

Investing in Education: Venture Philanthropy and the Marketized Practice of Educational Improvement

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ABSTRACT

Many contemporary policymakers and philanthropists interested in fixing problems in urban education look to business practices and market-based reforms. Venture Philanthropy (VP), draws its practices directly from the financial sector, using strategic investment to increase the capacity and achievement of funded organizations and to promote social goals. VP firms are increasingly a part of the education environment yet currently there is little empirical data on the specific meaning, ideas, and logic through which these organizations understand and investment in education, particularly urban education.

This research sought to answer the research question, *what is the theory of action of a venture philanthropy firm focusing on educational improvement and what new meanings and practices does it produce in one urban district?* This study collected data using embedded ethnographic methods including over 200 hours of observations, 21 interviews, and document collection creating a case study of a single education VP, the Center for Educational Advancement (CEA). Using Foucauldian disciplinary theory to analyze CEA's perspective on and practice of educational investment, this study found that CEA sought to transform the instruction and culture within its portfolio of urban schools by using the disciplinary practices of observation, judgement, and examination, thereby producing for its donors a student achievement return on investment.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many contemporary policymakers and philanthropists interested in fixing lingering problems in urban education look to business practices to inform their approach. From accountability systems to school choice and charter school competition, market-based reforms have reshaped the landscape of urban schooling. This dissertation used qualitative methods to examine an education non-profit that embraced market-based education reform and invested millions of dollars into urban schools. The model this and other organizations used, known as venture philanthropy, was drawn directly from the financial sector. It aimed to use strategic investment to increase the capacity of funded organizations to promote particular social goals. Venture philanthropy has become an increasingly important force in education policy and practice, yet researchers have only begun to examine these organizations. There is currently broad analysis of the field of education philanthropy but little empirical data on the specific meaning, ideas, logic, and practices through which education is understood and investments are made.

In this dissertation, a single venture philanthropy firm, the Center for Educational Advancement (CEA) was the subject of an immersive ethnographic case study, encompassing over 200 hours of observations and 21 interviews, aiming to address the question: *What is the theory of action of a venture philanthropy firm focusing on educational improvement and what new meanings and practices does it produce in one urban district?* This study chronicles and examines the manner through which CEA understood and produced a return on investment (ROI) for its donors. The improvement

and production of successful standardized student achievement test scores, considered to be the defining metric for both successful education practice and the future college and career success for students, was the return CEA promised to deliver on its donors' philanthropic investment.

CEA invested in a portfolio of schools that it believed would educate students to achieve positive testing outcomes. Consistent with the VP model outlined in (Gordon, 2014), CEA forged a partnership with their grantee schools that extended beyond just granting funds, but also into the workings of their grantees, and in the process, providing institutional resources, networks, trainings, and consulting. The investment team, staffed by former "successful" urban principals was tasked with proposing schools for investment, analyzing school and student performance data, creating and upholding grant agreement contracts, and observing and managing partners towards achieving benchmarked performance goals.

CEA and this investment team used specific types of discipline to shape the instruction and culture of their portfolio schools, with the intention to help schools achieve their performance goals and for CEA to demonstrate its desired ROI. The discipline CEA and its investment team conducted and promoted at its grantee schools, aligned with Foucault's (1977) analysis and discussion of how students are created and transformed as subjects through power and knowledge. The three techniques Foucault distilled from his theoretical examination of institutions - observation, judgement, and examination - were used both by CEA's investment team to manage their investments and as a model of instruction they wish to instill in their schools so they may positively transform students.

This research aimed to examine how venture philanthropy, as a model imported from the financial world, aligns with these disciplinary practices, using an economic frame of reference to identify, assess, and justify its investments in education. An investment firm, especially one that invests the money of external funders, must make its decision making clear and legible to those funders. Education is an extremely complex system of historical, ideological, material, and practical understandings. Numerous factors such as race and class considerations, education policy, teacher education and evaluation, curriculum and pedagogy, and monetary resources combine to make the problems of education seem intractable and current solutions seem ineffectual. The marketization of urban education through school choice has brought even more complexity to those trying to support the education of chronically underserved urban youth. Traditional urban public schooling has been criticized for opaque decision making and financial management while accountability and transparency is a proposed benefit of corporate style education reform. An investment strategy is ideally formed around a coherent use of information and a direct theory of action that leads to a desired result. This clarity of cause and effect and the ability to communicate the procedures of change are very appealing to business minded reformers who wish to improve the educational lives of children.

To work into a complex system, a domain of knowledge is crafted to make sense of the decisions being made. The appeal of financial investment logic is its ability to refine data and describe processes that create growth. Investors demand to know how and why their money is being spent, and when investing in education, results must justify this investment. An example of investment in education would be a reading protocol that has

demonstrated a testable increase in reading comprehension. With the understanding that this protocol improves measurable educational outcomes, it would be an effective investment to expand such a program and promote its use. In the abstract, this is a straightforward investment in a cause and effect relationship, however implicit assumptions are being made about education itself for such an investment to make sense to investors and to the public. To make measurable change within a complex system often requires that certain aspects of that system are highlighted, while others are elided. Oftentimes, these decisions are being made by and communicated to actors who have little experience in education. Flawed conclusions, unintended consequences, and ineffectual practices can occur when complex systems like education are treated with simplistic solutions. What does a successful investment in education look like? Does that investment improve educational practice, and/or does it reshape the practice of education entirely?

A brief example is the rise of standardized testing across the field of education. One of the benefits of standardized testing is that it gives real concrete data through which decisions can be made and assessed. In essence, standardized testing helps make sense of the complexity of education. Standardized testing is also a time-intensive instrument that defines the curriculum, pedagogy, and practice of education. If investment decisions rely exclusively on test scores, education as a complex human process is rearticulated and reduced to quantifiable metrics, requiring and perpetuating the practice of standardized testing. What is currently unknown is which (of many) ideas about education define an investment strategy and reciprocally, how does the practice of investing in education define the practice of education itself? This qualitative study of the

meaning making and practice of a venture philanthropy firm will bring to light the dynamics of this reciprocal relationship, specifically, how the conceptualization of education by those investing directly in schools and schooling crafts how education is understood and practiced.

Currently, many traditional public schools, charter schools, and private schools are receiving funds from private venture philanthropic investment. These investments have a dual function of both the articulation and dissemination of a domain of knowledge. The process of investment reflects a particular understanding of education itself while it promotes pedagogical practices related to that understanding. This research aimed to map out the terrain of that understanding, unearthing through qualitative empirical examination, the goals, parameters, and practices through which education is understood and produced in an investment context. In these ways, this study aimed to better articulate the manner in which a complex system like education is made clear to investors and to the public, and how that clarity is put into practice through instructional discipline.

Context

The history of philanthropic investment in education is a long one, reaching back to the days after the Civil War. Titans of industry like Rockefeller, Carnegie, Ford, and Rosenwald have each used their vast wealth to influence the policy and practice of education at all levels. The influence of private investment in education continues today with new names like Gates, Broad, Dell, and Walton (Gasman, 2012). This new generation of philanthropists, like their forbearers, are marshalling their vast wealth to directly influence how public education works for children in America. However, they

are facing sharp criticism that a wealthy few exercises control over a democratic institution, and through their money, power, and impact, a “billionaire boys club” is influencing the educational fate of a nation (Ravitch, 2016; Reckhow and Snyder, 2014; Scott, 2009; Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

Philanthropic donation has recently come under fire with calls for more progressive taxation and democratic involvement as an alternative to well-funded elites singularly promoting their agendas for the public goods. Anand Giridharadas, in his 2018 book *Winners Take All* critiques the use of philanthropy to fix social problems with the methods of capitalism, investment banking, and management consultancy, methods that he believes helped create problems of poverty and inequality, two of the social problems education philanthropy claims to address. Giridharadas argues that “business language has conquered the sphere of social change and pushed out an older language of power, justice, and rights” (27) and that those who have the power and wealth to address these problems get to determine the solutions, and oftentimes those solutions absolve philanthropists of their responsibility for the issues at stake. Education philanthropy is not immune from these criticisms as it is rare that philanthropic actors in education advocate for policy prescriptions that include a large-scale public investment in historically impoverished communities and school districts.

Instead, many of these influential philanthropists engage in a new form of philanthropic giving that has arisen in the last twenty years and draws its model from venture capital investment. “Venture philanthropy” is a term for the strategic investment in social enterprises with a focus on the impact of specific investment organizations in the production of social goods. The venture philanthropy model includes direct financial and

non-financial support, high engagement, multi-year commitments, capacity building, and quantitative performance measurement and analytics geared towards determining specific cause and effect relationships (Cummings and Hehenberger, 2011).

Venture philanthropy is considered an outgrowth of and stands in contrast to “traditional” or “old” philanthropy, epitomized by foundations like Ford and Kellogg that take a “field-oriented approach” to education philanthropy. This traditional approach to education giving is more comfortable funding a field of grassroots and community organizations who may approach a complex problem from differing angles, while granting these organizations freedom to problem solve without too much oversight (Tompkins-Stange 2016). The main differences between the traditional philanthropy of foundations and the new model of venture philanthropy lies in the desire of venture philanthropy firms to seek out investees directly, the detailed attention and even co-creation to the staff, models, and missions of the organizations in which they invest, and the use of formal and informal networks to pursue common goals (Gordon, 2014).

The Venture Philanthropy Model and Method

Many entrepreneurs and business executives are looking to familiar business approaches to use their wealth to generate social goods. Alongside development venture capital funds that have a social as well as financial bottom line, venture philanthropy firms utilize an investment formula more closely aligned with venture capital than traditional foundations. Venture philanthropy (hereafter referred to as VP) utilizes a much deeper involvement and a far more selective process than the application/award/return formula practiced in previous generations of philanthropy. The success and influence of the VP model has seeped into the modern philanthropic giving of the most powerful

education foundations. In this model, non-profits no longer apply for a single outlay of grant money, rather prospective organizations are often sought by the VP firm for a strategic and collaborative long-term partnership where the return on investment is measurable social improvement.

Like the venture capital projects from which VP draws its methods, VP firms seek only the organizations (which may be non-profits, social enterprises, or charities) which will yield the greatest return on investment, looking for strong models, management, and past successes (Fried and Hisrich, 1994). Many VP firms specialize in one or several closely aligned social problems so they can inform their mission and strategy and leverage the strength of their knowledge, expertise, and networks. Oftentimes drawing on networked connections for possible leads, information is collected on investees through a thorough vetting process.

Once a potential partnership is found, relationships are built allowing for both sides to perform due diligence into the history, staff, and capacity. A model of the VP partnership is mapped out and ideally both the VP firm and its partnering organization share helpful information. In interviews with prominent VP firms and their partners, this mutually beneficial two-way process is frequently cited as an important aspect of forging a successful working relationship. The VP firm learns more about its field of interest from its partner and the partner often gains managerial assistance; accounting, staffing, other funding, and access to an influential network, services typically provided through management consulting (Gordon, 2014). This relationship building and information sharing allows for an engaged and collaborative vision to emerge that ideally will lead to increased success. Early relationship building and two-way information sharing

commonly found in VP differs from traditional venture capital investments which seek to invest in ready to launch projects. The co-creative process within VP of developing an organization during the investment process is more closely aligned with “business angel” or “founding angel” partnerships (Gordon 2014).

As the partnership is being finalized, the investment relationship progresses into a more explicit co-creation process where decisions around investment criteria, leadership and management of the organization and the social return and exit strategy are modeled. Several forms of investment capital are considered: financial, social, intellectual, and symbolic. The leadership and staff of the investees are examined for strengths and weaknesses, flexibility, and receptivity to co-creation with the VP firm. Finally, a return on investment is envisioned; is the return on investment economic, social, political, or a mixture of the three? How can the social good outlast the investment window? Can continuous funding streams be procured? Can policy be enacted to ensure governmental support for the organization or initiative? The goal of VP, at least in the literature in review here is to create social change that can be “leveraged” beyond the life of the partnership or even the life of the recipient organization. This co-creation process is circular and iterative and “suggests that a deep kind of learning occurred between the philanthropy team and the potential investee” (Gordon, 2014, p. 96).

