and negative. When it comes to teachers and their organizations, the message is often a negative one, even in a global setting. Poole, in her study of media portrayal of teachers in Canada found that “throughout the 1980s, media stories about the lack of accountability in education, teacher incompetence, and the diminishing quality of education did much to erode the public support for teachers” (Poole, 2000, p. 112). Baker (1994) found that British media displayed a distinct bias against educators, using access to teacher conferences to frame teachers as corrupt, left-wing radicals in order to sensationalize news coverage. In America, Swetnam found that,

Unlike the relatively positive portrayals of other professions on television and in film, the portrayals of teachers are often demeaning and unrealistic, and they are likely to have a negative effect on recruiting the brightest and the best individuals into teaching. Even teachers already in service may experience a lack of respect and



support due to the negative perceptions these portrayals engender. (Swetnam, 1992, p. 31)

Given that often-negative portrayal of teachers in the media, one might ask: If teachers were to craft their own image, how would they portray themselves?

This study seeks to understand the specific differences between the way the policy-related actions of the two major US teacher organizations are portrayed in national newspapers and the way in which these teacher organizations wish to be portrayed, as evidenced by their own organization news releases. In this way, my study seeks to help fill a gap in the research highlighted by Baker. “Although teachers, educationalists, and parents frequently complain about the way the media portrays education, there has been little serious study of the way the press, television and radio treat this subject” (Baker, 1994, p. 286). Additionally, this study may provide an opportunity for both of the major national teacher organizations to gain an increased understanding of their organizations’ media portrayals and the effect these portrayals may have on public opinion. The media can play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and political perceptions, highlighting the power the media can have as the messenger to the public (Baker, 1994). By increasing our understanding of this phenomenon, this study may shed light on possible ways to improve the public image of teachers and their organizations and increase their ability to influence education policy-creation.

### **1.8.3 – Argument for increased teacher input in national education policy-making**

Despite the history of education being a state's right within the United States, education policy is increasingly coming from the national level. From the 1980s forward, national education policy has centered on the issues of testing, academic standards, and school choice (Spring, 2005). In election years, presidential candidates on both sides, from George H. W. Bush forward, have made effective use of the media to highlight the “failings” of schools and the need for education reform (Spring, 2005). Once in office, both recent Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush devoted major political resources to educational reform efforts. Tamir cautions that,

In the future, unlike the last episode of [No Child Left Behind], in which states determined independently the standards for their highly qualified teachers, the federal government might choose to use the infrastructure of the national certification and start requiring states to meet national standards. (Tamir, 2008, p. 89)

In this case, the trend toward increasing national level involvement in education policy-making seems clear.

This study seeks to present a path for teachers, and their organizations, to increase their access to national level education policy-making. Kerchner and Koppich (1993) suggest that in the future, “Teachers must assume an obligation to be active participants in the development of educational policy” (p. 202). By uncovering the differences between teacher organization representation of their policy-related actions and their media portrayal, teacher organizations may be able to pursue ways of making their public image more congruent with their own organizational goals. This improvement in public image,

specifically an increase in the public perception of teachers as knowledgeable educators and willing collaborators, who possess the ability and desire to improve public education, would change the nature of the education debate by presenting educators as important allies for national education policy-creation.

### **1.9 – CONCLUSION**

Education policy is increasingly being created, modified and controlled by the federal government and to an increasing extent, these policies fail to include the expertise of the professionals who carry out education as their occupation; specifically teachers. The inability for teachers to shape national education policy suggests a de-professionalization of their occupation, a suggestion reinforced by the commodification of teachers and their work found within current national education policies, such as No Child Left Behind.

While the negative images of teachers present in national education policy are alarming to educators and damaging to their professional status, these images did not originate in these policies. Instead, they reflect a negative portrayal of teachers, commonly found in national news media, and are an indication of the influence that this media can have on public opinion. These images suggest that teachers are primarily concerned with personal protections at a cost to the betterment for the public education system. Instead, I contend that these images inaccurately portray the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT, who instead desire to be involved in policy creation and modification that improves the education system, perhaps even at a cost to job protection.

This study seeks to clarify what types of policy-related actions the NEA and AFT engage in and how they wish for these actions to be portrayed, and to expose the

dissonance between these portrayals and their representations in national newspapers. In the end, through this increased understanding, it may be possible for teacher organizations to combat negative representations, capitalize on positive portrayals, and empower themselves to become more welcomed and integral participants in future national education policy endeavors.



## **CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 - INTRODUCTION**

As research issuing from a paradigm rooted in critical theory, this review of literature best serves as a way to connect some of the conceptual threads that converge in this study, in order to widen the study perspective and provide a rich context in which to study. This approach echoes one of the potential strategies outlined by Piantanida and Garman (2009). These connections are most easily made by making use of the review of literature to answer questions that may arise from the intended audience of this study, while, simultaneously, using these questions to position this study within a larger academic discourse.

Literature reviewed in this study was obtained largely through two search strategies. The initial searches were done using the JSTOR database that, in my experience, carries the vast majority of scholarly references dealing with education and sociological issues. This search included the use of a number of key terms found in Table 2.1. These terms were used in various combinations to elicit articles, and the results were reviewed to determine which articles were applicable here.

Table 2.1

*Key Terms Used in Search for Applicable Literature*

<b>Key Terms</b>	
American Federation of Teachers	Policy Modification
Critical Theory	Professional Association
Education Policy	Public Opinion
History	Public Policy
Media	Teacher
Media Portrayal	Teacher Agency
National Education Association	Teacher Union
Organizational Behavior	Trade Union
Policy Creation	United States

Additionally, a large number of sources were located through an “ancestry approach.” This approach strategy was expanded on in the work of Donna Mertens (2005), in which she explains that an individual can use the references found at the end of other scholarly works in order to find more information and to overcome some of the limitations of the selectivity of academic databases. This strategy allowed for the location of book-length texts and additional articles that greatly increased understanding of the topic of study.

Lastly, some of the texts, both articles and books, were already found in the researcher’s professional library from previous academic work and helpful members of the researcher’s dissertation committee suggested a number of useful texts as well. When information was required that was as current as possible, some web pages were also used. Together, these search methods resulted in the literature used within this review.

This review of literature is organized into four conceptual themes: (1) critical theory, (2) the media, (3) national education policy, and (4) the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. Within each conceptual theme, the review is organized under a series of questions designed both as a guide for my own work and to structure the review in a logical manner (see Table 2.2). While each individual question could serve as its own research study complete with extensive reviews of literature, in the case of this review, the goal is to gain an appropriate and concise answer to each question in order to present a thorough and relevant body of literature for this dissertation. In the end, this literature review, through the answering of my thematic questions, provides both a rich background and a location for conceptual connections to be made at the inception of my inquiry.



Table 2.2

*Review of Literature Thematic Questions*

<b>Literature Question</b>	<b>Page #</b>
<b>Critical Theory</b>	
What do critical theorists say about education?	29
What do critical theorists say about the role of teachers?	35
What do critical theorists say about the media?	39
<b>The Media</b>	
What influences can the media have on public opinion?	46
How has the media's influence changed over time?	51
How are teachers commonly portrayed in popular media?	54
<b>National Education Policy</b>	
Who currently influences the creation of national education policy?	62
What images of teachers do current national education policies project?	70
<b>National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers</b>	
From the year 1945 to the year 2000, how have the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers influenced education policy?	75
How do the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers currently influence national education policy?	84
What are the public thoughts of the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers on current national education policy?	88
How have the organizational behaviors of the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers changed over time?	93
What suggestions for change have resulted from previous research into the nexus of public opinion and the organizational behavior of teachers?	97

## 2.2 - CRITICAL THEORY

### 2.2.1 - What do critical theorists say about education?

It should come as no surprise that critical theory and the accompanying theorists are largely negative toward education systems but within the works of some it is possible to find positives and possibilities for improvement. It is helpful to remember that the

foundations of critical theory are rooted in the concept of praxis, or the idea that criticism alone is useless without a chance to use those same criticisms to affect an improvement. While many critical theorists may appear to paint a negative picture of education systems, when taken as a whole, the suggestions for positive change become apparent as well.

Of most specific concern for critical theorists appears to be the process of standardization present within education. Marcuse explained that increasingly “the social value of the individual is measured primarily in terms of standardized skills and qualities of adjustment rather than autonomous judgment and personal responsibility” (Marcuse, 1974, p. 96). Marcuse’s belief is informed by the criticism leveled by Freud that schools inadequately prepare students for their future lives as commodities in a market system (Freud, 1961). Marcuse goes on to further explain that the education system (and entertainment) unites people in a collective insensitivity to ideas that challenge the status quo of oppression (Marcuse, 1974). This conception strongly echoes Marcuse’s thoughts about the “one-dimensional man”. The one-dimensional man (or woman) is reduced to conformity and standardization without the ability to envision or engage in societal revolution (Kellner, Lewis, & Pierce, 2009). Marcuse sees this one-dimensionality as resulting from education around “that which is” as a set of societal norms, rather than exploring “that which could be” as a way of rising above oppressive societal norms found in education (Kellner, et al., 2009).

In his critique of the education system, which Marcuse distrusted for its role in the creation of the one-dimensional man (or woman), Marcuse offered two powerful solutions. First, he called for the creation of a “new type of man” that is “incapable of tolerating what is going on, who have really learned what is going on, has always been going on, and why,

and who are educated to resist and to fight for a new way of life” (Marcuse, 2009, p. 35). This new man (or woman) would take on these qualities through increased educational emphasis on the humanities and by developing an education system that is political in the sense that it compels individuals to develop an intolerance for aggressive and destructive movements (Marcuse, 2009). The second solution, proposed by Marcuse, is the increased emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of education. Marcuse envisioned aesthetic education as developing a connection between the mind and body that would allow people to realize their oppressed positioning and develop more sensual needs, allowing people to rise above their own role in creating the present condition of oppression (Kellner, et al., 2009). This would allow students engaging in aesthetic education to break free from the instrumental and technological reality produced by standardization, and instead enter into a mode of education where reason and happiness converge (Van Hertuum, 2009). Both of these notions for educational change were designed to address the ways in which the educational system standardizes students and leaves them unable to critique their own domination.

Of the later individuals who engaged in critical theory, Foucault (1977) points to a similar trend of standardization when he refers to the education system as creating the “disciplined” individual, complete with both economic utility and political obedience. In this manner, Foucault suggests that a singular product is desirable in “docile” individuals and that the schools are responsible for this production. He elaborates that even the architecture of schools is designed to instill discipline, in many ways mirroring the construction of prisons, complete with restricting spaces and omnipresent surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Within these schools, Foucault explains that “the Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education and

the establishment of the [teachers' training colleges]" (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). It appears here that Foucault is once again highlighting the process of standardization noted early by Marcuse. Giroux (2006), providing a current critique of standardization, explains that modern education reform strips students of the capacity to think critically and instead prepares them for learning centered around standardized test-taking. This makes it clear that the critique of standardization in education is not limited to the modern era of No Child Left Behind, but has instead featured heavily throughout the body of critical theory.

Prominent among current critical theorists of education is Henry Giroux. Giroux (2001) suggests that schools serve other interests beyond capitalism, some of which exist in opposition both to the ideology of the dominant society and to the economic order. When examining the educational system, Giroux (2001, p. 148) reminds us that "what appears as 'natural' must be demystified and revealed as an historical production, both in terms of unrealized claims or distorting messages of its content, and the elements that structure its form." He argues, instead, that traditional critical theorists - particularly from the Frankfurt School - struggle to fully liberate themselves from one-sided notions about the power of capital, which limits their ability to find opportunities for emancipation within the social apparatuses they critique, including the education system (Giroux, 2001). In this way, Giroux is suggesting that while the education system may represent an ideological apparatus for oppression, it also represents a location for a critical pedagogy of emancipation, positioning Giroux as more utopian than many members of the Frankfurt School.

In a more general sense, some critical theorists see education as failing to live up to its possibilities for human freedom. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argue that as barriers

of educational privilege have fallen and access to enlightened culture has increased, education has failed to lift people out of a state of historical materialism. Their argument rests in the notion that the enlightenment brought with it the possibility for liberation, but that reason was corrupted to keep individuals in a state of oppression. They explain, "But as the real emancipation of the humanity did not coincide with the enlightenment of the mind, education itself became sick" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 163). This "sick" education system instead commodifies culture and spreads information that those who acquire it are unable to understand (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Marcuse (2009) also referred to "education in sickness" showing the relevance of this metaphor among multiple critical theorists, and the power of this metaphor to describe a system as diseased yet possibly curable.

To provide us with a way out of a sick system, Adorno suggests that "the target of attack should be the ideology of schooling" (Adorno, 2005, p. 188). This attack is leveled through the introduction of critical reflection into the education system. By coming to know the mechanisms in education that result in the kind of formalized reason that divorces individuals from humanity and renders them as commodities, individuals can free themselves from an oppressed position and make use of the education system to improve society (Adorno, 2005). Adorno explains that, "the only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection" (Adorno, 2005, p. 193). This would allow education to transform itself into a study of societal forces that oppress people by allowing the state to place its rights over those of the citizens (Adorno, 2005). Therefore, a move toward critical reflection in education would allow for a change of the education system into one that leads to empowerment, rather than subjugation.

This analysis would be incomplete if I did not also add the thoughts of Jürgen Habermas, who had a strikingly different view of the education system. He concerned himself with the study of communication, seeing the act of enlightened and unrestricted communication as the key to removal of oppression (Habermas, 1979). Habermas (1979) explained that the impetus to develop toward freedom came from gaining the ability to competently interact, and that education can be a contributor to this process. He elucidates this educational undertaking as a three-step process in which one ultimately, at the third level, reaches the ability to question social roles and norms, at which point “the critique and justification of need interpretations acquire the power to orient action” (Habermas, 1979, p. 84). This action is the point at which people begin to break free from commodification and realize their full humanity. This analysis by Habermas, if not outright optimistic about education, at least acknowledges the positive possibilities of the education system to affect change, and presents education as the cure, rather than a sickness.

### Conclusion

In the end, many critical theorists appear to take aim at the standardization present in education as a societal sickness. This suggests that while education promises human freedom, it often fails to live up to this promise and instead is easily made to serve as a force for oppression. Fortunately, critical theorists also illuminate ways in which education can change to reflect critical thought and improved communication, ultimately leading to a more democratic society.

### 2.2.2 – What do critical theorists say about the role of teachers?

While a variety of critical theorists have expressed an opinion on education (Adorno, 2005; Foucault, 1977; Freud, 1961; Giroux, 2001, 2006; Habermas, 1979; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Marcuse, 1974), very few of them make the leap in discussion to speak directly about teachers. The most notable exception is Theodor Adorno, who dedicated an entire essay to the topic, titled *Taboos on the Teaching Vocation* (Adorno, 2005). While the essay first reads as an assault on the teaching profession, careful reading does at least hint in the direction of ways to seek improvement.

Adorno's (2005) essay centers on the manner in which society views teachers, in this case as something less than the professionals they may wish to be. As an example, Adorno (2005, p. 178) proclaims that, "compared with other academic vocations such as law or medicine, the teacher's profession unmistakably smacks of something society does not take completely seriously." He further elaborates that even teachers are ashamed of their status, often describing themselves to others as different from "typical" teachers (Adorno, 2005). This shows a conscious effort by the teacher to appear as somehow better than they believe they are typically perceived. Adorno (2005) traces the dissonance in perception to the disconnect between the teacher's intellectual claim to status and power and the reality of their lower social position.

In attempting to explain the differences between the wanted and actual status of teachers, Adorno examines a number of contributing factors and in doing so, makes a number of claims about teachers. The explanation given by Adorno that is perhaps the most salient for this study is that both lawyers and doctors are seen as belonging to independent professions and subject to competitive markets, whereas teachers are not

subject to the same market forces (Adorno, 2005). While Adorno does not make this explicit, he does appear to be suggesting that the bureaucratic structure of schooling creates a different environment from that of a competitive marketplace. Adorno (2005) also highlights that the status of teachers is corrupted by their work with children, relegating the teachers to a status that somehow marks them as members of a children's world, rather than members of adult society. As an additional critique, Adorno (2005) explains that teachers mistake their work environment for reality, often trying to make their classrooms a more equal environment than the "real" world. This false reality carries forward in the teacher's mind into their dealings outside of the school, making them less likely to accept outside realities. As a last critique, Adorno highlights his own, fairly low, view of the people who become teachers. "The teacher is... someone who among all other possible occupations and professions inevitably limited himself to this as his own..." (Adorno, 2005, p. 186). Unfortunately, all of these critiques present a fairly negative view of teachers.

Before offering his suggestions for change, Adorno is quick to highlight his own shortcomings. When trying to answer the question of what to do to fix this problem, Adorno responds "I feel, in general, and so too here, quite incompetent to respond" (Adorno, 2005, p. 187). He does, however, go on in the essay to offer two suggestions. First he suggests that teachers not attempt to appear as emotionless and objective "professionals" but rather to embrace their emotional positions as the nature of their work (Adorno, 2005). In this case, providing teachers with a unique position, as that of a caring advocate, from which to attempt to influence their field. Adorno (2005) offers as a second possibility, the act of reforming the ideology of schooling, which he sees as largely



contributing to the devalued position of the teachers. While he is quite critical of the education system<sup>1</sup>, in this essay he does not continue on to explain exactly what it is that should be done to change this ideology, instead just suggesting the target for the reform as a jumping-off point.

It is important to note that in a different essay, *The Meaning of Working Through the Past*, Adorno appears to have a different view of teachers. In this essay, while trying to determine how to enlighten individuals to the power of historical analysis, Adorno explains that:

The problem of how to carry out practically such a subjective enlightenment probably could only be resolved by the collective effort of teachers and psychologists, who would not use the pretext of scholarly objectivity to shy away from the most urgent task confronting their disciplines today. (Adorno, 2005, p. 102)

In this case, Adorno sees teachers as those who, along with psychologists, instead have the ability to escape formalized reason and are able to combine their own subjectivity with historical study to illumine oppressive facets of history. Here the teacher represents the possibility for students to gain critical perspectives toward the dominant ideologies present within society.

Van Heertum speaks specifically to and about teachers in his attempt to fuse Marcuse's thoughts on education with Freire's vision of critical pedagogy. Van Heertum (2009) suggests that teachers are to play a role in a change in the education system by awakening students to their surrounding world, while also giving them the strength and

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to section 2.2.1 of this review

belief that they can work to change it. Giroux (2001, p. 199) explains that “teachers must attempt to understand the meaning of the contradictions, dysfunctions, and tensions that exist in both schools and the larger social order.” By embodying a form of political education advocated by Marcuse, teachers can demonstrate an intolerance for behaviors of aggression and domination, modeling for their students methods for empowerment (Van Hertuum, 2009). This position would highlight teachers as public intellectuals. Giroux, explains that one of the major challenges facing the education system today is the need “...to recover the role of teachers as public intellectuals...” (2006, p. 9). As public intellectuals, not only would teachers speak against undemocratic processes, but also they would engage politically in attempts to overturn these practices and allow them to symbolize hope for their students (Giroux, 2006; Van Hertuum, 2009).

### Conclusion

For many important critical theorists, concern over the status of teachers represents an important line of study. It is important for critical theory to “recover the space of the teacher as an oppositional intellectual rather than as dutiful technician or de-skilled corporate drone” (Giroux, 2001, p. xxii). By moving to a more “professional” position as public intellectuals, teachers may be able to serve as models of how to apply critical approaches against ideologies present in society that repress the powers of those not in dominant positions.

### **2.2.3 – What do critical theorists say about the media?**

When it comes to the media, the thoughts of critical theorists have changed and increased in diversity over time, mirroring the growth and diversification of the focus and influence of media. During the Frankfurt School period of critical theory (particularly following World War II), only a few of the theorists devote their attention to the media, and the approach is a rather one-sided polemic against the media as a tool for ideological creation. More recent critical (and post-structural) theorists develop a more pluralistic view of the media that includes both its ideological traits and its empowerment possibilities.

#### The Frankfurt School

It is the Frankfurt School that first begins to take a critical philosophical approach to the media (Kellner, 2000). From the 1930s to the 1950s, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School leveled criticism against what they labeled as the “culture industry”, but their critique failed to evolve beyond this original approach to the media (Kellner, 2000). In other words, the members of the Frankfurt School were able to create an initial critical analysis of the media, but failed to continue to adapt that critique to new forms of media or any new possibilities that the new media presented. Even though the Frankfurt School members were known for their practice of “immanent critique” - the consistent turning of ideologies against other ideologies to analyze social reality against its possibilities - in this case they failed to develop a multi-positional approach (Giroux, 2001; Kellner, 2000). However, the one-sided critique that was developed by the Frankfurt School theorists does provide a lens through which to see the influence of the media.

It is Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno who posit the first critique of the media in their famous 1944 work, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). In this original critique, and the subsequent critiques issued by the Frankfurt School critical theorists, two themes become apparent: 1) media as a vehicle for the spreading of a capitalist ideology and 2) engagement with the media as a new type of labor.

Addressing the ideological claim, Horkheimer and Adorno explain that the initial effect of the media is to create a filter through which people learn about their world, that removes their ability to freely imagine alternative interpretations (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) explain, “the more strongly the culture industry entrenches itself, the more it can do as it chooses with the needs of consumers – producing, controlling, disciplining them; even withdrawing amusement altogether: here, no limits are set to cultural progress” (p. 115). This presents a downward cycle in which the media is able to gain increasing influence over its public participants.

Political groups and capitalist interests are then able to use the influence of the media to shape the ideology of the public sphere (Habermas, 2006) while simultaneously teaching acceptance of subjugation to this ideology (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Within the media, certain representations of political positions are used to reinforce the hegemonic dominance of specific political groups, causing the public to see the groups’ ideologies as the nature of the world (Kellner, 2000). “This tends to close out dissenting views even more comprehensively, as they would now conflict with an already established popular belief” (Herman & Chomsky, 2006, p. 282). It is this ability to change the perceptions of the public to fit the ideology of dominant groups that makes the media so

threatening for traditional critical theorists. Ultimately, although the media may appear to present new opportunities for the public, the pervasiveness of the ideological control of the media instead creates a sameness in the thoughts of the public, leaving them trapped in an ideology of economic coercion (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002).

The Frankfurt School critical theorists also see engagement with the media as a new type of labor. Horkheimer and Adorno explain that, "Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism" (2002, p. 109). While the media is seen by laborers as a way of escaping from the toil of work, instead the media involves a new type of work that simultaneously prepares the escaping individual to consume and to return at the next opportunity to their traditional labor position (Giroux, 2001; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). The special type of work in the media is that of consumption by the audience in which the audience itself, strangely, both consumes and becomes the commodity (Smythe, 2006). In this way the audience is subject to the ideology and advertisements of the media, while the media competes for the attention of the audience as a market for commodities (Kellner, 2000). Both instances reduce the media to an arena for commodity exchange, rather than positioning the media in a manner that could allow for emancipation.

Given both the tendency for the media to spread the capitalist ideology and the perception of the media as a continuation of labor, it is no surprise that the Frankfurt School theorists appear to have found no redeeming value in the culture industry. This leads Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) to instead suggest an avoidance of the media as the answer to these problems. Regrettably, in today's world of media inundation, avoidance is an entirely unrealistic approach.

### Recent Critical Theory

More recently, a more nuanced understanding of the media has come to dominate critical theory. This new critical approach, led largely by the work of Douglas Kellner, makes a more concerted effort to engage in the type of “immanent critique” generally favored in other realms by the Frankfurt School (Kellner, 2000). Such an ideology critique allows dominant ideology to be “...disassembled and refashioned with the aim of developing social relations and modes of knowledge that serve radical needs” (Giroux, 2001, p. 160). This new approach recognizes that media contains both ideological forces that subjugate individuals and possibilities for emancipation from domination. It is to each of these possibilities that I now turn.

Echoing the earlier thoughts of the Frankfurt School, the media can still be seen as a site for the engraving in the public of specific political and commercial ideologies. Kellner, in his work, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and Postmodern* (2000) provides a number of readings of popular commercial films and television that demonstrate the media’s reinforcement of conservative views. Among the most consequential of these ideologies are those centered around: racism – placing whites above all others, sexism and a favoring of hyper-masculinity, competition and the requirement to win at all costs, and the positioning of the US as dominant over all other cultures and nations (Kellner, 2000). All of these types of media make use of a narrative style to elevate dominant groups (Kellner, 2000).

Beyond the readings of commercial film and television, and of most importance for this study, modern critical theorists also explain the use of the news to distribute and support various political ideologies of the government. Kellner, in his work *Media Culture*

(2000), goes through a number of readings of public news in which he demonstrates a tendency within the media to spread a view of the government that supports the actions of the political parties in control, even in situations where the news is clearly disinformation. This results from the tendency of the media to draw on limited viewpoints for information, and the ability of the government (and corporations) to provide these viewpoints in a manner that is both accessible and appears credible (Giroux, 2006; Herman & Chomsky, 2006; Kellner, 2000). In this way, the press, with an abundance of similar viewpoints, presents what Gramsci described as an “ideological front” that maintains, defends, and develops the ideological position of those in power (Gramsci, 2006; Kellner, 2000). As an educational force, media controlled by such a limited and select group, is able to shape how “...politics [is] defined, understood, engaged, and carried out” (Giroux, 2006, p. 18). By favoring the ideology of those in power, alternative views fail to reach the public in meaningful ways. Bourdieu similarly explained that the news, in an effort to reach a broad audience, makes a conscious attempt not to offend anyone, and therefore fails to give voice to contested viewpoints (Bourdieu, 2006). This failure of multiple viewpoints to penetrate the news results in an inability of unwary consumers to gain a clear picture of topics of interest, and instead leaves them with no choice but to subsume the dominant ideology.

As a result of the dominant ideologies found in the media, recent critical theorists decry the ability of the media to cause cultural homogenization and audience commodification in a similar fashion to the critique leveled by those in the Frankfurt School. Giroux (2006) points to the media as one of today’s most consequential sites of public pedagogy, becoming a significant educational force that remains limited in both discourse and value representation. Kellner (2000) explains that in many cases, the media

has replaced myth and ritual in cultural identity formation. This replacement with the “sameness” of the media has resulted in a furthering of uniformity and continuity in modern culture that makes it less sensitive to diversity (McLuhan, 2006). At the same time while cultural diversity is being narrowed, commodity formation in both the media and the audience continues to occur. Smythe (2006) describes the phenomenon as a cyclical one in which the media presents commodities that the audience desires as a source of pleasure, while simultaneously the audience becomes a commodity for the media, as a vulnerable customer base for media ratings and profits. In this manner, the audience continues to “labor” as described by the Frankfurt School critical theorists, but the media is now laboring as well.

It is this two-way relationship that presents modern critical theorists with the opportunity for the media to play a role in emancipation. As Kellner explains, “I see media culture as a contested terrain reproducing on the cultural level the fundamental conflicts within society rather than as an instrument for domination” (Kellner, 2000, p. 101-102). Because the audience becomes selective consumers of the media, the media cannot simply rely on presenting the dominant message to consumers out of fears that they may choose to consume from different media sources (Granham, 2006). Thus, the media must rely on presenting a wider range of messages in a rapid-paced manner to interest a larger portion of the public, making room for the possibility of conflicting messages and the chance for consumers to make their own decisions. Here the break from the Frankfurt School critical theorists becomes clear: because the audience, as consumers, has an ever-increasing amount of choice, the media has the potential to become a space for “the informed citizenry to make intelligent political judgments “ (Kellner, 2000, p. 340).



While the media continues to play a role in modern identity formation, its rapid changes also present individuals with the freedom to change their identity (Kellner, 2000). Supporting this claim, Kellner (2000, p. 258) states that, “many icons of media culture suggest that identity is a matter of individual choice and action and that each individual can produce their own unique identity.” In the most recent decades, it is the Internet, which has provided an environment to both experiment with this identity formation and gain access to increasingly diverse politics that make room for previously neglected viewpoints. The creation of new “amateur” authored websites, such as wiki’s, blogs, social network sites, and video hosting sites, has made room for countless opinions and viewpoints to find an audience (Kahn & Kellner, 2006; Poster, 2006). Now, not only is the audience the consumer, they are also the producer, creating the possibility for emancipation through the interaction of individuals with the media (Poster, 2006). Kahn and Kellner (2006, p. 720) explain that, “rapidly evolving media developments in technoculture make possible a reconfiguring of politics and culture and a refocusing of participatory democratic politics for everyday life.”

### Conclusion

Critical theorists, both from the Frankfurt School and in the present, agree that the media plays a role in the indoctrination of the audience into dominant ideologies. However, as media forms have changed and become more prolific, the opportunity to make use of the media for emancipation has grown. It is only through a critical approach to the media that one can parse messages of emancipation from those of domination.

## 2.3 – THE MEDIA

### 2.3.1 – What influences can the media have on public opinion?

Originally, I had this question written as “what influence does the media have on public opinion?” but after reviewing the literature, it became clear that determining a causal relationship here is an impossibility. Rather, the interaction between the media and public opinion is so complex and multifaceted that it defies the ability to establish quantitative causal links. Instead, it is more relevant to describe the ideological messages of the media, the “contested terrain” (Kellner, 2000) within the media, and the differences found in public audiences, which all contribute to a qualitatively better understanding of possible ways the media can influence public opinion.

#### Media as Ideological Vehicle

Media is often described as a location for distribution of the ideology of the elite. Gramsci (2006, p. 16) explains, “The press is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure... Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it...” This ideological message, portrayed by the media, displays the images of both the government and dominant private interests and plays a major role in the cultural formation of a society (Herman & Chomsky, 2006; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Kellner, 2000; Schiller, 2006; Wilkinson, 1999). In this way, the media functions as an pedagogical site, educating the public to accept the politics, discourses and values of the ruling elite (Giroux, 2006). This heavy influence, while shaping culture around the world, can also be used to manipulate public opinion to agree with dominant ideological interests.

In the modern age, it is nearly impossible not to be a consumer of some type of media. As a forced consumer, dominant ideologies present in the media are inescapable. The effect this has on the public is related to what Kellner (2000) termed as “resonant images,” which are the images that remain in our mind after consuming media, that lead to later thoughts and actions. In order for the media to change public opinion, it must either play into resonant images that already exist (Kellner, 2000) or create new images, often in the form of propaganda, that then resonate with the public (Herman & Chomsky, 2006).

The government has become particularly adept at using media propaganda to create new cultural images that can influence public opinion. The government most often makes use of the news media genre to spread their propaganda campaigns, frequently using select or even false information to steer public opinion toward the acceptance of new government policies (Kellner, 2000). As Kellner (2000, p. 198) explains, “The mainstream media in the United States and elsewhere tended to be a compliant vehicle for the government strategy to manipulate the public, thereby imperiling democracy...” While news sources may appear to be abundant, the reality is that most news is generated among a small collection of top-tier news agencies and then picked up by lower level news organizations (Herman & Chomsky, 2006). These top-tier news sources have ready access to government officials, who in turn use these contacts to spread government-generated data as support for government policies (Herman & Chomsky, 2006; Kellner, 2000). Additionally, top-tier news agencies are afraid to go against the government-created images for fear of losing their expert insider contacts and ability to “break” the news, giving the government unequaled access to use the news to bias the public (Kellner, 2000). In this way, the government can

make use of the ideology-forming properties of the media, and their own ability to create the images presented in the news, to influence public opinion.

### Media as “Contested Terrain”

While the above section presents an image of the media as a tool for dominant interests to force an ideology on the public, it is important also to understand aspects of the media that prevent those in dominant positions from making their ideology ubiquitous; specifically the variety of media viewpoints now available. Kellner (2000) explains that, “while media culture largely advances the interest of the class that owns and controls large media conglomerates, its products are also involved in social conflict between competing groups and articulate conflicting positions, sometimes advancing forces of resistance and progress” (p. 16). This possibility for multiple viewpoints in the media stems primarily from the commercial nature of the media. At its base, the media is a commercial endeavor that requires attracting audiences to exist, which gives the public the option to buy into particular ideologies of their choosing (Garnham, 2006). Because those who work in the media are, in the end, most concerned with maintaining employment, the commercial nature of the media presents a two-edged sword for public opinion (Garnham, 2006). On one hand, the media must maintain contacts with reliable “expert” informants and easily accessible information that keeps them presenting the ideology of those in power; but on the other hand, the news must cater to public opinion and present the public with what it wants to consume (Garnham, 2006; Herman & Chomsky, 2006; Smythe, 2006), which may go against the dominant ideology. It is the public’s freedom to choose which media to consume that limits the ability of the media to influence public opinion.

Further complicating the media's influence, the Internet has now made it possible for the creation of new media that represents views outside of those presented by large media conglomerations. The Internet has a multitude of tools that allow individuals to create and share media with very small investments of time and resources, making it possible for the consumers of the media to become its producers (Jenkins, 2006; Kahn & Kellner, 2006). These new possibilities allow for fierce economic competition and previously-subdued opinions to find traction and circulation among the public, possibly swaying public opinion (Kahn & Kellner, 2006). Because of its infinite nature, the Internet presents a new contested terrain that enhances images of both domination and resistance (Kahn & Kellner, 2006; Kellner, 2000). In the end, it is up to the public, with its multitude of options, to decide which ideology influences their opinion. Unfortunately, not all options are equally accessible, which explains why popular media continues to have such an influence over public opinion. While opportunity does exist in emerging forms of media, the ease of availability of popular media and the sense of expertise often attributed to the news favors the news genre as an influential informant of public opinion.

### A Diverse Public

Turning my attention to the public, in this case what is important is the plethora of ways in which variation in the public can affect their receptiveness to attempts by the media to influence their opinion. Wilkinson (1999, p. 23) points out "that the ways in which people make meanings out of media messages are context specific." This context is heavily influenced by the genre of the media source, as some genres of media (such as the news) can provide a context that is more apt to change public opinion than other genres (such as

a horror movie) (Kellner, 2000). Additionally, public consumers often make different interpretations of media sources than academics who study the same media (Kellner, 2000; Wilkinson, 1999), further blurring the ability to draw direct links between media messages and public opinion. It is often the case that members of the public can have vastly different interpretations of the same piece of media. These different interpretations result from dissimilarities in audience education level, social class, political interest, gender, race, culture, etc... that influence the way in which people “see” the media piece (Welch, 2003; Wilkinson, 1999). Because of this, certain groups may be more susceptible to influence by media messages that resonate with their personal schemas (Welch, 2003), while other groups may fail to internalize the same message. Any group wishing to use the media to influence public opinion would need to craft messages and deliver them in such a way as to ensure that they appeal to their intended audience.

### Conclusion

The media represents a powerful tool for influencing public opinion, but the degree to which this influence is possible is less clear. The media represents a distribution point for dominant ideologies, and news media is often the location of government attempts to influence public opinion. However, the public has both the freedom to choose and an expanding variety of choices when it comes to the media they consume. To some degree, this may place limits on the ability of dominant ideologies to influence public opinion. The public also comes to the media with a diverse set of traits that make certain audiences more or less susceptible to attempts to have their opinion swayed by the media. Ultimately,

while in many cases the media can have an influence on public opinion, which people within the greater public they influence and to what degree, are both highly subjective.

### **2.3.2 – How has the media’s influence changed over time?**

In reviewing the literature surrounding the evolution of media influence over time, two distinct periods distinguish themselves. The first of these is a sharp focusing and dominance by the media, particularly following World War II, in which media producers are bought up into larger corporations and the message of media becomes more concise and ideological. The second period of time, signaled by the mass spread of Internet use, represents a fracturing of media influence in which the cost of media production shrinks drastically and tools become available that allow consumers to become producers. It is these two distinct periods that demonstrate the changing influence of the media over time.

#### Media Dominance

In order for the media to have an influence over large groups of people, it has to be easily reproducible to meet the desires of a large audience. While many would cite Gutenberg’s printing press, created around 1440 C.E., as the primary example of reproduction, Benjamin reminds us that founding for the Greeks, engraving in the Middle Ages and lithography in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were also dominant forms of artistic reproduction (Benjamin, 2006). He further explains that by the 1900s, technical reproduction had reached a level at which it could be used to bring large audiences to artwork previously reserved for high culture viewers (Benjamin, 2006). Unfortunately, such reproduction was (and is still) not the original piece of art, which Benjamin sees as robbing the consumer of

the aesthetic experience of the original work and reminds the consumer of their position in society of a viewer of copies of art, rather than as an owner of actual art (Benjamin, 2006). Perhaps it is this differentiation that represents one of the original media messages of domination.

Turning to the press, which is of most importance for this study, Habermas (2006) points to the 1830s as the period of time in which the press became integrated into the market economy. Prior to this period, small press operations had been able to spread a wide range of viewpoints. During the middle of the 1800s, the cost of production soared as readership increased, limiting the ability of smaller press groups and favoring larger media organizations (Herman & Chomsky, 2006). From this period in the middle of the 1800s through to the modern day, press media has continually been condensed and consolidated under the ownership of large media corporations, causing a narrowing of media viewpoints and a general scarcity of news, which is of benefit to owners of the large media corporations (Herman & Chomsky, 2006; Poster, 2006).

During this period of media consolidation, the United States began to dominate the media message. This command of the media began during a period from the 1930s to 1950s in which Hollywood films became worldwide consumables (Mulvey, 2006). After World War II, the television also became a major vehicle for cultural consumption, again with US media being the most largely watched (Kellner, 2000). This US domination of media, particularly following World War II, led to a spreading of American-capitalist values throughout the world, causing Schiller (2006) to describe the phenomenon as “US cultural imperialism.” Many have written about the negative influence US dominance of the media has had on cultures, citing wholesale changes in cultural values, spreading of the capitalist



philosophy, spreading of dominant ideologies, and the judging of cultural worth based on media messages (Kellner, 2000; Sreberny, 2006; Straubhaar, 2006). However, during the 1980s and 1990s, the Internet came to prominence, changing the influence the media can have over media consumers and providing new opportunities for alternative viewpoints to re-enter the media conversation.

### Media Fracturing

While the origins of the Internet date back to the 1960s, it was the drastic reduction of government control of the Internet in the 1980s and 1990s, coupled with the availability of new and affordable computer technologies, that allowed the Internet to change the influence of the media (Poster, 2006). The Internet provided an outlet for the growing amount of amateur-produced media content, involving both the creation of brand new content and the reconfiguring of mass media material into new artifacts (Jenkins, 2006; Kahn & Kellner, 2006; Mulvey, 2006). This new media and the exponential growth of media content on the Internet has provided many new options for media consumers that has, in some ways, lessened the influence of the media on the public (Welch, 2003). This is not to say that the Internet has caused a reverse of the ideological properties found in previously popular medium; rather, the Internet now provides room for new and contrasting ideologies to gain prominence (Kahn & Kellner, 2006). As a result, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has shown a marked return to more regionally created media, particularly in Latin American and the Arab world, where ideologies that are different from those of the US have come to dominate the media market (Straubhaar, 2006). Unfortunately, connection to the Internet is not universal, and disparities created by this difference likely allow for singular

ideologies to dominate the less “connected” parts of the world. Fortunately though, current efforts by organizations, such as *One Laptop Per Child*, are making efforts to close these gaps and allow for the emancipation properties of newer participatory media to spread.

### Conclusion

Two distinct periods exist in the evolution of the media’s influence over public opinion. Following World War II, media went through a period marked by both rapid expansion and corporate consolidation that tightened control over media content and increased the ability of the media to act as a vehicle for the transmission of dominant ideologies. The widespread use of the Internet marks the second period of media influence, in which media production and distribution becomes more accessible, allowing participation by sources outside of the corporate media conglomerates. This period allows alternative messages and ideologies to become more widespread, allowing media to act as a contested terrain that can be both oppressive and emancipatory.