Final investment decisions are typically made by the foundation board who, in the case studies performed by Gordon (2014) very rarely rejected a funding proposal after the lengthy relationship building process described above. Outcomes, metrics, and measurements are agreed upon and timelines for the partnership are established in a formal contract. An interviewed chief executive noted that the contract is “a legal

agreement which is binding on both parties around key performance indicators and evaluation and our ability to terminate... what I stress is that if we were not changing the programs as we went along we would be doing the wrong thing” (Gordon, 2014, p. 98). Even though Gordon stresses the mutual relationship between VP firms and their investees, much of the critical scholarship of VP and foundation influence highlights uneven power dynamics, especially between VP social goals and democratic social goals (Lipman, 2011 & 2015; Baltodano, 2017; Saltman, 2012; Scott, 2009).

The cases studied by Gordon (2014) determined an exit when the partner organizations could provide their own revenue streams, a disengagement that was planned and understood by both parties. Partnerships could range up to five to ten years, but VPs contractually reserve the right to terminate the partnership if progress is not made, in the words of one philanthropist, “We are buying an outcome (a return) on children and that’s how we see it” (Gordon 2014, p. 99). The power dynamic of outcomes and returns lies not only between the VP and its partner but also between the VP and the communities they serve (Lipman 2011 & 2015, Baltodano, 2017, Scott, 2009).

Gordon’s research into specific VP firms is instructive in its analysis of the VP model. VP firms take pride in their deep commitment to, as well as investment in, their partners, highlighting that “In VP, the drive to maximize a social return may also be rooted in the emotional commitment of the philanthropist to make a difference with their personal wealth in a strategic, structured way. The personal identification (VPs have) with the investment is a strong driving force” (Gordon, 2014, p. 102). This personal care combined with an intention to co-create with and develop their partner organizations stands in contrast to the more removed approach of traditional philanthropy. What is lost

in much of the literature on market fundamentalism and technocratic managerialism in education is how this new style of “hands-on” investment patterns and shapes relationships and if and how power relations are manifested in venture philanthropic practice.

The policy prescriptions and educational practices funded by venture philanthropies have both proponents and detractors, especially in the contentious arena of urban education reform where class and race have and continue to play a profound role in who receives a quality education. Proponents believe that the sclerotic, inefficient and ineffective public education system has failed students for far too long and that new ideas and entrepreneurship can solve these perennial issues. Proponents of school choice and high accountability systems also generally support private philanthropy and parental responsibility (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Hess and Henig, 2015). Critics see public education as an abandoned system left to rot, where influence has been undemocratically stripped from citizens and sold to those who want to profit from the common good (Lipman, 2011 & 2015; Scott, 2009; Baltodano, 2017; Saltman, 2009 & 2014). Much of this debate is framed along ideological lines while too little is known of the actual decisions and practices that are shaping education. In the words of Fredrick Hess and Jeffery Henig’s introduction to *The New Education Philanthropy*, “For all the ink devoted to foundations... we know remarkably little about patterns of giving and the purposes funders seek to achieve” (2015, p.1). Within the context of this debate, it is especially important not just for researchers but for the public to understand the decisions made by those who have the power shape an important field like education. To address this gap in research and public knowledge, this study will examine how investments in

education are made and understood through an ethnographic and sociological case study of the practices and meaning making of a venture philanthropy firm.

Neoliberalism

The rise of the influence of education philanthropy, venture philanthropy, and education reform exists within a context of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism can be understood in many ways and with many points of interaction in our current education climate and this dissertation will use the following understandings of this term. Pauline Lipman describes neoliberalism succinctly in her book *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*, as “an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, discourses, and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and a sharp retrenchment of the public sphere” (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). Neoliberal economic and political theory argues that public goods, previously assured by the government, will be more successful if they are privatized, and that this private sector can provide social welfare more efficiently and effectively through the implementation of competitive markets. David Graeber further theorizes neoliberalism as governmental austerity, specifically a retrenchment of spending policies that benefit the most marginalized citizens, because such spending is “counterproductive” and “should be paired back or eliminated since they distort the workings of the market” because “the market itself will provide better solutions to these problems” (Graeber, 2009, p. 81).

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault examines the rise of neoliberal economic thought in Europe, specifically Germany and France, as a response to fascist, communist, and totalitarian modes of government. American economic thinkers during the same

period drew similar parallels to socialism while witnessing the government expansion of the New Deal, the “economic and social interventionism developed during (WWII),” and the expansion of the federal government after the war, especially the social programs implemented around poverty, race, and education (Foucault, 2010, p. 216). Neoliberalism as an ideology positions itself against this expansion of the powers of government, fearing a limitation of personal liberty and freedom. VP in American urban education would not be nearly as influential without the historical foundation of neoliberalism. This economic and political framework explains why many urban school districts have been reeling from austerity, privatization, and an infusion of market fundamentalist policies and practices and why philanthropic networks have filled in the space left by governmental cutbacks in education.

School Choice and the Urban Education Marketplace

For market-based solutions to public problems to work “efficiently,” sectors like public education formerly overseen only by the government must be opened to market forces. School choice as a policy and practice is the marketizing mechanism in urban education. Private capital investment in public education, beyond having a school, gym, or library named after a generous donor, requires the policy and the reality of public school choice for schools to be a potential market for VP investment. A rationale for school choice policy as a remedy to poorly performing school districts is that private investment into these districts would increase because investors and private capital would be more attracted to schools within a marketized environment as opposed to the traditional public-school district “monopoly” where investors have little oversight or accountability over their investments. Privately controlled public schools found in school

choice models, where parents are conceived as customers and schools are conceived as businesses, are therefore more conducive to investment strategies based on a marketized system.

Milton Friedman proposed the privatization of public schooling (as well as the voucher system) in his classic text *Capitalism and Freedom*, widely considered to be a foundational book of American neoliberal and market fundamentalist thought. One of his main complaints against the American public education system was that it was a monopoly that needed to be broken, thereby creating the market competition that would allow the sector to function at peak efficiency (Friedman, 1962). Friedman argued for the policies of school choice and public school privatization on several grounds. The first being that increased school choice would foster a new set of schools to meet the demand of discerning parents who wish to send their children to quality schools.

In Friedman's model, parents would be able to directly express their freedom and desires for the education of their children by withdrawing their children from schools that failed to meet their needs and enrolling in the best schools for them, regardless of locality. This consumer choice within a free market (in Friedman's analysis), generates competition among schools that is "far more efficient in meeting consumer demand than nationalized enterprises" (Friedman, 1962, p. 91). The 'denationalizing' of public schooling will also, in Friedman's view, increase class mobility by allowing those that value the education of their children to have the freedom to pursue better schools and not be restricted to those schools that reflect the class distinctions of their neighborhood. It is here that Friedman makes his case especially for poor urban parents who cannot move to wealthier suburbs, a perceptive analog for the current state of school choice which occurs

mostly in urban centers. Friedman claimed that poor households, if they so choose, can save money and buy a car of equal value to one available to a wealthy household, but they are unable to purchase education in the same manner. Friedman believed that education could operate with the same marketized accessibility and consumer choice as the automobile market (Friedman, 1962).

School choice among private education enterprises will also drive quality, variety, and innovation through healthy competition because, in Friedman's view "The problem is not primarily that we are spending too little money – though we may be – but that we are getting so little per dollar spent" (Friedman, 1962, p. 94). Friedman argues that this competition amongst schools will drive responsiveness to the supply and demand of market forces, the economic result of which being merit based salaries in the school and a more efficient use of public funds (Friedman, 1962). Friedman wants to provide parents with more freedom of choice among educational options, with only the bare minimum ensured by, but not administered by, the government. The current educational landscape in many urban cities that have embraced school choice policy align with Friedman's prescription. I wish to determine in this study the extent to which these ideas still resonate and how often the arguments Friedman outlined above are deployed to sell VP investment in education to the public, school leaders, and donors.

Friedman's economic and political theory has held sway over American public policy makers in many fields but his vision for education reform has become a reality in many cities, with charter providers competing with traditional public schools for the public money that follows student enrollment. John Chubb and Terry Moe took up Friedman's banner in their influential 1990 work, *Politics, Markets, and America's*

Schools, believing that the American public education system has two institutional issues that hamstring its success, a “bureaucracy problem and a politics problem.” These “problems” result primarily from the democratic control the public (government) wields in the education sector that stymies individual decision making (Chubb and Moe, 1990, p. 26). It took more than a decade for Chubb and Moe’s ideas to begin to influence not only business leaders, but also politicians and bureaucrats.

Neoliberal and Market Fundamentalist Education Reform

An example of neoliberal and market fundamentalist theory in action in American urban education was when former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Charles Zogby announced, after the poor testing results in some School District of Philadelphia schools, that “We believed that there was not the capacity on the ground to turn that situation around. We needed outside expertise... We believed the private sector could do a better job” (Bulkley et al., 2010, p. 130). Zogby’s statement is an apt descriptor of Freidman, Chubb, and Moe’s thinking deployed in public education. Philadelphia public schools have a history of underserving poor and minority students, providing lackluster education with few of the resources enjoyed by their suburban public school counterparts (Bulkley et al., 2010). However, these racial and class arguments were not noted in Zogby’s decision, it was the low test scores that prompted his desire to privatize public education in Philadelphia, a practice not suggested for public schools in wealthier Pennsylvania districts, districts which due to their increased resources and the social capital of the communities they represent, had no trouble passing the same standardized tests (Bulkley et al., 2010). Bulkley et al’s examination of education reform in Philadelphia, “One Step Back, Two Steps Forward: The Making and Remaking of “Radical” Reform in

Philadelphia” is a historical foundation for this research as it traces the effects of market fundamentalist understanding of public education as it played out in an urban district, from the formation of the charter school law in Pennsylvania in 1997 through the present incarnation of “portfolio management.”

In Philadelphia the shift “from government to governance” in education was crystalized in one moment in time, the state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia in 2002. Beginning in 2000 with Act 16, The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) was informed that it had three years to improve student academic achievement or else risk such a state takeover. Shortly thereafter, then Governor Tom Ridge, using budgetary pressure to gain the support of Mayor John Street, contracted Edison Schools, a for-profit EMO, to conduct a review of SDP operations and to propose how the District could streamline its services. Edison Schools, after stating that “the Philadelphia School District had spent 10 billion dollars “with no clear accountability for the results,” recommended the privatization of District schools and services. This policy was supported by Ridge, who refused to provide any more state funding unless the SDP agreed to more state oversight (Peterson & Chingos, 2009, p.8).

Edison Schools, with a consulting cost of 2.7 million dollars, also purposed a shift in leadership structure at the SDP. The state followed Edison’s recommendation by replacing the elected Philadelphia School Board with the School Reform Commission (SRC) in 2002. The SRC consisted of five members, three members appointed by the Governor (originally four), and two members appointed by the mayor. Securing, even after the mayor gained an extra appointment, district alignment with neoliberal state policies. The SRC then turned over 45 schools to EMO control, with a majority of those

schools allocated to for-profit EMOs (Byrnes, 2009). By this time, the State of Pennsylvania had already passed charter school legislation, forcing the district to perform oversight over several different types of schools, both traditional public schools, magnet schools, and privately managed charter schools.

This example of the rise of neoliberal public-school privatization, austerity, and school choice signals a strong shift in the power the government wields in the education field. It is a shift, “from government to governance” where the overarching success of free market ideology alters the role of parents from “public citizens” to “informed consumers,” and replaces publicly elected government entities with governance by experts and managers (Lipman, 2011, p. 13). Supporters of modern education reform don’t necessarily see this shift as an attack, but rather as an improvement. Those who share in Friedman’s belief in the reduced role of government see a reasonable solution in market fundamentalism; that public goods, previously assured by the government, will be more successfully managed if they are privatized, and that this private sector can provide social welfare, (in this case, education) more efficiently and effectively through the implementation of competitive markets.

Technocracy, Managerialism, Surveillance, and Education/Investment Data

VP investment could not occur without quantifiable education metrics (Crouch, 2011). These metrics provide for the education investor a legible set of benchmarks and goals that frame the investment of capital into schooling, and they determine who receives investment. Finally, these metrics are the language of the return on investment (Gordon, 2014). Several scholars believe this practice of data-based educational accountability is a form of surveillance that conditions a specific type of conduct over its

field of influence (Ball, 2013, Apple, 2010; Allen, 2013). Three research questions in this study address the use of accountability data to manage and determine investments; *What information is used to determine investment strategies? What accountability practices are in place to oversee recipients? And how is a return on investment calculated and understood?* Since VP implements a more involved investor/partnership style, it is helpful to examine current literature on the use of data as a means of disciplinary management.

Surveillance is a central concept of the Foucauldian theory of disciplinary technology (Foucault, 1977). When applied to education and modern education policy and reform, surveillance is often discussed in terms of accountability or audit practices (Apple, 2010). Previously understood as a diagnostic tool for measuring student achievement, education data has become a signifier for the *practice* of educational excellence and the primary way that education professionals are held to account for student learning (Mehta, 2013; Ball, 2013, Apple, 2010; Allen 2013; Trujillo 2014).

Information is a prerequisite to evaluating the superiority or inferiority of business actors in a market-based system and a key component of individual choice (Crouch, 2011). The evaluation of educational outcomes has been used for years now to “improve” the quality of education in the public sphere, but while measuring outcomes is a popular accountability measure in the business realm, knowledge assessment testing has become the measure of educational success for schools of all types (Apple, 2010, Ball, 2013; Allen, 2014).

Education accountability in America, like student testing, is not a modern development. It extends as far back as the Progressive Era, when district superintendents

first became “CEOs” using managerial techniques and early forms of student testing to efficiently use resources and track student outcomes (Trujillo, 2014). State level education accountability systems also grew in scope during the Civil Rights Era in order to improve schooling for all, especially poor and minority students. The current trend in education accountability begins with the politics of Reagan and Thatcher, making our current system the third round of such reforms (Mehta, 2013).

These three waves of education reform all share what Jal Mehta defines as an overarching technocratic logic, a logic that aims to “make systems function more efficiently” but most importantly a “logic (that) does not draw on knowledge from the sector but rather applies general principles of management to whichever sector may be under consideration” (Mehta, 2013, p. 7). It is important to note that as the application of technocratic logic moves from economic and business applications to education, it defines the standards, activities, and metrics within that field, creating a locus of control external to the education field, situated in a public/private alliance driven by economic reasoning (Ball, 2013; Scott, 2009).

Student knowledge assessments are themselves not an outgrowth of market fundamentalist policies, for examination has been a central part of public education since its inception (Trujillo, 2014; Mehta, 2013; Foucault, 1977). However, the expansion of student knowledge assessments as a quality indicator of the education system: including teaching, learning, curriculum, schools, school districts, and national education systems, are an outgrowth of market fundamentalism and its accompanying structure of technocratic management (Baltodano, 2017; Scott & Jabbar, 2014). The education provided through marketized consumer choice is defined through audit, accountability,

visibility, and surveillance. Understanding how knowledge about the process of education is bound by this domain will give greater clarity to the mechanisms of venture philanthropic investment.

VP investment, within a market fundamentalist governmentality, utilizes “audit culture” as a political technology to manage the education it provides. Through the surveillance of educational outcomes, accountability technologies shape schooling (Ball, 2013; Allen, 2014). The terms audit and account are synonymous, and both are derived from financial management, making their application in the educational field a direct example of the penetration of technocratic logic and methods. The use of the terms audit and accountability have migrated away from finance and are now foundational pieces of modern management techniques and market fundamentalist governmentality, where they have been “released from (their) traditional moorings, blown up in importance and now, like a free-floating signifier, hover over virtually every field of modern working life” (Shore and Wright, 1999, p. 558). Data driven investment practices can define a domain of knowledge, knowledge used to justify ways of “thinking and acting” and provide the “epistemological foundation for the rise of new institutions and the discourses that sustain them and legitimize their activities” (Shore and Wright, 1999, p. 559).

In education, the discourse of accountability perpetuates itself and pursues its own reasoning through concepts like ‘performance review’, ‘transparency’, ‘effectiveness’, ‘best practice’, ‘stakeholder’, and especially ‘outcomes’ and ‘results.’ Market fundamentalist governmentality, as seen through charter school policy, claims to promote market actor innovation. However, educational audit culture only allows for a variability of means while strictly controlling the end goals; where teaching practices, the

knowledge taught, and the means of assessment are all incentivized, produced, and enforced by external funding and management, combined with the institutional pressure of free market competition (Baltodano, 2017; Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Trujillo, 2014).

Restructuring public education on free market competition requires the production of a great deal of information, to ensure that improvement is constant, and that public and private investment has a net return on investment. Central to determining “improvement” in education is the proliferation of audit culture, which through surveillance and measurement reduces the practice of education to quantifiable parts that allow for non-educators to understand and manage from a position outside of the school (Mehta, 2013). Michael Apple’s (2010) article, “The Measure of Success” outlines the use of “audit culture” in education to make both teaching and learning visible to oversight and management. The terms audit and account are theoretically apropos for use by a venture philanthropy firm that presumably conducts its investments in education in this manner.

Chubb and Moe (1990), Milton Friedman (1962), and fellow market fundamentalist thinkers believed that public sector teachers and public schooling, protected by unions and stifled by bureaucracy, suffer from a lack of incentive to perform at their best. As market fundamentalism presumably reshapes parents into education consumers, so too does it theoretically reshape teachers from a community of practitioners into individual agents who will only increase their measurable performance if they are both given the right financial and professional incentives and constantly held to account through the education metrics they produce. My aim with this research is to determine if venture philanthropy investment generates a similar audit culture hierarchy

and how that relationship is perceived by both VP employees and the recipients and administrators of their funding.

Within the contentious arguments and ideological assumptions surrounding education philanthropy today, there is a lack of empirical scholarship that directly approaches the thinking behind venture philanthropic investment decisions and the practices that VPs in education use to nurture returns. The goal of this case study is to address this blind spot in current education scholarship by understanding the logic and practice of investment and management within a single venture philanthropy firm in a specific urban education environment, with the belief that this research will speak to larger trends in the field.

This research seeks to address how a specific set of logics, discourse, and practice are deployed in a context of investment in education. Though these themes may have been addressed generally in prior research, there is limited empirical work on the topic. There are few qualitative studies examining venture or “new philanthropy” in education and these are primarily concerned with the influence of philanthropic activity on the education sector broadly. This research will probe how a singular venture philanthropy firm rationalizes the practice of education to make the most “effective” investment decisions.

Prior to this study, it had yet to be researched how the distillation of such an intimate and human phenomenon as education into investment data was understood by those who make investment decisions. It was also unknown if and how this logic shapes the practice of those schools, programs, and educators who receive investment funds. Current literature indicated how philanthropic influence has had an outsized effect on

public education policy and practice, but we must also understand the epistemic domain that explains why these reforms have captured the imagination of the philanthropic sector and how that epistemic domain was operationalized in the practice of investment management. It is valuable to understand this “regime of truth” because the practice of education, specifically public education, shapes future generations, including their knowledge, their social bonds, and their civic identity.

This study will also empirically examine claims made in the existing literature on venture philanthropy and its relationship to the governmentality of market fundamentalism in ways not currently found in present scholarship. “Success” and “improvement” in education are ideas, the definition of which, craft a reality of practice. Foucault’s disciplinary theory will be brought to bear to interpret these discursive elements as well as the practice and pedagogy that these ideas engender. Foucauldian analysis of the field of education practice supported by venture philanthropy will help this research track the multiple locations of interpretation in an investment cycle and how those interpretations shape what counts as an improvement in urban education, and in that way define a domain of practice in urban education.

This research also addresses whether venture philanthropy conceives of students as subjects or objects in their investment practice. This study will examine the power dynamics in venture philanthropic investment in education to probe whether this relationship truly, as some researchers believe (Baltodano, 2017; Lipman, 2015; Saltman, 2014; Scott 2009), seeks to control and remake urban education and the students involved. In this control, are students’ understood by venture philanthropic discourse and practice as active participants in their own educational journey, or are they the

commodified and objectified products, a return on the investment of wealthy donors? This research will use qualitative methods to engage with these deeper questions of modern education.

Objectives

The aim of this research is to understand the theory of action of an education-focused venture philanthropy organization. Specifically, this study examines: how investments are made, what metrics and conceptions the firm uses to guide investment, the investment strategy itself, how the firm communicates its work, how the firm conceives of the students it serves. Much of the theory and analysis of this type of investment organization assumes that they function on purely economic and financial evaluations, a perspective on education that some theorists believe is antithetical to education as a democratic and personally enlightening project (Reich 2010, 2019; Lipman, 2011 & 2015; Baltodano, 2017; Saltman, 2014). An overarching goal of this study is to provide empirical data on the aims, perspectives, and practices of venture philanthropy to provide more evidence to this conversation. The objective of this research is to empirically examine the ideas about education that a venture philanthropy firm brings into their work, if and how those ideas are mobilized through practices and methods of investment, and the impact these decisions have on education pedagogy, policy, and practice.

Significance

The scholarship into the relatively recent field of venture philanthropy in education has begun to analyze several aspects of the sector, including: the influence of modern

philanthropy on education politics, policy, practice, and research; the sustainability of philanthropic “institutional entrepreneurship” in education; the effect of philanthropic influence on teacher training and teacher working conditions; and the class relations involved in the philanthropy of wealthy donors exerting control over a (presumably democratically managed) public institution. The significance of this research is that it aims to be the first qualitative case study of the connection between how venture philanthropy makes sense of the complex field of education, and the relation that understanding plays in the process and practice through which venture philanthropy invests in the education sector in an American urban setting. Specifically, this study will focus on the logic, knowledge, and practices deployed to make a reasoned investment in the education space and the types of investments made within this theoretical framework.

This research will be the first of its kind to document the decision-making process of a venture philanthropy firm through an entire year long investment cycle. Much has been written about the overarching structural and organizational patterns of venture philanthropy in education (a summary of which will be included in the literature review of this study), from economic evaluations of human capital, to political economy, to managerial and technocratic institutional dynamics, to policy advocacy. Philanthropy in education has had a long and large influence in American urban education and as such there has been excellent scholarship on these structural dynamics. However, the day to day decision making practice of the investment model of venture philanthropy has never been chronicled in detail to determine the depth of these structures, to what extent a theory of market fundamentalism for instance, actually permeates the thought process and

the workings of those who decide which schools and programs should receive investment.

It is through these investment choices that a theory of educational improvement will surface, a theory however, based on observations of both the practice and process of investment decisions, and the extent to which investment choices determine what happens in schools and with children. “Quality education” is a hotly debated concept and it will be of interest to researchers in the field, to families who must choose the school for their children, and to others in the philanthropic community how this firm (and presumably others like it) conceive of education, especially when they are investing large sums of money based on these conceptions.

Hopefully, this research can diversify the current thinking around philanthropy, where it appears that lines have already been drawn and opposing camps are only looking to reinforce their positions. Exploration rather than evaluation will guide this study. Because we know so little about precisely how investments are made in education, this study will seek first to diagram how the venture philanthropy approach operates in practice. Even if venture philanthropy has only a minor influence over education practice, firms have significant resources at their disposal that they direct within a perpetually resource deprived urban education landscape. The significance of this study is its ability to shed light on how these resources are allocated, the relationship of investment to education practice, and the way that education as an endeavor is rationalized by those who can invest in its improvement.

Research Questions

This study will be guided by one overarching research question and ten sub-questions:

What is the theory of action of a venture philanthropy firm focusing on educational improvement and what new meanings and practices does it produce in one urban district?

- *How does an education venture philanthropy firm make investment decisions?*
- *How is education understood and envisioned in this model?*
- *What educational practices are encouraged in this model?*
- *What accountability practices are in place to oversee recipients? How do they relate to disciplinary management?*
- *What disciplinary techniques are used to manage instruction? How are those techniques operationalized in practice?*
- *In what ways does investment in schools and their programming reflect investment strategies and practices in the business world?*
- *How do investors, board members, employees, and grantees view their mission and their involvement with this model and with education as a sector and a practice?*
- *What information is used to determine investment strategies? How is this knowledge produced?*
- *How is a return on investment calculated and understood?*
- *What role do students play in this model? How are they envisioned?*

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The writings of Michel Foucault, specifically his focus on the productive power of disciplinary practice, provide the theoretical grounding for this study. Though Foucault only briefly turned his analysis to education directly, his work has been brought to bear in critical education studies by subsequent researchers such as Stephen Ball and Ansgar Allen. Similarly, I rely heavily on Foucault's work on the interplay between individuals, society, governmental and institutional power, and on the production of truth and knowledge. Foucauldian theory provides a mode of inquiry into how an influential set of actors made sense of the complex dynamics of urban education and how through that sensemaking and implementation of disciplinary technologies, these actors could produce knowledge about education that can shape both the institutional meaning of education and its practice.