### **2.3.3 – How are teachers commonly portrayed in popular media?**

“Popular” media represents the types of media content that individuals encounter frequently and that contribute to the popular culture of a society. These types of media generally are not sought out for their educative value, but rather, popular media is most often used as a source of entertainment. Even though they function as entertainment, popular media represents a form of public pedagogy in which people in a society learn cultural capital. It is often through popular media that people form their attitudes and values (Swetnam, 1992). Therefore, when thinking about how the public views teachers, it

is important to account for the common images of teachers presented within US popular media.

Tillman and Trier (2007, p. 126) explain that, “representations of teaching, learning, and leadership can... have implications for the way in which educational policy is discussed and perhaps shaped at the local, state, and federal level.” Within popular media found in the US, there are two types of images of teachers that are most readily apparent: teacher as “teacher-hero” and “teacher-as-incompetent.” In popular movies and TV shows, these images often exist together dialectically, in that in order to present a superhero teacher, you have to position them in opposition to a body of seemingly incompetent teachers. In popular news sources, these images are more readily broken apart and displayed without the need for the opposite image. Unfortunately, it appears as though the teacher-as-incompetent image is the more sensational one and is, therefore, the image that dominates these contexts. Here, I will explore both the image of teacher-hero and teacher-incompetent in popular television and movies, before moving on to describe how popular news media focuses on the teacher-incompetent image to sensationalize their media product.

### Teacher-Hero

Teacher-as-hero would appear to be a positive image for teachers. From 1977 forward, there has been a resurgence of popular media in which a teacher is shown as the hero of the film (Bulman, 2002) conforming to the desire of the audience to see movie and television classrooms as transformative spaces (Bauer, 1998). The movies and television shows (as successful examples: the TV show *Boston Public* and movies such as *Dangerous*

*Minds, 187, Lean on Me, and The Substitute*) seem to follow a common formula in presenting both the classroom and the teacher-hero.

The classrooms tend to be urban classrooms filled with rowdy, hard-to-educate students, mired in a culture of poverty that prevents them from realizing their full potential (Bulman, 2002). Here, failings appear to be caused from the inability of the students to realize the value of education and the opportunities that education may present to them. Members of the education system are depicted as unwilling or unable to help the students to break with their cynicism about education and to realize their full potential (Bulman, 2002).

Into this environment enters an outsider teacher-hero with a troubled past, little experience, a good heart, a sense of selflessness, and some sort of unorthodox approach to education (Bulman, 2002). The notion of teacher-hero with little experience suggests that those with more experience are unwilling to give these rowdy students a chance, instead dismissing them as destined for failure. In a way, the teacher-hero at first appears to be thrown in with the lot implying that they too have been equally dismissed to failure. Instead, the teacher-hero begins a process of importing middle-class, cultural capital to the students so that they may realize the error of their current poverty values and can instead learn the value of education (Bulman, 2002). As the story unfolds, the teacher-hero makes various sacrifices and struggles with his/her ability to continue teaching until finally, many of the students come around to the teacher's view that education is important, thus leaving the audience with a happy ending in which the teacher-hero has saved the students from an otherwise dreadful future.

Unfortunately, this teacher-hero portrayal creates a number of problems for public education. First, because the students are most often from various minority groups, and are saved by a teacher-hero who imports middle-class majority values, the image appears to represent a stereotyping of minority cultures (Tillman & Trier, 2007). Second, the image of teacher-hero suggests that anyone can be a teacher, regardless of experience or training, while evidence suggests that, in reality, inexperienced and alternatively-certified teachers leave the profession at almost double the rate of those teachers with traditional education backgrounds (Bauer, 1998; Tillman & Trier, 2007). Third, this image presents the urban poor as impoverished for the wrong reasons. Bulman (2002, p. 258) explains “Rather, it is argued that the urban poor are impoverished because they have the wrong values and the wrong attitudes about school, work and family.” This portrayal completely disregards social conditions that may contribute to poverty culture and suggests instead that simply having a teacher who can impart middle-class values on these students will emancipate them from their oppressive value system. Lastly, while the portrayal of the teacher-hero is one in which they seem to be able to save the students, it is important to note that the students are dependent on the teacher for their salvation (Bulman, 2002). In this case, it is not that the teacher has changed society for the better; they have just created a classroom environment in which students trade their dependency on society for dependency on the teacher as the conveyor of middle-class values toward education.

### Teacher-Incompetent

Tied in with the portrayal of the teacher-hero is the notion that all of the other teachers – and therefore the majority of our schools’ teachers – are incompetent. The suggestion in

popular media is that if enough caring and charismatic teachers showed up, that the schools could be saved (Bauer, 1998). In these depictions, the veteran teachers appear to continually fail the students and seem unable to come up with the right answers to make students successful, instead requiring the inexperienced teacher-hero to come up with the right answers for success (Bulman, 2002). Additionally, the other teachers appear uncaring about the students, cynical about their chances for success, incompetent in educating, and generally burned out with the teaching profession (Bulman, 2002). These aspects are transferred onto the portrayal of teacher organizations in popular television and movies. Teacher organizations or “unions” are commonly depicted as self-serving, only voicing the complaints of teachers, and obstructive to education reform (Bulman, 2002).

In addition to the portrayal of incompetence, another damaging representation of teachers portrayed in these films and television shows is that of teaching as a lesser profession. While the focus is often on one teacher-hero, the suggestion is that this hero is heroic partially because of their choice to enter a lesser field of work. In this way, teaching is depicted as less attractive and less professional than other comparable professions (Swetnam, 1992). The message conveyed is that most teachers, while sentimental, remain powerless and reactionary (Bauer, 1998; Bulman, 2002). “No matter how successful, teaching is portrayed as a failure to do something else more meaningful in the cultural – and even the teacher’s – imagination” (Bauer, 1998, p. 312). This image is most prevalent in teacher portrayals in comedy, in television shows such as *Saved by the Bell* and movies such as *Ferris Buellers Day Off*, *School of Rock*, and *Bad Teacher*. These programs break from the more traditional – urban high school students need teacher-hero – formula, to instead depict teachers as autocrats and clowns; presentations of teachers that are both demeaning

and unrealistic (Swetnam, 1992). In either case, teaching is not presented as a traditionally desirable occupation, but rather as an occupation for those with either a need for an almost monastic level of self-sacrifice or as an occupation reserved for the least competent among us.

### Beyond Fiction

Popular media also includes non-fiction sources, most notably popular news, politics, and current event programming. Here, sensationalism is often the key to success and the portrayal of teachers as incompetent appears to garner the most salacious headlines. Troy (1998, p. 6) insists, “[Public education] is the most lied-about, misreported story in America. Newsweekly magazines, mindless editorial pages, televisions newscasts, talk radio and televangelists malign public education with a ferocity usually reserved for serial killers.” While Troy may be exaggerating to prove his point, teachers are often targets for attack in popular media. Diane Ravitch, an education historian noted for her early public support of standardized testing and school choice, now explains that:

One would think, by reading the critics, that the nation’s schools are overrun by incompetent teachers who hold their jobs only because of union protections, that unions are directly responsible for poor student performance, and that academic achievement would soar if unions were to disappear. (Ravitch, 2010, p. 175)

Unfortunately, individuals chosen to speak about public education often have a personal stake in the success of the expansion of private education (Troy, 1998). Whether these interests come from links to education corporations and/or specific political ideologies, or these interests are informed by moral positions that wish to see a breakdown of the

separation between religion and schools, the end result is that those who criticize public schools in popular media are falsely attributed an unbiased-expert status (Herman & Chomsky, 2006). Additionally, because most major news outlets are found within cities, they are closest to the majority of our nations “failed” schools (Troy, 1998). The unfortunate result is that education, and the teachers within the education system, are inaccurately portrayed in popular news media contexts.

Ravitch (2010, p. 177) explains, “the critics most often quoted in the media see unions as the major obstacle to education reform.” Perhaps chief among the popular news sources that target teacher organizations as the problem with public education is Fox News. Featherstone (2011) suggests that teacher unions have been caught up in a current effort to discredit public employee unions. As an example of this type of rhetoric, Fox News reports, “Program control over important services such as education should be the province of governors and mayors, who are responsible to voters and taxpayers, not public unions whose leaders more often than not have a private agenda that is in direct conflict with popular will” (Donatelli, 2011). Fox News also describes education decision-making by Democrat Presidents as tied to teacher unions. As an example, “During his first six months in office and under pressure from the NEA, President Obama moved to phase out the [school choice] program... The unions don’t like school choice, so neither do Democrats” (Arney, 2011). Lastly, Fox News suggests that public schools are unable to get rid of poor performing teachers. As an example, “...poll found that 78 percent think it should be easier for school administrators to fire poorly performing teachers” (Fox News, 2010).



Highlighting the hypocrisy present in the Fox News portrayal of teachers, Jon Stewart of Comedy Central comes to the aid of teachers. When Fox News began comparing teachers with Wall Street bankers, Jon Stewart of Comedy Central explained (in jest), “regardless of the greed-based, almost slightly-sociopathic job bankers did wrecking our economy, those people were there every single day, twelve months a year. Not that nine-month bulls---” (Stewart, March 3, 2011). Additionally, Stewart takes issue with the Fox News push to limit teachers’ salaries, but not those of Wall Street bank CEOs. Again through the use of comedy, he explains, “We have got to pay those bailed out firms’ CEOs top dollar. Otherwise those companies could wind up being run by a couple of jackasses who f--- things up so royally, it torpedoes the entire global economy” (Stewart, March 3, 2011). Unfortunately, Jon Stewart represents one of the few individuals in popular media taking a stand against the more common negative portrayals of teachers.

### Conclusion

Throughout popular media, two images of teachers appear to be the most common: teacher-hero and teacher-as-incompetent. Both images carry with them implications that are both unrealistic and demeaning to actual teachers in our society. Fictional accounts often portray both images simultaneously, owing to a particular plot formula – based largely on middle-class values and fears – that has been successful in previous television shows and movies. In non-fiction popular media, primarily popular news reporting, the characterization of teachers and their organizations as self-serving and obstructionist appears to play largely into the teacher-as-incompetent image. For teachers, it is important to understand both of these types of popular portrayal. “Understanding how society views

teachers through the prism of the cultural imagination can productively challenge the profession to create its own pedagogical images” (Bauer, 1998, p. 312). By countering these images, teachers may be able to alter the national discussion about education in a way that can lead to more effective education policy-making.

## 2.4 – NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

### 2.4.1 – Who currently influences the creation of national education policy?

There are quite a large number of groups and individuals (perhaps innumerable) that have their fingers in national education policy creation. For the sake of this literature review, it is easiest to describe the ideologies behind the actions of most (but not all) of these groups, and then to describe a number of the interest groups that have a major influence within national education policy creation. Table 2.3 provides the breakdown of the ideologies and interest groups.

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Table 2.3

*Those Who Influence National Education Policy*

<b>Ideologies</b>	<b>Interest Groups</b>
Neo-Liberal Neo-Conservative (New Right) Christian Right Managerial Class	Corporate Sector Foundations Special Interest Groups Teacher Organizations

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For this analysis, I find it helpful to first describe each ideology, their worldview, and what types of education policies they are interested in. After this, I can describe some of the

interest groups that play the biggest roles in national education policy creation, their link to the aforementioned ideologies, and their methods of influence.

Those who have read the work of Michael Apple will recognize the four ideology categories as they match up almost directly with the four categories he describes in *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality* (Apple, 2006). In my review of the literature, not only did I find his text useful here, my supporting texts appear to directly support and confirm Apple's thesis.

The first ideology that influences the creation of national education policy is the Neo-Liberal ideology. Neo-Liberal is a term that is commonly applied to those individuals or groups in the global political economy who view free markets as good and government interference as bad (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2008). Writing about the ideology's influence on education, Apple (2006, p. 9) agrees in the description of Neo-Liberal ideologues as "...deeply committed to markets and to freedom as 'individual choice'." This commitment to the market becomes the salient feature of policy pushes by Neo-Liberal ideologies, who tend to gather around issues related to linking schools and the economy through school choice, which they see as placing schools directly into the market setting (Apple, 2006). This market setting, in their view, would increase school efficiency, lower costs, improve parent involvement, improve achievement, reduce bureaucracy, and equalize educational opportunity (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). In the Neo-Liberal view, teacher "unions" are both too powerful and too costly, causing Neo-Liberal ideologies to also support many policies that take power away from teacher organizations (Apple, 2006). As is evident here, this Neo-Liberal view is tied to an almost unquestioning faith in the purity of the free-market system.

The second ideology is that of the Neo-Conservative or New Right. Neo-Conservative ideology is tied to a desire for a return to a (faulty) view of the past that they see as preferable to our current position, and that requires a return of discipline and traditional knowledge, with an almost total lack of interest in social and economic rights (Apple, 2006; Baylis, et al., 2008). In their view, education is the location for the transmission of discipline and traditional knowledge. This view often includes an image of teachers as those who ought to have no influence on education policy and should simply be working as implementers of policy handed down to them from above (Croll, Abbott, Broadfoot, Osborn, & Pollard, 1994). This view of teachers causes those with Neo-Conservative ideologies to support policies that remove teacher organizations from participation in educational policy-making (Croll, et al., 1994). Neo-Conservatives also tend to support policies relating to standardization of content and standardized testing, demonstrating a distrust of teachers and the education system (Apple, 2006). This standardization push also includes de-emphasis of “soft” subjects and a push to return to the “basics” in education (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), which may be best characterized as reading, writing and arithmetic. A number of authors also posit that the increased emphasis on JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps) in schools, particularly in poor communities, is an expression of a Neo-Conservative drive to instill discipline in youth and provide soldiers for a large military (Berlowitz & Long, 2003; Brown, 2003).

The third ideology is that of the Christian Right. Apple (2006) refers to this group as the authoritarian populists and claims that their motivation lies in a desire to see the separation between church and state removed and the return of (their) God to US institutions. From their worldview, the existing school system needs to be changed to

support commonly held religious beliefs among typical evangelical groups of Christians, and in the absence of this reform in public schools, the choice to attend private religious schools should be paid for by the government (Apple, 2006). These groups find themselves concerned with education policies relating to "...school vouchers, abstinence-based sex education programs, phonics-based reading instruction, and the removal of evolutionary theory from biology classes" (Spring, 2005b, p. 17).

The last ideological group is that of the Managerial Class. Apple (2006) refers to this group as the new middle class and explains that their interest is in bringing the business practices they are familiar with into the education system. While this may make them seem like adherents to the Neo-Liberal ideology, the difference lies in their lesser commitment to the "good"-ness of the free market and the increased emphasis of the managerial class on attempting to bring best practices from the business community into education settings. Members of this group include representatives of both "right" and "left" wing politics, with a central focus on a singular, business-model view of what schools need to improve (Apple, 2006). The managerial class' worldview is that hierarchal, centralized control and standardization of teaching and evaluation can be used to solve the various failing of schools (Apple, 2006). As such, they tend to support policies that promote increases in standardized assessments, which led this ideology to be instrumental in the creation of No Child Left Behind (Apple, 2006; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2010). In addition to improving the schools through centralization and standardization, the managerial class also has an interest in preparing students to become efficient workers in future settings, tying the schools in closely with the needs of the business community (Spring, 2005b). Given President Obama's education agenda, typified by the *Race to the Top* education

initiative, it appears as though he has most aligned himself with the thoughts of economists and corporate-style education reformers (Ravitch, 2010), which represent this managerial class ideological group.

I have classified the many differing groups that influence national education policy-making into four categories: Corporate Sector, Foundations, Special Interest Groups, and Teachers Organizations. The first three categories are where one can find the nexus between the four ideologies and national education policy-making. While it is true that the corporate sector uses foundations and interest groups to influence policy, I am labeling them separately to distinguish between groups that increase their profits because of their influence (corporate sector) and groups with a non-profit seeking agenda (foundations and special interest groups). The last category, teacher organizations, provides a location for discussion of some of the motivations and practices that these groups have, as well as a discussion of similarities and differences in their ideological stances to the other categories.

The corporate sector is a broad term that I am using here to denote companies that are either privately held or publicly traded, which seek to make positive gains for themselves through the influence of national education policy. These entities are where the Neo-Liberal ideology plays the biggest role, as well as concepts relating to the Managerial Class. The corporate sector is often at the head of the push for national standards and testing, which they see as positive for economic growth (Spring, 2005b). The goal of the corporate sector is for students to learn more useful skills and be more disciplined, making them more prepared workers to allow the company to compete in the global economy (Spring, 2005b). Standards are seen as a way of removing the influence of the teacher and of learning that is not economically viable for the students, as future workers, and focusing

on the knowledge and skills that make for a “good” worker (Apple, 2006; Croll, et al., 1994; Gallagher, 2000), resulting in commodification of the student into the model of an efficient worker.

In some cases, corporations can stand to make direct profits from the school system, and may wish to influence national policy for this reason. A number of corporations make use of nationally-circulated educational material to try to influence the curriculum of classrooms, providing material that both improves the image of their corporation and highlights the benefits of commercialism (Saltman & Goodman, 2003). In short, “...corporations are using schools to teach market values and make these values into common sense, even fashioning them as the basis of morality” (Saltman & Goodman, 2003, p. 43). The testing industry also makes direct profits based on national education policy, causing them to push for policies that increase the use of standardized tests, such as No Child Left Behind (Spring, 2005b). “Clearly, the expansion of the testing industry is the result of improved production methods and newly created markets” (Spring, 2005b, p. 201). In this case, the testing industry benefits from keeping policies in place, or creating new policies, which allow them to force schools into taking standardized tests. “Distrust of teachers is carefully nurtured by the testing industry to keep the present educational power structure intact” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 502). For the corporate sector, it is clear that students represent both a captive market of consumers and a future workforce, causing the business community to invest heavily in national education policy-making.

Falling in the space between corporations and special interest groups are the foundations. Within education, the Gates, Walton, and Broad foundations are able to exercise large amounts of influence over the education system through their investments in

school reform (Ravitch, 2010). These three foundations represent the philanthropic efforts of some of our nations wealthiest corporate members, such as Bill Gates and the Walton Family. As Ravitch (2010, p. 201) explains, “they have taken it upon themselves to reform public education, perhaps in ways that would never survive the scrutiny of voters in any district or state... they are bastions of unaccountable power.” These foundations represent the Managerial Class ideology, seeking to influence education policy through direct financial investments to education institutions that are designed to allow them to experiment with free-market-based reforms. As such, they have as their agenda efforts to increase the amount of choice, competition, and privatization in schools (Ravitch, 2010).

The special interest groups are where we find the greater influence from the Neo-Conservative and Christian Right ideologies, although there certainly are groups that represent Neo-Liberal and Managerial Class ideologies as well (and ideologies outside of the four I have described). Spring explains that, “the most powerful interest groups other than business are politically conservative and right-wing religious organizations” (Spring, 2005b, p. 225). These groups have as their goal the changing or narrowing of the school curricula to suit their beliefs (Spring, 2005b). Even though Conservative and Christian Right special interest groups appear to be the most dominant, it would be inappropriate to paint a picture of them as the only groups present. In reality, special interest groups from both the “right” and the “left” operate to influence national education policy, including: philanthropic organizations, liberal and conservative foundations, civil rights groups, labor organizations, business groups, teacher associations, regional accrediting agencies, academic organizations, scientific organizations, and parental advocacy groups (Ingersoll, 2003; Spring, 2005b).



Finally, I have chosen to separate teacher organizations from the list of special interest groups to highlight their unique properties as a group concerned with influencing national education policy-creation. Apple (2006) explains that teacher organizations are weak influencers of policy when compared to other special interest groups. While both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers are most often seen as supporting the values of the Democratic Party (Spring, 2005b), the national membership of these organizations, representing such a large population of the US, actually represents many diverse sets of political values. The major teacher organizations can influence policy, but they represent a large body of people who often are not unified in their positions. However, instances in which the memberships of the organizations have unified around support or opposition to a national education policy have been very effective (Croll, et al., 1994).

### Conclusion

The corporate sector, special interest groups, and teacher organizations all seek to influence national education policy through the same methods. They lobby members of our government, contribute campaign funds, support specific candidates in elections, and attempt to consult in the drafting of education legislation (Spring, 2005b). Depending on a number of factors, including the political leanings of the government, the state of our economy, and the power of competing interests, these three categories of interest groups find themselves more or less able to influence national education policy in their direction. However, Foundations seek to influence education policy through direct investment in education reforms, bypassing the political process and instituting reforms as they see fit.

This makes the foundations particularly influential in education policy-making, although more so at the state and local level. Perhaps what should be most alarming for teacher organizations is the clear evidence that they hold no special ability to influence policy – despite their expertise in the field – and instead are often the least able to influence national education reforms. As Ravitch (2010, p. 225) explains, “our schools will not improve if elected officials intrude into pedagogical territory and make decisions that properly should be made by professional educators.” This highlights real questions about the public and government views of teachers as professional experts, and suggests instead a lesser view of the knowledge held by teachers.

#### **2.4.2 – What images of teachers do current national education policies project?**

When I write about current national education policies, the primary focus is on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, which has been the dominant national education agenda for nearly a decade. This act represents a substantial shift in the manner in which our federal government engages with school systems, resulting in a dramatic altering of education systems across the nation and presenting new images of educators that liken them more to workers than professionals. When I speak here of images, I am following the work of Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle, who described images as “central common conceptions that are symbolic of basic attitudes and orientations to teaching and learning” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 670). To understand these images and the influence they may have on teachers, it is important to describe both the images presented of teachers and those of the work of teaching. Only by gaining an understanding of both types of images can

those who wish to improve the positions of teachers in the modern era, such as myself, move forward.

### Teachers

National Education policy, primarily through the vehicle of NCLB, presents a variety of negative images of the people who choose teaching as their profession. One common theme in the policy is that schools are failing to educate all children and that teachers are almost exclusively to blame for the societal problems that come with this failure to educate everyone (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Ingersoll, 2003; Luke, 2004). Ingersoll (2003) points out that education policies attempt to centralize control over teachers, reflecting a view that teachers lack the discipline to do what is “right” on their own. The large increase in requirements on teachers suggests that teachers can do more with their resources, presenting an image of teachers as either lazy or inefficient (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007). Additionally, the intense focus on standardized testing presents an image of teachers as not knowing what to teach and requiring guidance from others to teach correctly (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This image is more fully embraced by schools, that repeatedly do poorly on standardized tests, when these schools choose not only to teach toward the test, but mandate that teachers use scripted lessons throughout the year for test preparation (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This emphasis on the teacher as the *ONLY* responsibility holder is an over-simplification and exaggeration of the influence teachers have and consistently sets expectations for teachers that they are unable to meet. This failure to meet expectations further plays into the image of the teacher as an unknowing, inefficient, and ineffective leader for the classroom.

A second theme of images presented by national education policy is that of teachers as simple transmitters of narrowly-focused subject matter. The focus of national education policy on high-stakes standardized testing places a heavy emphasis on the subject matter knowledge of teachers, rather than the pedagogy of teaching. Because the tests focus on a narrow skill set for students, they present the image of a teacher as “good” only if they know the limited skills and can replicate them in students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). This image leaves no room to assess the teacher’s knowledge of students, caring manner, ability to generate curiosity, or ability to motivate their students (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). To reinforce this image of teachers as transmitters of narrowly defined skills, reference to professional development activities in NCLB is limited to a focus on subject matter acquisition for teachers who do not “know enough,” almost completely disregarding the aspects of teaching that do not directly influence test scores (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). The end result of this reduction is “images of teaching [that] are deceptively simple and instrumental...” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 681), which ultimately causes a focus more on weaknesses than strengths, for both teachers and students.

A third theme of images is that of the teacher as a worker in a factory setting, rather than as a professional. This includes reference to professional development as “training” rather than “learning,” and the idea that bad teachers should be “retrained” to do their jobs correctly (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). This is coupled with the idea that teachers need to be better controlled by their managers, in this case the administrators (Ingersoll, 2003). Because national education policy reduces children to products, in this case test scores, teachers are presented as responsible for the production of a product and ought to be graded by measuring the value of the finished product (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006;

Nichols & Berliner, 2007). None of these qualities present an image of teachers as professionals, rather, implying that the de-professionalization of teachers is one goal of the policy. “It is very telling that NCLB and its accompanying documents and websites do not use the term ‘professional practice’ to refer to what teachers do” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 681).

### Teaching

In line with the images of teachers presented in national education policies are images of the work of teachers that oversimplify and distort the practice of teaching. By embracing high-stakes testing as the measurement tool for schools, NCLB reduces teaching to the technical transmission of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). In this technical transmission model, the work of teaching is reduced to the training of students in basic skills in order to perform well on standardized tests (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Valli & Buese, 2007), without concern for other important facets of teaching, such as motivation, caring, and curiosity. The basic skills approach favored by national education policy is one that limits both higher-order and critical thinking (Luke, 2004). This view suggests that knowledge is standardized and easily communicated and ignores the fact that knowledge and teaching itself are contested arenas (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). It also suggests that good teaching can be measured only through performance by students on standardized tests (Apple, 2006). Unfortunately, this representation of knowledge transmission is faulty. “The premise that subject-matter knowledge is an object that can be given more or less directly by one party to another has generally been rejected by the education community” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 674). The resultant image is an inaccurate portrayal of the

craft of teaching and an inappropriate understanding of how to evaluate good teaching. Even Diane Ravitch, an education historian noted for her early defense of the NCLB now explains “what once was an effort to improve the quality of education turned into an accounting strategy: Measure, then punish or reward” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 16).

This distorted image of the work of teaching opens up the education field to suggestions that market influences can benefit students. By focusing on an industrial model of teaching, the national policies convey the idea that teaching is a production process, ignoring differences in student “inputs” and viewing the “output” of student learning as a commodity (Ingersoll, 2003; Luke, 2004). Nichols and Berliner suggest that, “Policymakers have applied basic Business 101 models to our schools – namely, to find ways to monitor productivity, then increase it, and to do so without spending any more money” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 19). This production model image of schools, and consequently the teachers in them, as inefficient and ineffective wastes of money, suggests that exposing schools to market forces is an appropriate way to improve them in much the same way that traditional market forces improve the efficiency of traditional commodity production (Apple, 2006). The reality is that teaching is not a production process and student learning is not a simple transmission of knowledge into an open container to be passed off as a commodity. As Ingersoll (2003, p. 235) explains, “...many top-down school reforms betray a deep lack of understanding of teachers’ work and the way schools actually operate.”

### Conclusion

Current national education policy remains largely focused on the No Child Left Behind Act, which has at its core, many negative images of teachers and the work of teaching. NCLB

portrays images of teachers as (1) to blame for society's problems and in need of more control, (2) only requiring simplified knowledge of subject matter, and as (3) workers in an industrial model rather than as professionals. These images are accompanied by images of teaching as a (1) technical transmission of knowledge and a (2) commodity production process. The negative images of teachers and teaching that dominate national education policy, demonstrate just how disconnected from the current education policy-making process teacher organizations are. Additionally, these images allow politicians to make use of teachers as inappropriate scapegoats for society's problems (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Giroux, 2006). Unfortunately, this improper laying of blame through national education policy only helps to unite voting blocks, rather than fixing actual problems within our education system.

## **2.5 - THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION AND THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS**

### **2.5.1 - From the year 1945 to the year 2000, how have the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers influenced education policy?**

While both the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) were in existence long before the end of World War II, (NEA - 1857, AFT - 1916) and were having substantive influence in education policy-making (Spring, 2005a; Urban, 1976), 1945 serves as an excellent jumping-off point for this analysis, due both to the changing nature of US society and the growth of our education system and the teacher organizations.

After World War II, a negative relationship between educators and the federal government began to change when the NEA began to receive support for general federal education aid from President Harry S. Truman and some liberal northern Democrats (Reese, 2005). This increased cooperation between the teacher organizations and the federal government would result in success for teacher organizations later, in the 1960s. This period of time also saw a major increase in lobbying for and against changes in education policy from both the NEA and AFT (Ingersoll, 2003). Although this lobbying was often in competition with other groups seeking to influence education, the end result was an increased focus by the federal government on education, resulting in an increased centralization of education systems across the country (Ingersoll, 2003). While this was not the first time teacher organizations had been involved in lobbying, it represents the beginning of an ever-increasing lobbying presence by teacher organizations.

The 1950s may best be described as a time of turbulence for the teacher organizations. As an integral part of society, the education sector was largely engrossed in the civil rights movement, and impacts on national education policy-making during the 1950s often reflect emphasis on issues of a civil rights nature. Within the 1950s, it was the more labor-oriented AFT that led the charge for educational reform. In 1952, the AFT began to use a professional public relations firm to spread its message to the masses (Eaton, 1975). Throughout the 1950s, the AFT was a leader in opposing loyalty oaths, and readily came to the defense of teachers who were accused of subversion (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). In 1954, the AFT also filed an amicus curiae brief (an unsolicited legal testimony) in support of school desegregation in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case, in addition to expelling local AFT chapters that had failed to



follow an earlier organization mandate to desegregate (American Federation of Teachers, 2010a; Eaton, 1975). These actions by the AFT surely contributed to the continued branding of the organization as the more radical of the two teacher organizations during this time period, but also demonstrated the willingness of teachers to challenge the federal government over a wide range of issues that affect education.

The NEA certainly was not silent during the 1950s, although it chose to use its voice to continue to guide the structure of public schooling, rather than the more radical issues of social justice pursued by the AFT. In 1952, the NEA chose to use public relations to take on a popular national movement for a back-to-the-basics style of learning in education, by using the organization's large public presence to convince citizens that their children were reading more, faster, as well as understanding better and remembering longer than their grandparents ever had (Reese, 2005). In the later part of the 1950s, the NEA also began the transformation from a "placid employee association into an extremely effective bargaining agent" (Zieger & Gall, 2002, p. 244), perhaps encouraged by the growing successes achieved by the more radical AFT.

The later part of the 1950s was the beginning of a major period of growth in membership for both the AFT and the NEA, with the NEA growing to become the largest "union" in the country, at over 3.2 million members in 2009 and the AFT growing from 40,000 in 1955 to 1.4 million members in 2009 (Sawchuck, 2009; Zieger & Gall, 2002). With growth into such a large membership, both organizations would gain the ability to influence federal elections and use this method to steer education policy-making in future decades. Throughout the later 1950s, the NEA, with the support of some Democrat members of Congress, continued the push for increased federal aid and support in public

schools, inciting a backlash from Republicans wishing to keep the federal government out of local schools (Spring, 2005b). This would be the beginning of a conflict between the teacher organizations and the Republican Party that lasts to this day.

Inspired by successes engineered by United Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker in New York in achieving collective bargaining rights for local teacher organization members during the early part of the 1960s, teachers continued throughout the 1960s to flock to “unions” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004), swelling their memberships and increasing their influence in election politics. In 1961, President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988, granting public employees the right to collectively bargain (Elam, 1981), prompting teachers and other public employees to gain collective bargaining legislation in 32 states (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). This more formal recognition of the organizations and their rights to bargain collectively helped to establish both the NEA and the AFT as the major teacher organizations they are today.

In 1964, encouraged by efforts from the NEA to increase federal aid to schools, the Federal Commissioner of Education – Francis C. Keppel – offered three options for federal aid to education: 1) general aid to public schools, 2) general aid to public and private schools, and 3) educational aid to the poor (Spring, 2005b). These three different options are expressions of the tension within the federal government over issues regarding interference in the public setting, and the influence that funding can have on both public and private schools. In 1965, the government chose option three, by providing a majority of funds targeted at disadvantaged poor children in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). This option allowed the government to escape the label of general funding, while promoting policy that appears to be more “social justice” oriented.

The social justice theme continues with the NEA push in the late 1960s for educational help for minority students. The NEA sponsored a large conference dedicated to bilingual education and the demands of Spanish-speaking students, which led directly to the passage of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act (Holcomb, 2006). Perhaps it may have been the mood of the times or competition against the AFT, but the progress of the NEA toward social justice education matters represents a widening of its focus beyond school structuring to include many of the more complex and interwoven social facets of the education system.

The 1970s would turn out to be arguably the decade in which the NEA and AFT were able to have their greatest effects on federal education policy-making. In the early 1970s, both the NEA and AFT had abandoned their no-strike traditions and their local affiliates were striking regularly (Zieger & Gall, 2002). This meant that as the organizations continued to grow, and continued to strike, the public was swept incresingly into debates centered on education, which indirectly influences government action. To influence the federal government directly, the NEA, from 1972 to 1976, formed the National Education Association - Political Action Committee (NEA-PAC), designed to funnel organization funds into election coffers (Elam, 1981). Because of ideological conflicts between teacher organizations and the Republican Party, the majority of funds and support coming from the teacher organizations would find its way to Democrats (Spring, 2005b). This increase in participation in political campaigns would quickly bear fruit for both teacher organizations.

In 1976, Jimmy Carter was elected president. Supporting his run for the presidency with both campaign finances and voter mobilization was the NEA, in exchange for a promise that Carter would work to form a cabinet-level Department of Education (Urban &

Wagoner, 2004). This would begin a close relationship between the presidency and the NEA, in which the manager of NEA lobbying would regularly meet with representatives of the Carter administration at the White House for breakfast (Spring, 2005b). Carter kept his promise in 1979 when the Federal Department of Education was created and the office of Secretary of Education<sup>2</sup> was added to the President's cabinet.

Additionally, it is important to mention the effect Albert Shanker was continuing to have on the strength of teacher organizations. In 1974, Albert Shanker was elected to head the AFT, adding his prominent and relentless voice for education reform to a large and empowered organization (American Federation of Teachers, 2010a). From this position, he continued to encourage teachers to strike for their rights, noting that it was in states where teachers went on strike regularly that they were able to gain effective collective bargaining (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). As a figurehead for teacher organization issues, Albert Shanker placed a public face on teacher concerns for improvement of their working conditions and helped to steer federal and state policies in the direction of advancement for teacher rights.

In almost total opposition to the advances made by teachers during the 1970s, the 1980s would turn out to be a very tumultuous time for teacher organizations. Emboldened by their successes with the Carter administration, the NEA increased its lobbying efforts in the early 80s, and it also realized the power that mobilizing its membership could have on elections (Elam, 1981). However, at the end of 1980, all of the support by the NEA (for Carter's reelection bid) was not enough to stop Ronald Reagan from being elected President.

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<sup>2</sup> Shirley Hufstедler was the first Secretary of Education.

The first major education reform from the Reagan administration was *A Nation At Risk* in 1983, which largely placed blame for perceived education problems on teachers. In response to the report, the two teacher organizations took different approaches. The NEA largely remained on the sideline, taking exception to the teacher-blaming but supporting the elements of the report that called for increased equity, while instead the AFT chose to embrace the reforms of *A Nation At Risk* in order to try to gain control over them (Koppich, 2005). Continuing the assault on teacher organizations, in 1985 President Reagan appointed William Bennet as the Secretary of Education. Bennet quickly began to speak out against the teacher unions, claiming that they were a major part of the problem with the education system (Spring, 2005b). Regrettably, this polarization of views between the Republican administration and the teacher organizations widened an already troublesome political divide that negatively affected the ability of the NEA and AFT to influence federal education policy-making during Republican presidencies.

Perhaps in response to decreased access to the executive branch of the federal government during the 1980s, in the early 1990s teacher organizations began to attempt to affect education policy at a grassroots level. The NEA and the AFT both began to encourage the networking of teachers and for teachers to also become learners within their profession, with an end goal of increasing the professionalization of the teaching force (Fullen, 1993). This collaboration also led to collaboration among teacher organization locals to create large and encompassing strikes, culminating in statewide teacher strikes in Washington, Utah, and West Virginia (Spring, 2005b). Both of these cooperative strategies indicate the adaptability of the teacher organizations in finding new approaches to influence education policy-making contexts.

As states throughout the nation began to take up the issue of school choice in the 1990s, encouraged by a federal government in favor of these policies, a unified approach from the NEA and the AFT was necessary to prevent these policies from coming to fruition. Urban and Wagoner (2004, p. 351) explain, “strong lobbying against the school choice measures by most members of the educational establishment, particularly by teacher organizations such as the NEA and AFT, also contributed to their defeat.” The teacher organizations also became unified when it came to issues of school control. Both the NEA and the AFT put their support behind school districts that experimented with decentralization models that were designed to spread decision-making power to teachers at the local level (Ingersoll, 2003).

In 1996, Democratic President Bill Clinton began to reach out to teachers. He created a program called *21<sup>st</sup> Century Teachers* that would instruct 500,000 teachers in the use of computers to help link the education system to the global economy (Spring, 2005b). Undoubtedly, this gesture renewed cooperation between the executive branch and the teacher organizations. In response, Spring (2005b, p. 15) explains, “the National Education Association agreed to cooperate with the program and encourage volunteers at its 1996 national meeting.”

In a review of educational reforms, Tyack (1991) explains that throughout the history of education, school reforms that are initiated by educators appear to have more lasting power than those initiated by outsiders to education. Historically, where the NEA and the AFT appear to wield the most power to affect federal education policy-making is in their use of indirect methods, such as public relations and grassroots efforts, rather than in the more direct use of lobbying.

## Conclusion

After 1945, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have had mixed success in influencing national education policy. In the 1950s, both teacher organizations increased their lobbying capacity, allowing them to become important participants in the creation of national education policies. The later 1950s and early 1960s also see a growth in the memberships of both organizations and the passage of collective bargaining rights for teachers. In the later part of the 1960s, the NEA and AFT successfully incorporate social justice issues into their policy efforts, helping in the fight against segregation and poverty. The 1970s are the most successful years for NEA and AFT influence, with the election of President Carter and the creation of the Cabinet level Department of Education. The 1980s mark a substantial shift that removes large amounts of power from teacher organizations and positions them at odds with Republican Presidencies. The 1990s are characterized by renewed cooperation between the Democratic Presidency and teacher organizations in a push to incorporate new technologies into the classroom. Additionally, the 1990s represent new levels of cooperation between the NEA and AFT to solidify their policy positions and attempt to regain lost agency in the national education policy-making process.

### **2.5.2 – How do the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers currently influence national education policy?**

When I speak of “currently” I mean from the year 2001 forward, reflecting the beginning of the George W. Bush presidency and shortly thereafter, and the passage of the No Child Left

Behind Act, which has altered our education system in many substantial ways. In this current period, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) continue to resort to two historically common methods for influencing national education policy: lobbying and public relations.

In 2001, in a move that seems counter to the history of relations between Republicans and the two major teacher organizations, President George W. Bush began his interaction with education by extending a \$250 tax deduction to teachers for their out-of-pocket expenses in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2003). However, this gesture is small and largely insignificant when compared to the major piece of education legislature President George W. Bush and Congress would pass.

On January 8, 2002, President G.W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law without either support or opposition from the NEA or AFT (Koppich, 2005). This law changed the dynamics of school financial support from the federal level as well as created new standardized testing requirements for students throughout the country, so it was surprising that neither teacher organization had anything critical to say about this bill at its inception. The silence may have resulted from the fact that both teacher organizations had some earlier say in removing four different areas of the bill, giving them some control over its final shape. Koppich (2005) explains that these four areas included:

- Removal of authorization for school vouchers
- Removal of mandatory testing for all teachers
- Prevention of a transformation from categorical funding to block grants
- Removal of provisions that would lessen the power of collective bargaining

Even though both unions were able to have these inputs into the creation of the bill and appeared neutral on its initial passing, it did not take long for the NEA and AFT to realize the negative effect NCLB would have on the schools and the teachers. One year later, in



2003, both the NEA and the AFT came out in opposition to the NCLB, with the NEA choosing to use public relations tools and the AFT using lobbying capacity to try to combat the bill (Koppich, 2005). NCLB became the primary focus of both teacher organizations' attempts to influence national education policy during the entire Bush presidency, and even now.