Michel Foucault's work as a theorist - though he has analyzed a wide variety of subjects such as madness, discipline, sexuality, pleasure, the penal system, and in more recent translations of his lectures, the instruments of government and the management of populations - rotates around a central axis, the human will to make the world intelligible and thus manageable. His conception of truth is one that is deeply connected to power, both institutionally and individually. For many researchers, truth is an aspect of objects and processes in the world, an aspect that has a separate existence which waits silently until it is uncovered by anyone who implements the proper method. Truth, as conceptualized by Foucault, is a productive process that seeks to create an order to things,

a pattern to impose rules and laws so that meaningful, effective, and ordered interventions can be implemented (Foucault, 1966).

What Foucault's theory brings to this research is the importance of exploring and examining how discursive ideas about fields of knowledge provide theoretical frameworks that make sense of complexity and how disciplinary technologies built on these frameworks can produce knowledge and exercise power. An example of this sense making in education is standardized testing, a diagnostic tool that allows for a whole industry of education reform to optimize students and education practice. Foucault argues that these regimes of truth and order, through the implementation of truth-producing technologies like standardized testing, are *productive* forms of power that craft the institutions and the people that they examine. Venture philanthropy, through its investments, is creating new knowledge about education itself; its purpose, its forms, how it is practiced, and the relation of education to common goals of government and society.

Venture philanthropy can invest coherently in the education field because it produces and utilizes a set of knowledge and beliefs on which it builds a theory of action. Some of these beliefs are explicit, such as the use of standardized testing as a valid and effective measurement of student knowledge and education accountability. Implicit however, is the belief that standardized testing is required to determine measurable returns on investment, thus making the education process itself manageable to external actors like a VP firm. Investment choices within a field of options can not only point to the broad educational goals and aims of investors, but they can also point to the way in which students, through the processes of education, can be conditioned by the educational practices and technologies of investing.

Education has always concerned itself with the formation of both individual students and populations of students, and in this way, it is a field ripe for Foucauldian analysis. Venture philanthropic investment through their involvement with a portfolio of investments including schools, programming, talent development programs, and sector innovations, is a relatively new player in the production of educational knowledge. Foucault's theory will attune this research to how venture philanthropy is producing knowledge about urban education, how this knowledge production is shaping education practice, and what that means for educators and for students.

Foucault builds his theory within a historical context and it is beneficial to this research that he maps out the rise of economic thinking and its migration to other forms of social analysis. In his work *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault uses the Greek term "episteme" to describe a regime of truth that defines "what works" in a field like education, writing, "in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice (Foucault, 1966, p. 168). Venture philanthropy operates within and reproduces a market fundamentalist episteme. Foucault traces the rise of this market fundamentalist framework, an episteme that, along with the productive power of institutions to impose order onto diffuse practices, gives this research a template for an examination of venture philanthropic investment in education.

Whether it is the penal, medical, or education system, epistemes, or domains of knowledge and truth, craft the interpretations, define the limits of action, and structure the causal understanding of a social discipline. The recent history of education reform in America has brought with it a new market fundamentalist episteme, in which a set of

marketized policies exist to improve urban education. Where previous epistemes in education placed the emphasis of reform and improvement within a dialogue of civil rights and the effects of poverty, current thinking, most concentrated in urban education, has shifted to concepts of school choice, market accountability, and the efficient spending of public money.

This episteme surrounds and flows through how governments understand, interact with, and produce their citizens, an “art of government” Foucault calls governmentality. These three Foucauldian concepts; the episteme, governmentality, and the productive disciplinary framework of observation, judgement, and examination, will inform both how this research will proceed and how collected data will be analyzed. I will turn to Foucault, who, in the collection of his lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010), puts these practices in their historical and institutional context, within a governmentality of market fundamentalist policy.

Governmentality

Education venture philanthropy sits in a fairly novel form of governmentality or “the art of governing,” one that Foucault, in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, calls neo-liberalism. In his analysis, Foucault places neo-liberalism as a return to, and a rearticulation of, the liberal ideal of individual sovereignty, subjectivity, and citizenship. Foucault is using the term neo-liberal to describe a new relation of the subject to their government, which specifically draws on the skepticism of liberal theorists like David Hume and Adam Smith, a skepticism based in the belief that sovereign/governmental knowledge can never properly understand the mechanisms of the market or the human subject. Foucault had a particular understanding of the term neo-liberalism, and in the late 1970s when Foucault

was outlining its theoretical origins, very few scholars were using the term. Today however, neo-liberalism has become an all-encompassing signifier and a theoretical framework of the modern age, and as such has lost much of its specific analytical salience (Dunn, 2015; Venkatatesan et al, 2015). For clarity and relevance, the theoretical framework of this research will discard the term neoliberalism in favor of market fundamentalism, a theory which places the ideal market, the ideal participants in that market, and economic analysis as the primary understanding of social and political relationships. Market fundamentalism, as it focuses on the practices employed by VP actors in education, has more explanatory value for this project than the broader context alluded to in the term neoliberalism.

As mentioned earlier, in his lectures collected in the *Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault examines American economic thinkers combatting what they saw as heavy-handed government authority while witnessing the expansion of the New Deal, the “economic and social interventionism developed during (WWII),” and the expansion of the federal government after the war, especially the social programs implemented around poverty, race, and education (Foucault, 2010, p. 216). Market fundamentalism as an ideology therefore, positioned itself against this expansion of the powers of government, fearing a limitation of personal liberty and freedom that ideally could be regained through the primacy of the free market.

One of the ideological shifts from classical liberal thinking to its neo-liberal manifestation is the expansion of economic analysis and evaluation into areas of public life once considered outside of the domain of economic activity, with the marketization of urban education being a prime example. This shift in governmentality reflects a deep

ideological belief in the ability of markets to manage public life and the common good. Central to this understanding is the concept of the “free market,” understood as an “economic rationality” based on the freedom of individuals to choose among competing interests, the total competition of which internally regulates their value (Foucault, 2010). This rationality creates a reciprocal relationship between the governors and the governed precisely through the centrality of individual consumer/citizen agency.

The concept of market fundamentalist governmentality is useful to this research because for Foucault, market fundamentalism is a “grid of economic and sociological analysis” that produces its own legibility of the subjects that act within its purview (Foucault, 2010, p. 218). The ideal marketplace, and its concurrent analysis and knowledge production, has become the field on which the game of urban education is played. Rather than having the government manage all urban public schools directly, urban public education has become a market of school choice among publicly and privately managed school options. The governmentality of urban public education has reshaped itself along marketized lines where parents and students exercise their educational citizenship primarily through consumer choices rather than civic participation.

A market evaluation of educational opportunities demands a level playing field, one where competitive claims can be made, justified, and communicated, leading to the production of marketized educational knowledge. A market fundamentalist governmentality creates and maintains that field of play through opening up a previously contained public education system to marketized choice and competition, importing discourse and knowledge from the finance and business management domain, and

promoting that episteme throughout the system, to the point where all schools become concerned with “growth,” “branding,” “evaluation and accountability,” and “institutional alignment.”

Venture philanthropy is perfectly suited to invest in and manage education in such a system and it is worth researching, in the context of this relatively new governmentality, the empirical realities of venture philanthropic investment, one that is concerned with economic growth and the economic analysis of its subjects as individuals and as populations. This research will follow Foucault’s theoretical framework to determine the relationship between the discourse and practice of a single venture philanthropy firm and the surrounding ecosystem and episteme of market fundamentalist governmentality.

Producing and Reinforcing an Episteme: Discipline, Knowledge, and Power

This research aims to explore the episteme of venture philanthropic investment in education through a close institutional case study of its discourse and practice. The primary focus of this research will be CEA’s use disciplinary technologies of accountability, or as Foucault puts it in his chapter on educational transformation, “hierarchical observation,” “normalizing judgement,” and “examination” (Foucault, 1977). A theme that runs through Foucault’s work is the use of knowledge by institutions, both governmental and private, to organize and manage populations. For example, Foucault examined the use of law and the definition of criminality in connection with the rise of the prison in *Discipline and Punish* and the intersection of the law and medical knowledge in the institutionalization of the mentally ill in *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1977, 1965).

Surveillance is a disciplinary technology that is interrelated with observation, judgement, and examination, yet Foucault reminds us to not to mistake these technologies for their desired effects, “These mechanisms can only be seen as unimportant if one forgets the role of this instrumentation, minor but flawless, in the progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of individual behavior” (Foucault, 1977, p. 173). The goal of discipline is to make its object into a knowable entity, separate and distinct from its contemporaries and surroundings, accountable to its own separate and particular behaviors and knowledge. Because once the truth of a subject is known, it can become a feature of and for power.

When he turns his attention to institutional education in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault rightly predicted the rise of examination and testing as signifiers of educational transformation, writing, “We are entering the age of infinite examination and of compulsory objectification” (Foucault, 1977, p. 189). Bolstered with computing technology and the rise of “big data” analysis, modern American education has elevated the knowledge examination to new heights of importance and interpretive power. Foucault might argue that these examinations do not merely reveal a truth about students’ ability to read or understand math, rather these examinations produce a knowable child who can be open to intervention and disciplinary adjustment. In the case of venture philanthropic investment, these examinations occur through accountability measures (often student test scores and various other quantitative metrics), which themselves produce or assist in the production of ways of educating and managing student knowledge and thus students themselves. CEA extends this visibility to its portfolio of schools, using observation and judgement to supplement its examination of instruction,

using the knowledge produced through this discipline to pursue reforms where schools are insufficiently producing “successful” students.

The examination is a productive endeavor, designed to create knowledge of the subject being examined. Examination is familiar to all who have traveled through modern education, and one of the most profound and useful critiques in Foucault’s corpus for education research is his critique of the examination itself. Made explicit in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault traces the historical use of the examination and its practice in (Western/European) society. A key function of discipline and its power, examination became one of the main forms of institutionalized social remediation. This new social training required technologies designed in multiple sites such as prisons, mental institutions, hospitals, barracks, and schools, and this array of diffuse technologies formed a new sort of power that Foucault named “disciplinary” (Allen, 2013).

Disciplinary power therefore is as equally productive as it is repressive, it serves to mediate and remediate subjects, to create, repair, and locate them, “one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique... (discipline) arrests or regulates movements” (Foucault, 1977, p 218). Discipline not only fixes the knowledge of a subject, but discipline is also concerned with a control of the body as well through “spatial distribution,” for example in the correct bodily positions or movements found in prison registers or attendance records. Spatial distribution can also include the sequencing of activities through time, as seen in a bell schedule or a course curriculum. Bodies and subjects are thus organized, understood, and transformed through a “composition of forces” (Foucault, 1977, p. 161).

A Transformational Disciplinary Framework

For Foucault, the goal of the scientific method is to not only understand the world but to act into it, to test the cause and effect relationships that define it. Foucault argues that this process cannot be separated from power, for power involves the constitution of meaning and order, creating a discourse that defines power relations and an instrumental model of knowledge (Foucault, 2001). Foucault is especially adept at tracking how science, legality, and institutional frameworks produce a knowable human subject that can be controlled and managed. Power and knowledge are nearly indistinguishable for Foucault because they both arise from a will to control the chaos of the world, and particularly for this project how to govern (and educate) the chaos and variance of a human population. Power works through a governmental and institutional apparatus to produce knowable subjects and populations, which in American public education is accomplished in large part through observation, judgement, and particularly examination.