While NCLB reignited the traditional divide between Republican presidents and the teacher organizations, the members of the Bush cabinet took this battle to a new level. In February of 2003, Secretary of Education Rod Paige referred to the NEA as a "Terrorist Organization" because of its public resistance to NCLB (Koppich, 2005, p. 150). While the Bush administration later retracted the statement, it showed the level of animosity present at this time between the executive branch and the teacher organizations. Ratcheting up the pressure, the NEA in May of 2003 launched a new advocacy group called *Communities for Quality Education* to try to bring more pressure on the federal government to change NCLB, through grassroots public relations efforts (Koppich, 2005). In 2004, the NEA also began to run public service announcements, demonstrating its opposition to NCLB testing requirements (Koppich, 2005). These pressures would yield results as the Bush presidency entered its last years. Sawchuck (2009, p. 3) explains, "In 2007, concerns raised by the NEA and the AFT about the use of tests for performance-based compensation and about collective bargaining helped derail congressional attempts to renew the NCLB law." While the bill remains in effect in the nation's schools, Congress still has failed to come to agreement over its reauthorization, which appears to be leading to a lessening of the emphasis on, and penalties resulting from, the law's provisions.

As the federal government continued to take a larger role in public education in the 2000s, the efforts of the NEA and the AFT to speak out against NCLB also catapulted them into being the major spokes-groups and advocates for public education (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). Under the new, Democrat, Obama administration one might assume, given the history of relations between both teacher organizations and the Democratic Party, a more amenable relationship would ensue, especially after the large amount of support given the Obama campaign by the NEA and AFT. However, in 2009 the NEA was first to take the offensive against core elements of Obama's *Race To The Top* education program, claiming that the ideas are not reflective of knowledge from practice and that the initiative is too similar to NCLB (Sawchuck, 2009). With current combined teacher organization memberships over 4 million, it is no surprise that the Obama administration has reacted to the criticism by telling teachers that they will be involved in the reforms rather than have the reforms imposed upon them (Sawchuck, 2009). How this relationship will be negotiated is yet to be seen, as the *Race To The Top* initiative is still in its earliest stages at the writing of this piece.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the Internet becoming such a ubiquitous media outlet in the lives of most Americans, it should come as no surprise that both the NEA and AFT operate comprehensive websites that allow them to bring their stances on matters of national education policy to the public's attention. Both the NEA and AFT have many sections of their websites devoted to specific aspects of education policy, at all three levels of government (local, state and federal), and both make it a point to post online many of the same policy briefings they supply to Congress (American Federation of Teachers, 2010g; National Education Association, 2010d). These websites allow both organizations to

present themselves in a more transparent manner as well as show the public the merit of their critiques and suggestions for reform.

### Conclusion

What is apparent is that both of the major teacher organizations are able to have an influence on national education policy-making, but that their ability to influence education policy comes through the same methods used by other interest groups. Unfortunately, while the NEA and AFT can have an influence on policies they disagree with, they are often (but not always) in a reactive stance to national education policy, rather than being involved proactively in the original policy formation. As representatives of the millions of expert educators within the nation's schools, it would seem more appropriate that their influence would be greater than that of other interest groups - outside of education - in our country; perhaps being consulted for their practical expertise at the early planning stages of new national education policies. Instead, the teacher organizations are left to try to influence national education policy in the same manners as all other education outsiders, and regrettably, they are often less effective than groups in the corporate sector, foundations, or special interest groups who may be able to spend more money, more greatly influence the public, or more directly access the ears of national policy-makers.

### **2.5.3 – What are the public thoughts of the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers on current national education policy?**

Both the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are vocal about their positions on education policy at the local, state, and national

levels. This presence reflects the rich history of both teacher organizations in the use of public relations as a tactic to influence policy-making. On both of their websites it is possible to easily find a section of the pages dedicated specifically to their policy positions and recommendations, as well as access to a variety of documents, including proposals to Congress and public statements, that provide further detail about their positions. For the purposes of this literature review, a summary of their positions on national level education policies is necessary to establish their public positions. The later analysis of texts collected during this study will be able to provide a more detailed landscape of the perspectives and thoughts of both national teacher organizations. It is important to note that each teacher organization, while sharing an intense focus on the No Child Left Behind Act, differs on the other issues that they emphasize as areas for improvement in national level education policy.

### National Education Association

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is one area in which the NEA substantially focuses its public voice for change. Their critique centers around their belief that NCLB “has failed to fulfill its own fundamental purpose: raising the achievement of all students and closing achievement gaps among students from different backgrounds” (National Education Association, 2010d). The NEA is also critical of the changes to NCLB proposed by President Obama, seeing the continued reliance on standardized tests and competition for education funds as a way of continuing the same problematic education gaps (National Education Association, 2010d). To offer alternatives to current policies, the NEA suggests five changes to NCLB.

- 1) Encourage development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in public schools

- 2) Move away from an emphasis on high-stakes standardized tests and toward assessments that provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate growth
  - 3) Help provide better teachers and administrators to all students
  - 4) Promote public education as a shared responsibility among all shareholders
  - 5) Increase funding to education at all levels to meet growing demands
- (National Education Association, 2010d)

Another issue of major emphasis on the national level, for the NEA, is professional pay. The NEA, seeing low pay as resulting in high teacher turnover and a loss of needed teachers, especially minorities and males, advocates for a nationwide starting salary of \$40,000 for pre-K to 12 teachers (National Education Association, 2010e). In addition to pre-K to 12 teachers, the NEA also advocates for higher pay for its members in institutions of higher education, and the paraprofessionals that work in education (National Education Association, 2010e). In the end, the NEA sees the higher pay as a way of attracting and retaining more diverse and skillful teachers.

The NEA sees education funding as an important national education policy as well. On this issue, the NEA has only public praise for President Obama's budget increases in education (National Education Association, 2010b). They go on to praise the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* for plugging current gaps in education funding at the state level, but caution that budget gaps will continue in the future and a more permanent solution will be required (National Education Association, 2010b).

A final national education policy stance presented by the NEA revolves around reducing the school dropout rate. The NEA advocates for the federal government to mandate high school graduation or equivalency for everyone under 21, in a similar manner to national laws centered on compulsory attendance (National Education Association, 2010c). To support this law, the NEA suggests a number of alternative education plans for

older students. These include: establishing federal high school graduation centers for those over the age of 19, smaller class sizes and tutoring, expansion of graduation options, increased career education, universal pre-school and kindergarten, along with a number of different monitoring suggestions to help track and identify students who are at risk for dropout (National Education Association, 2010c). By providing such a comprehensive group of supports to their push, the NEA hopes the government can make universal high school graduation a reality for US citizens.

#### American Federation of Teachers

Like the NEA, the AFT also focuses a great deal of its attention on the No Child Left Behind Act. The AFT claims to be in agreement with the NCLB objective of closing the achievement gap, but argues that the bill, in its current form, does not help to decrease this gap (American Federation of Teachers, 2010g). To expand this view, the AFT argues that “adequate yearly progress” is inadequate and arbitrary, the “highly qualified” teacher requirement is not being applied equally, and the school interventions available in the law are actually punitive rather than helpful (American Federation of Teachers, 2010g).

Following these criticisms, the AFT suggests these subsequent reforms:

- 1) Set challenging but attainable goals
- 2) Judge school effectiveness by measuring the same students over time
- 3) Hold all schools equally accountable
- 4) Provide multiple ways for schools to succeed
- 5) Tie the assessments to more scientifically based standards
- 6) Develop great induction programs for new teachers
- 7) Improve professional development and widen opportunities for paraprofessionals
- 8) Provide grants to districts that want to develop peer assistance and review programs
- 9) Increase pay for teachers and assistants and provide additional ways to earn money by taking on additional responsibility

10) Require states to develop accountability systems to better track high-need schools

11) Make use of more credible data to determine schools in need

12) Alter the school improvement process to allow for more planning and time on the district's part

(American Federation of Teachers, 2010d, 2010e, 2010f)

Another piece of national education policy that the AFT speaks publicly about is the host of issues that surround school choice. The AFT is a supporter of charter schools, which they see as locations where teachers can "...strengthen their voice in school and curriculum decision-making" (American Federation of Teachers, 2010c). The AFT believes it is important that charter schools be held to the same standards as other public schools, work with their local public schools, and that teachers ought to be free to form unions (American Federation of Teachers, 2010c). However, the AFT does react negatively toward privatization in education, instead urging that alternative school choices and services within schools ought to remain public (American Federation of Teachers, 2010h). One thing the AFT fails to do on its website is reconcile its push for charter schools with its dislike of privatization, which strikes me as two issues that are tied inexorably given that private organizations are often involved in the opening of charter schools. In the last arena of school choice that the AFT expands on, vouchers, the AFT says it "...supports parents' right to send their children to private or religious schools but opposes the use of public funds to do so" (American Federation of Teachers, 2010i). Their reasoning centers on the idea that funding to private schools takes money out of the funding for public schools, which the AFT sees as detrimental to school systems that already struggle with funding problems (American Federation of Teachers, 2010i).

## Conclusion

The positions presented here from the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers represent their public positions on issues of national education policy. It is important to note that both organizations also have a great deal to say about state and local education policy, which is not covered here due to my own attempt to limit this review to the scope of this study.

What is clear from this review is that both teacher organizations see No Child Left Behind as a top priority and both agree that in its current form, the law fails to close the achievement gap in schools. Both also make it a point to demonstrate their active willingness to be involved in the educational reform process by offering their suggestions for changing NCLB to better meet its stated goals. While both organizations also make mention of funding and pay as important issues, they do have some differences. The NEA is clearly making a concerted push for mandatory high school graduation, which the AFT makes no mention of that. Alternatively, the AFT has devoted a large amount of thought to school choice as a national level interest, whereas the NEA devotes a great deal less to this issue, and appears to regard it as a state and/or local issue (National Education Association, 2010a).

### **2.5.4 – How have the organizational behaviors of the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers changed over time?**

To describe the changes in organizational behaviors of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, I find it best to think of four distinct historical periods of organizational behavior. These include first a period of inception, which



describes the beginnings of each organization. Following this would be an early growth period, where the initial behavior patterns of the organizations become apparent. The third interval, I would label as the period of change, as one organization changes its identity drastically in respect to the other, creating almost a reversal of roles. The last phase is the current period, which brings our understanding of the organizational behaviors of both the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers up to the contemporary.

### Inception

The National Education Association (NEA) was founded in 1857, led by school administrators, and remained an association centered on school administrators for almost a century to follow (Urban & Wagoner, 2004; Zieger & Gall, 2002). Through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the NEA spent the majority of its time guiding the development of the early education system, including proactive education policy efforts, such as the 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (Spring, 2005a). While the NEA went through an early governance change, from a democratic town meeting-style to a representative style, school administrators continued to direct the majority of the organizational behavior and continued to promote their membership as “professional” rather than “union” (Eberts, 2007; Spring, 2005a; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). The organization was also largely male-dominated, ignoring the wishes of women teachers until the election of Ella Flagg Young to the NEA presidency in 1910, beginning a change to more democratic and gender inclusive behavior (Urban & Wagoner, 2004).

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) was founded in 1919, growing out of the Chicago Teachers Federation with the purpose of being a trade union for teachers (Spring, 2005a; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). To emphasize their intention, “the AFT quickly gained a charter from the American Federation of Labor...” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 240), one of the best-known trade union groups in American history. During the beginning of the AFT, both groups were friendly with one another, but following World War I, the NEA’s “professional” agenda took an anti-union stance that brought it into direct conflict with the “union” oriented AFT (Urban, 2001). This professional association versus trade union relationship would continue to characterize the organizational behaviors of the NEA and AFT throughout their early years.

### Early Growth

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the NEA stuck to its professional association roots, as the AFT became the national symbol for unionized teachers. The NEA’s early focus on school administrators and education policy largely shielded it from the anti-union sentiments that dominated the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and hindered the efficacy of the AFT (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). By holding to its organizational position as a professional association, with school administrators occupying the top positions in the leadership hierarchy, the NEA became openly antagonistic to teachers unions and largely unresponsive to the needs and demands of their own teacher members (Urban, 2001). However, as labor unions began to make gains in the 1930s and 40s, both the NEA and AFT grew, and as the NEA increasingly counted more teachers among its ranks, its organizational behavior began to give way to a more pro-union sentiment (Zieger & Gall,

2002). This beginning of change in organizational behavior by the NEA signaled the beginning of a new period in the organizational behavior of both the NEA and AFT.

### Change

The 1960s and 1970s mark a period of great change in the organizational behavior of the teacher organizations, most notably in the behaviors of the NEA. Decades of declining influence in education policy-making, historically high inflation that lessened the financial well-being of teachers, and improvement of collective bargaining rights for public employees all contribute to the metamorphosis of the NEA from a conservative professional association into a more radical labor union (Eberts, 2007; Zieger & Gall, 2002). This transformation into a more traditional union catapulted the NEA into a more powerful position than the AFT, in terms of both numbers and perceived radicalization (Spring, 2005a). Following the lead of the NEA, in the 1970s the AFT abandoned its no-strike tradition, and both organizations began to orchestrate work stoppages (Zieger & Gall, 2002). “The rise of militant teacher unionism shocked those who continued to regard the nation’s classrooms as sacrosanct refuges from sordid reality” (Zieger & Gall, 2002, p. 210). While both organizations were able to increase their control over working conditions and pay, the abandonment of the professional association model may have inadvertently removed the teacher organizations from insider influence over educational policy-making, leaving them in a similar position to other interest groups who seek to change education policy (explained in more detail in section 2.4.1).

At the end of this period of change, it is the NEA that appeared to more fully embrace the union mentality, whereas the AFT now found itself positioned as the more “professional” of the two organizations.

### Current Times

From the 1980s forward, the NEA and the AFT have maintained a fairly steady course. The NEA has grown into the largest union in the country, with over 3.2 million members, while the AFT grew to include over 1.4 million members (Sawchuck, 2009; Zieger & Gall, 2002). The NEA draws heavily on teachers from suburban and rural parts of our country, while the AFT is primarily made up of urban teachers (Zieger & Gall, 2002). At the end of the 1990s, the NEA began to try to shift back in the direction of education policy reform, followed closely by the AFT (Eberts, 2007). Both the AFT and NEA now talk about ending adversarial relationships between teachers and school administrations, seeking instead to work collaboratively to improve the education systems (Eberts, 2007). “In the race to organize teachers, the NEA and AFT have continued to jockey for position in leading the reform effort” (Eberts, 2007, p. 185). This recent softening of adversarial positions within both the NEA and AFT may signal an organizational move back in the direction of the professional association model. As perhaps a sign of this shift, while the NEA has always maintained the “association” moniker, the AFT now proclaims their organization to be “a union of professionals” (American Federation of Teachers, 2010b).

## Conclusion

Organizational behavior for the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) goes through four distinct historical periods. The first period – *inception* – marks the beginning of each organization (NEA in 1857, AFT in 1919) and their initial organizational characteristics – the NEA as a professional association and the AFT as a trade union. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a second period exists – *early growth* – in which the organizations maintain their respective organizational characterizations and seek both to add members to their roles and to influence education policy. The third period – *change* – takes place during the 1960s and 1970s and marks shifts in the characteristics of both organizations. During this period, the NEA transforms into a more traditional trade union, while the AFT begins to take on more professional association-like behavior. The last period – *current times* – represents a slow but steady move, by both organizations, to embrace more “professional” organizational behaviors as the “union” stigma prevents the NEA and AFT from participating in the creation of national education policy.

### **2.5.5 – What suggestions for change have resulted from previous research into the nexus of public opinion and the organizational behavior of teachers?**

Many scholars regularly agree on both the varied nature of public opinion in the US toward public education, and on the ways that teacher organizations can make gains in this arena. Specifically, while the media regularly presents negative or misguided images of public education, people are only partially susceptible to these messages. Scholars suggest that to increase public support for education, teacher organizations need to make efforts to

collaborate with the public, in order to expose the public to the reality of public education and dispel myths created by politicians and the media. These collaborative efforts are symbolic of the type of symbiotic relationships that exemplify professional associations, rather than the more prolific examples of adversarial relationships that often characterize traditional labor unionism.

A number of scholars have sought to describe the way in which the media seeks to distort public opinion about education. Berliner and Biddle (1995) explain that the media creates a negative image of public education, while ignoring the majority of research that exists on the topic. To highlight the difference, they point out that individuals in the public who give our schools low marks, often do not have any interaction with schools and instead take their cues from media criticism; whereas those who do have direct contact with schools, most often parents, actually give schools much higher ratings (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Elam, 1995). Politicians are also guilty of disparaging public schools without the ability to cite research, instead suggesting that their years of service to the public provide enough evidence to make claims about the education system (Elam, 1995). Naturally, because politicians and the media have a mutually dependent relationship, it is understandable that the media would pick up on such political rhetoric. Elam (1995, p. 45) found that "...a large majority of lay respondents – more than 65% - were getting their information about schools secondhand, generally from the media, and so received a distorted view of what goes on in schools." Because many Americans do not have regular personal contact with schools, many are susceptible to the media's image, which can lead to a lack of respect and support for teachers (Swetnam, 1992). But to suggest that the media

presents a negative image and that the public buys it wholeheartedly would be an oversimplification.

The public is often of two minds when it comes to education. On one side, they are susceptible to distorted images about education from the media and from politicians, but on the other side, many hold onto positive views despite these messages. The public often has very high expectations of the education system, and those that directly interact with public education often have positive views of their local schools (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010; Elam, 1995; Fullen, 1993). Even though the public of 2010 has improvement of the quality of teaching as their highest concern (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010), the public often has a negative perception of teacher organizations within the school system. They view teacher organizations as self-serving and often to blame for the perceived poor level of national educational performance (Eberts, Hollenbeck, & Stone, 2004; Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997). While there is a definite disconnect between the public's positive thoughts about their local schools and negative thoughts about the nation's schools (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010), which is likely attributable to negative media messages (Eberts, et al., 2004; Elam, 1995; Ravitch, 2010), teacher organizations cannot simply lament this situation; rather, they need to take steps to militate against this perception.

To address both the negative perception of teacher organizations and the negative view of public education propagated by the media, numerous scholars agree that a change in the organizational behavior of teacher groups is in order. Unequivocally, the answer suggested is that teachers, and their organizations, need to increase collaborations with the public and businesses. The purpose of such a move would be to reestablish a public trust by redefining the interest of teacher organizations in the public education system, rather than

interest rooted in economic gains and protections (Giroux, 2001; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). As parents represent the public served by teachers, parents need to feel that teacher organizations are on their side and working with them for the betterment of their children (Kerchner, et al., 1997). Some teacher organizations have been able to build collaborations with parents, businesses, and even media that have helped to create this feeling (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). When teachers and parents both see and talk more often, they are more aware of each other's needs and work together more often to improve the local education system (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). However, one note of caution, it is not enough for teacher organizations to just form these collaborations because they are virtuous, they also must provide their collaborators with cultural, political, and technical frameworks that allow them to navigate the bureaucracy of the education system (Magolda, 2000). Well thought out and meaningful collaborations between teacher organizations and their community is one way to fight against the negative media portrayal of the education system.

These collaborations also have positive effects for the teacher organization and its member teachers. Collaboration not only helps to distill negative media images, it raises the professional status of teachers (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Giroux, 2001). These collaborative efforts strengthen the position of teachers as those who should be responsible for improving the quality of schools (Kerchner, et al., 1997). When the public views teachers in a more professional way, they are more supportive of reforms that "empower the profession of teaching" (Henderson, 2004, p. 18). The public is also more likely to grant freedoms and autonomy to public education institutions when they are confident in their performance (Kerchner, et al., 1997). Teacher organizations can also use collaboration to focus the public attention on the organization's non-economic goals (Poole,



2000). By making an effort to create collaborations with the public, both parents and business, teacher organizations build relationships that boost their professional status and their ability to influence education policy.

Teacher organizations forming collaborations with the public create more symbiotic relationships that bear the mark of professionalism, rather than the adversarial relationship formation often exhibited by more traditional trade unions. Kerchner and Koppich (1993) explain that the public has little patience for adversarial, union-like behaviors in the schools. When teacher organizations work in collaboration with the public, both groups may be able to rise above placing blame and focus on crafting solutions to educational problems (Fullen, 1993). This collaboration results in the further empowerment for teachers, because this symbiotic relationship ultimately grants their teacher organizations more control over their profession (Bauman, 2008; Miner, Crane, & Vandenberg, 1994). In this case, researchers caution that teacher organizations need to guard their public partnerships against fault finding and to be sure that disagreements are framed as differences in position and not personalities (Fullen, 1993; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). In the end, successful collaborations increase the professional status of teacher organizations.

While the media is largely responsible for spreading a negative image of public education that greatly influences those who do not have regular contact with schools, members of the public who are regularly connected to the school setting have a much more positive view. Teacher organizations that wish to improve their position can benefit from bringing more members of the public into the school setting, through collaborative efforts with both the public at large and businesses. By engaging in collaborative endeavors,

teacher organizations create the type of symbiotic relationships that characterize professional associations, increasing both the professional status of teachers and their ability to influence the public education system.

### Conclusion

Scholars remind us that public opinion is not constant and that teacher organizations have the possibility of gaining increased influence through the generation of positive public perceptions. While the media represents dominant ideologies that are often oppressive to teacher organizations, public opinion does not always follow suit. To combat these negative portrayals, teacher organizations need to engage in efforts to collaborate with the public, both to dispel myths about our education system created by politicians and the media and to expose the public to the realities present within education. These collaborations represent a shift for teacher organizations toward more professional behaviors that build cooperative relationships between teachers and those they serve.

## **2.6 – CONCLUSION**

After such an extensive review, it is time to highlight some of my most salient points and meaningful conclusions, in order to weave the conceptual threads present in my questioning together and to present my motivations for this study and the direction in which to go forward. In doing so, my intention is to clearly present answers to three questions, originally developed by Piantanida and Garman, as tools for guiding novice researchers through the review of literature chapter within a qualitative dissertation.

These questions are:

- How does the intent of the study emerge from and contribute to significant discourses?
- What is the potential significance of the study and to whom?
- Why is the study worth doing?

(Piantanida & Garman, 2009)

With these questions in mind, I return to my review of the literature for the answers.

Critical theorists have often explained the ways in which schools present dominant ideologies that lead to subjugation, most specifically through the standardization of the school curriculum. Even though these insights were first offered in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they are more relevant now than ever with the increase in focus on both standards and high-stakes standardized testing brought on by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This study recognizes the theoretical nature of the critique against standardization within the education system and attempts to address critical notions that within the education system, there is the possibility of emancipation. The critical theorists chose to use the metaphor of “sick” to describe this function of schools, implying that a cure is possible. If one were physically very sick, they would likely seek out the professional help of a physician. If it is the schools that are sick, they require professional help as well.

Teachers see themselves as the professionals of education. While some critical theorists are quick to point out the negative perception of teachers by the public, they are simply highlighting the dissonance between the public perceptions of teachers and the teachers’ own belief about their professional status. This study is designed to break this dissonance free from the philosophical ponderings of theorists and to highlight one of the mechanisms through which this dissonance is created: the portrayal of teachers and their organizations in the media. With this purpose in mind, this study seeks to move one step closer to the positioning of teachers as critically-minded public intellectuals; a move critical

theorists have long argued is the key to empowering teachers and improving the education system.

The media has long been criticized for its ideological properties. While it may indeed carry the capitalist ideology to consumers, as critical theorists argue, new forms of user created media present the possibility for alternate narratives and opportunities for dialogue that feature the voices of those that have been traditionally oppressed. In order to realize the full potential of these new opportunities, it takes a critical approach toward media study to call attention to repressive messages and illumine messages of empowerment. If teachers are to combat images of the commodification of education in the media that lessen their professional status, they need to engage in a critical approach. Elam suggested that, "media treatment of education in America is a topic worthy of extended analysis" (1995, p. 10). This study seeks to contribute to such an analysis by presenting the images of teacher organizations portrayed in national news media and allowing those teacher organizations to respond to this portrayal. As such, this study is informed by, and engages in, a process of critical media study that highlights media imagery that is oppressive to teachers and makes use of a critical approach to provide an alternative image of teacher organizations that presents the possibility for increased empowerment.

Within the media, the news genre is one of the most influential over public opinion. The sense that news is objective and carries with it the opinion of experts makes the public highly susceptible to dominant ideologies presented within this genre. In reality, the news is neither objective nor full of experts, but rather is largely dependent on government sources for information and is easily manipulated by government propaganda. While it is impossible to link news media to public opinion in a causal way, it is possible to highlight

the rhetoric present in news media that may negatively influence public opinion of teachers and their organizations. This study seeks to provide a clear understanding of the dissonance that exists between the national news media portrayal and the desired public portrayal of the two major teacher organizations, highlighting the ways in which a negative media portrayal can become oppressive to teacher organizations wishing to engage in national education policy-making. With this knowledge in hand, both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers may be able to determine ways to combat these negative images, perhaps even making use of new forms of media to present opinion counter to the dominant ideology.

Analysis of national education policy highlights the negative images of teachers found within the dominant ideology of the ruling elite. While a number of different ideologies combine through different groups to shape the direction of national education policy, a distrust of teachers is one common thread of thought among most of them. While this distrust serves different purposes for different groups, ultimately, these images are ones that de-professionalize teachers and are harmful to the education system. Further complicating this problem, teacher organizations appear to be in no special position to influence the creation of national education policy and often appear to be some of the least influential groups in the creation of major national education reforms. This further illuminates disconnects between teachers and the national policies that govern their work. If our education system really were “in a state of crisis,” as the government would have us believe, the omission of the 4 million educators who carry out education policies from the process of national policy creation is a systemic perversion. This study is an attempt to demonstrate that the National Education Association and the American Federation of

Teachers have the betterment of the education system as their primary focus, and that their diminished role in the policy creation process robs government officials of necessary information and experience that could allow for substantive and positive educational reform.

A review of the histories of both the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) reveal that their ability to influence the government directly has been waning since the early 1980s. The creation of policies such as No Child Left Behind indicate just how little both of the teacher organizations are able to influence current national education policy creation. However, a review of their history also highlights the power that both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers are able to have when they present a unified message for education reform and when they turn toward influencing public opinion as a way of accessing members of government. What becomes clear here is the absolute importance of the role of public opinion in empowering individuals and groups to create national education policy. “Teachers must counter the discourses of derision, or blaming and shaming, among politicians and the media, that have helped to create a loss of public faith in, and regard for, teachers and their work” (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 169). Through comparison, this study will provide a portrayal of the practices and beliefs of the NEA and the AFT that seeks to counter these negative media and government portrayals of the two teacher organizations. If the NEA and the AFT wish to rise above their recent inability to become more heavily influential in national education policy creation, a change in public opinion is the way. This study attempts to provide a critical analysis of the images presented in the national news

media, to allow the NEA and AFT to better focus their efforts for improving the public opinion of teacher organizations.

Teacher organizations appear to realize that their ability to influence national education policy may be limited by the use of traditional union tactics. Although both organizations have periods of their history where they were easily likened to trade unions, currently the NEA and AFT blend the lines between union and professional association, with a direction of change oriented toward professional association-like behavior. To this end, both the NEA and the AFT have begun to engage in more professional, collaborative behaviors in hopes of becoming more influential in national education reforms. Unfortunately, their current positioning between both union and professional association likely prevents either organization from fully realizing the benefits that either organizational model presents to more traditional adherents. Fortunately, the current move in the direction of professional associations indicates that both the NEA and AFT realize the benefits and empowerment in policy creation that come with these organizational behaviors. This study seeks to examine public representations of the NEA and the AFT to provide these organizations with an assessment of how their organizational behaviors are currently portrayed to the public, both through the national news media and through their teacher organizations. This analysis will allow the NEA and AFT to tune their public images into ones that better convey their efforts to improve our public education system.

One of the key features of both professional occupations and professional associations is their vaunted status in the public eye. While teachers may currently represent a weak professional group, a continued loss of status may lead to the complete

de-professionalization of teachers and total exclusion from national education policy creation processes. This study attempts to stop this trend, and help to affect a change in course for teacher organizations that allows them to aid teachers in reclaiming lost professional status. Because professional status is inexorably linked to public opinion, preventing the loss of professional status for teachers is the first step in a movement to gain more power for teachers and their organizations. Freidson (1986, p. 219) reminds us that “A considerable amount of power can be generated in the United States by public opinion, mobilized and focused by the mass media and culminating in political actions...” To change public opinion, teachers will need to form more collaborative relationships with the public and counteract the negative images of teachers, and their organizations, presented by the media. This study highlights these negative images and provides an opportunity for the NEA and AFT to generate responses that more effectively address public concerns about teacher organizations and expose the inaccuracy of their media portrayals.

A more complete understanding of the dissonance between the media portrayal of teachers and the actual behaviors of teacher organizations is an important early step in the process of improving the ability of teachers to become more influential contributors to national education policies. This improvement hinges on the public opinion of the professional status of teachers, which is inescapably linked to the behaviors of both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. Currently, national government policies and news media outlets regularly present negative views of teachers and their organizations, which demonize and de-professionalize teachers. If our education system is to be cured of its current sickness, we are going to need professional



help. If teachers really are the professionals that they believe they are, their public is in need of convincing.



## **CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 – INTRODUCTION**

This study falls within a tradition of research often referred to as “qualitative” study. To simply call this research a qualitative study would do little to explain what is actually occurring, as a qualitative style of study encompasses a wide variety of strategies, methods, subjects, data, analysis, and possible conclusions. However, because qualitative research is often a personal journey, I feel compelled to briefly describe my own position as a researcher and why I believe a study that falls within the realm of qualitative research is best in this case.

There are a number of characteristics of this study, and of me as the researcher, which make a qualitative research approach an appropriate fit. My personal worldview is not one that is informed by the positivist tradition, nor does it seek to uncover some universal truth. Instead, my critical approach serves as an example of a transformative paradigm; being political in nature, designed to expose power struggles that lead to domination and subjugation, and to change existing ideological arrangements (Mertens, 2005). As a researcher, my concern is with providing a rich, descriptive analysis of a particular social phenomenon that takes into account nuances of human reality-making and interaction, with an overall goal of enhancing a theoretical worldview. As such, I am firmly positioned within the research as the instrument of interpretation, and have as my objective the positioning of my research within a community of discourse relating to critical social theory (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). While many quantitative researchers

are concerned with finding constant relationships between variables, because my study is concerned with attributes of discourse within news media texts and their possible interpretations, constant relationships are “virtually non-existent” (Robson, 2002, p. 21). Instead, this study focuses on nuances of language, interpretation, and on meaning-making, suggesting a qualitative approach to study (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). While I will make use of a few statistics in order to present some comparative data, the vast majority of this study is concerned with the analysis and interpretation of media presentations of the policy-related actions of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

The following sections of this chapter are designed to explicate the particular characteristics of this study in order to more fully describe my research design, data collection methods, data analysis process, and intended research outcomes.

## **3.2 – RESEARCH GENRE: CONTENT ANALYSIS**

### **3.2.1 – Historical Roots**

Content analysis has a rich history as a research methodology. While one could make the argument that analysis of documents has been occurring since the beginnings of literacy, the systematic analysis of text dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where the Church began to analyze newspapers for their moral content (Krippendorff, 2004). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first well-focused newspaper analyses began to appear in Sweden, including in the later part of the century, studies that sought to compare various interpretations of content, setting the stage for later qualitative content analysis techniques (Krippendorff, 2004).

However, the majority of these studies remained relatively unknown to the larger research communities of the time.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the methodology of content analysis was expanded both across disciplines and to encompass many new techniques. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, content analysis was limited to rather simple empirical analyses of the content of newspapers by schools of journalism (Krippendorff, 2004). These studies most often sought to determine the quantity of “worthwhile” news to be found in newspapers of the time (Robson, 2002). During the 1930s and 1940s, the expansion of behavioral and social sciences pushed content analysis methodology to include new analyses techniques focused on “attitude” presented in material (Krippendorff, 2004). It is this analysis of “attitude” – such as the presentation of favorable or unfavorable opinions in the content – that demonstrates the more qualitative side of this research methodology. These qualitative content analysis strategies became an integral part of US efforts during World War II, when they were applied to enemy propaganda to gauge the popular support for enemy leaders and to predict the timing of enemy actions based on the shifting nature of enemy propaganda campaigns (Krippendorff, 2004). After World War II, content analysis was embraced as a methodology throughout the social science disciplines, with current efforts to expand qualitative content analysis most often rooted in literary theory and critical scholarship (Krippendorff, 2004). As the variety of media content has expanded throughout history, particularly in recent decades, so too have the interests of content analysts and the diversity of their techniques.

### 3.2.2 – Key Components of a Content Analysis

Content analysis typically takes the form of a number of sequential steps, leading from the identification of something worthy of analysis to the final interpretive conclusions resulting from the analysis. While various researchers describe a different number of steps, ranging from five steps (McMillan, 2000) to seven steps (Hseih & Shannon, 2005), it is the six-step process described by Krippendorff (2004) that appears to be most useful, particularly in light of the high frequency with which his work is cited within other content analysis research studies. In Krippendorff's (2004) work, he suggests that a properly designed content analysis has six components: (1) Unitizing, (2) Sampling, (3) Recording, (4) Reducing, (5) Inferring, and lastly, (6) Narrating. Here is a brief summary of each component and how it fits into the design of a content analysis.

Unitizing is a systematic way of distinguishing which texts are of interest to a content analysis. As such, it is incumbent upon the content analyst to demonstrate that the information needed is represented within each specific unit of text to be analyzed (Krippendorff, 2004). In this component, the goal for a content analyst is to select units that create the best balance between the productivity, efficiency, and reliability of the study.

Sampling is the process of limiting the number of texts to be analyzed to a manageable number, while still providing enough sources to conceptually represent the larger unit of study. Krippendorff (2004) explains that sometimes this component includes sampling techniques that commonly occur in empirical studies (i.e., random sampling, cluster sampling, etc.) while at other times, a content analyst may use *relevance sampling* (selecting units that apply to a given research question), *census* (all units of a given type), or a *convenience sampling* (making use of what is most readily available). Once the sampling

technique(s) is/are chosen, the analyst must also break the sample down into a manageable sample size for analysis that still logically represents the whole of the sample. In qualitative research, samples are less often chosen to satisfy statistical guidelines and are, instead, more often employed as evidence for particular claims and as representations of similarities within the content (Krippendorff, 2004).

Recording is the “reading” of the texts in which the content analyst makes the initial interpretations of the meaning of each selected text. During this component of a content analysis, unedited texts are turned into analyzable representations (Krippendorff, 2004). Here, it is most important that the recording instructions contain everything needed to replicate the analysis elsewhere in order to ensure reliability.

Reducing is the process through which large numbers of recorded text analyses are pared down into more manageable units. Krippendorff (2004, p. 85) explains that, “in qualitative pursuits, rearticulations and summaries...reduce the diversity of text to what matters.” Here, the focus is on taking the large mass of recorded data and turning it into a more efficient account that can be communicated to others.

Inferring is the point at which the interpretations of the text move beyond what the text says to what the text means, refers to, implies, entails, provokes, etc. This process requires the content analyst to provide warrants for their interpretive claims, and these warrants must be backed by evidence (Krippendorff, 2004).

Narrating is the point at which the content analyst appears to answer their research questions by making their findings comprehensible to their readers. Krippendorff (2004, p. 85) explains that, “sometimes, this means explaining the practical significance of the findings or the contributions they make to the available literature.” This process most often





### 3.2.3 – Operationalization of Knowledge

For a content analysis to be successful, during the recording component there needs to be a clear conception of how the interpretation of the text is going to occur. This process is most often referred to as the “operationalizing” of knowledge (Krippendorff, 2004). Mertens (2005, p. 344) defines operationalizing as “the process of determining what to collect data about and how to do it...” Here, the content analyst must clearly indicate what they are specifically looking for and how they are going to make interpretations, in a manner that is justifiable to the reader.

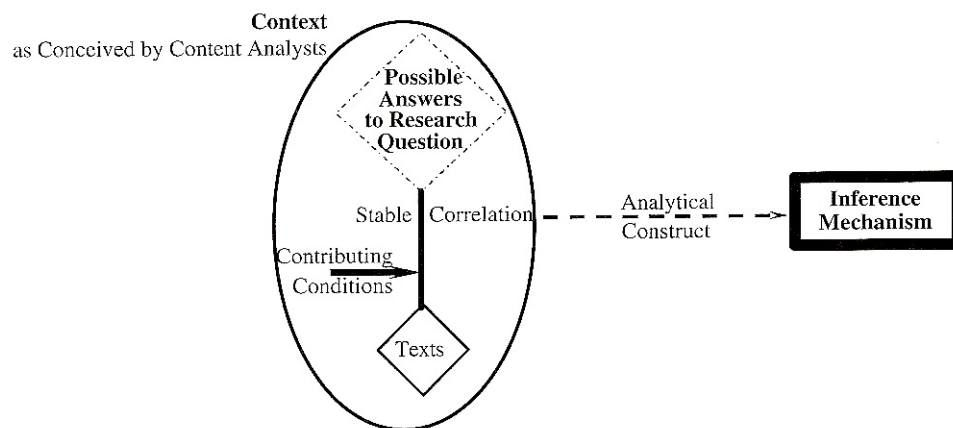


Figure 3.2 - Operationalizing Expert Knowledge

From: *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.) by Klaus Krippendorff, 2004, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 2004 by Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

In Figure 3.2, the content analyst conceives of a context into which fit the texts and possible answers to research questions, connected by stable correlations that have contributing conditions. However, in order to be able to appropriately analyze the given context, the content analyst must create an analytical construct that allows them to make

inferences out of the given context. This analytical construct is the operationalizing of knowledge, in that it represents a clear conception of how the content analyst is going to move from the stable features within the texts to the analyst's own inference-driven interpretations.

One of the better ways to carry out this operationalizing of knowledge is to create operationalized categories for analysis, with each category representing a different analytical construct. In order to operationalize each category, the content analyst must be both specific and explicit about what indicators they are looking for when making each categorization (Robson, 2002). Out of these categorizations flow the later interpretations in the content analysis, therefore, the strength of a content analysis rests on the ability of the researcher to create and explain the categories (or analytical constructs) for interpretation in a way that is both logical and easily understood by those doing the study and also by the study's readers.

### **3.2.4 – Strengths of Using a Content Analysis Methodology**

As a qualitative research method, content analysis has a number of strengths that are valuable for this study. The methodology is unobtrusive in nature, often drawing upon publicly available documents (Krippendorff, 2004; Robson, 2002). Additionally, because of the availability and permanency of the documents, the research is often reproducible (Robson, 2002) allowing for an ease of re-analysis both to confirm reliability and to answer emerging research questions. Moreover, content analysis allows a researcher to explore research questions that are unanswerable through quantitative methods (Holdford, 2008). Likewise, content analysis allows a researcher to deal with unstructured data, because a

researcher uses a predetermined method of analysis that is context specific and allows the research to extrapolate meaning from unstructured sources (Krippendorff, 2004). Furthermore, content analysis allows a researcher to cope with large volumes of data, whereas other qualitative techniques often require a much smaller sample size (Krippendorff, 2004). These strengths of the content analysis research approach apply in almost all cases where research questions can be answered through the use of various types of texts.

Generally, content analysis is seen as having one major limitation. Kolbe and Burnett (1991, p. 244) point out that, "...this method is quite susceptible to the effects of researcher biases which, in turn, can affect decisions made in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data." To address this limitation, content analysts must recognize that they cannot have a naïve approach to their content and must instead make their biases specifically known to their readers (Holdford, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Through this revealing process, this limitation can become a strength when the purpose of a study is to inform a theoretical perspective. Using a directed content analysis approach, a content analyst both supports and extends existing theory, making "...explicit the reality that researchers are unlikely to be working from the naïve perspective that is often viewed as the hallmark of naturalistic designs" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1283). In this way, the established theoretical perspective that influences the researcher is further confirmed or invalidated through the content analysis process (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Because this particular content analysis seeks to inform a critical theoretical position, the choice of a content analysis strategy presents an opportunity to extend the critical worldview.

### 3.3 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While I outlined these questions originally in Chapter 1, they appear again here to help center my explanation of the research undertaken in this study.

4. How are the policy-related actions of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers portrayed in national newspapers, following the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act?
5. How do the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers present their policy-related actions in their current news releases?
6. How do the National Education Association's and the American Federation of Teachers' presentations of their policy-related actions compare with those found in recent national newspapers?

### 3.4 – RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.4.1 – Unitizing

In this study, my interest is in capturing the way in which the *policy-related actions* (actions meant to change fundamental parts of the educational process) of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are characterized within national news contexts and within the NEA's and AFT's own news releases, so that these different portrayals can be subject to comparison. In this case, there are two units for

study: articles within national newspapers and NEA/AFT news releases, located on their public websites. These units can be further broken into smaller subunits, which include four preeminent national newspapers – *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* – and the two predominant teacher organizations – the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

### National Newspapers

Among the variety of genres of mass media, the news is one of the most influential over public opinion, due to the traditionally flawed perception that the news is objective, represents expert opinions, and is reported with journalistic integrity (Herman & Chomsky, 2006; Kellner, 2000). Top-tier news agencies – determined through prestige, outreach, and resources – both largely define the news agenda, and supply most of the national news to lower tier media groups, which disseminate this news to the public (Herman & Chomsky, 2006). I have chosen here to focus on national newspapers within the top-tier news agencies for three reasons. First, national newspaper articles are readily available and easily accessible. Second, national newspapers are a daily publication, providing a rich source for finding a plethora of articles referring to both the NEA and AFT. Finally, national newspapers are known for breaking stories that are later picked up by other news sources, suggesting that they are the cutting edge of news production. Herman and Chomsky (2006) conclude that the top-tier national newspapers are: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. While other newspapers may be highly regarded as prestigious news sources, they may struggle to match these four in

resources and/or outreach. As such, I will limit my analysis to these four national newspapers. It is my intention to use these newspaper sources to gather texts that demonstrate how each particular newspaper commonly portrays the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT.

#### National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers News Releases

The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers both have national, state, and local divisions that influence policy creation at their levels of organization. I have chosen to focus on the national level of these organizations because I wish for this research to be timely in that it addresses a current change in educational control. While states still maintain the majority of control over education policy, increasingly national education policies are becoming influential within the US education system, with No Child Left Behind representing a substantial centralization of educational control at the national level (Spring, 2005b; Tamir, 2008). The use of NEA and AFT national level news releases is most logical for two reasons. First, both organizations post current news releases on their public web pages as a response to current issues in education. Second, these news releases are constructed in a similar manner by both organizations and are designed to resemble the types of news articles found in national newspapers, making comparisons between each of these units more reliable.

#### **3.4.2 – Sampling**

In this study, it is not possible to analyze all national newspaper articles ever written about the NEA and/or the AFT nor would it be possible to analyze all of the NEA and/or AFT

news releases. Instead, these need to be pared down to controllable numbers of texts so that this study can be efficient, while still maintaining productivity and credibility. As such, my earlier units are broken down into manageable samples using a relevance sampling technique.

### National Newspapers

My interest is in capturing the national newspaper portrayal of policy-related actions by the NEA and AFT from January 2001 to the end of May 2011. January 2001 serves as an important beginning time as it represents the beginning of the national conversation around the No Child Left Behind Act (signed into law on January 8, 2002), which has changed the nature of public education. As such, I limit my sample to include only articles published after January of 2001, in order to ensure that these articles capture the more recent discourses that exist in the national newspapers.

These newspapers are printed daily, therefore, it is unreasonable to read every paper for articles. As an alternative, I have chosen to use the ProQuest National Newspaper Database, which allows a user to search through articles within the national newspapers using specific search terms and within specific date ranges. I am able to locate applicable articles in each of the four national newspapers by searching with the key terms “National Education Association” and “American Federation of Teachers” in the database using the date range of January 1, 2001, to May 31, 2011<sup>3</sup>.

Unfortunately, because this still yields over 400 articles, these need to be narrowed down to the most applicable articles. Here I have chosen to narrow these articles down to

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<sup>3</sup> In the *Los Angeles Times*, the NEA is always referred to as the “National Education Assn.”, requiring this specific wording in the search engine in order to find applicable articles.

those that appear in each newspaper's first (or "A") section, generally characterized as main news/front page stories. I choose this section because it consistently has the highest level of readership among newspaper readers – 85.1% in 2009, 82.2% in 2010 (Newspaper Association of America, 2011). With the highest level of readership, it is likely that these articles are the most influential to public opinion.

#### National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers News Releases

Here, my interest is in capturing the most current way in which the NEA and the AFT wish to portray their policy-related actions. This requires a different approach to timing than the newspaper articles, because both organizations have evolved their stances on policy-related issues over the last ten years and both organizations publish roughly five news releases per week. As such, I have chosen to limit the time period for the NEA and AFT news releases to the last six months (December 2010 to May 2011), which prevents confusion from arising over the evolution in the public representation projected by the NEA and the AFT over a longer period of time. While this alternative time span may seem to create an uneven comparison, I would argue that the NEA and AFT are far more likely to evolve their portrayal of their policy-related actions over time than the national newspapers are, and that to sample both sources from a similar period of time would introduce many alternative portrayals on the behalf of the NEA and AFT that would make interpretations in this content analysis far less credible.



### 3.4.3 – Recording

Earlier in this work, I described my personal beliefs and understandings, as well as provided an extensive review of literature in Chapter 2, as a way of communicating my qualifications and biases as a recorder. While, generally, having the content analyst function as the recorder in his/her own study is a questionable practice, I have chosen this path for two reasons. First, and most importantly, this content analysis represents a type of critical media study, as suggested by Douglas Kellner (2000), in that the goal is to expose media as a source for the distribution of dominant ideologies that can be damaging to those who are negatively portrayed. In critical media studies, a lone recorder/interpreter is common as is an acknowledgement that their interpretation is not the only possible interpretation. Second, I lack the availability of similarly trained recorders to record for me. However, I do feel confident that any scholar, armed with the background in critical theory, critical media study, and education presented in Chapter 2: Review of Literature, could carry out this same study and would come to similar interpretive conclusions.

For this recording process, I have created a content analysis recording form (Appendix A) that will allow me to record information from both the national newspaper articles and the NEA and AFT news releases. Within the tool, the recording is broken down into four mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. These categories begin with their definitions, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, followed by further clarification designed to operationalize these categories into analytical constructs that yield recordable and analyzable units of data. In the end, my interest is in how portrayals of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT may influence public opinion about these organizations. As such, I have chosen to operationalize the nominal variables of *direction*,

*traits, methods and goals* in an attempt to capture the qualities of a portrayal that may be most influential to public opinion, as informed by a tradition of critical media study.

Direction: “The line or course on which something is moving or is aimed to move or along which something is pointing or facing” (Merriam-Webster, 2011a). This category makes use of a three point ordinal metric that asks for an interpretation by the recorder of whether the NEA and/or AFT was being portrayed as either *favorable, neutral* or *unfavorable*, followed by evidence that supports this conclusion. Table 3.1 includes a direction determination matrix to assist in this interpretation.

Table 3.1

*Article Direction Determination Matrix*

<b>Favorable</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Unfavorable</b>
<b>Obviously Favorable</b> - Uses positive adjectives and/or adverbs to describe NEA/AFT policy-related actions - Only presents/supports the policy position of the NEA/AFT	<b>Objective</b> - Entire article appears written in a factual manner, with no support or bias detectable toward the NEA/AFT - Just mentions the NEA/AFT without any description of their policy-related actions	<b>Obviously Unfavorable</b> - Uses negative adjectives and/or adverbs to describe NEA/AFT policy-related actions - Only refutes/critiques the policy position of the NEA/AFT
<b>Not Obvious Favorable</b> - Builds a positive portrayal of another organization then links this organization with the NEA/AFT - Presents positions that both support and critique, with a clear majority of the positions being in support of the NEA/AFT	<b>Deliberative</b> - Presents the NEA/AFT in a manner that demonstrates both positive and negative aspects of the organizations - Presents positions that both support and critique, with no clear majority of the positions being in support of, or critical of, the NEA/AFT	<b>Not Obvious Unfavorable</b> - Builds a negative portrayal of another organization then links this organization with the NEA/AFT - Presents positions that both support and critique, with a clear majority of the positions being critical of the NEA/AFT

Traits: “A distinguishing quality – as of personal character” (Merriam-Webster, 2011d). This would include any adverbs and adjectives used to characterize the NEA

and/or AFT or to suggest that the NEA and/or AFT is/are different or unique from any other organization (i.e. “the AFT is *cumbersome* with bureaucracy” or “the NEA is *overtly militant*”).

Methods: “A procedure or process for attaining an object: as a way, technique, or process of or for doing something” (Merriam-Webster, 2011c). This would include characterizations within the document that suggest that the NEA and/or AFT go about accomplishing their goals in a particular manner (i.e. “the NEA is prepared to *strike* for...” or “the AFT is engaged in *lobbying* activities to...”).

Goals: “The end toward which effort is directed” (Merriam-Webster, 2011b). This would include characterizations within the document that suggest that the NEA and/or AFT favors and works toward any particular policy options (i.e. “the NEA calls for *smaller class sizes*” or “the AFT is pushing for *higher salaries*”).

Lastly, the content analysis recording form contains a section to list specific terms used to describe teachers and/or their organizations for two reasons. First, this section allows for later reduction to determine if certain terms are being used more often to characterize the NEA and/or AFT. Second, the use of a terms category functions as a reliability check for the content analysis, in that each term located in the terms sections should be identifiable with one of the analysis categories above. If a term does not fit into one of the above categories then a new category needs to be created to account for these types of portrayals.

### 3.4.4 – Reducing

Once all of the documents have been analyzed using the content analysis recording form, this data will need to be focused into information that captures the essence of the differing portrayals. In this study, reduction will occur in three ways.

First, the content analysis will be broken down into each individual source, including the national newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*) and the teacher organizations (the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers). This allows the analysis to capture how each individual source carries out their portrayal of the NEA and AFT, instead of just limiting the analysis to “national newspapers” and “teacher organizations.”

Second, a frequency analysis will be applied to each operational category in order to determine if particular patterns of portrayal are being used within each source. The number of articles from each source that lean in a certain *direction* (favorable, neutral, or unfavorable) will provide an overall feeling for how each individual source wishes to portray the NEA and/or AFT. When analyzing the nominal variables of *traits*, *methods*, and *goals*, particular themes of teacher organization portrayal will become apparent. These themes can be analyzed using a frequency analysis to determine if a newspaper favors a particular theme when portraying the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT.

Lastly, recorded data will be reduced through the grouping and explanation of similar portrayals, within each source, that highlight common ways in which the portrayals are occurring. Here, the purpose is to rearticulate and condense these portrayals to capture the most meaningful ways in which each source chooses to portray the policy-related

actions of the NEA and AFT. In this way, emerging themes and patterns within the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT would become apparent.

### **3.4.5 – Inferring**

During this component of the content analysis, my interpretations move beyond what is in the texts to what the text means. In this study, inference begins with a comparison between (1) how each national newspaper portrays the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT and (2) how these teacher organizations portray their policy-related actions. My interest here is in demonstrating the specific nature of the dissonance that exists between these two types of portrayals and linking that dissonance to its possible effects on public opinion. Additionally, during this analysis certain themes of portrayal may emerge that demonstrate an overall discourse present within certain groups of texts, or perhaps in and among all of them. In this inference period, any emerging themes will be explored for their meaning and their possible influences. To warrant my interpretive claims, I will make use of examples found within the content analysis and make reference to earlier theoretical understandings in a way that allows my interpretations to connect the information in the texts with a critical theoretical position. As a qualitative researcher, my intention is to continually revisit the different sources of data throughout the study so that my earlier interpretations can better reflect the larger body of texts. This process may include such undertakings as looking back thorough earlier texts to analyze using new categories or re-reading of the earliest texts in search of themes emerging in later ones.

### **3.4.6 – Narrating**

In this final component, my goal will be to suggest ways in which the NEA and the AFT may address the portrayals of their policy-related actions that occur within the national newspapers. Of interest are portrayals of policy-related actions that appear to present the NEA and the AFT in a manner that differs from the way these groups attempt to portray themselves. This narrative interpretation will include describing the nature of this dissonance, factors that may contribute to the differing portrayals, and ways the NEA and AFT might seek to counter these portrayals in order to better inform the public about the nature of their organizations' policy-related actions. In this case, the warrants for my interpretive claims will issue from both the content analysis process and from the earlier theoretical works contained within Chapter 2: Review of Literature. This orientation, toward connecting theory with action, reflects the foundational concept of praxis within critical theory. While it would be naïve to suggest that the NEA and the AFT are not already conscious of the ways in which the national news media inaccurately portrays their policy-related actions and are not already taking steps to counter this dissonance, my intention is to provide an analysis that may increase their understanding and embolden their efforts.

## **3.5 – CONCLUSION**

This study falls within a category of studies commonly labeled as qualitative-interpretive study; as such, this study is concerned with description and interpretation with an eye toward human meaning-making. Additionally, this research is heavily informed by a critical theoretical tradition, and has, as its purpose, research with a political focus, to further empower teacher organizations.

This study employs a content analysis methodology, which has a rich historical background. This particular content analysis is largely based on the work of Klaus Krippendorff (2004), as he goes into great detail to describe a process of content analysis that is both commonly cited and replicated – both from his 2004 work as well as its first edition from 1980 (Holdford, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; McMillan, 2000; Robson, 2002). This research design features six components – *unitizing, sampling, recording, reducing, inferring* and *narrating* – all designed to move from an original context of study, to the identification of applicable texts for analysis, through a recording and reduction process, to the final ability to make interpretive inferences and conclusions that enhance a theoretical worldview. The key feature of this process is the operationalization of specific nominal variables that allow the recorder to efficiently, productively, reliably, and credibly extract units of data for analysis from the expansive body of texts incorporated into the content analysis. This content analysis methodology has a number of strengths that make it the best research strategy for this study, including: an unobtrusive nature, the ability to extrapolate meaning from unstructured data, and the ability to cope with large numbers of documents.

In the end, this study is designed to accomplish a number of goals. This study seeks to interpret the way the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT are portrayed both in the four most influential national newspapers and in the publicly-available news releases of the NEA and AFT. Additionally, this study seeks to compare these various portrayals in order to distinguish the types and levels of dissonance that exist between each unit within the larger research context. Lastly, this study seeks to suggest ways in which the NEA and the AFT can increase their ability to counter negative media portrayals of their policy-

related actions, in order to enhance current efforts to improve the public opinion of the two teacher organizations.





## CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS

### 4.1 – INTRODUCTION

This analysis chapter proceeds through three distinct stages. Following a brief description of how data were gathered, the first stage of analysis (Sections 4.3 and 4.4) begins with a reduction of information found in the four national newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*) and the two teacher organizations' websites – the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) – into clear and concise findings for later analysis and interpretation. For the newspapers, this process starts with a quantitative analysis of the direction and subjects of each newspaper's portrayal, then moves on to qualitative discussion of emergent themes within each newspaper. The teacher organization analysis follows a similar pattern, but without the need to determine subject and direction of each organization's news releases, as each teacher organization naturally only writes favorable material and their own organization is always the subject of their news releases. A qualitative analysis makes up the bulk of the findings, referring to emergent themes within each of the various sources. I have defined an emergent theme as one that appears in at least 10% of the articles or news releases subject to content analysis in each newspaper and/or teacher organization's news release. In my representation of these findings, readers will notice that I have chosen to reproduce some fairly large portions of text from each source. This is in an effort to capture more of the context in which the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT are presented, so that it becomes possible for the reader to

realize some of the more subtle aspects of portrayal that became apparent during the reduction process.

The second part of this content analysis (Section 4.5) involves an interpretive analysis that accomplishes two different objectives. First, the analysis compares and contrasts information found in the four national newspapers, so that their individual differences in portrayal become apparent and an overall picture of the way in which the national newspapers present the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT can be synthesized. Because this analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative data, a rich description of the portrayal of the policy-related actions becomes possible. Second, the news releases of the NEA and the AFT are also compared and contrasted, allowing for a representation of some of the key similarities and differences in the way each organization presents its policy-related actions. This analysis highlights both the focus and way in which each teacher organization frames their policy-related actions. Analysis of the teacher organizations provides some intriguing insights into how each group wishes to be perceived and how their portrayal may influence their corresponding media representation.

The third and final part of this analysis (Section 4.6) includes a comparative, interpretive approach in which the emergent themes from the overall analysis of the national newspapers are compared and contrasted with the overall analysis of the emergent themes presented by the teacher organizations. This section is designed to shed light on places where the two types of portrayals are congruent and places where they are dissimilar. Additionally, in this interpretive section, I make a number of connections between the different overall analyses in order to draw some conclusions about why the

media representations and teacher organization portrayals appear the way they do and what characteristics of the teacher organizations' portrayals appear to find the most traction in the national newspapers.

## **4.2 – DATA GATHERING PROCESS**

### **4.2.1 – National Newspaper Data**

A search was conducted through the four major national newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*) using the ProQuest national newspaper database, with a date range of January 1, 2001 to May 31, 2011. This search yielded 206 total articles, appearing in Section A “Main News,” that referred to the National Education Association and/or the American Federation of Teachers. Each newspaper article was printed out and a copy of the Content Analysis Recording Form (Appendix A) was attached to each. Once all of the newspaper articles had been assembled, they were broken into their individual newspapers, so that each newspaper’s portrayal could be analyzed independently. Following this division of the articles by newspaper, the recording process began in which each article was read – looking for traits, methods and goals used to describe the teacher organization(s) – and these aspects of the articles were recorded along with a direction (favorable, neutral, unfavorable) in which the article appeared to lean and to which organization the article referred. All of this information was then reduced to capture the essence of the differing portrayals of the teacher organizations, which is reported throughout Section 4.3 of this chapter.

Of the variables within the study that were to be coded, the direction of each newspaper article proved to be one of the most nuanced, given the variety of writing styles of the different newspaper reporters. In Chapter 3 – Methodology a table was included to assist in this coding and interpretation process<sup>4</sup>. Below are example newspaper articles from this study that demonstrate more clearly how each determination was made.

#### Obviously Favorable

Anderson's (2010) article in *The Washington Post* includes a number of quotes like, "Michael Casserly...said Weingarten 'should be applauded' for being open to the use of student test data in teacher evaluation" and "Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in a statement, 'Randi is really showing courage by raising these issues.'

#### Not Obviously Favorable

Herszenhorn's (2003) article in *The New York Times* includes a positive quote that refers to school reform, "Mr. Klein reacted positively yesterday...[saying] we believe the burden of the current contract should be lifted from all our schools" followed by a more objective quote that links the AFT to this positive reform; "...[AFT] urged local unions to move away from contracts laden with work rules in favor of streamlined or 'thin' contracts tailored to individual schools in exchange for giving teachers a larger voice in the management of schools."

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<sup>4</sup> See Table 3.1 Article Direction Determination Matrix found on page 125

### Objective Neutral

An article in the *Los Angeles Times* (2006) provides two objective quotes, reporting that “The AFL-CIO said the National Education Assn. with 2.8 million members, would allow local affiliates to join the labor federation, which was hurt when major unions defected last year” and “Reg Weaver...said the partnership would give educators more muscle when they campaigned for candidates for local political office and advocated legislation”

### Deliberative Neutral

An article in *The Wall Street Journal* (2005a) presents two sides of a debate, describing the NEA position by stating, “parents in communities where school districts are financially strained were promised that this law would close the achievement gaps...instead, their tax dollars are being used to cover unpaid bills sent from Washington for costly regulations that do not improve education,” quickly followed by a counter-statement by the Bush administration, “This is a victory for children and parents all across the country. Chief Judge Friedman’s decision validates our partnership with states to close the achievement gap, hold schools accountable and to ensure all students are reading and doing math at grade-level by 2014.”

### Obviously Unfavorable

Another article from *The Wall Street Journal* (2004) negatively portrays the NEA by including quotes, such as, “...the teachers unions that prefer the status quo and too many politicians who depend on them for financial support” and “...NEA’s high-priced

Washington lobbyists [who] have made no secret that they will fight against bringing real, rock-solid improvements in the way we educate all our children..."

#### Not Obviously Favorable

One article from *The Washington Post* (2009b) indicates that, "the teachers union has countered with a proposal that includes some laudable support programs for teachers but would do little to weed out ineffective ones" and that "...another problem with the union proposal is that it seeks generous pay hikes... at a time when the city is broke."

#### **4.2.2 – Teacher Organization News Release Data**

When it came to the NEA and AFT "news releases," gathered from each organization's website, analysis followed a similar process. A smaller time frame was used to cut down on news release volume and capture the most current portrayal that the NEA and AFT wished to present. From December 2, 2010 to May 31, 2011, 127 total news releases were found. Each news release was printed out and the same content analysis form was attached to each document. These documents were then separated by organization so that each organization's portrayal could be analyzed independently. While certain items were constant – such as which teacher organization was referenced and all news releases were written in a favorable direction – the analysis focused on the traits, methods, and goals used to portray the policy-related actions of the teacher organization. In this way, it was possible to determine how each organization would like to be portrayed to the public. This information was reduced in order to capture the essence of each organization's portrayal efforts, which is reported throughout Section 4.4 of this chapter.

### 4.3 – FINDINGS: NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

Each of the four major national newspapers was analyzed individually for direction of articles, subject of articles, and emergent themes – relating to traits, methods and goals – in the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). It is important to remember that the four national newspapers, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, have been found to be the most influential print news media sources, passing on stories they break to other national, state, and local news agencies (Herman & Chomsky, 2006). As such, the newspaper portrayal of the teacher agencies, both as individual newspapers and as an overall collective source of information, largely helps to define the news media representation of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. As described below, these findings represent the portrayal of the teacher organizations by each individual newspaper, providing both quantitative and qualitative findings. What becomes clear is that each newspaper takes both a quantitatively and qualitatively different approach to presenting the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT.

#### 4.3.1 – *The New York Times*

Searching through the “Main News” section of *The New York Times*, 63 articles were identified that dealt with the National Education Association (NEA) and/or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Of these articles, 17 out of 63 (27%) referenced just the NEA; 30 out of 63 (48%) referenced just the AFT; and 16 out of 63 (25%) referenced both teacher organizations. These numbers indicate that articles describing the policy-related



actions of teacher organizations within *The New York Times* have, as their subject, the AFT more often than the NEA. Within these articles, it was possible to determine the direction in which the author(s) chose to depict the NEA and/or AFT. Of these articles, 23 out of 63 (37%) were written in a neutral direction; 29 out of 63 (46%) were written in a favorable direction; and 11 out of 63 (17%) were written in an unfavorable direction. This breakdown is represented in Figure 4.1, and clearly shows that articles within *The New York Times* show a more favorable bias, in their reporting, toward the policy-related actions of the two national teacher organizations.

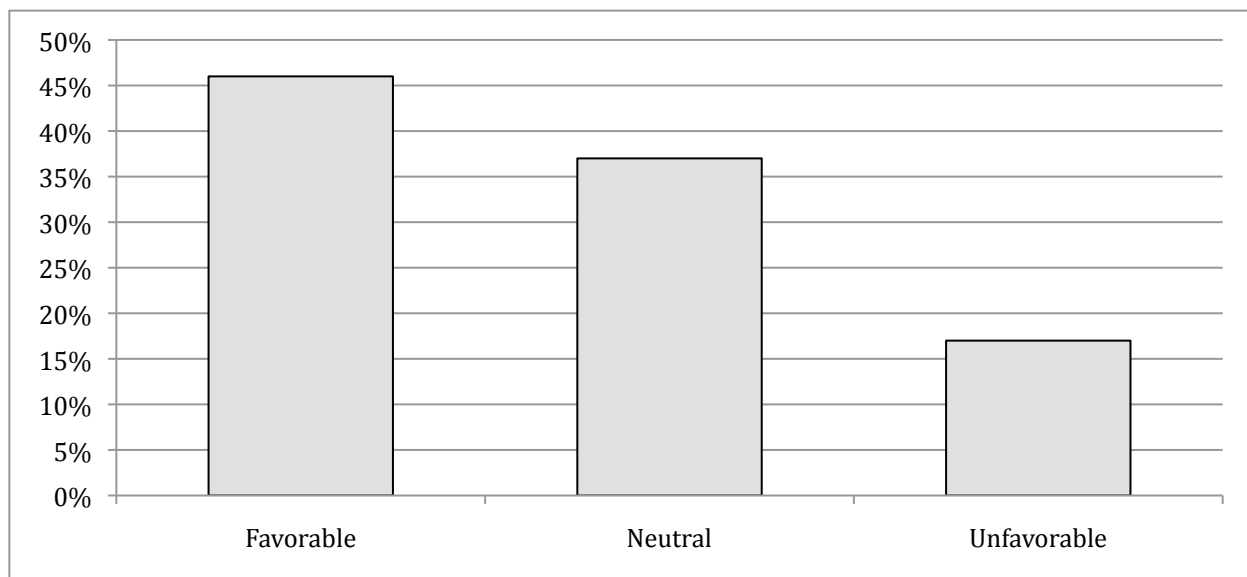


Figure 4.1 - *Direction of Articles in The New York Times*

When the direction of *The New York Times* articles is further broken down, it is possible to determine how each teacher organization tends to be represented. The National Education Association is represented in a favorable direction in 13 out of 33 articles (39%); neutral in 9 out of 33 articles (27%); and unfavorable in 11 out of 33 articles (33%). The

American Federation of Teachers is represented in a favorable direction in 23 out of 46 articles (50%); neutral in 18 out of 46 articles (39%); and unfavorable in 5 out of 46 articles (11%). This information is depicted in Figure 4.2, and indicates that the two teacher organizations tend to be portrayed in a different manner, with the AFT being more often the subject of favorable and neutral articles, whereas the NEA is more often the subject of unfavorable portrayal in articles. This suggests that, while overall *The New York Times* is favorable to teacher organizations, the newspaper has a more favorable bias when it comes to reporting the policy-related actions of the AFT, as opposed than the NEA, which seems to have their policy-related actions depicted in a more balanced fashion.

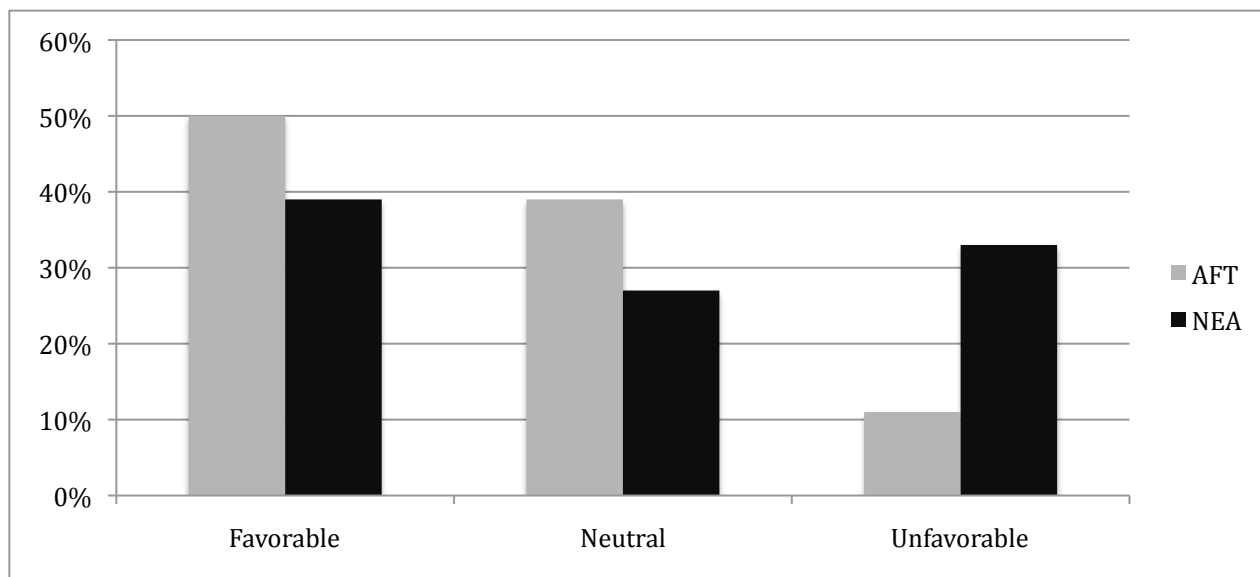


Figure 4.2 - Direction of *The New York Times* Articles by Teacher Organization

### Emergent Themes

Within *The New York Times*, seven themes are common in the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT, shown in Table 4.1. Five of these themes reflect goals of the teacher organizations (promote positive school reforms, change No Child Left Behind Act, prevent school choice efforts, create better working conditions, obstruct positive school reforms), and two of these themes reflect traits of the teacher organizations (allied with Democrats, and self-serving). Of the seven themes, three common themes are presented in a favorable manner when referring to the NEA and AFT, including; “promote positive school reforms,” “change No Child Left Behind Act,” and “create better working conditions.” Two themes, “prevent school choice efforts” and “allied with Democrats,” are most often presented in a neutral manner, with the newspaper providing facts but tending not to bias the articles in either direction. The two least common themes, “self-serving” and “obstruct positive school reforms,” are presented in an unfavorable way when referring to NEA and AFT policy-related actions.

Table 4.1

*Frequency of Emergent Themes within The New York Times Portrayal of the Policy-Related Actions of the NEA and the AFT*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># out of 63 articles</b>
Promote positive school reforms	21 (33%)
Change No Child Left Behind Act	13 (21%)
Cooperating with the Democratic Party	13 (21%)
Prevent school choice efforts	10 (16%)
Create better working conditions	9 (14%)
Obstruct positive school reforms	9 (14%)
Self-serving	7 (11%)

### Promote Positive School Reforms

*The New York Times* tends to direct its focus to the policy-related actions of the AFT when they describe the promotion of positive school reforms. One article describes the AFT as working with business groups, such as the U.S. Chamber of Congress, to endorse draft national standards for English and Math (Dillon, 2010d). Another article describes the goals of a previous AFT president, Sandra Feldman, when she writes,

[Ms. Feldman] is scheduled to call today for universal access to high-quality preschool programs for every child in the nation age 3 and over...Ms. Feldman plans to propose a large-scale expansion of Head Start, the decades-old preschool program for poor children, to make it available on a sliding fee scale to all families.

(Wilgren, 2001, p. A. 16)

Writing about the current president of the AFT – Randi Weingarten – one author explains, “she wants to replace President Bush’s focus on standardized testing with a vision of public

schools as community centers that help poor students succeed by offering not only solid classroom lessons but also medical and other services” (Dillon, 2008c, p. A. 11). In one of the few mentions of both teacher organizations that are tied to positive school reforms, one author writes, “The American Federation of Teachers...and the National Education Association...see reform as a matter of survival; if they don’t improve the schools, someone else will, and kill the unions in the meantime” (Zernike, 2001, p. A. 1). This last article, which ran on the front page in 2001, seems prophetic given the current period of anti-labor educational reforms.

Many of the articles that deal with positive school reforms speak favorably about Randi Weingarten’s work with the AFT in creating new union-run charter schools, working on new pay-for-performance measures, and creating new teacher discipline structures that help administrators to rid themselves of ineffective teachers in a more efficient manner (Dillon, 2008b; Gabriel, 2011a, 2011b; Greenhouse, 2008, 2010; Herbert, 2010; Herszenhorn, 2003; The New York Times, 2010, 2011). As an example of what appears in these articles, one article explains,

The president of the American Federation of Teachers says she will urge her members to accept a form of teacher evaluation that takes student achievement into account and that the union has commissioned an independent effort to streamline disciplinary processes and make it easier to fire teachers who are guilty of misconduct. (Herbert, 2010, p. A. 23)

In another article, Weingarten is quoted as saying, “with the exception of vouchers, which siphon scarce resources from public schools, no issue should be off the table, provided it is

good for children and fair to teachers” (Dillon, 2008b, p. A. 15). An additional article announces that,

Facing criticism that her union makes it too hard to get rid of bad teachers, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, on Tuesday announced a union-backed effort to develop a new model for how public school teachers should be evaluated, promoted, and removed. (Greenhouse, 2010, p. A. 21)

An article notes that, “Ms. Weingarten has shown strong leadership in this area, and is well ahead of the National Education Association, the nation’s largest teachers’ union” (The New York Times, 2011, p. A. 26). A final article explains that,

Ms. Weingarten has sought to play a major role in changing evaluations and tenure, lest the issue be used against unions to strip their influence over work life in schools – just as Republican lawmakers in Wisconsin and Ohio are trying to do this week. (Gabriel, 2011a, p. A. 19)

All of these articles suggest that the president of the AFT is leading the policy-related actions of her organization in a direction of positive school reform by taking up many of the reform initiatives called for by powerful groups outside of education.

#### Change No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

A NEA and AFT desire to change NCLB is a common theme for the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations. Within *The New York Times*, these portrayals are favorable ones in which the newspaper presents the teacher organizations as positive forces for change. Pointing out the length of the struggle over NCLB, one article reminds us that, “the administration and the [NEA] have been at odds practically since January 2002,

when the president signed the law, known as No Child Left Behind” (Dillon & Schemo, 2004b, p. A. 15). Relaying the desires of the AFT for changes to NCLB, one article explains,

A coalition of organizations, led by the AFT (nation’s second largest teachers union) introduced a campaign on Wednesday to mobilize opposition to the No Child Left Behind law, to demand more money for public schools and to raise the profile of education as an election issue. (Schemo, 2004, p. A. 20)

Another article explains the NEA efforts,

The law, the No Child Left Behind Act, calls for greater use of standardized tests and remedial action to raise student achievement and improve school performance... The [NEA] is lobbying for legislation that would give states more flexibility and more money. (Pear, 2004, p. A. 20)

Following former Education Secretary Rod Paige’s 2004 comment that the NEA was a “terrorist organization” – a statement he later recanted – an article explains that,

The statement...has given the union, the National Education Association, reams of free publicity and energized its efforts to topple No Child Left Behind, which holds public schools accountable for closing the achievement gap between rich and poor children. (The New York Times, 2004, p. A. 22)

Even President Obama’s efforts to rewrite NCLB are criticized by the NEA and AFT, in an article that says,

...the administration’s proposal for rewriting the main law outlining federal policies on public schooling, No Child Left Behind, would continue what they called an overemphasis on standardized tests, impose federal mandates on issues

traditionally handled in collective bargaining, and probably lead to mass firings of teachers in low-performing schools. (Dillon, 2010a, p. A. 16)

These articles highlight a struggle by both teacher organizations to change the NCLB policy.

*The New York Times* also follows lawsuits, filed on behalf of states and the teacher organizations, which attempt to either gain full funding for, or to alter NCLB. An article pronounces,

Opening a new front in the growing rebellion against President Bush's signature education law, the nation's largest teachers' union and eight school districts in Michigan, Texas and Vermont sued the Department of Education yesterday, accusing it of violating a passage in the law that says states cannot be forced to spend their own money to meet federal requirements. (Dillon, 2005, p. A. 1)

Citing a victory in a NCLB lawsuit in an appellate court, one article quotes Reg Weaver – former NEA President – as saying the ruling “indicates that if the federal government hands down programs, it's their responsibility to pay for them, so that's a victory for the students of America” (Dillon, 2008a, p. A. 8). While *The New York Times* does print articles that represent opposition by the teacher organizations to NCLB in an unfavorable fashion, because there are not enough negative depictions of NCLB opposition to warrant its own theme category, they are instead fit in as a subtheme under “obstruct positive school reforms” which will be discussed at a later point in this section

#### Cooperating with the Democratic Party

*The New York Times* often makes mention of the relationship that exists between the two teacher organizations and the Democratic Party. Generally, this portrayal is neutral in



direction, with the newspaper pointing out support for Democrat candidates and funding their campaigns. Most of these articles make mention of endorsements by the NEA and/or AFT for particular Democratic Party candidates for top offices, such as John Kerry or Barack Obama for President, or Howard Dean for President of the Democratic National Committee (Greenhouse, 2008, 2011; Greenhouse & Swarns, 2003; Nagourney, 2005; Sanger & Rutenberg, 2004; Schemo, 2004). One article, showing NEA support, states, “the reactions made public an often bitter struggle between the Bush administration and the National Education Association, which has 2.7 million members and frequently supports Democrats at election time” (Dillon & Schemo, 2004b, p. A. 15). These articles appear to be just acknowledging the reality of the common alignment between the Democrats and the teacher organizations.

Other articles describe the campaign contributions of the two teacher organizations to the benefit of Democratic Party candidates. One author points out, “Last year, political action committees of the N.E.A. and A.F.T. gave \$3 million to Democratic campaigns, and almost nothing to Republicans” (McGray, 2005, p. A. 28). Another article cites federal data, by indicating that, “by comparison, since Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York announced her candidacy...the American Federation of Teachers [has spent] \$1.7 million, Federal Election Commission records show” (The New York Times, 2008, p. A. 19). Another describes the public acknowledgements of campaign financing from the NEA and AFT, in stating that,

[The NEA]...says it spent \$50 million in 2008 to help elect the President and more than 50 candidates for Congress and governors’ offices, most of them Democrats.

The American Federation of Teachers...also spent millions of dollars to help elect Mr. Obama and other candidates in 2008. (Dillon, 2010c, p. A. 8)

While other newspapers make mention of additional ways in which the NEA and AFT support the Democratic Party, *The New York Times* tends to limit this discussion to campaign endorsements and financing.

### Prevent School Choice Efforts

Efforts by the NEA and the AFT to prevent school choice efforts, such as opposition to vouchers and charter schools, are often portrayed in a neutral manner within *The New York Times*. Describing a 2001 study by the AFT, one article explains, “the American Federation of Teachers...[argues] in its own study that Edison public schools perform no better than similar, more traditional schools” (Steinberg, 2001, p. A. 18). A number of articles reference a 2004 study, commissioned by the AFT, which found that charter schools are performing worse than public schools. As an example of this portrayal, one article states, “...an August report by the American Federation of Teachers based on federal government statistics found that students in charter schools did not perform as well as those in comparable public schools...” (Dillon, 2004, p. A. 15). Another describes, “...a report by the American Federation of Teachers, which showed students in charter schools lagging behind their public school peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress” (Dillon & Schemo, 2004a, p. A. 21). These articles tend to just report the AFT findings, along with opposed findings from other researchers, as a way of just communicating both sides of a national debate.