Venture philanthropic investment can be analyzed through Foucault's understanding of the productive power and organizing principle of discipline. To improve their school investments, CEA and its investment team engaged in the forms of discipline Foucault outlined in his education focused chapter in *Discipline and Punish*, "The Means of Correct Training," that of observation, judgement, and examination. This study determined that the goal of CEA's investment was to improve the test scores of students, and to do so the team contractually defined and engaged in these three disciplinary procedures to manage that improvement. CEA's contracted relationship of investor to investee included observations of school instruction, both a judgement of school instructional and cultural practices and a judgement of school performance data against

benchmarked goals, and the examination of school data and school leadership. To guide the observational and judgmental practices they would employ in their school visits to shape instruction, the investment team would work back from the results of student achievement examination. The discipline of CEA's management would result in a suggested instructional model that itself replicated the disciplinary framework CEA employed, promoting observation, judgement, and examination to improve educational outcomes.

Investment decisions and the management of investments require knowledge, and knowledge requires observation, judgement, and examination. CEA's investment in education centered on making the education at the grantee schools knowable so they could properly manage school instructional practices and outcomes. The disciplinary processes Foucault outlines in *Discipline and Punish* can be seen as nefarious, but this research seeks to avoid, as Foucault often did, characterizing discipline as morally wrong or inappropriate. Whether you believe discipline, as outlined by Foucault, is good or bad, modern urban education as a field is deeply attuned to "audit," "oversight," "accountability," and "discipline." While these terms are used frequently in education reform discourse, they reveal how deeply surveillance and examination continue to shape the practice of education, both institutionally and pedagogically, making Foucault's theory of disciplinary frameworks a useful tool in this research.

One of the research questions this study seeks to answer is: *How is education understood and envisioned in this (venture philanthropic) model?* The theoretical framework outlined above includes several features, the governmentality of market fundamentalism as a field for an educational evaluation and intervention, the power of

regimes of truth like market fundamentalism to frame an epistemic understanding of education, and the disciplinary power of observation, judgement, and examination to create and enact those fields of knowledge into the world. This ethnographic research will take this Foucauldian theoretical framework as a both a background when exploring the conceptual foundations and investment practices of the venture philanthropy field, and as a structure for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review will consist of two parts. The first will be a review of the literature with a focus on the methodology and empirical data of studies on venture philanthropy and its influence on education policy and practice. The second will be an overview of the gaps in the current literature that will be addressed by this study. The goal of this literature review is to not only describe the current scholarship on venture philanthropy in education, but to also probe how scholars have researched issues within venture philanthropy and education and what concrete knowledge has been produced on the subject. The review will show that this study will address current research gaps through both its interpretive lens and empirical data.

One of the difficulties in producing a literature review on venture philanthropy in education is that it involves several disparate literatures. There is literature on venture philanthropy and its effect on education as an institution, however some of this scholarship is theoretical and ideological, examining the systemic effect of philanthropy and venture philanthropy in promoting neo-liberalism and market-based solutions in and through education reform. There is also set of literatures that draw on empirical data to make their assessments about philanthropic influence in education policy and practice, but this literature covers various topics in education and not investment as a discrete practice. There is also scholarship within philanthropic and non-profit journals on venture philanthropy as a practice and how to improve its production of successful outcomes. In this literature review, I will cover these disparate groups of literature individually before I highlight the gaps in the literature and how this research will address those gaps.

Ideological Critique of Philanthropy and Education Reform

Much of the literature on philanthropy and education is characterized by its ideological social critique of the broader philanthropic community and its interest in fixing common social problems. In *Winners Take All* Anand Giridharadas chronicles his experience moving in wealthy philanthropic networks like the Aspen Institute and Davos. In his work, he interviews philanthropists, staff of philanthropies, and “thought leaders” that service the industry. Giridharadas paints a critique of modern philanthropy as an aspect of market fundamentalist social change where the paradigm of this change is restricted to marketized solutions involving people as atomized and self-interested actors. He also charges the philanthropic community with trying to launder, through their philanthropic giving, the often counter-social business practices that lead to current wealth hoarding and social ills. In short, Giridharadas is claiming that the philanthropic community is patting itself on the back for trying to fix social problems without taking responsibility for their role in creating these same social problems. While his work only touches on education, it provides illuminating data on the donor class that gives to education philanthropy.

There is a thread of research on philanthropy and education that mirrors Giridharadas’ social critique in an education context. Pauline Lipman (2011 & 2015) and Kenneth Saltman (2009, 2011 & 2014) approach philanthropy in education as an effort by the wealthy to exert their influence over the education sector. Lipman (2015) argues the VP domination of urban education policy is part of a colonial project, a project to capture and control black and brown urban environments through land use, gentrification, and urban education. Saltman (2009 & 2011) turns his attention to specific philanthropies

like the Eli and Edyth Broad Foundation, asserting that the social and political context of education has been dominated by wealthy philanthropists who impose market forces onto education practice. Lipman and Saltman are joined by Ravitch (2016) and Klein (2007), in building an argument that wealthy interests forced the implementation of market fundamentalist governmentality to capture the public education system. Likewise, Baltodano (2017) and Rodgers (2015) argue that the influence of powerful education philanthropies over education policy and practice is a threat to schools as democratic institutions. This thread of research is useful as a literature review of the topic of philanthropy and education and builds a case for a structural and class-based critique of power, and I interpret these works as an ideological project to present a specific interpretation of education reform. I aim in this study to provide empirical data to test the validity of this overarching political narrative and to provide nuance to the academic discussion.

Philanthropy, Education Policy, and Institutional Reform

Other literature has examined how the marketized ideology of modern philanthropy is manifested into education policy and practice. Rob Reich in his book *Just Giving: Why Philanthropy is Failing Democracy and How It Can Do Better* (2018), brings together research on the tax incentives given to philanthropic donation and analyzes it using a democratic political philosophy lens. He argues that current policy on charitable giving is often anti-democratic and predisposed to plutocracy as philanthropy in the modern age has become a 50 billion dollar a year tax haven for the wealthy (Reich, 2018). Reich argues that the wealthiest donors are making philanthropy into a political weapon, funneling dark money through social welfare organizations or 501(c)(4)s where

wealthy philanthropists like Mark Zuckerberg, Pierre Omidyar, and Laurene Powell Jobs are setting up limited liability companies (LLCs) at least partly to avoid the transparency requirements that attach to foundations (Reich, 2018).

Scott (2009) provides a concise definition of venture philanthropy as a practice in education and places it in the historical context of education reform before examining how the funding priorities of VP are correlated with charter school policy advocacy. Stephen Ball, as well as contributing illuminating Foucauldian analysis of modern education policy in his other works, provided a framework for network analysis of philanthropic influence in education policy and how these networks reinforce political movements, institutional reform, and governmentality in education in the UK (2008 & 2012).

Ball's book with Carolina Junemann, *Networks, New Governance, and Education* (2012) has laid the groundwork for similar education network, funding, and policy analysis in the American educational context. Scott and Jabbar (2014) utilize this network analysis in their empirical study of intermediary organizations that receive philanthropic funding. They find that certain policies, like merit pay for teachers, receive philanthropic support not only through political advocacy, but also through the production of research evidence funded by the same network of philanthropic donors. Ellison and Allen (2018) also utilize network governance analysis to interpret labor market and case study data on how STEM discourse moves from elite policy actors to material practices in classrooms, while Anderson and Donchik (2016) do the same to isolate the political and discursive reach of the American Legislative Exchange Council over education policy.

In her qualitative case study of one national intermediary organization, Trujillo (2014) tracks the philanthropic promotion of “scientific,” research-based, managerial business logic and practices. In her study, this managerial framing of a domain of education discourse and practice penetrates educational understanding and reinforces the market fundamentalist conception of public education noted in Scott and Jabbar (2014). To probe the thoughts and meaning making of those in the philanthropic field, Megan Tompkins-Stange used qualitative methods to research the perspectives of VP and “old” foundation actors in her 2016 book *Policy Patrons: Philanthropy, Education Reform, and the Politics of Influence*. She interviewed sixty philanthropic actors and found that venture philanthropy organizations like The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, in contrast with traditional foundations, did actively seek policy change as part of their mission to improve educational outcomes. The attention these foundations paid to shaping education policy, in the words of a VP subject interviewed, promoted “market-based solutions” guided by staff that are “professional managers with expertise in strategic business planning techniques and quantifiable metrics to gauge impact” (Tompkins-Stange, 2016, p. 63). Her finding that not only did VP foundations seek to drive innovation and student success through the same investment strategies that brought philanthropists success in their business endeavors, but they also intentionally promoted market fundamentalist policy on a governmental level is an important understanding of the goals of VP philanthropic actors.

In *Follow the Money: How Foundation Dollars Change Public School Politics* (Reckhow, 2013) brings a mixed-methods approach utilizing case study, network analysis, and survey and interview data to chart how foundations influence policy

implementation and constituent power dynamics in the education contexts of New York and Los Angeles. She finds that increased federal involvement in public education was paired with market reforms that granted foundations influence in the management of networks of intermediary policy organizations like VP firms. Reckhow and Snyder (2014) implement a broad longitudinal dataset of philanthropic tax information to analyze the policy advocacy of major educational foundations. Their research finds most education philanthropies support “jurisdictional challengers” to traditional education systems and that, while funding for traditional education systems has declined, the voice and influence of the philanthropic sector in education policy has grown. The definition of “jurisdictional challengers” in education, conceptualized by Mehta and Teles (2012) can be understood as organizations that promote alternative education practices and promote and produce new understandings of education as a field of study.

Quinn, Tomkins-Stange, and Meyerson (2014), in their qualitative study of jurisdictional challengers that were promoting charter management organizations, found that a core group of educational philanthropic funders were able to alter institutional forms of education practice, specifically through new cultural interpretations of education, a disciplinary evaluative framework, and a sponsorship of a new field of professionals to oversee the new form. Williamson (2018) examines this phenomenon within the technology sector, reviewing how Silicon Valley tech companies like IBM are using venture philanthropy to support “disruptive” startup schools that utilize a combination of the values of Deweyan progressive education with “educational data-analytics systems” that can measure student’s human capital through neuroscience (p. 230).

In a poignant example of such institutional reform in education, Dana Goldstein levies several critiques against the more recent Gates funded Measures of Effective Teaching research. Goldstein argues that the MET study and the Value Added Metrics design used to determine teacher effectiveness exist in an echo chamber of education policy reform. During the time when the MET research was being conducted, a network of education philanthropies all followed a similar agenda in concert with the Department of Education and its reform minded Secretary, Arne Duncan, away from traditional public schooling and towards a market fundamentalist agenda (Goldstein, 2015). When he conducted a thorough review of the Gates sponsored MET study, Goldstein worried that this policy and reform network had serious blind spots,

How is research received by scholars, policy makers, and practitioners when the sponsor of that research – and political allies including the president of the United States – have already embraced the reforms being studied? And is anyone paying attention when the conclusions of such research appear to contradict, or at least complicate, some of the core assumptions of that reform agenda?” (Goldstein, 2015, 106-107).

The Gates Foundation, which prizes its education involvement on the ability to turn a measurable return on investment, was disappointed to read the final report of the RAND Corporation that the overall effect of the MET research and approach was minimal at best and negative at worst, showing no clear results or correlation between teachers who participated in the MET study and those who did not (RAND, 2018). Results like these lead policy journalists like Dylan Matthews to question whether the education philanthropy epitomized by Gates is both an ineffective and unnecessary waste of resources (Matthews, 2018).

Philanthrocapitalists like Gates, according to Reckhow and Snyder (2014), primarily fund think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings

Institution to produce reports, policy recommendations, and legislation in support of free market economic ideology that will support their financial as well as social interests. Kovacs and Christie (2011) argue that studies funded by the Gates foundation are forms of propaganda aimed at providing skewed information to undermine public education. Similarly, Zeichner & Pena-Sandoval (2015) trace how the New School Venture Fund developed and advocated a bill before Congress for a redefinition of teacher education, partially through claiming that traditional teacher education was failing schools and students. Individually, these organizations might have a limited influence over public education, however as a network of institutional and jurisdictional challengers that are well funded by foundations with deep pockets and presumably good intentions, the combined weight of this network results in a significant degree of policy capture (Ball, 2008 & 2012; Baltodano, 2017; Reckhow & Snyder 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016; Quinn, Tompkins-Stange, & Meyerson, 2013; Zeichner & Pena-Sandoval, 2015). This literature points to the power and influence philanthropy has had over the practice of education in the last two decades and these findings demand further study into the purpose and meaning of this new market fundamentalist domain of education.

Venture Philanthropy Theory and Practice

There is a set of literature on venture philanthropy that explores how to conduct VP investment more effectively. Though this set of literature does not speak to the specifics of investing in education in America, it can reveal how the field of VP conceptualizes its own practice. Gordon (2014) provides the most comprehensive review of VP literature, drawing connections between VP and venture capital and angel investing. Her research includes interview data from philanthropists, program managers,

and grantees, and broadly defines the partnerships of VP investment and practice as one of strong collaboration, well defined oversight and accountability measures, and return on investment. Her case study data adds to the conclusion that VP is importing logic from the investment field into its philanthropic work to maximize its social effect. Grossman et al (2013) have similar insights, drawing on a large sample of interviews of VP practitioners and executives of American non-profits. Where Gordon examines practice, Grossman et al paint a picture of the entire VP space, including its effectiveness, the need for deeply knowledgeable VP officers, how to accelerate the growth of VP, and how best to attract donors. They highlight the role of VP as encouraging the scaled growth of promising social entrepreneurs, as a catalyzing agent for systemic change, and as a factor in determining measures of outcomes and scale. Eshun (2018) employs institutional and organizational theory when he analyzes venture philanthropy as an emerging field placing it at the intersection of philanthropy, venture capital, and entrepreneurship.

Case Studies and Ethnography on Venture Philanthropy and Education

There are no examples of an ethnographic case study on the practice of venture philanthropy in education. However, there is a literature of case studies in venture philanthropy and on philanthropy (that is not specifically venture philanthropy) and education, as well as some relevant ethnographic studies on venture philanthropy and education. Case studies are a standard mode of research and analysis in the philanthropic space because they can examine specific research questions within the bounded case of a singular organization, making a review of case study methodology of the philanthropy field instructive to this study.

Gordon (2014) provides the most comprehensive literature review and description of venture philanthropy as a field and process, bolstered by the use of several case studies to situate her analysis. She compares four VP firms based in the UK but operating in Africa, all of which promote the benefit of the young, two through educational programming. Involving twenty interviews, her case studies are instructive and comparative of VP practices across the sector, but they are lacking in the depth and detail of data on the meaning making and practice of participants that this study will bring to the literature on venture philanthropy. Charlebois et al (2013) use a case study to look at the food corporation Campbell's use of VP to target food insecurity in Canada through a network of partners, Scaife (2008) uses a case study to examine VP's ability to support and develop medical research within an Australian context, and Ingstand et al (2015) implement a case study approach on a Norwegian VP firm to determine how and why VP's engage in value adding activities. This study would most closely align with the work of Ingstand et al, as I am trying to determine how and why a VP firm conceptualizes education and how that translates into specific investments and management practices.

There is a set of case study literature that probes the connection between philanthropy and education. One drawback to this literature is that it covers philanthropy more generally and not specifically VP practice. However, paired with the VP case studies above, I can begin to frame current research methods. The case study that most closely aligns with this project from a content standpoint is Wisdom (2015) in which she uses a case study of the Walton Family Foundation to highlight the effectiveness of their giving practices. This case study is funded and published by Grantmakers for Education,

an education philanthropy network, and is a prime example of a non-academic case study intended for a philanthropic audience. More methodologically relevant to this study, Drezner & Garvey (2016) use an interview heavy constructivist case study to probe the “(Un)Conscious motivations” of LGBTQ giving in higher education. Thiele et al (2011) examine the giving circle philanthropy model with high school students, using a case study to describe the function and practice of this type of philanthropy and its benefits to students.

There are several ethnographies on the confluence of education and modern, “venture-style” philanthropy. Several recent ethnographies researching the perspectives of teachers and students who must promote and market themselves to funders (Brown, 2015 & 2017), a network ethnography on the role of philanthropy in character development in UK schools (Allen & Bull, 2018), and the philanthropic promotion of healthy lifestyles in schools to combat childhood obesity in New Zealand (Powell, 2018) have begun to flesh out the qualitative literature on VP and education. These studies are useful because they draw out the motivations and interests of policy actors, be they philanthropists and or those who implement their initiatives. These studies also track the promotion of epistemes through philanthropy. It is worth noting the diversity in the purpose, location, and perspective of these studies. As of now there is no unified field of research where ethnographic methods in a case study design are used to probe VP investment in education. This summary represents my attempt to locate the connections of the current literature on this methodology and topic and I believe aspects of each of these studies can inform this study and how it can fill gaps in the current literature.

Gaps in the Literature

This study will occupy a unique space in the current literature of venture philanthropy in education. There are three prominent gaps in the literature that this research seeks to address. These gaps will be discussed in detail, followed by an explanation of how precisely this study aims to fill these research gaps.

Gap 1: Venture Philanthropic Investment in Education

Venture Philanthropy is a relatively new phenomenon. As such there is not a long history of scholarship in the field. The term “venture philanthropy” is associated with venture capital investment and denotes that style of investment in the philanthropic sector. Sometimes referred to as “new philanthropy,” “venture philanthropy” is often described in contrast to the “old philanthropy” of well-established foundations. The distinctive investment/management style of venture philanthropic investment is covered in depth in the context section, but the literature on venture philanthropy highlights how, despite being a relatively new area of education research, it is already a hotly contested topic. Part of this contention is the divide between academic education research on the topic, policy, and practice, and the position and research papers underwritten with philanthropic funding, some of which are peer reviewed, most of which are not. An unanswered question that can be partially addressed in this research is how much influence academic education research has in a VP firm’s decision making and to what extent VP investment strategies rely on research that is funded by and promotes a marketized venture philanthropic approach to educational improvement.

With this context in mind, the gap in the academic research on venture philanthropy that this research will address is the need for empirical data, specifically qualitative data, on investment decision making and management in urban education. There have been several studies in the last decade involving VP influence in education policy (Tompkins-Stange, 2016; Scott, 2009; Zeichner & Pena-Sandoval, 2015; Rogers, 2015), politics and political theory (Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Reich, 2010 & 2018; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Reckhow, 2013), education research (Goldstein, 2015) and institutional education practice (Quinn, Tompkins-Stange, & Meyerson, 2013, Scott, 2009; Trujillo, 2014; Saltman, 2009; Williamson, 2018; Gross and Shapiro, 2014) but no close empirical study on the conceptualizations, discourse, and practice used when making investment decisions in education.

There is a theoretical understanding of business or marketized logic that runs through many of these studies, especially as market-based education reforms have driven many of the current conversations in urban education studies. However, what this study will explore is if and how these rationales epitomized by terms like “edu-business,” “philanthrocapitalism,” and “venture philanthropy” occur in practice within one VP organization as participants make sense of their work in education. It is important to research the extent to which critics’ assumption of a marketized stance towards education is indeed how practitioners of venture philanthropy, through their on the ground discourse and practice, conceptualize education and their work in the education field. If scholars wish to properly analyze the impact of venture philanthropy on education, they will need to work with theory that properly maps out the content and character of this

process, otherwise any critique, reform, or improvement of VP will be toothless and ineffectual.

Gap 2: Lack of Empirical Data on the Meaning and Purpose of Venture Philanthropic Investment in Education

There are several empirical studies on the meaning making and understanding of education on the part of key actors in the overarching foundation and venture philanthropy field. Megan Tompkins-Stange's work *Policy Patrons* (2016) includes empirical data from a multitude of interviews with program managers and donors from the Gates, Broad, Kellogg, and Ford foundations. Much of Stange's approach is built on the work of Sarah Reckhow's (2013) book *Follow the Money: How Foundation Dollars Change Public School Politics*, which incorporates a methodological focus on interviews and network analysis. These works, alongside of Quinn et al's (2013) empirical study on institutional entrepreneurship, form the best empirical knowledge on the value, goals, and mission on VP investment. Likewise, *The Prize*, by Dale Russikoff (2015) looks at the education reform strategy of the Newark school district conducted with the philanthropy of Mark Zuckerberg in government partnership with politicians like Cory Booker and Chris Christie. These studies address the changes in philanthropic focus from grant making to institutional and policy change to make the largest impact in the field of education.

What these studies have in common is their broad political and social perspective, diagramming the intersection between education policy and private actors who wish to reform, what they believe, to be calcified education systems dominated by ineffectual

government bureaucracies. Whereas overarching policy studies in philanthropy can contribute to an understanding of the meaning making of VP investments, this study will provide a more focused and embedded set of empirical data than has previously been researched in this space.

Though the investment of the Gates and Broad foundations chronicled in *Policy Patrons* are indicative of a venture philanthropic perspective, this study will research venture philanthropic investment on a more granular level than the aforementioned works, delving into the workings of an organization that is funded by national actors like Gates, Broad, and Walton amongst other funders, and that chooses how to directly invest these funds in educational partnerships in a specific urban context. This study will examine investment specifically as a lever to improve schools and catalyze systemic change and in so doing draw out the meaning making of actors who make and assess investment decisions in the educational space. Where these studies have begun a discussion of the goals, policy, and institutional reforms of VP on a national level, this study brings to bear a novel theoretical approach that can both unpack the ideas of investment and connect those ideas to practices that produce and enforce new forms of schooling.

What becomes clear when reading the literature on modern philanthropy in education is that private parties, supported by tax incentives and free of democratic oversight, often engage in policy advocacy to promote a marketized school reform agenda as a means of improving education. If, as the literature suggests, the “new” foundation approach to philanthropy distributes its funds with an eye on a social return on investment, but does so nationally, this study will locate how these national investments

play out on a local level. I will examine the investment logic of decisions as to which schools and which programs are worthy of direct investment. Of equal importance and another understudied phenomenon, is the oversight large national foundations, donors, and philanthropies have over the investments of a “pass-through” VP firm like the one in this study, which must prove its value to their donors through its investment performance. Smaller VP investment firms, like the one I will research in this study are, in their terms, the “quarterbacks” or “harbormasters” of philanthropic investment. The decisions of these education quarterbacks can change the outcomes and destiny of schools and students, more directly than the national philanthropies like those examined in *Policy Patrons and Follow the Money*. What makes this study unique is that it will probe how VP firms actualize philanthropic choices on a specific and localized education field, helping to rewrite the rules of the game, reshaping urban education in the process.

Gap 3: Lack of Case Study and Ethnographic Research of Venture Philanthropy in Education

There are a number of case studies of venture philanthropy, (e.g., Charlebois et al, 2015; Ingstad, 2014; Scaife, 2008) and several case studies in philanthropy in education (Wisdom, 2015, Thiele et al, 2011; Easterling & Main, 2017). Case studies in venture philanthropy and education are, however, not currently found in the literature. There are several ethnographies on the confluence of education and modern, “venture-style” philanthropy (Brown, 2015 & 2017; Allen & Bull, 2018; Powell, 2018) but these studies do not address direct investment into schools and schooling. The literature gap I will address with this research is to use the methods of an ethnographic case study to describe

the nature of education investment practices within in the bounded case of a specific VP organization.

This study will fill several gaps in this literature. First, there currently are no embedded, ethnographic case studies on a VP firm that operated exclusively in American urban education. Second, there are no studies on the meaning making of VP actors who make investment decisions. Thirdly, this study will be instructive for the study of venture philanthropy itself through providing a novel research model, an ethnographic case study on the specific practices of a single VP firm. This approach, focusing on the logics, sense-making, and investment management practices of a single firm, has yet to be conducted. This study intends to fill these gaps of context, specificity, and meaning in a manner not yet addressed in current scholarship. Currently there is no common approach to studying education VP firms. This research can bring insight into not only the theoretical approach of a single firm, but hopefully lay a groundwork for future study of organizations in this space.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Objective

The objective of this study was to uncover and examine the theoretical assumptions and management practices that make urban education a legible sector for investment. The rise of venture philanthropy in urban education reflects a market fundamentalist conception of education theory and practice. VP firms promote their work as improving the state of education in historically defunded and underperforming districts. The firms' definitions of "improvement," however, alters both the way that education functions and how it is understood. The objective of this study was to examine the meaning making of actors who make strategic investments in the educational lives of children. Education is an intimate and human endeavor, making the understanding of that endeavor by those investing and their beneficiaries especially important in describing the form VP-supported education takes. There are heated arguments around the importance, effectiveness, and power of venture philanthropy, yet a case study probing the often difficult, troubling, and innovative decisions made by real people who want to improve educational success through investment had yet to be completed.