Other articles attempt to articulate the NEA position in the school choice debate. One article explains that former NEA president, Reg Weaver, sees school choice efforts as, “an effort to promote private schools, weaken the union or change course just for the sake of change” (McGray, 2005, p. A. 28). Another article explains the NEA position – in reference to NCLB – as “The union sees the law as a barely concealed effort to weaken public education and build support for vouchers” (Dillon & Schemo, 2004b, p. A. 15). What becomes clear in these portrayals is that *The New York Times* appears to be distancing itself from either position within the school choice debate by only restating the findings and/or opinions of the teacher organizations without seeming to support either side.

#### Create Better Working Conditions

When *The New York Times* portrays the teacher organizations as trying to create better working conditions, this portrayal is made in a favorable way, implying that these better working conditions would benefit both teachers and the education system. As an example, one author writes,

...The American Federation of Teachers urged local unions to move away from contracts laden with work rules in favor of streamlined or ‘thin’ contracts tailored to individual schools in exchange for giving teachers a larger voice in the management of schools. (Herszenhorn, 2003, p. A. 1)

Here, what is portrayed is that the AFT is moving away from more traditional union bargaining in an attempt to improve the education system.

There are generally two types of working conditions that the teacher organizations are portrayed as trying to improve: increased pay for teachers, and better teacher

preparation. Demonstrating concern for both higher pay and better preparation, Sandra Feldman, the former AFT president, stated in one article,

While we [AFT] believe that higher pay for teachers is critical, we also strongly believe that the teaching profession would have fewer retention problems and perhaps no shortage of qualified instructors if new teachers were better prepared... (Feldman, 2001, p. A. 18)

The NEA is also concerned about increasing both pay and teacher preparation. One article quotes Bill Raabe – a director of collective bargaining at the NEA – as saying,

We know that experience makes a difference in student achievement – teachers get better...and additional training, too, whether it's a masters degree or some other way a teacher has improved her content knowledge, we think it ought to be compensated. (Dillon, 2010b, p. A. 21)

Showing that the AFT membership encompasses, and is concerned for, more than just public school teachers, an article notes that, "...the measure reflects union muscle – the American Federation of Teachers won living-wage coverage for some of its child care workers, too" (The New York Times, 2002a, p. A. 16). The AFT also represents some graduate instructors, as one author indicates that, "at schools like the University of Michigan, unionized teaching assistants have negotiated training so they can teach better, and the union has arranged extra support for graduate employees who come from overseas" (The New York Times, 2001, p. A. 22). These examples demonstrate how *The New York Times* favorably depicts policy-related actions of the teacher organizations as efforts that can improve both working conditions and the education system.

### Obstruct Positive School Reforms

The most common unfavorable portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT in *The New York Times* is that they are trying to obstruct positive school reforms. One author even characterizes the NEA as the “enemies of school reform” (The New York Times, 2005a, p. A. 20). Another author, writing about reforms designed to provide increases in school choice, explains that, “Despite compelling evidence that it improves student achievement, the national teachers’ unions stand against the policy” (White, 2008, p. A. 17).

Articles often focus on the NEA and AFT objections to pay-for-performance measures as the types of school reforms that the teacher organizations are trying to obstruct. One author notes, “Merit pay would help public schools retain good teachers by paying them more. But the unions have fought against such measures” (White, 2008, p. A. 17). Another author – attempting to explain the current pay structure – states,

Indeed, the national teachers’ unions – the National Education Association... and the American Federation of Teachers...have spent decades fighting such ideas in favor of a formula that sets salaries according to classroom experience, with a bump for extra time in graduate school. (McGray, 2005, p. A. 28)

In an effort to demonstrate that the two organizations actually have different opinions on pay-for-performance measure, one article points out that the NEA is absolutely against pay-for-performance measures, whereas the AFT is depicted as more lenient with performance pay, asking that it just not be based solely on student performance on standardized tests (Dillon, 2007).

Even though it is far more common to find articles within *The New York Times* that praise the efforts of the NEA and AFT to change the NCLB legislation, opposition to NCLB is

also depicted in an unfavorable way in a few articles, as a subtheme in articles that suggest that the teacher organizations are obstructing positive school reforms. An article points out that, “the country’s largest teachers’ union, the politically powerful National Education Association, would like to see [NCLB] gutted. Fortunately, the chairman of the House education committee, George Miller, Democrat of California, has resisted those pressures” (The New York Times, 2007, p. A. 28). Echoing the idea that the NEA would like to “gut” NCLB, another author adds, “the N.E.A. is working partly through Democrats in both houses, who have introduced measures that would gut accountability standards, preserving the disastrous status quo” (The New York Times, 2003, p. A. 24). Describing a recent loss in a lawsuit designed to challenge NLCB, one author explains, “moreover, the N.E.A. is likely to appeal the decision in its own suit in an effort to continue its campaign of vilification against the law” (The New York Times, 2005b, p. A. 26). This shows that even though *The New York Times* seems often to side with the teacher organizations against NCLB, it does make room for dissenting opinions to give a more balanced portrayal of these types of policy-related actions.

### Self-Serving

The portrayal of the NEA and the AFT as self-serving in their policy-related actions is a common negative way of describing the two teacher organizations. While representing only a small portion of the articles in *The New York Times*, it is important to note how this portrayal is depicted. One author writes, “The union agenda has often run counter to the interests of students and teachers alike” (White, 2008, p. A. 17). Another explains that, “in New York City, for example, unions ordinarily prevent teachers from being dismissed for

incompetence – so the schools must pay failed teachers their full salaries to sit year after year doing nothing in centers called ‘rubber rooms’” (N. D. Kristof, 2009, p. A. 35). Of the articles that note this self-serving quality, the NEA is often the target of criticism. One article asks, “why does [the NEA] put so much emphasis on the teachers? What about the children whose lives are cast into permanent shadow when they have to attend dismal, nonperforming schools?” (The New York Times, 2005b, p. A. 26). Another article states that, “The N.E.A. has ceased being an organization concerned with education and now operates only as a labor union” (The New York Times, 2002b, p. A. 22). When depicted in these ways, both teacher organizations appear to be motivated – in their policy-related actions – toward trying to better their own positions, to the detriment of education efforts.

#### Conclusion: *The New York Times*

After review of the seven common themes of portrayal in *The New York Times*, it becomes apparent that the newspaper shows a favorable bias toward the teacher organizations, with the American Federation of Teachers being the subject of the majority of the newspaper’s positive articles. This bias likely results from a long-standing relationship that has existed between the AFT and *The New York Times*, which began with former AFT president Albert Shanker’s “Where We Stand” columns that ran for over a decade in *The New York Times*. While many articles reflect biases, *The New York Times* appears to make an effort to publish both positive and negative portrayals of the teacher organizations, unlike the other influential national newspaper from New York – *The Wall Street Journal*. However, when taken together, more often the policy-related actions of the NEA and the

AFT are portrayed in a favorable manner in *The New York Times*, indicating a moderate level of positive bias toward the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT.

#### **4.3.2 – *The Wall Street Journal***

A search through *The Wall Street Journal* returned 64 articles, in the “Main News” section, that dealt with the National Education Association (NEA) and/or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Of these articles, 34 out of 64 (53%) referenced just the NEA; 19 out of 64 (30%) referenced just the AFT; and 11 out of 64 (17%) referenced both organizations. From these numbers, it seems clear that articles describing the policy-related actions of teacher organizations within *The Wall Street Journal* most often focus on the National Education Association. Within these articles, it was possible to detect the direction in which the author(s) chose to depict the NEA and/or AFT. Of these articles, 15 out of 64 (23%) were written in a neutral direction; 3 out of 64 (5%) were written in a favorable direction; and 46 out of 64 (72%) were written in an unfavorable direction. This breakdown is represented in Figure 4.3, and clearly shows that articles within *The Wall Street Journal* show a heavy bias in their reporting against the two national teacher organizations.



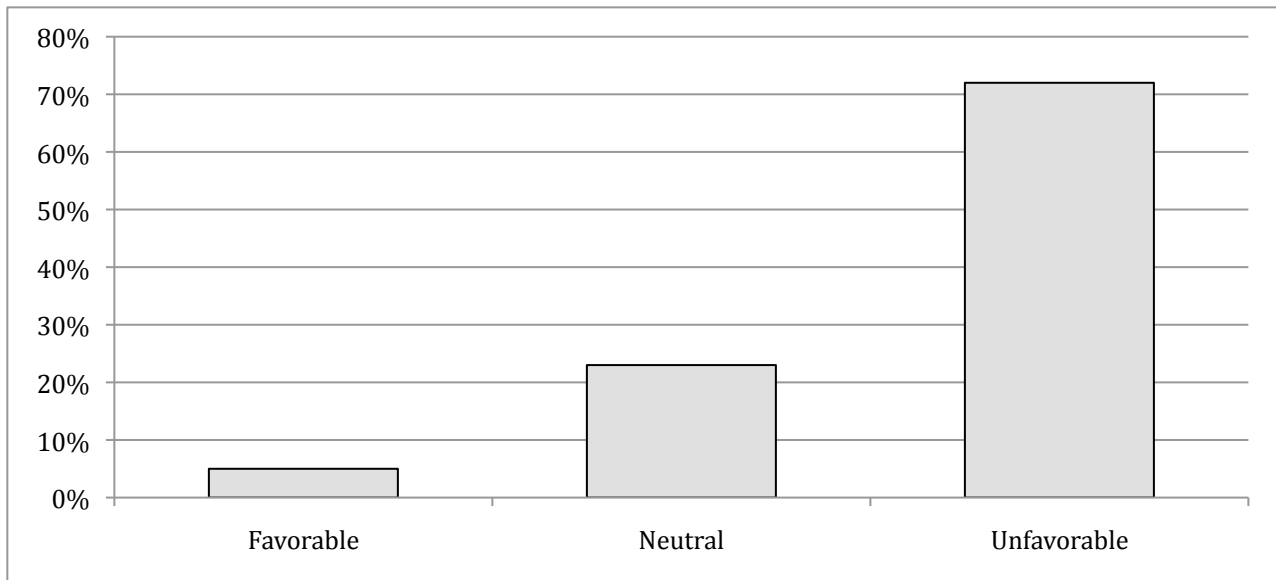


Figure 4.3 - *Direction of Articles in The Wall Street Journal*

When the direction of *The Wall Street Journal* articles is further broken down, it is possible to determine how each teacher organization tends to be represented. The National Education Association is represented in a favorable light in 1 out of 45 articles (2%); neutrally portrayed in 10 out of 45 articles (22%); and portrayed unfavorably in 34 out of 45 articles (76%). The American Federation of Teachers is represented in a favorable light in 3 out of 30 articles (10%); neutrally portrayed in 7 out of 30 articles (23%); and portrayed unfavorably in 20 out of 30 articles (67%). This information is depicted in Figure 4.4, and indicates that both teacher organizations are most often represented in an unfavorable way, with the NEA gathering the largest share of the negative portrayal. Both teacher organizations appear to be represented equally in neutral articles, and of the few (3) articles that present either of the two teacher organizations in a positive way, the AFT is

always included, whereas the NEA was only the subject of one favorable article, alongside a positive portrayal of the AFT.

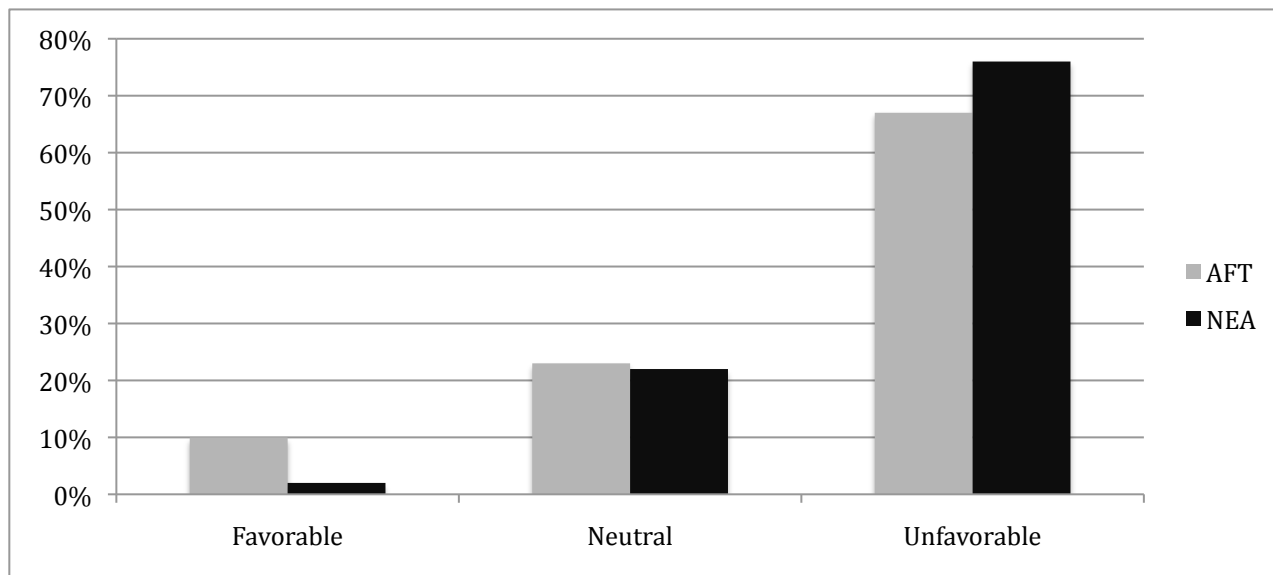


Figure 4.4 - *Direction of The Wall Street Journal Articles by Teacher Organization*

### Emergent Themes

Within *The Wall Street Journal*, four themes are common in the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT, as shown in Table 4.2. One of these themes reflects a perceived goal of the teacher organizations (obstruct positive school reforms); two of these themes reflect traits of the teacher organizations (liberal/left wing group and self-serving), and one theme deals with methods (campaigning). All four of these themes are presented in an unfavorable manner when they are used to portray the policy-related actions of the two teacher organizations.

Table 4.2

*Frequency of Emergent Themes within The Wall Street Journal Portrayal of the Policy-Related Actions of the NEA and the AFT*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># out of 64 articles</b>
Obstruct positive school reforms	34 (53%)
Liberal/Left wing group	22 (34%)
Campaigning to influence the public	17 (27%)
Self-serving	15 (23%)

### Obstruct Positive School Reforms

*The Wall Street Journal* most often tends to characterize the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT as being disruptive or preventative to positive school reforms. This unfavorable description of the goals of the teacher organizations takes many forms, ranging from a general anti-reform sentiment to the mentioning of specific reforms – such as school choice or NCLB legislation – that the NEA and AFT may be trying to obstruct.

The more general anti-reform theme is portrayed in a very negative manner. One author writes, “in the long war between teachers unions and reformers...” (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2010c, p. A. 18). Another article notes that, “...teacher unions block or stifle education reforms to the detriment of the low-income minority kids who populate the nation’s worst schools” (Riley, 2011, p. A. 13). Quoting former Secretary of Education Rod Paige, one article states “...NEA’s high-priced Washington lobbyists have made no secret that they will fight against bringing real, rock-solid improvements in the way we educate all our children regardless of skin color, accent or where they live” (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2004, p. A. 14). As a final example, one article observes, “states that refuse to cross the

teachers unions are unlikely to produce significant education reforms for the simple fact that collective bargaining contracts are the biggest barrier to change” (The Wall Street Journal, 2010a, p. A. 18). These articles portray the teacher organizations as standing in the way of whatever reforms might help students without pointing out what those reforms may have been.

Other articles go further to describe specific reforms that the NEA and the AFT are trying to obstruct. The most common reform effort that the teacher organizations are described as obstructing are those centered around school choice efforts, such as school vouchers and charter schools. One article details NEA contributions to two organizations, People for the American Way, and Protect Our Public Schools, which are described as “vehemently anti-voucher” (The Wall Street Journal, 2006b, p. A. 26). Another author explained that the AFT, “...is the same union that has done everything in its power to prevent poor kids in the district from getting vouchers worth just a few thousand dollars to escape its failing public-school monopoly” (The Wall Street Journal, 2003, p. A. 24). In an attack on a former NEA leader’s credentials as an educator, one article opines, “when Mr. Weaver announces support for vouchers for all students who want them and merit pay for teachers, he’ll begin to have credibility as a professional educator, rather than a union president” (The Wall Street Journal, 2007b). This type of article also mentions merit pay as the sort of pay-for-performance measure that the teacher organizations are occasionally mentioned – in *The Wall Street Journal* – as being against as well. As one article, describing the current AFT President, says, “Ms. Weingarten was also against merit pay for individual teachers” (The Wall Street Journal, 2009, p. A. 12).

The anti-voucher theme is often also combined with anti-Democrat and anti-liberal themes in *The Wall Street Journal*. An article states, “the next time the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank that received \$45,000 from the NEA last year, issues a report slamming school choice, we’ll have to wonder whether it was bought and paid for by the teachers unions” (The Wall Street Journal, 2006c, p. A. 8). Another adds, “yet Mr. Obama waved off any provisions for school choice, voicing his commitment to ‘fixing and improving our schools instead of abandoning them and passing out vouchers.’ The NEA couldn’t ask for a better tribune” (The Wall Street Journal, 2007a, p. A. 14). And finally, one author indicates that the teacher organizations are more radical than the teachers they represent, by remarking that, “no doubt a majority of public school teachers oppose vouchers, but they certainly don’t seem to think they are worth the jihad against them that their union bosses have mounted” (The Wall Street Journal, 2001, p. A. 8). While certainly the term “jihad” has taken on new significance after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks (the last article was published before September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001) it serves as an excellent example of just how unfavorable the portrayals of the NEA and AFT can become.

Often, articles suggest that the teacher organizations are against reforms that would hold them accountable for their students’ performance. As an example, one article points out that, “U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spelling deserves credit for not giving into Connecticut and the accountability-averse National Education Association...” (The Wall Street Journal, 2005b, p. A. 10). Another article states, the NEA “...has also defended the status quo, fighting measures to hold teachers accountable for student test scores and to offer parents more choices in their children’s schooling” (Golden, 2004, p. A. 1). Usually, the accountability measures that the NEA and AFT are portrayed as being against are the types

of standardized tests that are associated with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In writing about the NEA's opposition to standardized testing requirements under NCLB, one author states, "yet few seem to have noticed that the NEA refuses even to take the temperature of students suffering from the plague of low achievement" (Rotherham, 2001, p. A. 22). Another pair of authors explains that, "Instead of joining efforts to improve a law designed to help the most disadvantaged of Americans, the NEA seeks to shut it down" (West & Peterson, 2005, p. A. 18). As if to suggest just how bad the teacher organizations can be, one author goes a step further by remarking, "but we never thought we'd see the day when the nation's largest teachers' union opposed a federal law because it forced school districts to spend too much on education" (The Wall Street Journal, 2005c, p. A. 14). The suggestion here is, of course, that the NEA and AFT are willing to go to any extreme to block reforms that hold their teachers accountable for student performance.

### Liberal/Left Wing Group

The second most common theme used in *The Wall Street Journal* articles to portray the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT is that they are liberal or left-wing organizations. While in other newspapers, this might appear as a neutral comment, just stating facts about those with whom the teacher organizations most often agree when it comes to education policy, as you will see, within *The Wall Street Journal*, the labels liberal and left-wing, and even Democrat, are situated within unfavorable contexts.

*The Wall Street Journal* refers the NEA and the AFT as, "...the most powerful labor unions in the country" (Riley, 2011, p. A. 13). One article explains that, "the National Education Association is even more skewed toward politics..." (The Wall Street Journal,

2006a, p. A. 20). As evidence of the direction of this skewing, one author states that the U.S. Secretary of Education must suggest proposals that are “left-leaning” in order to get NEA support (The Wall Street Journal, 2001). Another article mentions the American Federation of Teachers as part of a roll call of groups from the “progressive left” (The Wall Street Journal, 2010b).

While the negative bias of these quoted selections might be mitigated as just stating facts about the NEA and AFT, it is when they are paired with quotes such as, “yet [the NEA] continues to contribute its members’ dues overwhelmingly to left-wing causes, most of which have nothing to do with educating our children” (Beckner, 2006, p. A. 13), that the unfavorable portrayal begins to come through. Another author states, “but many unions, the NEA in particular, now see themselves as part of a liberal vanguard that makes common cause on a variety of social and economic issues” (The Wall Street Journal, 2002a, p. A. 14). Continuing the “liberal” theme, one article describes the political donations of the NEA in the following way, “...you’d probably assume we were describing a liberal philanthropy. In fact, those expenditures have all turned up on the financial disclosure report of the National Education Association, the country’s largest teachers union” (The Wall Street Journal, 2006b, p. A. 24). Along the same lines, another article explains, “what caught our attention in the NEA’s most recent filing is the extent to which it behaved more like a liberal philanthropy than a labor union in dispensing \$295 million in member dues it took in last year” (The Wall Street Journal, 2006c, p. A. 8). While these linkages between teacher organizations and liberal or left-wing groups generally tend to focus on the NEA, the negative way in which these associations are made presents a largely unfavorable portrayal of the policy stances taken by the teacher organizations.

The NEA and the AFT are also often linked to the Democratic Party, but as with linkages to liberal or left-wing causes, these associations tend to be presented in an unfavorable way. One author states, “the teachers unions want more money and less accountability, which is what they’ll get if the Administration’s reforms are tossed overboard. And too many Democrats in Congress are all too happy to oblige” (The Wall Street Journal, 2010d, p. A. 18). Another author, speaking of President Obama’s proposals during his first presidential campaign, says, “but in toto, Mr. Obama’s policy proposals to the NEA were dominated by ritual obeisance to the union and orthodox thinking” (The Wall Street Journal, 2007a, p. A. 14). Linking the liberal causes of the teacher organizations with the Democratic Party, an author explains,

Political donations from these groups go overwhelmingly to Democrats, and the role that member dues play in the wider liberal movement can be seen in teachers union support for everything from abortion rights to single-payer health care to statehood for Washington, D.C. (Riley, 2011, p. A. 13)

And perhaps in one of the most direct and negative statements, one article exclaims, “it’s the Democratic Party that is the tool of the NEA” (McGurn, 2001, p. A. 14). Clearly, neither the Democratic Party nor the teacher organizations are to be seen in a positive way when they are linked to one another in *The Wall Street Journal*.

### Campaigning to Influence the Public

Over one quarter of the articles that appear in *The Wall Street Journal* include a discussion centered on campaigning. While this method is often used to link the NEA and AFT to candidates from the Democratic Party, as mentioned in the last section, here it is important



to note how these campaign involvements are portrayed. Within the newspaper, articles that refer to campaigning methods include: the contribution of funds to political campaigns, direct campaigning for candidates, and the buying of ads for specific candidates. In this way, the newspaper appears to indicate that including themselves in the process of election campaigns is the primary way in which the teacher organizations attempt to influence public opinion.

One article states that the unions, "...coordinate in a campaign to counter challenges to their political and contract bargaining power in a growing number of states" (Maher & Trotzman, 2011, p. A. 4). Another article states that, "...the NEA also works...to further its political goals through bankrolling ballot and legislative initiatives" (The Wall Street Journal, 2006c, p. A. 8). Speaking of more public campaigning by the NEA, one author adds, "The NEA is pumping millions of dollars into ads attacking President Bush's record" (Kronholz, 2004, p. A. 6). Another author states,

Union groups are pulling out all stops to woo 38,000 state workers in Kentucky, after it opened the door to limited union representation of such workers. The American Federation of Teachers...ha[s] deployed 50 organizers and taken out full-page newspaper ads. (K. Chen, 2001, p. A. 1)

In describing the efforts of UniServ reps – regional NEA representatives – one article explains that they are, "NEA affiliate employees who ostensibly oversee collective bargaining but in reality operate as an army of paid political organizers and lobbyists" (The Wall Street Journal, 2002b, p. A. 18). Highlighting an example of a very negative portrayal, one article says,

The opponents have raised a bundle to disseminate their predictions of doom, including more than \$3 million from status quo headquarters, the National Education Association. They're stoking that fear with antivoucher TV ads that aren't winning high marks for honesty. (The Wall Street Journal, 2007c, p. A. 18)

These portrayals suggest that campaigning, either through contributions, creating ads, or mobilizing human resources is the preferred method used by the teacher organizations to influence policy.

One common negative subtheme within the campaigning portrayal is that the NEA is cheating tax codes in order to finance its political interests. One author states, "all the while the NEA was sitting on these committees and financing these Democratic campaigns, it was listing zero dollars for political expenditures on its tax forms" (McGurn, 2001, p. A. 14). As another example, a different article explains,

The National Education Association's 2004 tax return, for instance, left blank the line for 'direct or indirect political expenditures.' Yet according to its LM-2, the NEA spent \$25 million on such activities from September 2004 to August 2005. Eliot Spitzer could sure have fun with that one – if he didn't have the NEA's endorsement. (The Wall Street Journal, 2006a, p. A. 20)

These types of portrayals make it appear as though the NEA is even willing to engage in illegal activities to influence policy.

Over time, this continued portrayal of the methods employed by the NEA and AFT suggests that they are willing to invest large amounts of money and manpower, even in illegal ways, toward influencing both the public and legislators into acquiescing to their policy-demands.

### Self-Serving

The least frequently – but still often – recurring theme within *The Wall Street Journal* is that the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT are motivated by self-serving interests, when they should, ostensibly, be motivated by the educational interests of students. Many articles come right out and say this, such as when one author states, “Then what is the basis of the NEA’s opposition? Mostly self-interest” (Rotherham, 2001, p. A. 22). Another article explains, “they expose the union as the honey pot for left-wing political causes that have nothing to do with teachers, much less students” (The Wall Street Journal, 2006b, p. A. 24). A third article mentions that, “it’s a shame the NEA doesn’t spend as much money and effort trying to improve lousy schools as it does trying to keep taxes high” (The Wall Street Journal, 2008, p. A. 18). While these serve as examples of direct accusations of serving self-interest, other authors make the accusation in a less direct manner.

Some authors level the self-serving criticism – within *The Wall Street Journal* – by suggesting that the teacher organizations are agencies that see their purpose as protecting bad teachers. One author notes, “to protect jobs for their members, they fight to keep the worst instructors from being fired and the worst schools from closing” (Riley, 2011, p. A. 13). Rupert Murdoch, whose company owns *The Wall Street Journal* explains that, “Unfortunately, our system is set up to protect bad teachers rather than reward good teachers” (Murdoch, 2010, p. A. 19). Another article describes a pool of additional teachers in New York public schools in the following way,

Meanwhile [Ms. Weingarten] has fought to ensure that the Absent Teacher Reserve Pool keeps allowing teachers whom no principal wants to hire to receive their full

salaries. New York spends an estimated \$150 million on this and on Teacher Reassignment Centers (for instructors who have been accused of misconduct) alone. (The Wall Street Journal, 2009, p. A. 12)

The issue of tenure is also linked to the two teacher organizations as a way of protecting bad teachers. One authors notes,

In most states, teachers receive tenure after only two or three years in the classroom, and then it's nearly impossible to fire them. Students are the victims of this system meant to serve adults with lifetime sinecures. (The Wall Street Journal, 2009, p. A. 18)

Another author explains, "...the inflexibility of the National Education Association on increasing time on task and, especially, the tenure issue which doesn't 'allow' school leaders to remove underperforming teachers" (Braun, 2008, p. A. 18). By indicating that the NEA and AFT are protecting bad teachers, the policy-related actions of these organizations are often depicted in a way that suggests these organizations saddle our public school systems with incompetent teachers.

#### Conclusion: *The Wall Street Journal*

After careful analysis of the four common themes of portrayal in *The Wall Street Journal*, what becomes clear is that this national newspaper shows a heavy bias against the teacher organizations, tends to target the NEA more so than the AFT, and is willing to make some pretty damning rhetorical leaps in an effort to portray the policy-related actions of these organizations as bad for the public education system. Because the overwhelming majority of articles are unfavorable, and all four of the common themes used to describe the policy-

related actions of the teacher organizations are negative, it is easy to conclude that articles appearing in the “Main News” section of *The Wall Street Journal* are very biased against the efforts of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

#### **4.3.3 – *The Washington Post***

The search through *The Washington Post* yielded 62 articles, in the “Main News” section, that dealt with the National Education Association (NEA) and/or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Of these articles, 26 out of 62 (42%) referenced only the NEA; 25 out of 62 (40%) referenced only the AFT; and 18 out of 62 (18%) referenced both organizations. This suggests that both organizations receive an even amount of coverage within *The Washington Post*. Within these articles, it was possible to detect the direction in which the author(s) chose to depict the NEA and/or AFT. Of these articles, 23 out of 62 (37%) were written in a neutral direction; 13 out of 62 (21%) were written in a favorable direction; and 26 out of 62 (42%) were written in an unfavorable direction. This breakdown is represented in Figure 4.5, and clearly shows that while no direction claims a majority share of the articles in *The Washington Post*, articles with an unfavorable direction were the most common, indicating a bias against the teacher organizations.

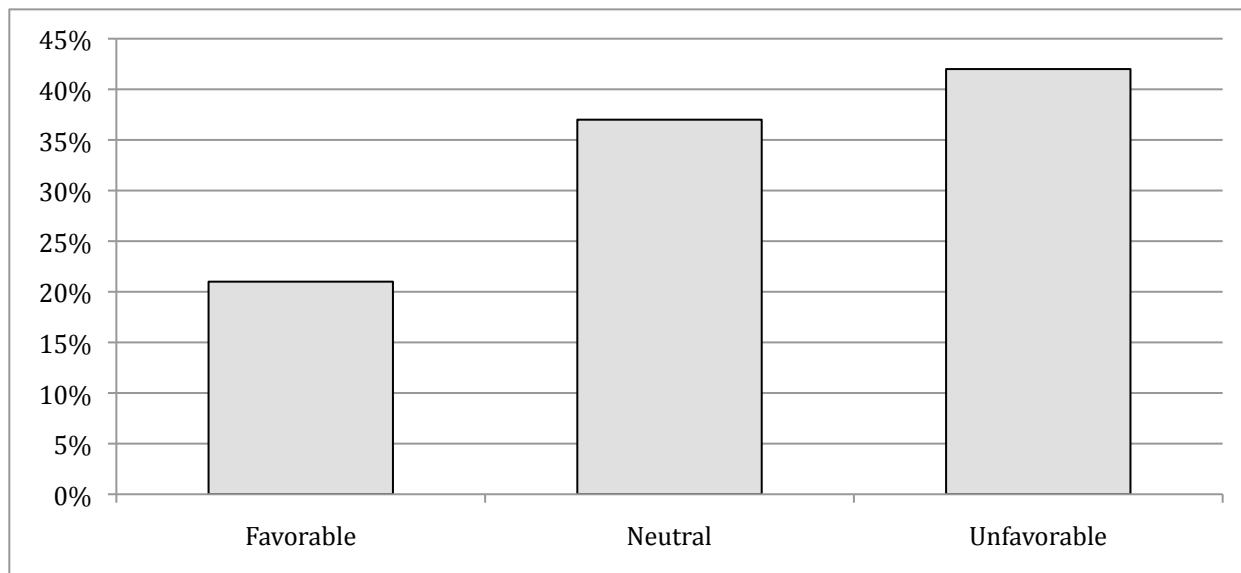


Figure 4.5 - *Direction of Articles in The Washington Post*

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When the direction of *The Washington Post* articles is broken down further, it is possible to determine how each teacher organization tends to be represented. The National Education Association is represented in a favorable manner in 6 out of 38 articles (16%); neutral in 15 out of 38 articles (39%); and unfavorable in 17 out of 38 articles (45%). The American Federation of Teachers is represented in a favorable manner in 8 out of 35 articles (23%); neutral in 12 out of 35 articles (34%); and unfavorable in 15 out of 35 articles (43%). This information is depicted in Figure 4.6, and indicates that both teacher organizations are represented in an unfavorable way in nearly equal proportions. However, it is important to note that the NEA tends to be depicted more often in neutral articles than the AFT, whereas the AFT tends to be depicted more often in favorable articles than the NEA.

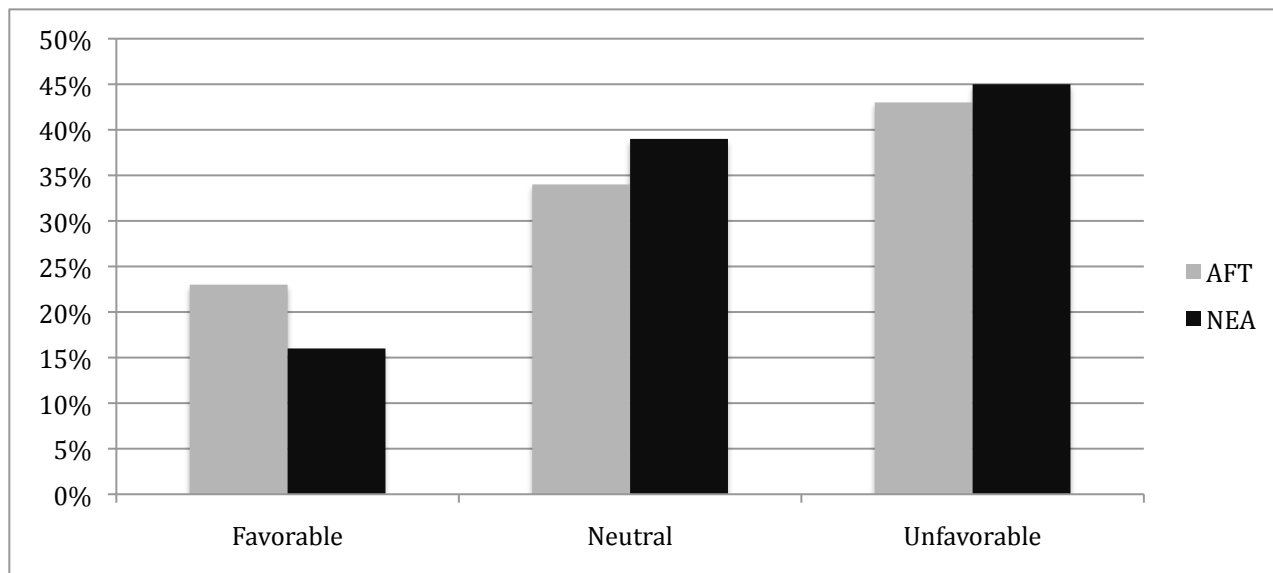


Figure 4.6 - *Direction of Articles in The Washington Post by Teacher Organization*

### Emergent Themes

Within *The Washington Post*, five emergent themes are common in the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT, shown in Table 4.3. Three of these themes reflect perceived goals of the teacher organizations (obstruct positive school reforms, promote positive school reforms, and protect good teachers) and two of these themes reflect perceived traits of the teacher organizations (self-serving and cooperating with Democrats). While the articles did reference methods used by the NEA and AFT, no single method occurred with enough regularity to become a theme within the newspaper articles. The themes “obstruct positive school reforms” and “self-serving” are presented in an unfavorable manner. The themes “promote positive school reform” and “protecting good

teachers” are presented in a favorable manner. The theme “cooperating with Democrats” is generally presented in a neutral manner.

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Table 4.3

*Frequency of Emergent Themes within The Washington Post Portrayal of the Policy-Related Actions of the NEA and the AFT*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># out of 62 articles</b>
Obstruct positive school reforms	20 (32%)
Promote positive school reforms	16 (26%)
Self-serving	14 (23%)
Cooperating with the Democratic Party	14 (23%)
Protecting good teachers	6 (10%)

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#### Obstruct Positive School Reforms

The most common portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT is that these teacher organizations are obstructing efforts toward ostensibly positive school reforms. One article explains, “...labor leaders in places like New York use their political muscle to block important reforms” (The Washington Post, 2010a, p. A. 16). In 2004, Secretary of Education Roderick Paige, called the NEA a “terrorist organization.” In an article about the incident, The Washington Post explains that Secretary Paige apologized, “...but maintained that the union uses ‘obstructionist scare tactics’” (The Washington Post, 2004, p. A. 17). When articles refer to specific types of school reforms that the NEA and AFT are trying to prevent, they commonly refer to either school choice programs or programs that would tie pay to performance, often referred to as “merit pay.”

The most common school reform that articles suggest the NEA and AFT are against are efforts to strengthen school choice movements, such as school vouchers or charter



schools. One article explains, “school choice is making a difference in the lives of thousands of children trapped in failing schools. Why do the NEA and AFT oppose such promising reform?” (The Washington Post, 2001, p. A. 18). In reference to school choice programs, another article explains, “they [NEA] know exactly what tactics to use to prevent a school district from adopting a choice program, which they view as the worst kind of threat because it challenges their monopoly on education” (Gregg & Armev, 2002, p. A. 17). Linking the NEA’s obstruction of school voucher programs to the education of special-needs children, an additional article states,

The negative reactions are in line with the NEA’s policy of zero tolerance for school reform. One can only imagine the NEA convention outcry if a presidential candidate invoked the dirtiest word of all, vouchers, in proposing, say, that special-needs students be given publicly financed scholarships to attend private schools that meet their needs. (The Washington Post, 2007, p. A. 14)

These articles suggest that the primary positive school reforms that the teacher organizations oppose are school choice initiatives.

Less often, articles within *The Washington Post* suggest that the NEA and the AFT are obstructing positive school reforms that center on pay-for-performance measures. One article explains,

Or is it that the union cannot abide, above all in the nation’s capital, a contract under which schoolteachers – like employees throughout the private sector – might have their work judged, and their compensation awarded, in part on how well they do their jobs? (The Washington Post, 2009a, p. A. 22)

Pointing out a desire not to engage in dialogs centered around pay-for-performance, another article notes,

But any time the talk goes to pay for performance or other ways to attract the best teachers to the worst schools, they [NEA and AFT] change the subject to the problems with parents, or say the need for change is so big we shouldn't get bogged down with little tactical things like the fight to get rid of teachers who don't perform.

(The Washington Post, 2008, p. A. 17)

Articles of this nature lead the reader to conclude that the teacher organizations are against merit pay because they do not want to be held accountable for student performance.

It appears that at least the NEA is aware of their portrayal in national news media sources as obstructive to positive school reforms. One article notes that the NEA believes "they are too often typecast as enemies of reform" (Anderson, 2011, p. A. 3). The fact that this is the most common type of portrayal found within *The Washington Post* would certainly warrant the claims made by the NEA.

### Promote Positive School Reforms

Even though the most common theme for the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT is that they are obstructive to school reforms, as a sign of the willingness of *The Washington Post* to publish differing opinions, the second most common theme is that the NEA and the AFT are advocates of positive school reforms. These typically include attempts to improve the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, attempts to increase teacher pay to attract and retain more and better teachers, and attempts to support policies that would help disadvantaged students.

Most often, the positive reforms that the NEA and AFT are linked to deal with changing parts of the NCLB legislation to help out schools districts. One article explains, “the NEA has worked hard over the past year to help Congress refine and improve the law so it will be worthy of extension” (Weaver, 2007, p. A. 14). The NEA and AFT are generally portrayed as trying to secure more funds in order to allow for a better implementation of NCLB requirements. One author notes,

The nation’s largest teachers union joined school districts in Michigan, Texas and Vermont in filing a federal lawsuit yesterday charging that the Department of Education has failed to provide adequate funding for the No Child Left Behind initiative. (Dobbs, 2005, p. A. 21)

Another article – citing John Kerry’s appeal to the American Federation of Teachers for support – noted, “Kerry criticized Bush’s education policies, accusing the president of underfunding programs for schools, teachers and students” (Priest & VandeHei, 2004, p. A. 06). These articles suggest that NCLB should be changed and that the NEA and AFT would like to lead this reform.