This lack of empirical research into a controversial and influential field leaves the question "*What does education mean to a venture philanthropy firm and the actors surrounding that investment?*" unanswered. VP investment, as discussed in the theoretical framework and the literature review of this proposal, has played an outsized role in urban education policy and practice. If private actors are investing in schools and education, not

only the research and philanthropic communities, but also the public deserves to know how these private actors view the importance of education and shape its practice so that all parties can make informed choices.

Qualitative Study

In this study I employed qualitative research methods consistent with an embedded ethnographic approach. I embedded myself within a venture philanthropy firm and collected data through several methods that I will describe below. My goal in this research was to identify the theory of action guiding VP investment in education and how that theory was understood and implemented to create educational improvement. A goal in this study was to support or contest current structural and organizational theory in the literature, an analysis that can be approached through this study of meaning making within a VP firm. I also address questions concerning how students and education are conceived of in a venture philanthropic model, concepts that were only able to be examined through qualitative analysis. As such, I was continuously adapting and crafting a theory of VP investment practice that best fit the data from the theories, assumptions, and meanings that participants used to inform their work.

It was important to elucidate how participants defined and constructed their field and their decision making, because investment decisions effected schools, students, and their families. I employed a qualitative case study with ethnographic research methods because I was seeking to better understand the perspectives and understanding of an educational investment organization. To draw out the meaning of education behind investment decisions, I conducted over 200 hours of observations, took copious field notes, and interviewed 21 participants, including those involved with the VP firm who

make decisions and those who are affected by the firm's decisions. I also reviewed the firm's documents and public statements for evidence about how the firm constructed the meaning and mission of its work.

Case Study

This study used a case study design. Merriam (1998) describes a case being, "a single entity, a unit around which are boundaries" (p. 27). She also highlights the ability for case study to, "bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (p. 30). Given the bounded nature of the organization, a case study approach was appropriate for this research. The case study approach allowed me to focus on the processes and the epistemic and formative ideas under observation as they are employed and practiced within the case. With this approach, I was able to understand the connection between meaning making and practice because the investments themselves and how they were managed provided a bounded set of decisions which served as the case.

The localized nature of the research around one specific organization was another reason the case study was appropriate for unpacking how processes of investment and assessment interacted throughout a grantmaking cycle. This case study approach blended the embedded ethnographic methods employed in this research with the bounded nature of the institution being examined. The rich data collected through observations, interviews, and artifact analysis painted a nuanced but focused picture of the case at hand (Hamilton & Corbett-Whitter, 2014).

Research Site: The Collaborative for Educational Advancement

The Collaborative for Educational Advancement (CEA, a pseudonym) is a public-private education non-profit whose “Great Schools Fund” aimed to invest \$140 million dollars in “high performing schools in support of the citywide goal to replace 50,000 seats in (The City’s) lowest performing schools with higher quality options.” According to CEA, success was measured by the “number of students who move out of failing schools to better-quality school options based on student academic outcomes” (Reference Suppressed, 2017).

In its position paper published on December 5th, 2014, CEA promoted an “aggressive expansion of schools that are achieving results for low-income and minority students” (p. 2). Even though both traditional public, charter schools, and private catholic and Christian schools were on the CEA “high impact schools” list, per CEA’s “position” at the time, it was the charter school sector that is achieving measurable results for the students that need it the most. Thus, CEA declared, “The best schools serving disadvantaged students are disproportionately charters” (p. 6). CEA, whose mission is to “create and expand great schools” received substantial investment from national charter school promoters. The Walton Family Foundation, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Dell Foundation are all donors, and CEA counted among its board of directors several directors and professionals in investment and finance (Reference Suppressed, 2019).

In addition to its efforts to provide funds to schools, CEA also created and operated three online programs relating to urban education in their city. The first provided a central website for parents to find information on school quality as defined

through a 1-10 rating determined through an analysis of publicly available school performance data, the second was a website intended to facilitate school choice by allowing parents to send applications to multiple schools that have open seats. Both support the vision of an education marketplace where parents are consumers of public and private education options. The final website was intended as a central location for teachers to find jobs in the city and as an advertisement for various neighborhoods to attract teachers to work in the local Catholic, Charter, and District schools.

CEA was an optimal site for the examination of investment practices and market fundamentalist logic in urban education because it aligned with research on VP structure and practice. CEA implemented institutional practices outlined in Gordon (2014) like securing long term partnerships, specializing in a specific social good (urban education), and building network connections within the sector. CEA sought a measurable return on investment in the form of measurable student achievement and they retained and dissolved partnerships based on that investment data. Finally, CEA investment was often contingent on its involvement with school leadership decisions and other institutional and instructional oversight. CEA was an optimal case for study because it was typical of institutional norms in their field. Very little was known about the internal workings of this organization, making this study illuminating not only to those interested in its work, but also to those who wish to peek behind the curtain at how a firm like CEA operated and how venture philanthropy as a field thought about education.

Several preliminary observations of this organization found a strong alignment between CEA's practices and the marketized logic and discourse of educational improvement described in the theoretical framework and literature review. In staff

meetings, in informal conversation, and in official press releases and documentation, CEA spoke a language of “data-driven decision making,” “return on investments,” and “consumer knowledge” within a market of “school choice.” CEA managed the growth of its schools through data-based accountability measures and directs the leadership and the instruction of the schools in which they invest. The ideas and meaning that formed these practices deserved close analysis and articulation not only because it had not yet received ethnographic study, but also because venture philanthropy reflects a new conceptualization of public education in American cities, one that affects large structural systems serving millions of students. CEA was a strong case study because it was not a purely singular organization, but representative of its field as a firm that existed within a network of education and other venture philanthropies that operated across the United States, and indeed the world (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Ellison & Allen, 2018; Anderson & Donchik, 2016)

Access

Gaining access to CEA was not a straightforward process. I knew that the organization was wary of outside observation and analysis as it had become a focal point for frustration with the education reform movement in the city. CEA’s executive director was a divisive public figure, engaging with educational issues both in local media and with powerful players in the city’s business, government, and school district. CEA also was a public facing organization that actively promoted school choice, school ratings, and was considered to be one of the foremost philanthropic charter schooling advocates in the city and the state.

I gained access by reaching out to my network to see if I had any connections to the staff or to the board. I was able to connect with Tim, CEA's manager of data and analytics through a former colleague from my time in nonprofit work and I connected with a member of CEA's board through a family connection. This family member formerly worked at a prestigious private school in the city where the board member, who also happened to be a founding board member and donor, had sent their child. I sent a formal letter introducing myself and my work to this board member after securing their address through my family member and they called me, beginning our relationship. I explained my interest and my proposed project, and I believe it was this contact that convinced the board and CEA's executive director to allow me access. I secured an in person sit down meeting with the executive director and pitched my research and answered questions about my intentions, specifically what my "hypothesis" was for this research. I explained that my work was exploratory and anonymized, and he asked that I sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement protecting CEA's proprietary information and the confidentiality of their donors. I agreed and after some discussion over the language of the NDA, I was invited to their office to begin conducting exploratory research.

Interviews, Observations, and Document Reviews

This study used interviews, observations, and document/artifact reviews. I describe each method below.

Interviews

I interviewed 21 participants involved with this organization, recruiting interview subjects from CEA and its network. I used formal and informal interviews to develop a

full understanding of operations and the theory behind operational choices. I also interviewed school leaders at grantee schools to better understand the relationship between CEA and the schools that received their funds. I recruited school-based participants through the Director of the investment team at CEA who oversees school partnerships. I informed all interview participants of the nature of this research (goals, research questions, anonymity, etc.) before asking if they are interested in participating.

I interviewed the five members of CEA's investment team who were responsible for strategy and oversight of the investments (schools, programming, instruction and achievement), one public relations manager, the donor relations director and their two managers, the talent development director, the external partnerships director and their manager, and the executive director. Thus, my interview sample comprised most of the staff of the firm. I supported each formal interview with CEA employees with multiple informal interviews. The purpose of these multiple interviews was to have an opportunity speak broadly about practice and context as well as on the meaning making and conceptualization of their work in VP.

I interviewed members of the CEA network who were directly or indirectly associated with the organization, including five members of the executive board, three of whom were founding donors and board members of CEA. I also interviewed six school leaders who were CEA grantees and part of its school portfolio, one of whom led an independent catholic school, one who led a traditional k-8 public school, one who led a project-based-learning district administered high school, two who oversaw a network of charter schools, and another who led a startup charter school. Finally, I conducted formal and informal interviews with several people familiar with urban education and CEA,

including local education journalists, a former employee of the organization, and a former city education official who had partnered with CEA at their inception.

Interviews covered such topics as; the role of education in society, the goals of education reform, current perceptions of the field of education and venture philanthropy, the investment model and return on investment, and the desired student education experience (see interview protocols). While my goals were to understand how my participants thought about topics that were sometimes abstract – such as the purpose of education – I used Spradley’s typology (1979) of question content (descriptive, structural, and contrast) to help them discuss their views and to elicit data on participant meanings. I used protocols tailored to the participant’s role or relationship with respect to CEA. For example, when interviewing CEA board members, I asked questions relating to their role as financial investors, relating to their goals and values as philanthropists in education, and specifically why they chose CEA. I asked questions of CEA staff and school participants that pertained more specifically to the practice of education.

Interview protocols were created after a review of the literature and as part of the IRB process. The interview protocols included in the appendix of this dissertation are the final protocols used during interviews. I modified my interview protocols over the course of the study to engage with emerging findings and to seek disconfirming evidence. The length of interviews ranged between twenty minutes to an hour, with most being about forty minutes long. I obtained consent prior to each formal interview and I recorded and transcribed interviews.

Data were also collected through informal interviews and casual conversation. My goal was to use these methods to conduct quick member checks about meetings and

events and to gather data when formal recorded interviews were not feasible. For example, I checked in with the investment team members informally after school review visits, talked with a CEA director after a leadership meeting to check observations, and interviewed parents and students at a high school fair, in an attempt to get multiple perspectives on observed interactions. Notes were also taken during casual office conversations with CEA staff as well as at donor or public facing events which provided context and clarity on topics of interest to this study.

Stakeholder	CEA Leadership	Investment Team	Development Team	Donors	Board Members	Grantees
# Interviewed	5	5	3	5	5	6
Interview Type (formal and/or informal)	Formal and Informal	Formal and Informal	Formal and Informal	Formal	Formal	Formal and Informal
Key Topics	Vision, Goals, Values, Purpose of Education	Metrics, Accountability Measures, Prospects, Data, Standardized Testing	Donor Relations, Donor Networks, Financial Oversight, Donor Accountability of CEA	Why Education, Return on Investment, Public Sector Confidence	Venture Philanthropy, ROI, Organizational Oversight, Why Education	Accountability, Quality Education, Financial Constraints, Funding Relationship, Educational Philosophy

Table 1: Overview of Interviewees

Observations

I conducted observations at multiple sites within CEA and at affiliated organizations. These included, staff meetings, school visits, partnership meetings, donor events, public facing events, and office interactions. As noted above, to ensure this study design (and proposal) accurately reflected events “on the ground,” I conducted some preliminary observations at the site (approximately 15 hours). The observation period encompassed approximately twelve months in the field, for a total of 200 hours of observation. I conducted observations at least once a week, often more when scheduling allowed. The focus of observations was often the discourse of the participants and the practices they employed, especially around the purpose of the work of the organization and its funded programs, portfolio school investment management, and internal programming. My observations also focused specifically on the procedures and practices the organization uses to assess and manage its investments, from data and financial requirements, to the metrics concerning what constituted quality education, found in both the conceptions of CEA’s staff, the funders of the organization, and the organization itself.

I kept jottings to record observations in a physical notebook which was kept on my person while in the field. I converted jottings to field notes within 24 hours of each observation. For each hour in the field, 1-2 hours was spent writing up observations. Oftentimes, note taking was a detriment to open communication, especially during initial interactions and observation when aiming to build trust with participants. In these situations, I set aside concurrent note taking and jotted down relevant details of the interaction when the time allowed. I also made voice recordings of impressions taken

after meetings and visits. In those cases, I made every effort to write up a complete set of fieldnotes immediately upon leaving the site, event, or interaction.