Positive reforms that the NEA and AFT are linked to also include attempts to gain increases in salary in order to attract more and better teachers into the classroom and to retain them for longer periods of time. One article describes the participation of former AFT president Sandra Feldman in a commission to improve education, quoting her as saying,

Until we make it more attractive for teachers to stay in our most challenging schools by offering a significant salary premium – enough to make their earnings exceed

those of teachers with less demanding assignments in affluent neighborhoods – the teacher shortage in hard-to-staff schools will not go away. (Mathews, 2004, p. A. 10)

Linked to these hard-to-staff schools, the last type of positive school reforms that the NEA and AFT are linked to are those that help disadvantaged students. The current president of the AFT – Randi Weingarten – in an article she wrote, indicates that what has been successful in D.C. schools are, “...essential programs that the American Federation of Teachers has promoted for years, including a strong discipline policy, a rich curriculum, after-school and Saturday classes, and modernized buildings” (Weingarten, 2008, p. A. 20). Other articles link the NEA and the AFT to support for policies such as Head Start, teacher quality grants, special education funding, and smaller class sizes (Niesse, 2008; Raspberry, 2001; Weisman, 2008). All of these types of articles suggest that the NEA and the AFT pursue goals related to the promotion of positive school reforms.

### Self-Serving

Another unfavorable portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT is the third most common theme found within *The Washington Post*: that the teacher organizations favor self-serving policies over those policies that would be most beneficial for students. Two subthemes that commonly arise in these portrayals are that the AFT and the NEA are protectors of bad teachers and that the teacher organizations are corrupt.

Many of the articles describe the teacher organizations as protecting bad teachers. One article asked why the AFT, “[...] purports to have no tolerance for low-performing teachers would fight to return to the classroom teachers so problematic that even the arbitrator acknowledged that their conduct warranted termination” (The

Washington Post, 2011, p. A. 20). Another author, describing a recent study by a non-profit consulting group called the New Teacher Project, remarks that, “because of seniority rules in teachers union contracts, many principals in urban school systems are forced to hire teachers ill suited to their jobs...” (Mathews, 2005, p. A. 10). These types of portrayals insinuate that the teacher organizations care more about protecting bad teachers than the education of students.

Three articles in January of 2003 describe an incident in which the leadership of a local affiliate of the AFT had been charged with embezzling \$5 million worth of union funds (Blum, 2003; Blum & Strauss, 2003; Timberg, 2003). One article notes that a social worker in the district stated, “the AFT did not follow through with the local when it was behind on its dues payments to the AFT and did not take action when the local did not submit required audits” (Blum & Strauss, 2003, p. A. 1). Another author noted that the NEA and the AFT were “gaming” the social security system in Texas, referencing a House of Representatives member who stated that, “a politically potent group is gaming the Social Security rules in ways detrimental to the overall system” (Eilperin, 2003, p. A. 8). In perhaps the most scathing attack on the NEA found in *The Washington Post*, author Mark Shields remarks that,

The National Education Association owes it to the teaching profession to change its indefensible position as apologist and defender of unregulated and unlimited million-dollar contributions that stain our national life or, at the least, to change its middle name. Public education deserves better. (Shields, 2001, p. A. 23)

Articles like these implicate the teacher organizations as engaging in nefarious activities to further their own ends.

### Cooperating with the Democratic Party

Occurring as often as articles that suggest the AFT and NEA favor self-serving policies are articles that link the AFT and NEA to the Democratic Party. Unlike in other newspapers, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, these articles do not tend to take either a favorable or unfavorable direction, instead simply pointing out some of the links between the teacher organizations and the Democratic Party. As an example, one article explains, "The American Federation of Teachers and Emily's List are working together to put Clinton over the top in Iowa" (Cillizza & Murray, 2007, p. A. 2). These articles imply that the teacher organizations and the Democratic Party share similar goals, but often leave out what those goals are. Often articles that mention the teacher organizations as supporting Democrat candidates speak of the immense size of the teacher organizations, suggesting that the Democrat party needs the support of these organizations in elections. One article that spins this connection in an unfavorable direction says,

The National Education Association has named Maryland's Martin O'Malley (D) America's greatest education governor. Little wonder. Just days before O'Malley picked up his award, a new law took effect in Maryland that undercuts local control in collective bargaining by giving significant new advantage to teachers unions, one they had been seeking for decades. (The Washington Post, 2010b, p. A. 18)

Aside from this last quotation, most articles within *The Washington Post* seem not to take a favorable or unfavorable position on the links between the teacher organizations and the Democratic Party.

### Protecting Good Teachers

The least recurring theme of portrayal within *The Washington Post* is a favorable portrayal of the AFT and the NEA as protecting the rights of good teachers and trying to either help or remove bad teachers. One article by Dennis Van Roekel – President of the National Education Association – stated that, “The dismissal process must be fair to teachers, but it should not protect those who do not belong in a classroom” (Roekel, 2011, p. A. 12). Another article quotes AFT president Randi Weingarten as saying she wants,

A fair, transparent and expedient process to identify and deal with ineffective teachers. But we know we won’t have that if we don’t have an evaluation system that is comprehensive and robust and really tells us who is or is not an effective teacher. (Anderson, 2010, p. A. 3)

These types of articles may help to counter the more prominent portrayal of teacher organizations as favoring policy-related actions that are self-serving in nature.

### Conclusion: *The Washington Post*

What becomes apparent after reviewing these five common themes of portrayal is that *The Washington Post* makes room for articles that describe many aspects of the policy-related actions of both the NEA and the AFT. While many articles reflect biases, *The Washington Post* publishes both positive and negative portrayals of the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations. However, when taken in aggregate, more often the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT are portrayed in an unfavorable manner in *The Washington Post*, indicating a moderate level of bias against the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT.

#### 4.3.4 – *Los Angeles Times*

In searching through the “Main News” section of the *Los Angeles Times*, 17 articles were located that dealt with the National Education Association (NEA) and/or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). This represents significantly less coverage of the national teacher organizations in the *Los Angeles Times* when compared with the other three national newspapers, who all had article totals in the 60s<sup>5</sup>. As such, while it was still possible to calculate percentages for direction and subject of portrayal, both the quantitative data and qualitative data should be perceived with an understanding that with far fewer articles in total, each article influences the content reduction more significantly.

Of the *Los Angeles Times* articles, 10 out of 17 (59%) referenced just the NEA; 5 out of 17 (29%) referenced just the AFT; and 2 out of 17 (12%) referenced both organizations. These numbers indicate that articles describing the policy-related actions of teacher organizations, within the *Los Angeles Times*, reference the NEA far more often than the AFT. Within these articles, it was possible to determine the direction in which the author(s) chose to depict the NEA and/or AFT. Of these articles, 4 out of 17 (24%) were written in a neutral direction; 9 out of 17 (53%) were written in a favorable direction; and 4 out of 17 (24%) were written in an unfavorable direction. This breakdown is represented in Figure 4.7, and clearly shows that articles within the *Los Angeles Times* show a more favorable bias, in their limited reporting, toward the policy-related actions of the two national teacher organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> A search through the *Los Angeles Times* using the term “teacher union,” in the same date span, found 1588 articles, suggesting that the *Los Angeles Times* prefers to cover state and local level teacher organizations, which are groups that fall outside of the context – or unit – of this study.



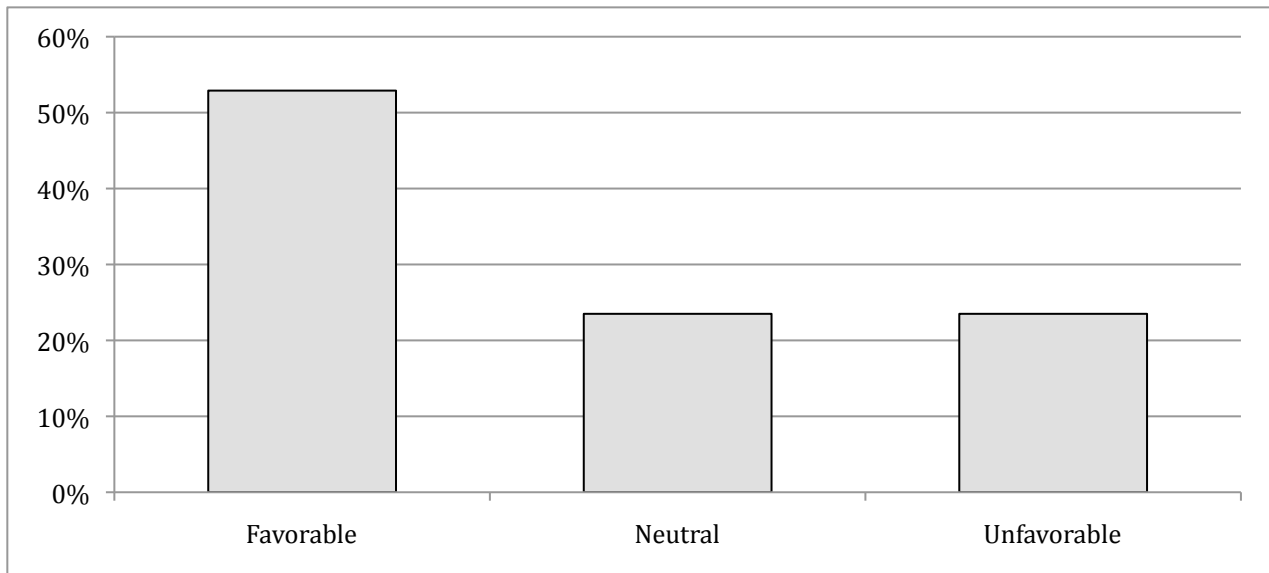


Figure 4.7 - *Direction of Articles in the Los Angeles Times*

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When the direction of the *Los Angeles Times* articles is further broken down by teacher organization, it is possible to determine how each teacher organization tends to be represented. The NEA is represented in a favorable way in 5 out of 12 articles (42%); neutral in 4 out of 12 articles (33%); and unfavorable in 3 out of 12 articles (25%). The AFT is represented in a favorable light in 6 out of 7 articles (86%); neutral in 0 out of 7 articles (0%); and unfavorable in 1 out of 7 articles (14%). This information is depicted in Figure 4.8, and indicates that the two teacher organizations tend to be portrayed in a different manner, with the AFT garnering almost entirely favorable representation, whereas the NEA receives a much more even allotment of favorable, neutral, and unfavorable depictions, with a slight bias going toward articles of a favorable nature. This suggests that, while overall the *Los Angeles Times* is favorable to teacher organizations, the newspaper has a more favorable bias when it comes to the reporting the policy-related actions of the AFT

and a more balanced approach to reporting the actions of the NEA. It is, however, important to remember that the sample size here is fairly small, and that the addition of one or two more articles would greatly alter the quantitative data presented here.

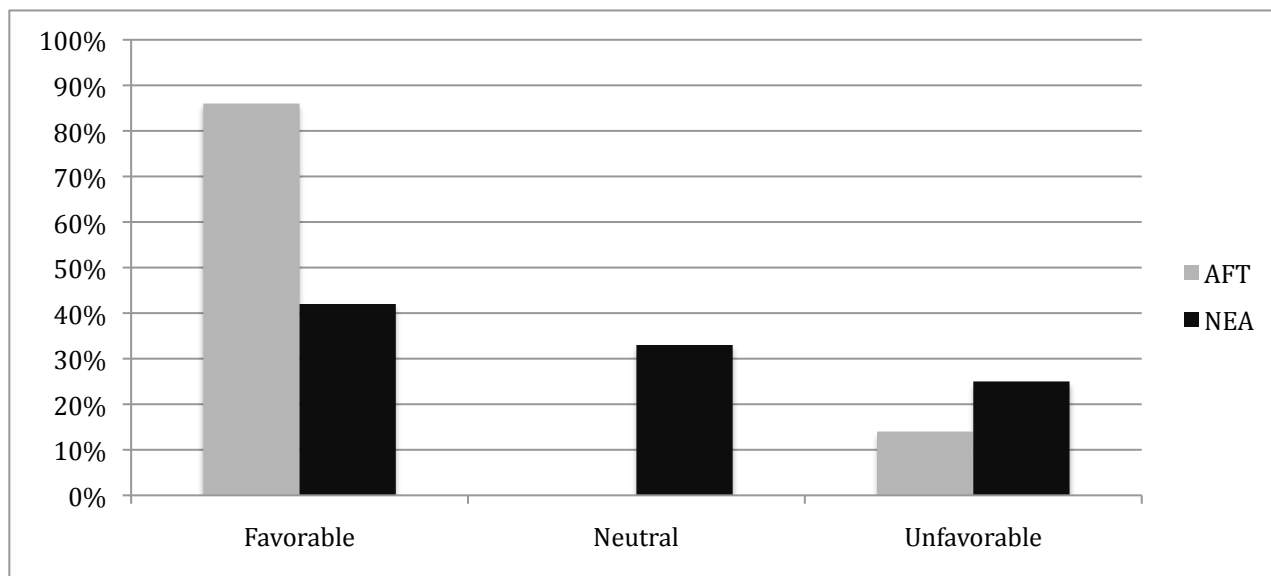


Figure 4.8 - Direction of Los Angeles Times Articles by Teacher Organization

### Emergent Themes

Given the relatively low number of articles found within the *Los Angeles Times*, three themes still meet the definition of an emergent theme within this analysis. These themes, of the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT, are shown in Table 4.4. Two of these themes reflect perceived goals of the teacher organizations (promote positive school reforms, change No Child Left Behind Act, and the remaining theme (self-serving) reflects a trait of the teacher organizations. Of the three themes, “promote positive school reforms” is presented in a favorable manner, “change NCLB” is presented with a balance of

both favorable and unfavorable portrayals, and “self-serving” is presented as an unfavorable trait of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT.

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Table 4.4

*Frequency of Emergent Themes within the Los Angeles Times Portrayal of the Policy-Related Actions of the NEA and the AFT*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># out of 17 articles</b>
Promote positive school reforms	8 (47%)
Change No Child Left Behind Act	5 (29%)
Self-serving	4 (24%)

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#### Promote Positive School Reforms

The most common perceived goal associated with the NEA and the AFT, in the *Los Angeles Times*, is that they are trying to promote positive school reforms. These articles tend to reference statements made by representatives of the two teacher organizations. One article quotes Randi Weingarten – president of the AFT – as saying, “charter schools are not the panacea they often are made out to be, and that our national focus must continue to include discussion of how to support and improve our regular public schools” (Landsberg, 2009, p. A. 4). Another article quotes Bob Chase – a former NEA president – as saying, “America’s public schools are filled with adults who rescue children and save the world in little ways every single day – often in the face of incredible odds” (Los Angeles Times, 2001, p. A. 12). These types of articles suggest that the main focus of each organization is to fortify our public education system.

A number of articles in the *Los Angeles Times* present the AFT as more progressive when it comes to educational reforms. In writing about proposed changes to the way teacher seniority is handled in the Washington D.C. school district, an article states, "...[with] the head of the American Federation of Teachers willing to put the issue on the negotiating table, the time is ripe for a new discussion of this antiquated entitlement" (*Los Angeles Times*, 2008, p. A. 24). A recent front page article, describing the policies of AFT president Randi Weingarten says,

...the system of teacher evaluations had been 'broken for years,' and needed drastic reform. She said a good system of teacher evaluation would ensure that struggling teachers receive the help they need to improve, but would also make it easier to fire teachers who were unable to change. (Landsberg, 2010, p. A. 1)

Another article explains,

Even Randi Weingarten, national president of the American Federation of Teachers, told *The Times* she has negotiated 54 contracts with teacher unions that include some form of value-added analysis, and she said parents have a right to know if teachers got satisfactory reviews. (Lopez, 2010, p. A. 2)

It is the perceived willingness of the AFT to consider moving away from these traditionally union-esque policies that largely contributes to the more favorable representation of their policy-related actions in the *Los Angeles Times*.

### Change No Child Left Behind Act

The *Los Angeles Times* portrays the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations primarily through inclusion of various critiques of the law by representatives from the NEA. In one article, Reg Weaver – former president of the NEA - is quoted as saying,

Our members say that once again, this national leader [Rod Paige] has insulted them, this time beyond repair, with words filled with hatred – and merely because [we] raised legitimate concerns about the president’s so-called No Child Left Behind law. (Los Angeles Times, 2004b, p. A. 22)

Another article quotes Joel Packer, an NEA education specialist, as saying,

No Child Left Behind has generally hurt teacher morale... Veteran teachers have to go through a lot of paperwork to prove that they are highly qualified. A lot of them find that insulting. And schools are sending letters home telling parents that their children’s teachers are not qualified... (Neuman, 2005, p. A. 28)

In referencing increasing demands on schools from NCLB regulations, “The National Education Assn. also lambasted Bush for what it said was insufficient education funding” (E. Chen, 2004, p. A. 15) suggesting that the requirements of the law are not being appropriately funded by the federal government. One article explains that,

Always skeptical of these provisions, the educational establishment is now in full revolt against the bill. This month, the National Education Assn., the big teachers’ union, ran full-page ads in newspapers denouncing the bill’s testing requirements... (Brownstein, 2003, p. A. 12)

All of these portrayals of the NEA tend to focus more on expressing the NEA’s concerns over the law, rather than demonstrating ways in which the NEA might actually go about

changing it, making this theme far more limited in portrayal than the similar emergent theme found in *The New York Times*.

### Self-Serving

In the *Los Angeles Times*, several articles appear to suggest that the NEA and AFT are engaged in policy-related actions that can best be described as self-serving, rather than the organizations being focused on education. One particularly scathing article explains that,

Some of the nation's largest teachers unions have joined forces with investment companies to steer their members into retirement plans with high expenses that eat away returns... The National Education Assn., the largest teachers union in the country with 2.7 million members, collected nearly \$50 million in royalties in 2004 on the sale of annuities, life insurance and other financial products it endorses. (K. M. Kristof, 2006, p. A. 1)

Another article points out that the political contributions of the NEA are under audit by the I.R.S. (Getter, 2004), making the subtle suggestion that the organization is under suspicion for breaking tax laws. As a description of internal corruption, one article describes a voter fraud scandal in a Chicago election for union president, pointing out that, "...the national teachers union said the winner should take over as president, while the incumbent refused to relinquish the keys to the office" (Los Angeles Times, 2004a, p. A. 24). This type of portrayal casts a negative light on the leadership of state organizations and portrays the national levels as having to spend their resources policing lower-level groups. Finally, one article attacks both teacher pay and tenure, saying,

Make teachers expensive and schools will hire fewer of them. According to statistics for 2008-2009 from the National Education Assn., California public schoolteachers are among America's most highly compensated, with an average salary of \$66,986... A job that requires nine months of work for \$66,986 corresponds to one that pays \$89,312 for 12. The majority of California taxpayers not only earn less than \$89,312 a year but cannot get, as Los Angeles teachers can, guaranteed lifetime tenure after a drive-by performance evaluation in their second year on the job. (Voegeli, 2010, p. A. 17)

While each of these articles targets different activities that the teacher organizations are engaged in, they frame an overall portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT as being actions designed to most benefit people within the organization, rather than ones that benefit the education system.

#### Conclusion: The *Los Angeles Times*

Even though the *Los Angeles Times* represented a much smaller sample of articles, after examination of the three common themes of portrayal, it becomes apparent that the newspaper shows a favorable bias toward the teacher organizations. Even though more articles are written about the NEA, the AFT garners a more favorable portrayal in the newspaper, particularly for their willingness to experiment with new school reforms. While many articles reflect biases, the *Los Angeles Times* appears to make an effort to publish both positive and negative portrayals of the teacher organizations, creating a more balanced portrayal. However, in aggregate, although they are less often written about in their newspaper, the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT are portrayed most often in a

favorable manner, indicating a moderate level of positive bias toward the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT in the *Los Angeles Times*.

#### **4.4 – FINDINGS: NEA AND AFT NEWS RELEASES**

On the websites for both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), each organization uploads their own news releases, on average about one every three days, both to update the public on what the teacher organization is doing and to react to events currently in the mainstream news. These releases are written in a similar manner to the way news articles are written within the top national newspapers. One key difference though is that these news releases are written and displayed by the teacher organizations themselves, meaning they are always favorable and represent how the NEA or AFT wishes to be portrayed to the public. In this section, each of the AFT and NEA news releases was analyzed individually for emergent themes – relating to traits, methods and goals associated with their policy-related actions – to capture the way in which each organization attempts to portray itself to the public.

##### **4.4.1 – American Federation of Teachers**

On the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) website, there were 64 news releases between December 1, 2010 and May 31, 2011. Content analysis of these news releases located six themes that are common in the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the AFT, shown in Table 4.5. Two of these themes reflect goals of the teacher organization (help those in need, improve education professions) three of these themes reflect methods



employed by the AFT to carry out their goals (support like-minded government officials, high-profile visits, and support collective bargaining rights). One theme (increase collaboration) represents both a method and a goal in that the AFT demonstrates successes it has had through using collaboration with others, and continues to seek out more opportunities for future collaborations. Because these themes are presented on the AFT's own website, they all represent favorable portrayals of the teacher organization and provide a glimpse into the way in which the AFT wishes to be both portrayed to, and thought of by, the public.

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Table 4.5

*Frequency of Emergent Themes within the AFT Portrayal of its Policy-Related Actions*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># out of 64 releases</b>
Increase collaboration	25 (39%)
Improve education professions	24 (38%)
Help those in need	17 (27%)
Support like-minded government officials	9 (14%)
High-profile visits	8 (13%)
Support collective bargaining rights	7(11%)

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Increase Collaboration

The largest share of AFT news releases express a common theme centering on collaboration. In these articles, the AFT praises successful collaboration efforts as a method of improving public education and also calls for more collaboration as a goal of its policy-related actions. As one news release explains, "...schoolchildren win when important

decisions are reached through collaboration rather than conflict” (Jackson, 2011f). As another argument for the benefits of collaboration, a release says, “improving student learning works best when teachers, administrators and parents work together to transform schools. Collaboration and teamwork, not conflict, will move our schools forward” (Bass, 2010b). Citing examples of successful collaborations, a news release states that,

In places like Baltimore; Pittsburgh; New Haven, Conn.; Hillsborough County, Fla.; Norfolk, Va.; and St. Francis, Minn., there is a strong culture of labor-management collaboration, shared responsibility for student success, and an intense focus on identifying and meeting every student’s needs. (Bass, 2010b)

In a release talking about an upcoming collaboration conference in Denver, the AFT is planning on, “...highlighting a collaborative, problem-solving approach that has led to less finger-pointing between school administrators and union members, expedited progress in developing education reforms, and better results for students” (See, 2011a). They say in another release about the same conference that they will also be demonstrating that collaboration has, “...led to less friction between school administrators and union members, expedited progress in developing education reforms, and better results for students” (See, 2011c). The AFT makes it clear that, “AFT members and leaders are reaching out and making common cause with parents, community, business and school leaders, elected officials and anyone else who has a stake in making our schools better” (Stephens, 2011c). The AFT also wants to use collaboration to improve higher education. One release points out that, “to increase student success in higher education, there must be greater opportunities for collaboration between university and college faculty and staff, and their institution’s administrators and other key stakeholders...” (Bass, 2011b). It is obvious from

these news releases that the AFT sees collaboration as one of its strongest tools for improving the public education system.

The AFT also speaks of partnering with other organizations to work jointly on particular causes. One news release announces, “the AFT also will be partnering with GLAAD [Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation] on a bilingual, youth-focused public service announcement campaign...” (Garza, 2011b). Another release, mourning the death of a teacher union leader in Hong Kong, explains, “for over a quarter century, the AFT and the PTU [Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union] have worked together in a shared commitment to trade unionism and workers’ rights as well as democracy and human rights in China” (Bass, 2011a). In support of collective bargaining rights, a news release makes it known that, “...the American Federation of Teachers and its affiliates will be part of a broad national coalition of community groups, unions and citizens taking part in ‘We Are One’ events...” (Jackson, 2011a). These types of collaborations suggest that the AFT is willing to work with many other groups in policy-related actions that can benefit public education.

A common subtheme – within the much larger theme of collaboration – are the AFT’s efforts to get government officials to increase their collaboration with teachers on education policy. One news releases argues that, “the mayor and school superintendent owe it to the community and to the students and teachers in Providence to resolve whatever problem they’re dealing with, not by fiat, but by working in a collaborative way” (Bass, 2011i). Another describes Randi Weingarten’s plea to the governor of Rhode Island,

Weingarten said she is asking Governor-elect Lincoln Chafee to use his good offices to convene a working group of teachers and union leaders, school and district

leaders, parents and others to assess what's working and what's not to put this school on track to help kids. (Bass, 2010a)

An additional release commends President Obama's efforts, "we applaud the [P]resident's call for more civility and collaboration, which we believe is the best hope for achieving better lives for students and all Americans" (See, 2011d). Praising positive gains in Maryland that the AFT credits to collaborative efforts, a release states,

The state has embraced a philosophy of shared responsibility and shared decision-making between administrators and teachers unions that can be seen in the new groundbreaking collective bargaining agreement between the Baltimore Teachers Union and the Baltimore City Public Schools. (Jackson, 2011b)

A number of the AFT news releases also cite examples of collaboration between government, school officials and teachers unions in foreign countries – such as Finland and South Korea – as an important component of their educational success (Bass, 2010b, 2011a; Lansworth, 2011b; See, 2010). These articles make it clear that the AFT sees collaboration with government officials as one of the most important ways in which it can participate in education policy-making.

### Improve Education Professions

The AFT is careful to explain – in a large percentage of its news releases – its desire to help teachers, higher education faculty, and education support professionals. The AFT, in one news release shows its support for Worthy Wage Day, "[a] national public awareness campaign to draw attention to the importance of early childhood education, and to call for better wages, benefits, professional development and working conditions for early

childhood and pre-K workers” (Jackson, 2011d). Another AFT news release hails the work being done on new standards, exclaiming, “the AFT welcomes this development in the implementation of the Common Core Standards: the creation of digital course materials, professional development and curricula that will help teachers integrate the standards into classroom practice” (Powell, 2011b). Efforts to assist higher-education faculty also receive a fair amount of coverage in AFT news releases. Explaining the contents of a recently published AFT report, one release explains,

The report offers specific recommendations, including correcting inequalities in compensation, expanding family-friendly campus policies, providing more flexibility in tenure and promotion policies, fostering opportunities for women in math and science, and ensuring women have a voice in their workplaces and in the unions. (Garza, 2011a)

This effort is designed to bring greater gender equity to college faculties. Describing a collaboration the AFT has made with other higher-education groups, one release announces,

We are pleased to join forces with other organizations to call for more resources and support for high-quality undergraduate instruction, and to make sure that policies that have been too heavily focused on standardizing curriculum and assessment take into account the faculty’s classroom perspective. (Garza, 2011e)

Describing an effort launched by the AFT to aide part-time college faculty, a news release reports, “AFT Higher Education launched the Faculty and College Excellence (FACE) campaign to achieve equity for contingent faculty and more full-time tenure-track faculty jobs through legislative action, collective bargaining and public education” (Garza, 2011c).

These releases show the AFT support for its members beyond public school teachers, and suggests that the AFT is concerned with improving working conditions for every one of its members.

The AFT also portrays itself as desiring to garner more respect for education professionals and to improve the ability of teachers to influence policy-making situations. In a statement of organization rationale, one release elucidates,

What the PISA [Program for International Student Assessment] results tell us is that if you don't make smart investments in teachers, respect them or involve them in decision-making, as the top-performing countries do, students pay a price. (See, 2010)

Explaining the contents of a recently released AFT report, a news release communicates that, "the report encourages higher education institutions to bring the voice of frontline faculty and staff into policymaking – particularly on curriculum and assessments – to ensure that ideas work as well in the classroom as they appear to work on paper" (Bass, 2011b). These AFT releases appear to be trying to convince the public of the need to accomplish the AFT goal of, "...understanding the importance of teacher voice in policymaking" (Bass, 2011e).

During the early part of 2011, the AFT partnered with Kenneth Feinberg – a famous mediation specialist<sup>6</sup> – to help the organization develop a new teacher evaluation and discipline template that could be passed down to AFT locals. This reform is the subject of a number of articles designed to portray the AFT as on the forefront of positive school reform

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Feinberg is known as the "pay czar" for his government oversight of the distribution of funds from the September 11<sup>th</sup> Victim Compensation Fund, T.A.R.P. Executive Compensation, and B.P. Deepwater Horizon Disaster Relief Victim Compensation Fund.

efforts. One news release explains, “the American Federation of Teachers adopted a template today for fairly and expeditiously addressing the rare but serious issue of teacher misconduct, which states can use when enacting or implementing their own policies” (AFT Public Affairs, 2011b). The goals of this reform are stated in another news release, “our aim is to have a comprehensive, fair, transparent and expedient process to identify, improve, and – if necessary – remove ineffective teachers... neither drive-by nor test-driven evaluations do so” (AFT Public Affairs, 2011b). The reform is described as, “...a comprehensive system to develop great teachers and evaluate them based on both instruction and student learning – a system developed by the AFT and now being used as a template by hundreds of local districts...” (Bass, 2011g). The AFT also cites examples of school districts that already have made efforts to develop new teacher evaluation and discipline procedures. One release argues that,

Student learning has a role in teacher evaluations, and it’s great that White Plains is going about it in a thoughtful, collaborative way...in too many places, it’s being done haphazardly and with little input from teachers, and the result is a system that isn’t accurate or fair. (See, 2011b)

Another release points out the current existence of such a system, by suggesting that the AFT is “... transforming Detroit schools by developing a comprehensive teacher evaluation system with peer assistance and review...” (Bass, 2011d). These efforts at reform of the teacher evaluation system appear to be designed to address the criticism that teacher unions are self-serving in their protection of bad teachers, by instead designing a more effective system for identifying and mentoring struggling teachers and removing those that are not suited to the profession.

### Help Those In Need

The AFT devotes many of its news releases to demonstrating its desire to help individuals in need, such as low-income earners and immigrant youth. As one AFT release explains,

We have to do a better job of getting resources to the children in greatest need, and we have to make sure children have access to healthcare, counseling, after-school programs and the other wraparound services they need to succeed. (Stephens, 2011c)

Also along the theme of supporting broad services to help the needy, another release states, “we welcome the collaboration with teachers, school districts and communities to ensure that all students receive nutritious meals, access to adequate healthcare, and other services they need to grow and succeed in school” (Slater & Burton, 2011). The AFT also supports vision care, in a release saying,

The American Federation of Teachers is proud to join with the American Optometric Association and other groups in a commitment to ensure that America’s schoolchildren have access to diagnosis and treatment for vision problems...access to vision care is even more critical for economically disadvantaged students. (Jackson, 2011e)

Arguing that new healthcare reform laws are good for Americans, one AFT news releases explains that,

Too much has been accomplished already that helps the American people and moves the system to a sane place where families are not forced by insurance



companies to mortgage their homes in order to buy the medicine their kids need to survive. (Lansworth, 2011c)

Here, the AFT is suggesting that by having appropriate medical care, healthy meals, functional vision, etc... students will have more of an opportunity to focus on education, which will lead to a more successful adult life.

These efforts to provide help for the needy begin with programs that benefit children before they even reach school age. In referring to early childhood education funds, one release states, “We wish enough funding could be made available to ensure that more children could get these services...” (AFT Public Affairs, 2011a). Another release announces that, “the American Federation of Teachers is proud to work with our education allies toward our shared goal of preparing all children – from the earliest age – to thrive in school, career and life” (Garza, 2011d). The efforts to help the less fortunate also extend beyond the primary and secondary school levels, to higher education. One AFT release says that, “we need a better system of checks and balances to make sure that predatory for-profit colleges don’t take advantage of our most vulnerable students” (Stephens, 2011b). Another argues that, “...we also have to protect those who are less fortunate and support those who are struggling mightily to lead a middle-class life, stay healthy, send their children to college and retire with dignity” (Lansworth, 2011a). The AFT is also a strong proponent of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) act. In one release, it explains, “the DREAM act needs to become a reality for the thousands of undocumented immigrant students who want to live the American dream by graduating from high school, attending college and obtaining legal status” (Garza, 2010b). In a release petitioning the U.S. Senate to pass the DREAM act, the AFT states, “if the Senate fails to act,

hard-working students who play by the rules would be denied the opportunity to pursue a college degree and a chance to become productive members of our society” (Garza, 2010a). This wide range of support, from early childhood through higher education, represents the broad spectrum of students that the AFT feels it can help, and demonstrates the range of education professionals who make up the AFT membership.

### Support Like-Minded Government Officials

The AFT makes use of its web page news releases to show support for government officials, whose policy-related actions align with the AFT’s goals. As an example, one release explains, “we applaud U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) and U.S. Reps. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) for reintroducing the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act today in Congress and for their tenacity in the face of indefensible opposition” (Garza, 2011f). Another release, also addressing the DREAM act states,

With its courageous vote last night, the House put immigrant children and their future first. We want especially to recognize the work of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.). We also applaud Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) for their efforts in shepherding the bill in the Senate. (Garza, 2010a)

An additional release says, “we join Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and others calling for our leaders to fix a system that consigns students to a lifetime of debt before they even begin their careers” (Stephens, 2011b). The AFT also makes an effort to support state-level lawmakers, as demonstrated by a news release statement that, “we thank Illinois

lawmakers, in particular state Sen. Kimberly Lightford, for navigating this process and understanding the importance of teacher voice in policymaking” (Bass, 2011e). One important trend among these statements of support is that the majority of the individuals supported appear to be Democrats, the party with whom the AFT most often aligns.

The AFT also makes an effort to support the President when his actions align with AFT causes. One release praises the President by saying,

The President has brought a welcome dose of reality to the debate on the budget. He has made clear that an honest approach to deficit reduction must include both cost savings and additional revenues. He put forth an important proposal that steers the debate away from an assault on the middle class and the poor, and toward shared responsibility for all Americans. (Bass, 2011h)

Another release thanks the President, by noting,

We are grateful that President Obama’s education budget reflects a continuing commitment to improving our public schools. A strong economy and a strong public school system are inextricably linked and the President understands that support for education is an investment in our children and the future of our nation. (Lansworth, 2011c)

Through this type of action, the AFT is able to attempt both to gain support for its causes and to generate publicity for government members aligned with AFT goals.

### High Profile Visits

It is not uncommon for AFT news releases to highlight high-profile visits by organization leaders to schools and other sites. These visits appear to be designed to bring press to a particular organization's causes or to show off examples of AFT policies in action. As one news release states, "American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten visited a White Plains school today to learn about the district's collaborative efforts to improve teacher evaluations and to highlight the district's successes in educating a diverse student population" (See, 2011b). Another article announces that,

The president of the American Federation of Teachers will visit Orange County, Fla., schools Thursday with the school superintendent and meet with teachers, parents, school and community leaders, applauding the county's efforts to make students and its public schools a priority, including through a voter-approved levy for public education, but urging the state to step up as well to help, not hurt, kids. (Bass, 2011c)

Public schools are not the only sites that receive high-profile visits. One article explains, "American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten will participate in three major events tomorrow, April 26, to urge elected officials and others to stand up for New Jersey's families and workers" (Stephens, 2011a). While AFT president Weingarten is usually the subject of these high-profile visits, vice president Loretta Johnson also goes on high-profile visits, as explained in this news release,

Johnson visited two child care centers – Fruit and Flower Childcare Center and the Oregon City View Manor Center – Clackamas County Head Start – to highlight how

early childhood professionals are making a difference every day in the lives of young children. (Jackson, 2011c)

Articles that portray these high-profile visits suggest that the AFT is very conscious of its media representation, and uses this as both a tool to highlight organization policies and as a way to bolster causes important to the AFT.

### Support Collective Bargaining Rights

In early February of 2011, Wisconsin state governor Scott Walker proposed a budget that had attached to it some provisions that drastically curtailed the collective bargaining rights of public employees, including public school teachers. During the period of these events, the AFT used its website to publish news releases supporting collective bargaining rights, which it explains as important because,

Collective bargaining is a means to bring together the voices of workers; it's problem-solving that incorporates the wisdom of the frontlines. It can be a means to find creative ways to maintain or protect vital public services in the face of budget shortfalls. (Powell, 2011a)

Another release announces that, "we will work with Wisconsinites to pursue legal channels to fight this unconscionable attack on working families, and to continue the recall effort against those who rammed it through" (Stephens, 2011d). In describing the protests that mounted in the capital of Wisconsin, the AFT exclaims, "Students, teachers, nurses, firefighters and so many others filled the streets and kept watch to protect the rights of workers and their democracy" (Bass, 2011f). These types of news releases demonstrate the

AFT desire to be linked to popular causes, particularly ones that affect its members and public education.

#### Conclusion: The American Federation of Teachers

After review of the six common themes used by the American Federation of Teachers to portray its policy-related actions, it is remarkable how the AFT is able to support a wide variety of different actions while maintaining its ability to “stay on message.” By this, I mean, the AFT is able to describe its efforts to create programs for the needy, support its own members, show support for government officials, create and implement meaningful education reforms, and support collective bargaining rights, all the while maintaining a sense that overall, this organization wishes to be involved in collaborations on everything. While the AFT represents itself as a collection of education professionals, it neither suggests that it is the only one capable of directing education reform nor that it can implement reforms on its own. Instead, even when the AFT is describing its various initiatives, it always seem ready to give credit to partners with whom it has allied and always appear ready to enter into new collaborations for the betterment of both its members and the public education system.

#### **4.4.2 – National Education Association**

On the National Education Association (NEA) website, there were 63 news releases between December 1, 2010 and May 31, 2011. A content analysis of these news releases found six themes that the NEA commonly uses in the portrayal of its policy-related actions, shown in Table 4.6. The NEA uses two of these themes to reflect its goals (promote positive

school reforms, improve education professions) and four of these themes reflect methods employed by the NEA to carry out its goals (collaboration, support like-minded government officials, conducting education research, and support the middle class). Because these themes are presented on the NEA’s own website, they all represent favorable portrayals of the teacher organization and allow outsiders to examine the way in which the NEA wishes to be both portrayed to, and thought of by, the public.

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Table 4.6

*Frequency of Emergent Themes within the NEA Portrayal of its Policy-Related Actions*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># out of 63 releases</b>
Promote positive school reforms	32 (51%)
Collaboration	23 (37%)
Improve education professions	16 (25%)
Support like-minded government officials	15 (24%)
Support the middle class	9 (14%)
Conducting education research	8 (13%)

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Promote Positive School Reforms

The NEA spends the majority of the news releases portraying itself as a champion of a plethora of differing positive school reforms. The most common school reform effort that the NEA advocates for in its news releases is a program it created called the “Priority Schools Campaign.” To describe the program, the NEA says, “NEA’s Priority Schools Campaign, the Association’s flagship effort to help transform low-performing schools, encourages state and local affiliates, parents, community leaders, education advocates, policymakers, and businesses to work together to help students achieve” (Busser, 2011b).

In another release, it continues, “through its Priority Schools Campaign, NEA is helping students in low-performing schools achieve and bringing communities together to promote students’ success” (Parks-Kirby, 2011a). As a further explanation, “...NEA is so committed to our Priority Schools Campaign. The campaign is specifically designed to challenge the status quo and foster changes in environments so that disadvantaged students can access quality education” (Hirschfeld, 2010). Another adds that,

Too many students in high-poverty communities are allowed to attend schools that are chronically underfunded and understaffed. We’ve learned that these factors create additional barriers to achievement and through NEA’s Priority Schools Campaign, we’re working to get some additional targeted support. (Grissom, 2011a)

This program is one that the NEA appears to be continually growing, as it points out, “NEA continues to expand its Priority Schools Campaign to improve low-performing schools” (Parks-Kirby, 2011b). In the end, it is the Priority Schools Campaign that appears to be the NEA’s chief policy-related action, encompassing both a desire to improve schools and to use a collaborative method – which will be expanded on shortly within this section – to accomplish its goals.

The NEA also devotes a large number of its news releases to promoting school reform causes related to fighting prejudice in schools. One common approach to this are efforts by the NEA to stop bullying. As one release explains,

Recognizing the enormous physical, emotional, and academic toll that bullying can take on students, the National Education Association (NEA) today announced a new initiative, ‘Bully Free: It Starts With Me,’ a national campaign to engage adults in stopping bullying whenever or wherever it occurs. (Busser, 2011c)



Another release describes a study by the NEA, “a new survey on bullying by the National Education Association (NEA) finds that school employees know bullying is pervasive in schools and that they believe it’s their job to intervene – but that they need more training to do so effectively” (Busser, 2011d). Additionally, a release proclaims that, “NEA strongly supports the Safe Schools Improvement Act and ridding schools of bullying and harassment” (Guequierre & Busser, 2011). Socially linked to its anti-bullying campaigns are NEA’s attempts to celebrate differences and end prejudicial treatments. One release announces that, “there is no better way to honor Dr. King than to work together to ensure that every student in America, regardless of race or background, has access to the great equalizer – a quality education” (Linebaugh, 2011a). As a way of promoting this philosophy, “in schools across America, NEA members are helping their students honor the rich cultural history and contributions of African Americans by celebrating Black History Month with special lesson plans and activities” (Robertson, 2011c). The NEA also applies this philosophy of equality to illegal immigrants, in that the organization is a proponent of the DREAM Act. A news release explains that,

NEA president Dennis Van Roekel today urged Congress to pass the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which would provide a path to legal status for young people whose parents brought them to the United States as undocumented children years ago. (Gonzalez, 2010b)

All of these anti-prejudice and anti-bullying policy-related actions portray the NEA as very concerned with many of the important social justice issues of our time.

One positive school reform issue the NEA writes about with some frequency is an effort to increase funding for educational programs. To ensure appropriate funding, the

NEA opposes measures that would cut school funding for any reason. A release explains, “we cannot afford cuts in programs that help children, which is what the fiscal commission proposes... The federal government consistently has underfunded education programs targeting those children most in need” (Robertson, 2010a). Another news release, talking about school vouchers, states that, “the National Education Association (NEA) strongly opposes funneling taxpayer dollars to private schools while cutting programs that help public school students” (Carter, 2011a). By opposing spending cuts and advocating for spending increases, these NEA policy-related actions seek to improve the resources available for public education.

Some of the positive school reforms for which NEA advocates are mentioned in only one or two news releases. As an example, one release states, “this child nutrition bill accomplishes two important goals: it provides access to more meals for the growing number of children in poverty, and it raises the nutritional standards for those meals” (Kappalman, 2010). Another explains that, “...NEA has encouraged the business community to support state efforts to integrate problem solving and critical thinking into content areas” (Carter, 2011b). In a show of support for the Affordable Care Act, a news release argues that, “NEA’s goal of a great public school for every student is only achievable if students come to school healthy and ready to learn” (Robertson, 2011b). Lastly, a news release proclaims that, “...all agree it is time to reframe the law [Elementary and Secondary Education Act] to better support policies and practices that ensure young children are ready and able to succeed in school” (Rice, 2011). These represent some of the more random positive school reforms for which the NEA advocates in its news releases.

Unfortunately, because the NEA devotes so much time to describing such a wide variety of positive school reforms in which it is involved, the importance of individual reform efforts appears to get lost in the shuffle and it becomes much harder without careful reading to say that a specific reform is the NEA's top priority. While the NEA may answer that its Priority Schools Campaign is its main focus, the inability to determine exactly how this reform effort works causes some issues of clarity.

### Collaboration

A large portion of the NEA news releases refer to policy-related actions that involve collaboration as a key method through which the NEA would like to improve education. As one release announces,

Van Roekel is on the road to galvanize support for public education and to urge all community members – parents, educators, elected officials, policymakers, business leaders, and others – to work together to ensure adequate and equitable funding for all of America's schools. (Hudgins, 2011b)

Another release explains that the "...NEA is at the forefront of innovative and creative collaborations to improve schools for all students" (Gonzalez, 2010c). The NEA portrays most of these collaborations as tasks to be carried out at the local level; as an example, "we know that the real drivers of change in schools come from educators, administrators, parents, and communities working together at the local level – district by district, school by school. Together we will help all students succeed" (Linebaugh, 2011b). They further point out that, "The bottom line is that when educators and others collaborate, students benefit" (Busser, 2011e). The NEA quickly points out that many groups besides teachers should be

involved in these collaborations, as in one release stating, “Transforming schools requires collaboration of all stakeholders – parents, teacher unions, elected officials and community members” (Grissom, 2011b). The NEA also highlights districts that have made gains through collaborative efforts. It explains in one release, “putting aside differences and working collaboratively to improve teacher quality will directly benefit students in their district. Others can learn from the success of this partnership” (Hudgins, 2011a). Another release perhaps captures the NEA position most clearly, as it exclaims, “Collaboration is the key to transforming schools” (Parks-Kirby, 2011c). These news releases all demonstrate that the NEA believes that the use of collaborative methods is the best way in which to make sure its policy-related actions can be effective.

When the NEA wishes to describe collaborations beyond the local level, they tend to describe collaborative efforts between the NEA and the federal Department of Education. Describing its attendance at a conference held by the Department of Education, a release explains, “affiliates of the National Education Association (NEA) are sharing strategies at a national conference focused on improving student achievement through labor-management collaboration” (Parks-Kirby, 2011a). In speaking about its attendance at the same conference, another release states that, “when all adults decide to come to the table and collaborate together, that’s when we’ll bring about real lasting, sustainable change for students” (Maiers, 2011a). Following the conference, an additional release points out that, “when unions and school districts share with others how they worked together for better solutions that help students succeed, we’re onto something” (Maiers, 2011b). At another high-profile event, Dennis Van Roekel – NEA president – and Arne Duncan – U.S. Secretary of Education – met to discuss education reform, prompting the NEA to state, “what we

learned today is that collaboration is indeed the key ingredient that's needed to ensure long-term success in low-performing schools" (Maiers, 2010). Two other articles also mention collaborating with Arne Duncan in order to ensure his participation in a "Read Across America Day" (Busser, 2011a, 2011b). What becomes clear from these portrayals is that the NEA sees its relationship with Arne Duncan and the U.S. Department of Education as one of its most important collaborative ventures.

### Improve Education Professions

The NEA uses its web news releases to suggest a number of ways in which it is seeking to improve the education professions; primarily those of public school teachers. In one news release, it argues for more diversity in the teaching profession, stating, "the evidence is clear that all students benefit from a more diverse workforce, with benefits that are both social and academic" (Baran & Hudgins, 2011). The NEA also wants to make sure that teachers recruited from foreign locations are properly vetted, saying, "we need a set of standards that addresses the employment needs of school districts, while protecting the rights of teachers. Recruitment agencies that work with school districts to hire teachers from abroad must be regulated" (Hirschfeld, 2011b). The NEA also advocates for educators to evolve with the education system, saying,

We're encouraging educators to change – embracing new ways of working and leaving behind old ideas that have not brought about desired results. With the right policy supports and resources, great educators can lead permanent change in low-performing schools. (Maiers, 2010)

These portrayals suggest that the NEA is using its policy-related actions to diversify and update the public teaching workforce.

The NEA also wishes to move teachers into a position where they are able to become more influential in policy-making. One news release exclaims, “our members are standing up to make sure that they have a seat at the table when decisions are made about schools and the quality of education” (Maiers, 2011c). Another argues that, “involving educators in policy decisions at the district level and improving professional compensation are both crucial to drawing new educators into the profession and retaining current ones” (Robertson, 2011a). In these cases, the NEA appears to believe that involving teachers in decision-making processes will lead to positive reforms.

The NEA also wishes to be involved in the creation of new teacher evaluations. A news release announces, “signaling a commitment to a new, more prestigious profession of teaching, the National Education Association (NEA) is calling on its members to set a course to overhaul teacher evaluation and accountability and advance student learning” (Speight, 2011b). Another news release explains, “...our union is working to create [an] effective evaluation system for teachers and principals...” (Gonzalez, 2010c). A news release finds, “...that arbitration is often the best solution to remove poor teachers from the classroom, while also ensuring fairness and due process” (Hirschfeld, 2011a). Outlining the NEA position, one news release states that the, “NEA has long advocated for high standards in the teaching profession, for regular teacher evaluations, and for professional development that improves teachers’ effectiveness” (Grissom, 2011b). These news releases show that the NEA is concerned with improving the quality of teachers within the profession and

improving how public school teachers are evaluated and dismissed, ostensibly addressing a common critique that the teacher organizations protect poor-performing teachers.

### Support Like-Minded Government Officials

The NEA invests a fair amount of time, through its news releases, in supporting members of the federal government who act in ways that align with NEA goals. Often these signs of support come in the form of statements that thank individuals, as evidenced in one release that states, “thank you to Sen. Durbin and all the dedicated co-sponsors in both the Senate and House who heard the voices of students who have worked hard in school in order to succeed in America – the country they call home” (Robertson, 2011d). Another release explains, “...the National Education Association... applauded the reintroduction of the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Robert Casey (D-PA) and Sen. Mark Kirk (R-IL)” (Guequierre & Busser, 2011). Members of the House of Representatives are also supported; as an example,

It is important to recognize three proponents of this effort: Congressman Michael Honda (CA-15) and Congressman Chaka Fattah (PA-2), true champions of school funding equity who urged the creation of this Commission, and Secretary Duncan for heeding their call. (Grissom, 2011a)

Additionally, one release announces, “We applaud the U.S. House of Representatives for passing the DREAM Act” (Gonzalez, 2010a). A number of news releases describe Read Across America Day, applauding the efforts of the first lady, Michelle Obama, and U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, in participating in this program (Busser, 2011a, 2011b). All of these examples show that the NEA is more than willing to spread its support

around to individuals in many branches of the government who support efforts that the NEA sees as positive for education.

The NEA is particularly fond of heaping praise and support on the President. As one example, “we applaud President Obama for standing firm on keeping crucial programs like Medicare and Medicaid intact because our seniors, the disadvantaged and students count on these programs” (Robertson, 2011e). Another release explains, “the National Education Association (NEA) agreed that it’s time to fix the law and thanked the President for his strong commitment to education and to reforming [Elementary and Secondary Education Act]” (Parks-Kirby, 2011c). Additionally, the NEA proclaims, “in tough economic times, it’s reassuring that President Obama continues to make education a national priority by calling for important investments in quality public education to keep America moving forward” (Gonzalez, 2011a). In reaction to the President’s second State of the Union address, a news release says, “NEA president Dennis Van Roekel tonight thanked President Barack Obama for shining a spotlight on education during his second State of the Union” (Gonzalez, 2011b). In describing the President’s proposed budget, another news release states, “NEA president Dennis Van Roekel today commended the Obama Administration on changes to the Race to the Top program in its Fiscal Year 2012 budget proposal” (Linebaugh, 2011b). This show of support has translated into early support for the President’s 2012 reelection campaign, as one article announces, “the recommendation makes the NEA – the nation’s largest union – the first to signal formal support of the President. NEA [also] supported President Obama in the 2008 presidential bid” (Speight, 2011a). What becomes clear from these examples is that the NEA desires to be a strong supporter of the President, perhaps seeing such support as a way of gaining increased influence in federal education policy-



making, or perhaps as a change of pace from the often bitter relationship the NEA had with President Obama's predecessor.

### Support the Middle Class

Beginning in February of 2011, there has been a national conversation about what type of collective bargaining rights state employees should have, sparked by a Wisconsin budget bill that stripped the majority of these rights away from the state's public workers. The NEA enters this conversation by cleverly portraying the event as an attack on the middle class. As one release explains, "the so-called 'budget crisis' is a smokescreen for stripping workers of their rights, doing away with collective bargaining, and further shrinking the middle class" (National Education Association, 2011b). Another news release states that, "the proposal...benefits large corporate donors and special interest groups, at the expense of America's middle class and our nation's students" (Robertson, 2010b). These descriptions portray the desire to remove collective bargaining rights as an attack by the government on the middle class.

Against this attack on the middle class, the NEA positions itself as an organization whose goal is to support and defend middle class workers. As one news release explains, "NEA members will stand in solidarity with America's workers this weekend by joining in protests against recent attacks on the middle-class workforce" (Kappalman, 2011). Another release announces NEA president Dennis Van Roekel's intentions, "I came here today to support our members, teachers and educators who are speaking up for public schools and the middle class" (Maiers, 2011c). Explaining away some of the rhetoric used by supporters of bills to remove collective bargaining rights,

Van Roekel cautioned that elected officials and policymakers should make sure they are making decisions based on facts, not misinformation. “The truth is the public pension funds are not the cause of state budget crises – Wall Street greed is the real culprit’. (Carter, 2010)

Defending the NEA against criticism, one news release argues that,

Attacks to silence school employees voices by attacking NEA and other public sector unions proves that there are forces across this country today who continue to blame middle-class workers for the mistakes made by millionaires. (NEA Public Relations, 2011)

In this way, the NEA is able to take a more isolated push to curtail collective bargaining rights and re-frame it as a larger attack on the middle class, while also positioning its teacher organization as a supporter and defender of the middle class.

### Conducting Education Research

The NEA uses a number of its news releases to shed light on its efforts in educational research. As reasoning for its choice of research to solve education problems, the NEA offers, “Making certain that all students have access to great teachers and to great public schools requires research-based solutions...” (Grissom, 2011b). To accomplish this research, the NEA employs a number of methods. In one release, it describes the use of a survey method, “A new survey on bullying by the National Education Association (NEA) finds that school employees know bullying is pervasive in schools...” (Busser, 2011d). In another release, it describes the use of survey research on a panel of experts, stating, “The National Education Association (NEA) recently assembled a panel of 100 accomplished

educators and surveyed them on issues such as...” (Robertson, 2011a). The results of NEA research are often presented to policymakers and the public in different “reports.” A release announces that, “for the past year, MALDEF [Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund] and the National Education Association (NEA) have worked together to refine a report that will help parents and communities across the country...” (Rodriguez & Everett, 2010). Another release describes, “collaborative research recently completed and published by Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the National Education Association (NEA) provides insights into how to close the teacher diversity gap” (Baran & Hudgins, 2011). Recounting its efforts to preserve its historical documents for future research, one news release explains that, “the NEA recognized the need to preserve its historical files and create a storehouse that will maintain accurate documentation of the history of American education and education policy” (Bowe & Campos, 2011). These news releases demonstrate the desire for the NEA to be perceived as research experts within the education field.

#### Conclusion: National Education Association

Careful analysis of the six common themes used by the National Education Association to portray its policy-related actions shows that the organization presents a rather complex and somewhat convoluted picture of its organization. While the NEA presents itself as an advocate for a number of very admirable reforms, the sheer volume of educational reforms it seems to support and the wide variety of different goals and methods that are portrayed in the same news releases, all make it challenging for the organization to present a clear picture of itself to the causal observer. Additionally, even though the NEA presents itself as

open to, and desirous of, collaboration, it also presents itself as already possessing the answers to tough educational problems and that others need to come to the NEA to get “expert” advice. This quality of the NEA portrayal of their policy-related actions promotes a sense of organizational arrogance that may interfere with its ability to both see answers that are not readily apparent and to form collaborations with groups outside of the NEA’s immediate sphere of influence.

#### **4.5 – ANALYSIS**

This section builds upon the findings from the national newspaper articles and teacher organization news releases. It begins with an analysis of the national newspaper portrayal from a macro-level in which the data from the four newspapers is combined to capture an overall portrayal of the National Education Association’s (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers’ (AFT) policy-related actions within the national newspaper discourse. This is followed by a similar approach to the teacher organizations in which the NEA and the AFT are compared with one another to identify common attributes and contrast differences in their representations of their policy-related actions and the effects these may have on the public’s perception of each teacher organization.

##### **4.5.1 – Combined Analysis: National Newspapers**

Overall, from January 1, 2001, to May 31, 2011, 206 articles appeared in the four national newspapers that included a portrayal of the policy-related actions of the National Education Association (NEA) and/or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Of these

articles, 54 articles (23%) were written in a favorable direction; 65 articles (34%) were written in a neutral direction; and 87 articles (43%) were written in an unfavorable direction. These numbers, represented in Figure 4.9, denote that the national newspapers most often tend to present the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT in an unfavorable manner.

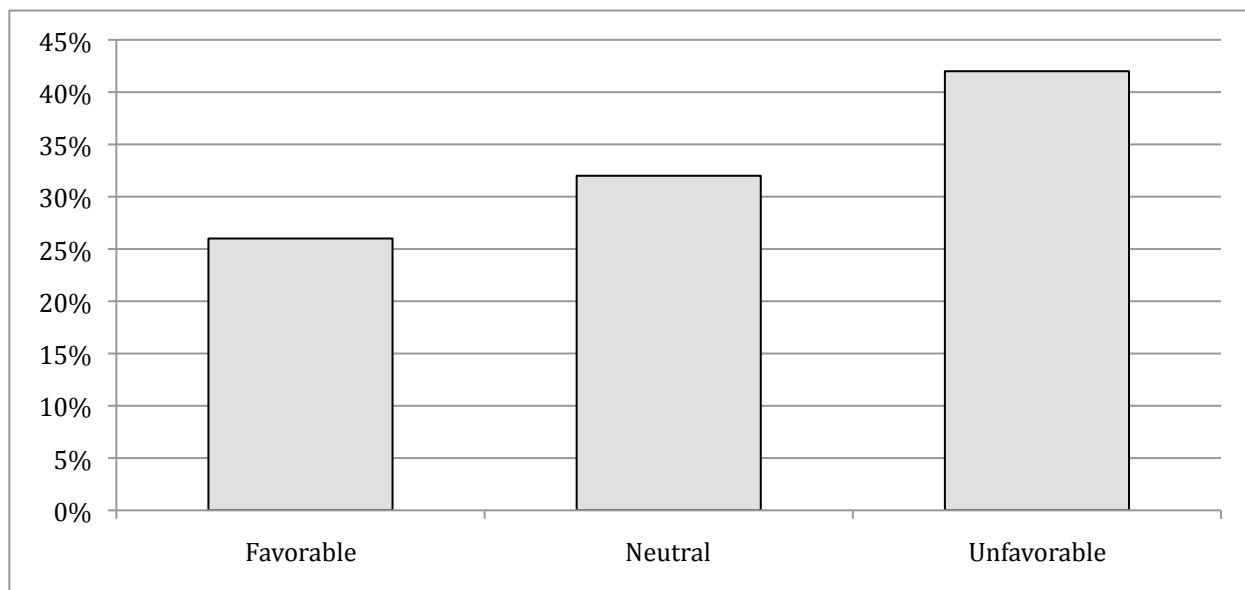


Figure 4.9 - *Direction of National Newspaper Articles*

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Of these 206 articles, 87 articles (42%) referenced the NEA; 79 articles (38%) referenced the AFT; and 40 articles (20%) made reference to both organizations. These figures, depicted in Figure 4.10, indicate that the national newspapers tend to publish articles that reference the NEA slightly more often than they publish articles that reference the AFT.

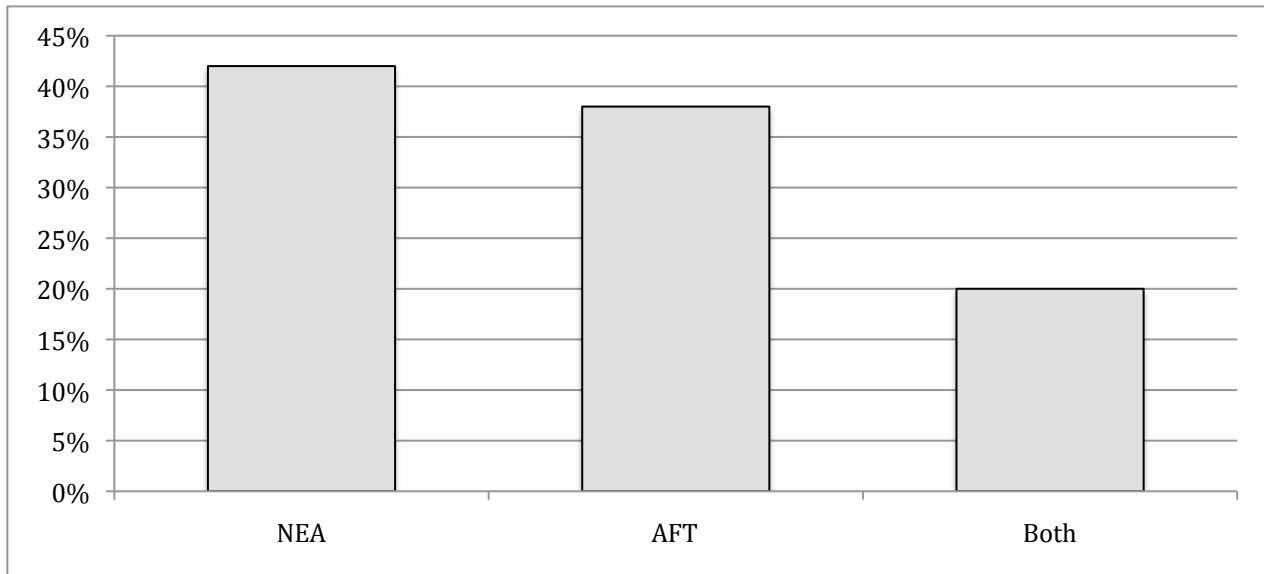


Figure 4.10 - *Teacher Organization Referenced in National Newspaper Articles*

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When the direction of the 206 articles is analyzed to determine how each individual teacher organization is presented, it becomes clear that the teacher organizations are subject to different portrayals, as presented in Figure 4.11.

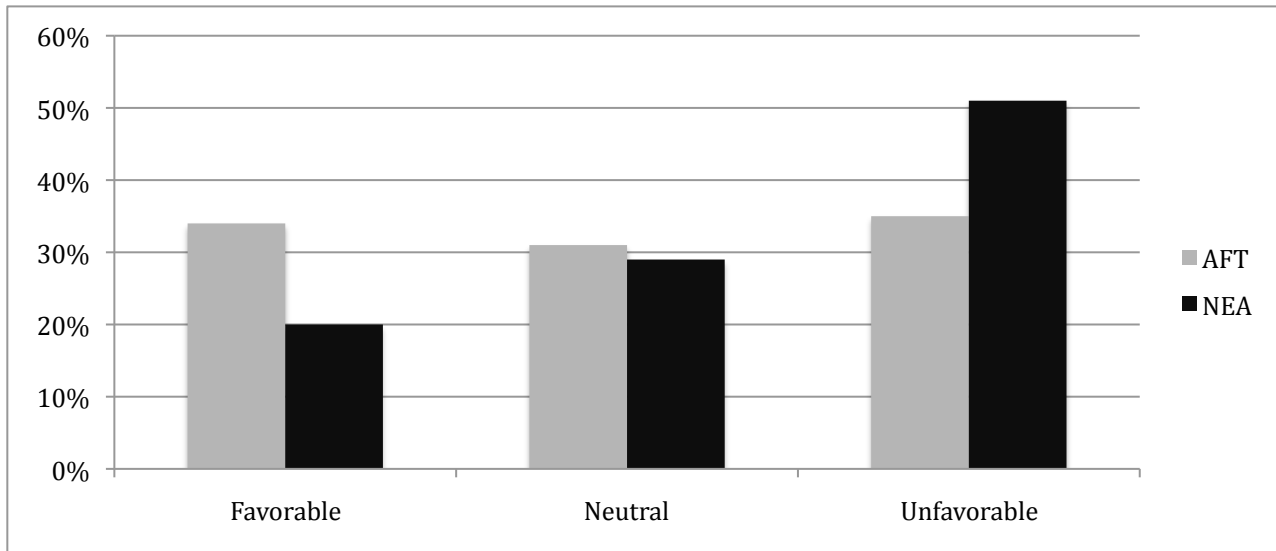


Figure 4.11 - *Direction of National Newspaper Articles by Teacher Organization*

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Of the 127 articles that portray the policy-related actions of the NEA, 25 articles (20%) are favorable; 37 articles (29%) are neutral; and 65 articles (51%) are unfavorable. This signifies that, when taken as a whole, the most influential national newspapers tend to portray the policy-related actions of the NEA in an unfavorable way more often than the number of favorable and neutral articles combined. Of the 119 articles that portray the policy-related actions of the AFT, 40 articles (34%) are favorable, 38 articles (31%) are neutral, and 41 articles (35%) are unfavorable. This indicates that when the national newspaper portrayal is analyzed as a whole, the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the AFT is fairly balanced between articles written in a favorable, neutral, and unfavorable direction. The question then becomes, why is it that one teacher organization – the National Education Association – can be portrayed in such an unfavorable way while the other

teacher organization, the American Federation of Teachers, garners a more balanced portrayal in the national newspapers? Possible answers to this question lie within the qualitative analysis of the emergent themes found within the national newspapers.

### Emergent Themes Across The National Newspapers

While the analysis of each individual national newspaper demonstrated emergent themes of portrayal found in each sample, when providing a view of the newspapers as a whole, it is important to determine which themes are occurring in more than one national newspaper at a time in order to conclude that a theme is truly “emergent” within the national newspaper discourse. While certain themes may seem closely related, such as “protect good teachers” in *The Washington Post* and “create better working conditions” in *The New York Times*, these themes are presented in contextually different ways. Of interest in this analysis are emergent themes that appear to be presented in a contextually similar fashion in more than one national newspaper. This analysis found five emergent themes, relating to the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations, which are present in more than one national newspaper. These themes indicate that the teacher organizations are:

- 1) “self-serving” rather than beneficial to the education process
- 2) making an effort to “obstruct positive school reforms”
- 3) trying to “promote positive school reforms”
- 4) attempting to “change the No Child Left Behind Act”
- 5) “cooperating with the Democratic Party”

Below is a more detailed breakdown of how each emergent theme portrays the policy-related actions of the two teacher organizations.



The most common emergent theme of portrayal was that the NEA and the AFT were engaged in policy-related actions with self-serving traits, rather than pursuing policies that would benefit the education system. Remembering that one of the major images of teachers from popular media is that teachers are incompetent, it comes as no surprise that the teacher organizations are often depicted in national newspapers as protecting these incompetent teachers. This protection is most often linked to tenure, with the suggestion that once teachers gain tenure, they are nearly impossible to fire. In these sections of the newspapers, the term “union” seems to take on a sinister meaning, as if being a “union” automatically means protection of the incompetent rather than a more professional goal of improving the education field. There are also a number of articles that mention internal corruption within the teacher organizations. These articles describe organization leaders as exploiting social security laws, embezzling within the unions, and enabling voter fraud in union elections. Such portrayals leave the reader with a feeling that these organizations are criminal in nature; a portrayal that does nothing to help the teacher organizations win over public opinion.

Often occurring within the national newspapers were unfavorable portrayals of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT as having goals related to obstructing positive school reforms. The vast majority of these critical portrayals revolve around objections from the teacher organizations toward school choice efforts, with the remaining tending to focus on pay-for-performance measures. School choice efforts and pay-for-performance measures are often represented using language heavily coated with free market principles. As such, when the teacher organizations suggest that vouchers and charter schools are bad, they are portrayed as being against freedom of choice or when the

teacher organizations explain that you cannot link teacher pay to student performance on standardized tests, they are portrayed as trying to dodge being held accountable for their work. In particular, *The Wall Street Journal* does a consistent job of presenting these reforms in a type of common sense language that makes the teacher organizations appear to be one of the biggest roadblocks to positive school reform. While the truth is that schools cannot be equated to free market businesses for a variety of reasons (i.e. public schools must serve every customer), when the teacher organizations try to make this argument in support of their opposition to school choice efforts, the newspapers generally fail to articulate the argument in a manner that justifies the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations.

Many articles within the national newspapers did, however, present favorable portrayals of the NEA and AFT as pursuing goals that were related to positive school reforms. These reforms include efforts to help students in lower-class communities through extensions of Head Start programs, the use of schools as community centers, and attempts to get the government to provide additional funding – through the No Child Left Behind Act – to help special education students. It is within this theme that the AFT really stands apart from the NEA. The AFT is often depicted as willing to experiment with changes to the traditional structure of union contracts, to allow for pay-for-performance measures, slackening of tenure protections that would allow administrators to more easily remove ineffective teachers, new efforts to improve teacher evaluations, and even the creation of its own charter schools.<sup>7</sup> On these same issues, the NEA is portrayed as unwavering in its objection to these reforms. It is this difference in depiction that may cause the policy-

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<sup>7</sup> Former AFT president Albert Shanker was an original advocate for charter schools during their inception.

related actions of the AFT to be portrayed in a more balanced way, whereas the policy-related actions of the NEA are more often portrayed in an unfavorable way.

The national newspapers, often taking a neutral approach to the subject, portrayed the teacher organizations as engaging in policy-related actions designed to change the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This portrayal often includes the antagonism that existed between the Bush administration and the NEA over the use of high-stakes standardized tests and a portrayed perception within the NEA that NCLB was not adequately funded. The height of the struggle occurred when former Education Secretary Rod Paige called the NEA a “terrorist organization” in 2004 when referencing its opposition to the NCLB law. This political gaff resulted in a great deal of positive press for the NEA and appears to have caused most of the national newspapers to begin to present objections to NCLB by both teacher organizations in a more balanced way.

The last common theme of portrayal was that the NEA and AFT are cooperating with the Democratic Party to gain control over education policy, a portrayal that varied greatly depending on which paper one was reading. While *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* tend to be more neutral when referring to the Democratic Party, *The Wall Street Journal* comes off as very much against the Democrats, whereas *The New York Times* seems very supportive of Democrats. These different political leanings influence how the relationship between the teacher organizations and the Democratic Party were portrayed. This portrayal was usually tied to contributions to the campaigns of Democrat candidates and the use of teacher organization funding and manpower for campaign ads in support of Democrat candidates. In all of the portrayals, the Democrats are depicted as highly dependent on the support of the teacher organizations, and in many ways, this support is

tied to the notion that Democrat candidates will need to deliver education policies that align with teacher organization goals. As controversial and partisan as politics has become in American society, one can easily imagine how rhetorically loaded some of these articles can be.

The policy-related actions of teacher organizations are presented in the national newspapers in a myriad of ways, with both neutrality and bias. The two most common portrayals are unfavorable ones, that the teacher organizations favor policies that are self-serving in nature and that these organizations wish to obstruct positive school reforms. Efforts to change NCLB and cooperation between the teacher organizations and the Democratic Party tend to be portrayed in a variety of ways and directions, providing a more balanced overall impression. Positive portrayal of efforts to promote positive school reforms are where the AFT gains a significant advantage over the NEA, because of its portrayed willingness to experiment with reform rather than the more typical presentation of the NEA as unwilling to be involved in newer reform ideas that go against traditional collective bargaining protections.

#### **4.5.2 – Combined Analysis: National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers**

Because both the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are primarily teacher organizations, representing largely similar groups of people, one might expect that they would present themselves in a similar way; however, there are both subtle and substantial differences in the way the two teacher organizations

portray their policy-related actions that, when taken together, really differentiates each groups' portrayal of its policy-related actions.

As one of the few similarities, both the NEA and the AFT issue statements of support for like-minded government officials. This accomplishes at least two tasks. First, it provides free publicity for government officials that may embolden them in causes the teacher organizations support. Second, this support allows the AFT and the NEA to inform the public about teacher organization policy positions and the policy positions of elected officials, while presenting both in a positive light. In this way, the teacher organizations are attempting to build support for education policies by building support for particular elected officials who favor the education policies and outcomes desired by the NEA and AFT. Because the two teacher organizations are so large, this type of support can make real differences in elections, although it is fair to say that the vast majority of those that the teacher organizations support are affiliated with the Democratic Party. This is likely the result of some shared views on education funding and support that exist between the Democratic Party and the two teacher organizations.

During the six-month period of time in which the news releases of the NEA and AFT were reviewed, an effort by elected Wisconsin Republicans to remove collective bargaining rights from public employees captured major headlines. This event caused both teacher organizations to use a portion of their news releases, in a largely similar fashion, to show support for public employees and their collective bargaining rights. Both the NEA and the AFT participated in protests and rallies to defend collective bargaining rights, and made use of their news releases to demonstrate the importance of collective bargaining rights for American workers, including public school teachers. However, in this policy-related action,

there is one subtle but important difference. The AFT writes these types of news releases as a show of support for collective bargaining rights, whereas the NEA couches its support of collective bargaining rights in a language of support for the middle class. This effort by the NEA to link collective bargaining rights to the middle class, appears to be a more effective rhetorical approach for building greater support for its position within such a contentious issue, rather than simply speaking in the language of collective bargaining rights, which may only appeal to those employed in union trades.

The NEA and the AFT also use a large proportion of their news releases to call for improvements for education professionals. These calls go far beyond the types of working conditions, or “bread-and-butter” issues for which unions tend to argue. Most notably, both teacher organizations are concerned with revamping the way teachers are evaluated and disciplined. They both contend that evaluations can be done in a more effective and useful way and that it should be easier to remove poor-performing teachers, a notion that appears to run counter to the type of “protection of the incompetent” images of teacher organizations presented in popular media. The AFT really appears to take the lead on this issue, bringing in outsiders who specialize in mediations to help draft new policies for performance evaluation and discipline. In this way, both teacher organizations, but particularly the AFT, appear to be trying to counter the notion that they protect poorly performing teachers, by making efforts to improve the ability of education leaders to improve the quality of the teaching ranks. Another subtle, but important, difference within this theme is that when the NEA talks about improving education professions, it primarily speaks about public school teachers, whereas the AFT seems concerned equally with public school teachers, higher education faculty, and support staff. It is not clear from these news

releases why the organizations demonstrate this difference, but it may leave casual readers with a false notion that the NEA represents a much narrower section of education employees than the AFT.

When the NEA and the AFT talk about school reforms, another important, and more substantial, difference occurs. The NEA uses the goal of promoting positive school reforms as its most prevalent theme for the portrayal of its policy-related actions. The AFT covers some of the same issues when it describes a goal of helping those in need; however, this portrayal differs largely from the NEA's. The NEA appears to support a plethora of positive school reforms, and while all of these reforms are noble ones, they create a murky picture of which ones may be most important to the NEA. On the other hand, when the AFT talks about helping those in need, it describes a narrower set of reforms in a much more concise way. This difference makes it much easier to sort out exactly which reforms are an AFT priority, while the NEA priorities appear more numerous and therefore less well-focused. While both approaches may have their merits, the more focused approach of the AFT means that when it comes to informing the public of where the AFT stands on certain issues, it has done a better job rhetorically of "staying on message" than their NEA counterparts.

What appears to be the most important difference in the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT stems from the way each organization chooses to approach efforts at collaboration, a topic to which each devotes very large proportions of its news releases. While on the surface, it may appear that both teacher organizations desire to work in collaboration, and are therefore similar, careful analysis reveals some key differences in how each organization views collaboration. The NEA uses collaboration as a

method to create positive school reforms, whereas the AFT sees collaboration as both a method for reform and a stand-alone goal that they consistently seek. Additionally, the NEA talks about collaboration as a desired method for reform, but appears to suggest that others should come to them to collaborate, because the NEA is a group of experts who already knows the answers that others will need. The AFT message is a much more open one in that it appears to say, instead, that it is willing to seek out and collaborate with anyone who might have good ideas about education and work together with these individuals to improve education. This is a powerful difference in communicative style that appears to favor the AFT. Additionally, for the AFT, collaboration stands apart as its primary message and the AFT communicates its desire to collaborate in a very concise and clear way, whereas the NEA's "collaboration" message may be lost among its more prevalent and less focused message of promoting positive school reforms. Because the ability to "stay on message" is important for building public support for one's cause, the AFT again appears to accomplish this more successfully than the NEA.

There are also a few smaller, but still noteworthy, differences in the portrayal of policy-related actions by the NEA and AFT. First, the NEA devotes a portion of its news releases to describing its efforts to conduct education research, a theme the AFT did not appear to address at all. This may help the NEA to portray itself as the experts of the education field, which contributes somewhat to the "all knowing" tone that it appears to take in its description of collaboration. Second, the AFT describes visits to education sites by its national leadership with relative frequency, whereas the NEA only mentions this in two news releases over the entire period of the study. This may contribute to a feeling that the national leadership of the AFT is more in touch with its membership, while the national



leadership of the NEA appears perhaps to be more aloof. Also, as a notable quirk, the NEA referred to the AFT in 13% of its news releases over the six-month period of time, while the AFT made no references to the NEA. While all of the NEA references to the AFT were favorable ones, the impression after analysis is that the NEA is trying to associate itself with the AFT, while the AFT may be attempting to distance itself from the NEA.

#### **4.6 – COMPARISON**

As the final part of this analysis, it is useful to compare the portrayal of the policy-related actions found in the national newspapers with those presented within the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) news releases. It is important to remember that while overall, the national newspapers portrayal of the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations was a slightly unfavorable one, when this portrayal was broken down by teacher organization, it turned out that the NEA was portrayed in a largely unfavorable way while the AFT had a more balanced, to neutral, portrayal. When the portrayals found within the national newspapers are compared with the news releases from the teacher organizations, it becomes possible to explain why a difference exists in how each teacher organization's policy-related actions are portrayed.

One area in which the national newspaper portrayal and the teacher organizations' portrayals appear to closely align is in the NEA and AFT support for the Democratic Party. Both the newspapers and the teacher organizations freely acknowledge the relationships that exist, including funding and campaigning efforts by the NEA and AFT on behalf of Democratic candidates. While the national newspapers seem to be highlighting these connections for their readers, the NEA and AFT go one step further to point out that these

candidates are being supported by the teacher organizations because each stands in agreement on certain policies that effect education. This political alignment appears to work as a double-edged sword in the national newspapers, particularly within the more liberal or conservative-leaning newspapers. In *The Wall Street Journal*, the cooperation between the Democratic Party and the teacher organizations is portrayed in an extremely negative fashion, whereas in *The New York Times*, this cooperation garners a very positive portrayal. In these cases, both papers are highly partisan in their reporting and the NEA and AFT either suffers or benefits based on the political alignment of the newspaper.

The most common theme of portrayal within the national newspapers was that the teacher organizations use their policy-related actions in a self-serving way, rather than in a way that benefits the education system. Additionally, the second most prevalent theme was that the teacher organizations are obstructing a number of positive reforms that center on school choice efforts and pay-for-performance measures. However, the national newspapers also portray the AFT as more willing to experiment with educational reforms than the NEA, which caused a more favorable portrayal of AFT policy-related actions in the newspapers. How this differing portrayal of the two organizations' policy-related actions occurs becomes clearer through comparison.

A willingness to experiment with new teacher evaluations and discipline is an area in which the AFT appears to be getting its message out to the national newspapers in a way that benefits the teacher organization. The overall analysis of the teacher organizations found that the AFT devotes a large portion of its news releases to trying to improve education professions, primarily through the creation of new teacher evaluation and discipline procedures. These improvements are ones that run against the typically-

protectionist stance of unions, and instead take on a more professional sense of policing the education field to remove poor performers. Additionally, the AFT brought in outside help to create these new policies, demonstrating its willingness to work with others outside of the education field to accomplish this task. All of these characteristics appear to counter the portrayal of the AFT as preferring policy-related actions that are self-serving. Moreover, while AFT policies less frequently address school choice, they do open the door for pay-for-performance measures, which partially counters the portrayal of teacher organizations as obstructive to positive school reforms. In experimenting with pay-for-performance, the AFT has adopted some of the free-market language that is found within all of the national newspaper portrayals, perhaps easing the ability of the newspapers to find common ground with AFT stances on policy-related actions.

Unfortunately for the NEA, it is not able to gain similar traction in the national newspapers with its policy-related action portrayals. While the NEA does talk about improving teacher evaluation and discipline procedures, it is largely in reaction to the gains made by the AFT, and the NEA both fails to elaborate on changes they would suggest and fails to work with outsiders on new evaluation and discipline procedures. Because the NEA appears to be opposed to any type of pay-for-performance measure, it is unable to adopt the free-market language characteristics that flavor the national newspaper portrayals. As a result of these failings, the NEA does not appear to be as serious about these types of reforms as the AFT and, consequently, the NEA appears incapable of getting the national newspapers to echo a favorable portrayal of its policy-related actions on these reforms.

Connected to this is how each teacher organization portrays its willingness to collaborate with outsiders. The AFT portrays its efforts at collaboration in a way that

benefits them over the NEA's portrayal of the same subject. Because the AFT presents its membership as open to collaboration with anyone who desires to benefit public education, and the AFT itself appears open to outside ideas for reform, this promotes a representation of the AFT as eager to cooperate to help the public education system. The NEA, on the other hand, presents itself as experts and subtly suggests that if others wish to create effective reforms, they will need to collaborate with the NEA. This instead encourages a representation of the NEA as more entrenched and aloof. These different portrayals of collaboration likely further contribute to the more balanced representation of the AFT and the more negative representation of the NEA in the national newspapers.

One area that should be a strength for the NEA is the promotion of positive school reforms, which constitutes the third most common emergent theme within the national newspapers. However, this is not the case. Even though the NEA devotes the largest portion of its news releases to portraying its policy-related actions as promoting positive school reforms, it is unable to focus on a small number of key reforms and appear instead to support a large swath of reforms to varying degrees. The result is that the NEA appears to struggle to stay on message. In contrast, while the AFT likely also supports all sorts of positive reform efforts, it manages, in its news releases, to stay focused on a few positive school reforms, which it talks about often using the same language, time and again. As a result, even though the NEA portrays itself as primarily concerned with positive school reforms, it is unable to transfer this portrayal to the national newspapers, whereas the AFT's ability to remain tightly focused and to repeat similar messages appears to gain more traction for its organization's portrayal of its positive school reform efforts in the national newspapers.

Another important feature of the portrayal of the policy-related actions is that the national newspapers portray the AFT as more willing to experiment with positive school reforms and the NEA as objecting to experimental reforms. The overall analysis of the teacher organizations suggest that it is actually the NEA that supports a larger variety of reforms, causing one to wonder: how could the national newspapers' portrayal appear to be so at variance?

The answer lies in which reforms each teacher organization wishes to experiment, and what traction these reforms appear to gain in the news media. The NEA appears more concerned with school reforms that center around social justice issues, such as racism, gender equality, and bullying. The AFT appears more concerned with reforms that alter the existing relationships between educators and administrators, communities, and the government. While surely both organizations are actually concerned with both sets of issues, the focus of their news releases does differ. In this case, each teacher organization appeals to different images of teachers from popular media. One popular image is that of teacher-hero who rescues students from discriminatory settings, the other popular image is of teacher-as-incompetent who stand in the way of a good education.<sup>8</sup> The NEA appears to be echoing the popular image of teachers as “heroes,” whereas the AFT appears instead to be countering the image of teachers as “incompetent.” Fortunately for the AFT, it has smartly chosen to counter the most prevalent negative popular image of teachers, while the NEA has chosen to link its reform efforts to an image that is far less common in popular media. As a result, the AFT's desired portrayal once again finds more traction than the portrayal favored by the NEA.

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<sup>8</sup> For a much more in-depth explanation of these images, please refer back to Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3

In the end, it appears as though the national newspapers are more open to the types of policy-related action portrayals presented by the AFT than those presented by the NEA. This characteristic, which benefits the AFT, appears to result from the organization's ability to promote a more clear and focused message about school reforms, its ability to appear more open as an organization, and its desire to counter the popular image of teachers as self-serving and incompetent. While the NEA news releases demonstrate that it, too, is concerned with such issues, the inability of the organization to focus its message and its more conservative positioning as education "experts" appears to result in less traction for positive portrayals of its policy-related actions within the national newspapers.

#### **4.7 – CONCLUSION**

This chapter covers the analysis of the portrayal of the policy-related actions of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), within the four most prominent national newspapers and from news releases posted on the NEA and AFT websites. This analysis began with a look at the individual national newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*) in order to determine the subject and direction of each article and emergent themes that occurred throughout the sample period. The analysis continued on to take a similar look at news releases from the NEA and AFT websites, as a way of determining how each teacher organizations wished to have its policy-related actions portrayed.

Once the individual analyses of the national newspapers and the teacher organizations was complete, it was possible to combine these findings to develop an overall analysis of both how the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations are portrayed

in national newspaper contexts and how the NEA and the AFT would hope that their policy-related actions were portrayed based on their own news releases. The overall analysis of the national newspapers included a discussion of emergent themes that were found across multiple newspapers, suggesting that these themes for portrayal are part of the national newspaper discourse. When the overall analysis turned to the NEA and the AFT, the two organizations' portrayals of their policy-related actions were compared and contrast to determine each organization's priorities and how each teacher organization went about framing its policy-related actions.

The final analysis within this chapter was a comparison between the overall analysis of the national newspaper discourse and of the teacher organizations' portrayals of their policy-related actions. Here, it was possible to explain the differences in the portrayal of the two teacher organizations within the national newspapers by linking these portrayals to focus and linguistic differences within news releases generated by the teacher organizations. Through the analysis present in this last comparative section, it is now possible to begin to suggest ways in which each teacher organization could improve the way its communicates within its news releases, in order to express how it would like to have its policy-related actions portrayed to the public, and in a way that they may find more traction within national newspapers. I will take this final step in the last chapter of this study.





## **CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 – INTRODUCTION**

This final chapter allows for the conclusion of my research into the dissonance between the way in which national newspapers portray the policy-related actions of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the way these teacher organizations wish to portray their policy-related actions, as evidenced by their organization news releases. The chapter begins with summaries of the research problem, method, and results. Following these summaries, the results of the research are linked back to previous research so that they may better inform the wider theoretical lenses that converge within this study. Using the comparative analyses from within this study, recommendations for improvement are made to both the NEA and the AFT that would allow them to benefit from this research and advance their ability to portray their policy-related actions in ways that may further improve public opinion of their organizations. This chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of this research and suggestions for future research into the nexus of public opinion and the organizational behavior of teachers.

### **5.2 – SUMMARY OF PROBLEM**

Even though teachers make up one of the largest publicly employed workforce groups, and although many possess advanced graduate degrees and countless years of experience educating children of all types, their organizations often struggle to influence national

education policy-making contexts. They struggle because teacher organizations, in many ways, appear to have lost the public trust, and as a result, increasingly, national education policies are informed and guided by outsiders to education. This loss of public trust coincides with narratives within popular media that depict teacher organizations as self-serving and obstructive to positive school reforms, even though the teacher organizations regularly attempt to engage in positive school reforms and collaborations with government and business groups designed to improve the public education system. A lack of public trust limits the ability of teacher organizations to gain the level of popular support that would result in their being actively sought out as integral participants in national education policy-making. An early step in regaining public trust is for teacher organizations to analyze their portrayal in popular media in order to better counter negative media representations, which may later allow them to regain lost public support.

### **5.3 – SUMMARY OF METHOD**

This study made use of a content analysis approach to analyze the dissonance that exists between the way that the four most influential national newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*) portray the policy-related actions of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the way in which these teacher organizations portray their own policy-related actions. The content analysis looked at both national newspaper articles and NEA and AFT news releases in order to determine what policy-related actions were portrayed in each source, what traits, methods, and goals were associated with the actions and, in the case of the national newspapers, whether each article gave a favorable, neutral,

or unfavorable portrayal of the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations. This information was used to describe emergent themes within the national newspapers in order to illustrate the current national newspaper discourse relating to teacher organization policy-related actions. Additionally, a similar approach was used to extract emergent themes from the NEA and AFT news releases in order to determine how these organizations would like for their policy-related actions to be portrayed. The emergent themes from the national newspapers and teacher organizations were subject to comparative analysis to determine ways in which the national newspaper discourse differed from the teacher organization representation of their actions.

#### **5.4 – SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

At the end of the content analysis process, this study yielded a variety of results that are useful in describing how the policy-related actions of the NEA and the AFT are portrayed in national newspapers as well as in demonstrating how the NEA and AFT would like the public to view their policy-related actions. Additionally, through the comparative process, it was possible to determine particular ways in which the teacher organizations were able to represent their policy-related actions that were either more or less effective in transferring their desired portrayals to the national newspaper discourse.

When the national newspaper findings were subject to combined analysis, it was possible to determine bias in the national newspapers and also to determine which emergent themes occur in multiple newspapers, indicating that the theme had become part of the national newspaper discourse. Overall, the national newspapers displayed an unfavorable bias toward the teacher organizations. However, when broken apart by

teacher organization, the national newspapers contain articles that are more often unfavorable when describing NEA actions, while the AFT garners a more balanced collection of favorable, neutral, and unfavorable portrayals. Five emergent themes were present across the national newspapers, which included negative portrayals of the policy-related actions of the NEA and AFT as (1) self-serving and (2) obstructive to positive school reforms. There was also a sizable positive portrayal of the teacher organizations as (3) promoting positive school reforms. The teacher organizations were additionally depicted as trying to (4) change the No Child Left Behind Act, which captured a more neutral portrayal in the papers. Finally, the NEA and the AFT were often represented as (5) cooperating with the Democratic Party, which was either heavily biased in the two most obviously politically leaning newspapers (*The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*) or more neutrally portrayed in less obviously politically aligned papers (*The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*).

Combined analysis of the NEA and the AFT news releases demonstrated both similarities and differences in the way in which these organizations chose to portray their policy-related actions. Both organizations are supportive of government officials who hold similar policy goals, and the majority of these officials come from the Democratic Party. Additionally, both organizations support collective bargaining rights, although the NEA tends to couch this support in language related to protecting the middle class. The AFT and the NEA both advocate for improvements for education professionals that go beyond simple bread-and-butter working condition improvements; however, the AFT presents itself as a more progressive organization through its efforts to create new teacher evaluation and discipline systems and its willingness to experiment with pay-for-

performance measures. Each of the two teacher organizations describes various positive school reform efforts that they are engaged in. The NEA appears to advocate for a wide-range of social justice-oriented reforms, but it struggles to focus its message to indicate which reforms it sees as key. While the AFT does support social justice reforms, the AFT news releases are focused more tightly on reforms centered on collaborations with school stakeholders, making it easier to determine exactly where AFT priorities lie. While both the NEA and the AFT describe efforts for collaboration, they describe the process in a way that is substantially different. The NEA describes its organization as education experts with whom individuals who wish to improve public education should seek to collaborate. The AFT describes its organization as willing to collaborate with anyone with good ideas for public education – even traditional outsiders to public education – and it actively seeks out these outside collaboration opportunities. The end result of these different portrayals is that the NEA appears more aloof and less willing to work with outsiders, as opposed to the AFT's portrayal of openness and willingness.

The comparative analysis between the national newspapers' articles and the teacher organizations' news releases revealed a number of ways in which particular portrayals of policy-related actions by the NEA or AFT were either more or less likely to resonate with the national newspaper discourse. The newspapers accurately capture NEA and AFT support of government officials primarily from the Democratic Party; however, this portrayal varies depending on the political leanings of the paper. While the newspapers commonly portray the teacher organizations as self-serving and as obstructive to school reforms, the AFT is often portrayed as more willing to experiment with new reforms, giving the AFT policy-related actions a more favorable presentation. The eagerness of the AFT to

create new teacher evaluation and discipline systems and its willingness to discuss pay-for-performance measures appears to help it to counter the notion that the teacher organization would be protective of bad teachers. The NEA also talks about new evaluation and discipline systems, but this is largely in reaction to gains made by the AFT. This, combined with the NEA's position against pay-for-performance, makes it much harder for the organization to get positive portrayals of its policy-related actions to resonate within the national newspaper discourse. While both organizations describe their desire to enter into collaborations, the more open and willing representation of collaboration efforts by the AFT, benefits it in gaining positive portrayal over the more aloof representation of collaboration efforts by the NEA. The NEA and the AFT also regularly describe positive school reforms they support, but the more concise portrayal of organization goals by the AFT makes it easier for it to garner similar positive media portrayals. Lastly, the types of positive reforms each organization chooses to support influences how they are portrayed in the newspaper articles. The AFT tends to focus on school reforms that benefit the public education system through creating new working relationships, ultimately allowing the organization to counter the common portrayal of teacher organizations as self-serving and incompetent. The NEA tends to focus on social justice reforms, but these types of social stands align with images of teachers that are less common in the media and are covered far less often in the national newspaper discourse. In the end, the AFT appears to portray its policy-related actions in ways that create a more balanced portrayal in the national newspaper discourse, whereas the NEA struggles to gain a similarly balanced portrayal and is, instead, more often the target of unfavorable coverage within the national newspapers.

## 5.5 – DISCUSSION

At this point, it becomes possible to link this content analysis back to previous research that allows this study to contribute to the various theoretical perspectives that intersect within this study. Because this study centers on critical media study, media portrayal of teacher organizations, and teacher organizational behavior, this discussion will fall along similar lines in order to maintain the salience of these connections.

### Critical Media Study

Critical theorists have very strong opinions about the way the media can negatively influence public thinking. This study highlights some examples of public ideologies present in the media, but indicates that such ideology presentation is not as one-sided as many critical theorists – particularly those of the Frankfurt School – would suggest.

Frankfurt school critical theorists often describe the media as presenting a *single*, capitalist message (Habermas, 2006; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002); however, this content analysis indicates that the national newspaper discourse represents a *variety* of alternative views about the policy-related actions of teacher organizations. Even though a bias against the two teacher organizations is evident within the national newspapers, the more balanced portrayal of the AFT, and the presence of neutral and favorable articles about both organizations, demonstrates that the news discourse often makes room for multiple viewpoints. While the media does make use of a narrative style to pass on ideological messages that teacher organizations are self-serving and obstructive to school reform, it also, to a lesser degree, makes use of the same narrative style to indicate that teachers are

advocating for positive school reforms. While the presence of an unfavorable bias does suggest a negative influence on public opinion, competing narratives lessen the degree to which the national news discourse can influence public opinion by making room for contested viewpoints, largely reinforcing Kellner's (2000) concept of modern media as a "contested terrain" that can simultaneously spread messages that empower and oppress. If the portrayal of the policy-related actions within the newspapers was as balanced for the NEA as it appears to be for the AFT, it might contribute to public engagement in a less-biased dialogue about these organizations.

The lack of a more balanced portrayal does suggest that, despite the media's contested properties, there is also an ideological message present within the national newspaper discourse. Modern critical theorists often argue that the media presents an ideological front for the government (Giroux, 2006; Gramsci, 2006; Herman & Chomsky, 2006; Kellner, 2000). However, within this study, although the government is not the main subject of analysis, it is clear from the varied descriptions of teacher organization support for government officials that an ideological front supporting the government is not being presented. Instead, the ideological front that most resonates within the national newspaper discourse studied here is one that reflects capitalist commercial interests, supporting Gramsci's (2006) claims that modern media presents ideological messages that can reflect government and/or private interests. Additionally, the notion that the news media circulates free-market ideologies, closely aligned with the types of capitalist ideologies described by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), provides more support for claims about the media, originally circulated by Frankfurt School critical theorists in the late 1940s. In other words, this study suggests that earlier critical theorists were correct in saying the media



circulates capitalist ideologies (although not just a *single* capitalist message), while this study refutes claims by some modern critical theorists that the media is a haven for pro-government ideologies. The best example of a newspaper where this capitalist ideological message appears most apparent is *The Wall Street Journal*, which reads, to this researcher, more like a free-market propaganda machine than an objective source for national news.

### Media Portrayal of Teacher Organizations

The presence of an unfavorable bias against the teacher organizations, particularly against the NEA, does indicate the possibility that the national newspapers are involved in the formation and support of a negative public perceptions of teacher organizations (Giroux, 2006). Kellner (2000) described how “resonate images” within the media can become part of the public psyche long after the media interaction is over. Because a variety of popular media sources present images of teachers as incompetent, national newspaper articles that depict the NEA and/or AFT as protecting incompetent teachers may be particularly influential on the public. Additionally, Welch (2003) noted that free-market ideologies are particularly resonant with a variety of media audiences; consequently, the abundance of free-market language within unfavorable newspaper articles may make certain portrayals of the teacher organizations – as against “free-market” reforms to education – particularly powerful. Because a portrayal of teacher organizations as self-serving and obstructive to reform efforts is prevalent in popular media and within the national newspaper discourse, informing a negative public perception of teacher organizations, such negative representations may contribute to the exclusion of teachers from national education policy-making contexts (Bulman, 2002; Tillman & Trier, 2007). Ravitch (2010) links this

exclusion to a public sentiment that union protections inhibit the public education system, which directly connects to the negative portrayals found within the national newspaper discourse. This particular sentiment is most prevalent in the highly unfavorable portrayal of the teacher organizations presented by *The Wall Street Journal*. Troy (1998) explained that public education is one of the most maligned subjects in popular media. The high frequency of unfavorable portrayals of the teacher organizations, without any substantial alternative viewpoints, signals that *The Wall Street Journal* is the most antagonistic of the national newspapers toward the teacher organizations.

Regardless of which national newspaper one is reading, the articles contain portrayals of teacher organizations that represent views representative of ideologies that currently influence national education policy. Newspaper articles often echo free-market and business sentiments, which align with both Neo-Liberal and Managerial Class ideologies (Apple, 2006). Most articles that describe school reform efforts are heavily couched in free-market language, while supporting reforms that issue from best practices within competitive business settings (Apple, 2006; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Spring, 2005b). While the newspapers present both positive and negative views of NCLB, many articles relay NCLB images<sup>9</sup> of teachers, representative of managerial class ideological notions, which are detrimental to the teacher organizations. The language within influential national newspaper articles tends to mirror one common NCLB image of teachers as laborers in a production setting (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Valli & Buese, 2007), which supports an inaccurate portrayal of public education that can mislead the public about which reforms may be most helpful for troubled schools. Additionally, NCLB portrays

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<sup>9</sup> For further explanation of images of teachers portrayed within national education policy, see Chapter 2 Section 2.4.2

another image of teachers as incompetent and in need of more control and oversight to insure that they will do what is right for the public education system (Ingersoll, 2003; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This view seems supported by national newspaper portrayals of teacher organizations as self-serving. While Elam (1995) notes that often media sources make statements about education or teachers without citing research to warrant their claims, very few of the national newspaper articles within this study referenced academic research in presenting negative portrayals of the teacher organizations. Those that did cite research tend to reference studies from economics, providing support for using business solutions to counter the (portrayed) self-serving tendencies of teacher organizations. To a much smaller degree, echoes of the Neo-Conservative viewpoint show up in discussions of standardization (Apple, 2006), but volumes of criticism against standardized testing have likely limited this ideology substantially within the national newspaper discourse. Finally, probably because of its more controversial nature, the Christian Right ideology is seemingly absent from the national newspaper discourse on the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations.

### Teacher Organizational Behavior

The NEA and the AFT appear quite aware of the negative images associated with their organizations in the national media. The NEA and the AFT both make use of their internet websites to provide counter narratives to their negative portrayals, highlighting the production capabilities of the internet that exemplify this modern “contested” media terrain (Kellner, 2000). Unfortunately, for the teacher organizations, their websites likely do not receive the same readership as the national newspapers, nor do NEA and AFT news

releases influence the creation of further news stories in the same way national newspapers can, limiting the ability of the teacher organizations to effectively contest their negative media portrayals. Despite these differences, efforts by the NEA and AFT to counter negative portrayals are clearly evident.

The counter narratives that the NEA and the AFT try to establish to improve their public opinion differ in ways that appear to favor the AFT. The NEA chooses to align with the less-common popular media image of teachers as heroes, which works against it in a number of ways. Implicit in the “teacher-hero” image found in popular media is the idea that these heroes are a minority of the overall teaching force, and differ from the majority of teachers who appear incompetent (Bulman, 2002). Additionally, this image usually includes the portrayal of the teacher-hero as largely inexperienced in the profession (Bulman, 2002). As such, NEA connections to this image implicitly devalue the wealth of experience of their teacher-members and inadvertently supports school choice options that would have students learning in alternative school settings staffed by non-certified teachers (Bauer, 1998; Bulman, 2002; Tillman & Trier, 2007). This is a policy alignment that the NEA is strongly against, indicating that it is not fully conscious of the implications present in its portrayal of teachers. In contrast, the AFT is taking steps to counter negative images of teachers by attempting to redefine the image of its teacher members, if not all teachers (Herman & Chomsky, 2006). This alternative portrayal both counters the “teacher-incompetent” image and avoids the pitfalls of the “teacher-hero” image by suggesting that all teachers, while not heroes, care about improving the public education system, even at a cost to traditional job protections. The effectiveness of this strategy

appears to be demonstrated in the more balanced portrayal that the AFT gains in the national newspaper discourse, which tends to highlight its more progressive reform efforts.

In a more general sense, both the NEA and the AFT are trying to redefine their positions to ones in which they are seen as “public intellectuals” (Giroux, 2006). Researchers commonly agree that teacher organizations, such as the NEA and the AFT, need to increase their collaboration efforts to reestablish the public trust (Giroux, 2001; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner, et al., 1997). In response to these suggestions, both teacher organizations appear to have embraced collaboration strategies. Because collaboration is the most prevalent theme in the AFT portrayal of its policy-related actions, this organization appears further along in this process. After careful analysis of the NEA and AFT news releases, the AFT seems to convey a more “professional” impression than the NEA – resulting from the AFT openness toward collaboration and willingness to experiment with new education reforms. The NEA news releases give the impression that it takes more of a protectionist stance toward new policies and collaboration – qualities that seem more akin with traditional views of unionism that may play into negative views of teacher organizations. However, one notable exception is the NEA emphasis on analytical research to improve the education system. By engaging in analytical research, the NEA demonstrates a willingness to invest resources into educational improvement. The AFT engages in similar research efforts, but it tends not to describe these efforts in its news releases.

Two additional aspects of the NEA and AFT portrayals of their policy-related actions bear mentioning as well. First, these two teacher organizations appear to be answering the call from critical theorists (Foucault, 1977; Giroux, 2006; Marcuse, 2009) to attempt to stop

the standardization of education by advocating for a variety of more humanistic reforms; however, this advocacy does not appear to translate well into the national newspaper discourse. While this advocacy is primarily tied to NCLB, the tendency of the national newspapers to take a neutral position on the legislation limits the NEA and AFT critiques. Second, even though the NEA and the AFT primarily use lobbying and public relations campaigns to influence education policy (Cooper & Sureau, 2008; Koppich, 2005), neither organization explicitly mentions these methods in their own portrayal of their policy-related actions. While it is obvious that the news releases they publish are a type of public relations campaign, the omission of any discussion of lobbying practices within their news releases suggests that these organizations are less open with this policy-related action than they are with others.

### Conclusion

This study was able to contribute to three theoretical understandings that intersect within this study. In the realm of critical media study, this research supports a critical theory position that the media is used to spread a capitalist ideology while simultaneously reinforcing Kellner's (2000) notion of current media as increasingly "contested terrain." In examining the media portrayal of the teacher organizations, this study found resonant images of teacher organizations – as self-serving and obstructive to positive school reforms – that may significantly influence negative public opinions contributing to the exclusion of the NEA and the AFT from national education policy-making. Through analysis of teacher organizational behavior, it is evident that both the NEA and the AFT attempt to counter

negative media portrayals, but that the AFT has significant advantages over the NEA in its current approach to the portrayal of its policy-related actions.

### **5.6 – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

After careful analysis of the national newspaper portrayal of the policy-related actions of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), as well as analysis of the way in which these organizations wish for their actions to be portrayed, it becomes possible to suggest a number of ways in which the NEA and the AFT could change their behavior to more effectively counter a negative media bias against their organizations. Because both organizations portray their policy-related actions differently, there are some recommendations that apply to one organization or the other. However, there are also certain changes that the NEA and the AFT could both make, which would increase the ability of both groups to counter negative media portrayals.

This study indicates that the NEA garners the majority of the unfavorable bias within the national newspaper discourse, indicating that it may be the most in need of recommendations for improvement. Analysis within this study demonstrated that the NEA takes a broad approach to positive school reform efforts that make it challenging to determine which school reforms are its top priority. The NEA should more narrowly focus its school reform efforts, or at least its public portrayal of these efforts, so that its organizational priorities become clearer to outsiders. Additionally, it is important for the NEA to recognize the pitfalls that are associated with the “teacher-hero” image and the gains that can be made by instead trying to redefine teachers, not as heroes, but as working professionals whose primary concern is with the improvement of the education system.

One way in which to create this more professional portrayal is for the NEA to portray its organization as more open to the input of outsiders, and to seek out more influential collaborators. As such, it is important for the NEA to recognize the many stakeholders present within the education system, and to try and meet these stakeholders on an even playing field of cooperation, rather than appearing either aloof to, or threatened by, these groups. The NEA could also make a larger effort to collaborate with the AFT on its new teacher evaluation and discipline procedures, policies which have gained the AFT a great deal of favorable attention.

One possible source of NEA collaboration could be the major education foundations (Broad, Gates, Walton, etc.), in order to counter its portrayal as the more protectionist teacher organization. While the education foundations are often criticized for their desire to bring choice, competition, and privatization to the school system and their attempt to weaken the collective bargaining rights of teachers (Ravitch, 2010), regardless of how these organizations are viewed, they are a reality of the current education policy scene. As such, just remaining critical of these groups will fail to change their activities, particularly when the common view of the NEA is that they are acting in a self-serving manner whereas the education foundations are very popular. If, instead, the NEA were to find ways to help guide foundation actions, such as school choice steered in the direction of NEA/AFT designed charter schools or if the NEA were to help the foundations to create a pay-for-performance process that more accurately assessed the ability of teachers, these two seemingly opposed groups may find similar working ground. While the NEA and the education foundations are not likely to agree on a lot of education policy, finding a few



points at which they could work together would help the NEA immensely in an effort to create a public portrayal that counters current negative images of the teacher organization.

Furthermore, the NEA could open itself to crafting a more objective and functional pay-for-performance process on their own, rather than taking a policy stance of being absolutely against such a measure. Many US professionals work under such plans and this move would bolster the position of teachers as professionals. It is likely that pay-for-performance is going to be a future reality for teachers, whether the NEA wants it or not. Perhaps it would be better for the NEA to become involved in a process of creating these plans, rather than having these plans forced upon them.

While the AFT is the recipient of a more balanced portrayal within the national newspaper discourse, there are still a couple of recommendations specific to its organization that may help it to further counter negative media portrayals. First, the AFT needs to continue with and strengthen its positive relationship with *The New York Times*. This newspaper is a major supporter of the teacher organization and serves as a counterpoint to the highly negative reporting of *The Wall Street Journal*, making a continued positive relationship between the AFT and *The New York Times* an essential one. Additionally, the AFT could increase its portrayal of its research efforts. While the AFT engages in research, increases in the publication portrayal of its research activities would improve its professional image as an organization using its resources in a variety of ways to better public education.

There are also a number of actions that both the NEA and the AFT could take that might allow each group to more effectively counter portrayals of their organizations as self-serving and obstructive to school reforms. Because the use of free-market language

resonates so easily with the public, the NEA and the AFT should focus on portraying their reforms using similar language. This means finding ways to argue that their more social-justice oriented reforms are also beneficial in a capitalist market system. Additionally, both teacher organizations need to be more open in describing their lobbying methods. The exclusion of this discussion, even though both the NEA and the AFT make extensive use of this practice, may inappropriately suggest that they have something to hide. The NEA and the AFT, instead, need to continue their push for increased professional status by improving public trust in their organizations, and this greater transparency would be beneficial. An added step in this process would be to increase their efforts to police their profession and help to facilitate the removal of poor teachers, a process that the AFT appears to already have started with its new teacher evaluation and discipline procedures.

There are also a few ways in which the NEA and the AFT can create counter narratives, outside of their news releases and the national newspaper discourse, which could influence that way they are perceived by the public. Both organizations would benefit from taking advantage of the growing range of modern web resources – such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube – to disseminate more positive portrayals of their policy-related actions through this increasingly popular social media source. The NEA and the AFT could also encourage more grassroots public relations campaigns. With such large membership numbers, it should be possible to take these grassroots campaigns throughout the entire country, if their teacher organization members feel strongly enough about the need to change the public image of teachers. To accomplish this, perhaps the NEA and the AFT may need to start within by convincing their memberships that they can and need to change the public view of teachers, if they wish to have more influence in national education policy-

making settings. Lastly, the NEA and the AFT should create more working relationships with Republican government officials. By allowing public education to become a partisan issue, the ability to present reasoned explanations for education reforms can easily become lost in party politics. It would be naïve to suggest that all Republican ideas for education are bad ones. Furthermore, to position the teacher organizations as always opposed to Republicans is to say that these organizations are unable to work with fully half of the people who occupy influential government positions. This stance has contributed to the NEA/AFT inability to influence national education policy from the 1980s forward. If the NEA/AFT wish instead to increase their ability to influence national education policy, they may need to find ways to create common ground with more Republican government officials. As a suggestion, exploring policies centered on school choice (which the AFT is open to) would make it possible for the NEA and AFT to gain opportunities to participate in education policy-making initiatives with Republicans. To become more influential, the NEA and the AFT are going to need to bridge the major divide between their organizations and Republicans (regardless of which group may or may not be “right”) so that they can extend their influence beyond partisan politics and have influence regardless of which party is in charge of the US government.

In the end, there are multiple ways in which both the NEA and the AFT can act, and portray their actions, that would allow the organizations to more effectively counter national newspaper discourses that suggest they are self-serving and obstructive to school reforms. Better awareness of their negative representations, and how the teacher organization portrayal of their policy-related actions can influence this discourse, is the

first step in determining how to improve the professional status of teachers and move them toward a position as public intellectuals.

### **5.7 – LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

As a critical media study making use of a content analysis methodology, this study has four major limitations that need to be understood so that the study can provide the right information to the right audiences without making claims or being used in a manner that is beyond the research design.

The first limitation of this study stems from the choice of national level teacher organizations and national news media sources, within the United States, as the subjects of study. By choosing to focus on the national level, state and local level organizations are excluded. The nature of both teacher organizations and of the media sources at the state or local levels may differ considerably from what was found in this study and suggestions for changes made or inferred from this study may not apply in those settings. Additionally, in other countries, teacher organizations have very different types of interactions with their governments, their media, and the public. As such, this study does not capture those alternative settings and may not be useful in such settings.

The second limitation stems from the choice to use news releases from two teacher organizations and news articles from national newspapers for my study. While every attempt is made to capture the dissonance between the way the teacher organizations wish to be portrayed and the way in which they are actually portrayed, perspectives that fall outside of these two sources are not taken into account. While an effort could be made to

include these outside perspectives, it would increase the complexity of this already complex study to a level at which the analysis may become unwieldy.

A third limitation results from the different time spans used within this study. While the national newspapers articles were analyzed over more than a ten-year period of time, beginning in January of 2001, the teacher organization news releases only cover a six-month period of time, beginning in December 2010. While these different time spans were necessary for a number of reasons<sup>10</sup>, they create a situation in which a specific event in the six-month span of the teacher organization news releases could give the appearance of more emphasis on an issue than likely would have shown up over a longer period of time. As such, while this study can inform future policy portrayal decisions, this information should not be generalized beyond this time frame and these subjects of study.

A final limitation of this study stems from my own position and experience as a teacher, my transformative paradigm, and my choice of a critical content analysis methodology, in which I am the sole coder and interpreter. While I have made use of a content analysis method designed to address these limitations, all of these factors bring with them possible biases for the study, the most important of which is my own desire to see teachers become more integral participants in education policy-making. As such, I make no claims that what I present here is the only possible interpretation of the teacher organization portrayal, either in the national newspapers or in the NEA and AFT news releases. Rather, I acknowledge that my analysis and interpretations are informed by my given research biases, and I recognize and account for these attributes in my study design.

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<sup>10</sup> Efforts were made to capture only the most current representation that the NEA and the AFT wished to portray, rather than the ten-year evolution of their organizational behaviors. Additionally, the sheer volume of NEA and AFT news releases made a ten-year span far too large a sample.

### **5.8 – SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This content analysis leaves open a few avenues for future research that have the possibility of further strengthening the understanding of the nexus between public opinion and the organizational behaviors of teacher organizations. These include exploration of alternative sources within the media, a deeper look within the teacher organizations, and an alternative look at different levels of governance.

An exploration of alternative sources of media may illuminate different ways in which the organizational behaviors of teachers are presented. To further extend this study, it would be worthwhile to explore alternative sources of influential national news. This should include national news magazines (Newsweek, US News and World Report, etc.), news programming (NBC Nightly News, Fox News, etc.) and national news websites (CNN.com, MSNBC.com, etc.). All of these sources could be subject to a similar analysis process that would not only shed light on how these sources portray the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations, but these studies would also allow for a comparison across media sources, to determine if the biases demonstrated in the national newspaper discourse carry over to other news media outlets.

A deeper analysis into the teacher organizations may be helpful as well. This study made use of NEA and AFT news releases to determine how the teacher organizations wished to have their policy-related actions portrayed. Further research should compare this news release portrayal with other methods of determining how the organizations wished to be portrayed, such as interviews with NEA and AFT leadership and public relations members, review of NEA and AFT print publications, and/or an examination of

alternative parts of their organization websites. By exploring different aspects of these teacher organizations, it may be possible to determine ways in which their news releases may be inappropriately portraying their policy-related actions, inadvertently failing to accomplish the task of clearly communicating their organizational behaviors to the public.

A last recommendation for future research would be the application of this type of study to state and local levels of teacher organization governance. Teacher organizations have very different relationships with both the public and with the government at these lower levels and it would be useful to determine how state and local level teacher groups portray their policy-related actions and how these actions are represented in state and local news sources. These lower level representations inform public opinion in similar ways to the national news discourse; therefore, making connections between the levels would further illuminate the connections between teacher organization portrayal and public opinion.

By using further research to explore alternative ways in which the portrayals of the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations are formed, it becomes possible for the NEA and the AFT to strengthen their public relations campaigns. Increasing the strength of the NEA and AFT public relations campaigns would allow both organizations to better communicate their organizational behaviors to the public and would allow the teacher organizations to better counter negative portrayals that exist about their groups within popular media.

## 5.9 – PERSONAL STANCE

As this study comes to a close, it becomes necessary to reflect on how it has changed my personal outlook as a teacher, union representative, and education activist. After completing this study, I have a few pieces of advice to give to my colleagues within local education settings.

1) Teachers need to understand the importance of their professional image. It is no coincidence that people often think more highly of their local school district than they do of the school system in our country at large, because it is within the local school district that the community can see the reality of the education process, unfiltered by the media. The interaction between the public and teachers, that takes place at the local school setting, is an excellent opportunity for teachers to influence public opinion. Teachers need to go out of their way to counter negative media images, which portray teachers as self-serving and obstructionist, by presenting themselves as instigators of new ideas, willing to sacrifice for their students, and willing to illicit the inputs of outsiders to make informed education decisions. If teachers wish to be perceived of, and treated as professionals, they need to ensure that at all times they are presenting this professional image to the public.

2) Teachers need to pay attention to their teacher organizations and not take for granted the gains these organizations have made for teachers nationwide. Currently, many teachers enjoy benefits and salaries that would not have been possible without these groups, and while there is room to move forward, there is also room to regress if these teacher organizations continue to be weakened by attacks on collective bargaining rights. To this end, teachers need to mobilize and support their organization with grassroots



campaigning and voting in a united fashion for candidates that wish to better the education system through collaboration with the teacher organizations.

3) Lastly, teachers need to pay attention to which candidates they are casting their votes for. It is absolutely appropriate that teachers favor different candidates from different political parties, but they need to be aware of where each candidate stands when it comes to public education and what each candidate has in mind for the future of our education system. Voting based on one's values is important, but included in those values should be a concern for the power these candidates can have to change our entire education system. The NEA often says, "vote your job" when it comes to mobilizing NEA members to go to the polls. Instead I would say, "vote for our future," from the future employment of teachers to the types of schools students would be able to attend to the manner in which these students will be taught and assessed. A vote for a specific candidate is a lot more important than our jobs; it matters to our way of life.

### **5.10 - CONCLUSION**

As this final chapter comes to a close, I feel it is important to describe the ways in which this study contributes to broader academic and social fields, and where this journey has taken me as a researcher.

This study has answered a call from previous researchers (Baker, 1994; Elam, 1995; Hargreaves, 2000; Kellner, 2000) to critically analyze narratives present within media and to interpret how these narratives may influence groups of people, in this case, teachers. Through this study, a greater understanding has been gained of the way in which influential national newspapers frame and describe the policies of the two largest teacher

organizations in the United States, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). This study demonstrates that while there is an unfavorable bias that exists against the teacher organizations – an expected conclusion – that when one looks more closely, one finds that the policy-related actions of the teacher organizations are portrayed in different ways, and that it is possible for different organizations, representing the same types of professionals, to receive different portrayals. This demonstrates that the media message may not be as unified as some have argued, and that to really understand its influence, we must look deeper into what is said and about whom. This study also provides insight into ways in which each teacher organization represents their own policy-related actions, and ways in which they are more (or less) effective in gaining traction for their desired representation within the national newspaper discourse. Through this analysis, it has been possible to make suggestions for both the NEA and the AFT that would allow them to improve the ways in which they communicate their policy-related actions so that they may more effectively counter negative media portrayals while supporting a more positive perception of both teachers and their organizations. I believe that by improving the public perception of teacher organizations, these groups can gain more input in national education policy-making, and I feel that an important first step is for the NEA and the AFT to gain increased control over the way their organizations are presented in public discourses. My hope is that the greater understanding that results from this study will assist the NEA and the AFT in taking these early steps in the long process to improve their public image and improve their ability to influence the education policies increasingly generated at the national level of government.

As for my own personal journey, this dissertation has been nothing short of a life-changing endeavor. As I have watched my study evolve over more than four years of doctoral study, from grand but hardly defined ideas to the scalpel-like precision required of a doctoral student, I have watched this study transform and I have transformed with it. While I take pride in my own efficiency as a scholar, during this study I have learned both to slow down and to take account of subtle yet important details, which have allowed me to make an important academic contribution toward the improvement of my own profession. I have also learned about the profound sense of accomplishment that occurs, as the light at the end of the dissertation tunnel grows brighter with each passing step. While I am not sure what I will do with all the extra time I hope to soon have on my hands, I recognize that my learning is never complete, and that this dissertation serves as a foundation for my future scholarly endeavors.

### APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS RECORDING FORM

Article Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Article Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Article: \_\_\_\_\_

Does the article describe the NEA and/or AFT? \_\_\_\_\_

Which direction (favorable, neutral or unfavorable) does this article take, in reference to the NEA and/or AFT.

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Traits associated with the NEA and/or AFT.

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Methods associated with the NEA and/or AFT.

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Goals associated with the NEA/AFT.

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What specific terms are used to describe teachers and/or their organization?

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