Document Review

To better understand the functioning of the organization and its animating assumptions, I also reviewed appropriate documents. I collected official records such as press releases, promotional material, assessment documents, board meeting notes, and instructional material. My analysis focused primarily on written discourse that relates to the meaning making, mission, approach, practice, and promotion of CEA and was open to new threads of analysis as they appeared during in the study. I also used documents as a source of triangulation, comparing them to interview and fieldnote data. Document review proved to be an integral part of this research as internal documents, particularly around grantee contracts, observation, and assessment, shed light upon investment discourse and practice within the organization. External facing documents also contributed to the epistemic discourse of venture philanthropy itself. To this effect, I collected promotional documents from meetings, donor events, conferences, and community/school events. Because the organization emphasizes providing online resources for parents, teachers, schools, and donors, I also collected digital information such as website data and event notices.

As I collected documents, both public and private, that the organization used to promote and define its investments and its results, I interpreted this data through the ethnographic approach outlined by LeCompte and Preissle in the work *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research* (1993). The documents that I collected represented the communication of the organization and reflected its values; thus, I

interpreted these documents as cultural artifacts. I also used LeCompte and Preissle's method of artifact collection of in this study. After I built trust with participants, I located documents and artifacts within CEA. Secondly, I compiled external facing digital and paper documents as the research progressed. Thirdly, I analyzed the document/artifact for its use and purpose, the identity of the creator, and the supposed audience, and the meaning the document has for users. Finally, I organized documents along categories that were formed and reformed over the course of the study.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data through categorical and contextual relationship mapping using Dedoose, a computerized qualitative research program, which I also used to collect and analyze field notes, documents, and interview data. First, data from internal and external documentation, interviews, and field notes were coded categorically into two subgroups: organizational and theoretical (Maxwell, 2013). I then coded organizational data into topics that fell within CEA such as "External Partnerships," "Donor Relations," "Talent Development," "Communications," "Board Meetings," etc. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I finally coded data with deductive codes drawn contextual research and from the theoretical framework of disciplinary education that corresponded with observed data, i.e., "Portfolio Discipline," "Market Fundamentalism," "Human Capital," "Observation," "Judgement," and "Examination," as well as emergent codes that arose from the data, such as "Educational Investments" and "Production of School Data." I employed an open coding method in addition to the deductive codes because it allowed for categories to develop as data was read and analyzed and because this research was exploratory (Maxwell, 2013).

I employed various methods to combat against validity threats. I tested the validity of emergent theories tested through member checks (Bryman, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and data triangulation (Fielding and Fielding, 1986). I also produced memo's analyzing field notes throughout the study. Validity threats arose in the study, and I collected this data and attempted to address them through the memo process (Maxwell, 2013). Specifically, as CEA was initially reticent to have me observe their work, I attempted to nullify the reactivity of my participants by initially asking questions that centered on gathering descriptive information on participants process and practice. This tactic was employed to build trust before moving to a more probing line of questioning. I also sought out disconfirming evidence from school leaders, particularly around the extent to which these leaders' personal perspectives on instruction and education was due to the influence of CEA and the investment team.

Researcher Role

I was a former Program Manager at an education non-profit in the city where this research takes place, making me familiar with the educational dynamics of the city and how both the urban education field and the role of philanthropy in education non-profit work has shifted in the last decade. My role placed me inside urban schools where initially our goal was to enrich students through tutoring and mentoring, event planning, and after school programming. However, during this time my responsibilities grew beyond managing the Americorps members, their service, and our school partnership; I became responsible for the production and management of educational *data*. I was evaluated on how well my team improved student test scores in math and reading, how often our focus list students attended school, and how often they were disciplined. This

shift in my role left me disillusioned, as I felt I had to prioritize data management, managerialism, and disciplinary accountability over the relationships with and the humanity of my students. I was also frustrated that I had to nurture corporate partnerships with high net worth individuals for my team to do their work with poor and marginalized students. My opinion of the use and success of our education work closely resembles Anand Giridharadas' position on social philanthropy in his book *Winners Take All* (2018). I feel like the wealthy too often use philanthropy to pretend to fix education while they refuse to entertain let alone promote reforms, such as redistribution, that would affect their wealth or status.

My interest in this research absolutely stems from my time working in urban schools with a non-profit. My program manager experience in connection with education philanthropy has given me insight and understanding that was proven useful in entering the research site and conducting preliminary observations. I could speak the language of data management, partnerships, and the importance of fixing urban education. However, to not have my negative experience and perspective color my findings, I attempted to consciously attend to the data wherever it led and did my best to stay neutral and exploratory in my assessment of CEA and their work. For example, I appreciated that the investment team was motivated to promote instructional rigor to help students that were left behind by the education system, data which gave me a fresh perspective on how instructional discipline can be beneficial for students who have fallen behind their peers. I used memos to process and reflect on my positionality, a review of which helped me to remain open to findings that did not align with my former expectations and perspectives.

Researcher Reflection

After spending hundreds of hours with the staff of CEA, my perspective on the people involved in the organization and the work they accomplished shifted in several ways. First and foremost, I found that my frustration with the education reform practices I had studied softened over my time researching CEA. Though I may have disagreed with the educational philosophies and practices of the donors, board, and staff of CEA, I shared their concern for the future of the students and families of the city. Members of CEA's staff were trying to manage the difficulty of trying to educate their children in the city and some had personal positive experiences with school choice giving them options other than persistently bad public schools. Though it was part of the organization's rhetoric, parent involvement in public education was truly important to some staff and board members while others truly saw the work of CEA as forwarding racial and economic justice where the government had failed. I did not anticipate how much I would enjoy my time talking over these important issues with the staff of CEA. They were knowledgeable, driven by their values, personable, and easy to work with.

My time with the investment team also changed my perspective on the value of discipline and data in educational settings. As a father, I understand how a discipline free environment is unstable for children and I appreciated the candor with which members of the investment team were willing to call out and transform bad education practices when they saw them. Transforming schools and schooling is difficult work, but the team used the tools at their disposal to improve education as they saw it. Their use of data showed me how it can be, among many, a useful indicator of instructional trends and a valuable tool for instructional improvement. This research also helped me to understand that

discipline is a practice that itself is neither good or bad but is ever present, whether it is examined or not. The investment team intentionally chose their disciplinary philosophy and instituted practices that aligned with their goals. They, like many on CEA's staff were trying to work within their "locus of control" and play their part as best they could, and I cannot fault them for that.

Limitations

This study will not be gauging the practice and investments of the organization for effectiveness or success, a potential limitation of this work. One can suspect that success will be represented by quantitative growth in student achievement represented through test scores or the enrollment of more students in funded schools and programs and this data are already collected by CEA and other educational actors. This study will have limited if any quantitative analysis of investment results, and as such it is not appropriate within this research to confirm or deny whether the investment of funds into education was successful. While many within the philanthropic or policy community may see this stance as a limitation, the goal of this study is to enter new data and analysis into the conversations happening both within the venture philanthropy sector and for those researchers who examine the education system itself.

Those who favor class critiques of venture philanthropy will also find limitations in this study, possibly believing this study serves as a promotional tool for organizations and interests that already have an oversized platform. A limitation therefore would be that this study is not sufficiently political, that it may ignore a structural analysis of power. This study acknowledges this critique and hopes to provide detailed empirical information for others more suited to precisely map out that terrain.

Another limitation of this study is that it uses qualitative research on *adults* to address the educational experience of *students*. To include surveys and interviews to research the experience and meaning making of students directly would have increased the breadth of this study beyond what is reasonable. However, the inclusion of student data would also add a layer of research complexity that would not serve the narrow focus of the study, notwithstanding the difficulty of interviewing minors. This study will instead focus on how adult decisions conceptualize students within VP investment in education.

A final limitation of this study is the lack of cultural and personal narrative data of the subjects involved. This study is focusing on how personal and institutional conceptions of the meaning and purpose of education influence the process and practice of education. It would have expanded the breadth of this research to the detriment of its depth if it included analysis of the personal histories and personalities of those involved in venture philanthropy. Some personal and character narrative was included to contextualize certain decision making and to flesh out the narrative elements of this dissertation, however that analysis was not the thrust of this work.

Research Timeline

Preliminary and contextual data collection began in March of 2019, and formal data collection began in May of 2019, (right after the dissertation proposal was accepted). Data were collected for approximately one year, with observations ending in February of 2020 and interviews conducted into August of 2020. This timeline allowed me to observe initial investment agreements as well as the presentations grantees perform to justify and/or continue their partnership. This timeline was appropriate for the research of CEA

because much of the planning and organization of this investment cycle occurred over the summer. The observation window of this study ended just weeks before the Covid-19 pandemic closed schools in the city and across the nation. This research does not address any institutional changes wrought by the pandemic either at CEA or at its partner schools.

CHAPTER 5

CONTRACTING DISCIPLINE

The goal of venture philanthropy is to produce a measurable good through strategic investment. In this investor/investee, grantor/grantee relationship, the practice of disciplinary transformation is required for a VP firm to improve the outcomes of their investments. As a VP firm, CEA follows the model outlined in Gordon's (2014) description of the ways that a VP interacts with its grantees. CEA provided consulting and managerial assistance as well as funding to its grantee schools and in addition to receiving a return on investment in the form of increased student achievement, CEA learned more about how education it is practiced both in its grantee network and in the local school system. In the case of CEA, and many VP and philanthropic relationships more generally, there is a power dynamic at play when one side needs funds and the other has the means to provide them. CEA's goals for its grantee schools were very similar to the goals of a Venture Capital investor and their investments. CEA expected its grantees to deliver a set of prespecified results. Thus, in exchange for resources to grow and build a school, CEA contractually involved itself in the school and its schooling, implementing a disciplinary framework to transform the school.

To analyze this relationship, I will draw on Foucault's theory on the ways school's disciplinary practices can transform the individual student, particularly his descriptions of three key practices: observation, judgement, and examination. CEA used these tools to transform schools and in effect, the students inside them. These three tools overlap in their use and purpose, but they all aim for the same goal: to alter that which is within the disciplinary gaze.

Exercising discipline requires observation that is coercive in form and function, and hierarchical observation intends to make behavior that is within its disciplinary gaze visible so that it can be transformed. A type of surveillance is inherent to the practice of education, and CEA used observational tools that allowed it to monitor general trends of teaching, cultural behavior, and student data in their grantee schools. This observation was often paired with recommendations that promoted what CEA considered successful teaching and schooling. Normalizing judgement is present in modern education in the form of state standards and common core curriculum, standards that were reinforced by CEA's disciplinary practices. CEA's normalizing judgement was found in the instructional rubric it utilized to define instructional "rigor" in the classroom. This rigor consisted of teachers' pedagogical skills to differentiate instruction while monitoring each student's ability to demonstrate defined academic skills and standards. In this case, the disciplinary goal was corrective, aimed at reducing gaps between what was observed and ideal practice. In the schools they observed, the CEA investment team would look for and promote standards-aligned curriculum and instruction, demonstrating the interplay between their work as investment managers and the judgment of the state in defining the standardized educational capacity of a "normal" student. Examination combines both hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement, however examination allows for discipline to function beyond observable behavior, forming a tool for student knowledge to be removed, codified, and analyzed. CEA as a "data-driven" organization, leaned heavily on the use of examination, using student data to understand, manage, and correct its investments. The investment team used formative and summative examination as both

a designator of quality education and as a tool for improving the productive capacity of their schools.

Over the next two chapters I will describe these three disciplinary tools, observation, judgement, and examination, and demonstrate how CEA operationalized their use with its investment schools. The first chapter is a review of the grant agreement contract, which outlined how CEA used all three tools to build their disciplinary framework with schools, and how it communicated and reinforced its disciplinary relationship with their grantees. In the second chapter, part one will include data from school observation visits to describe how the investment team used hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement to provide consultation feedback and instructional guidance to their investment schools. Part two will describe how CEA relied on the data extracted from examinations to understand and transform schools, schooling, and students through both promoting data collection tools and practices and by conducting End of the Year School performance reviews/examinations with their grantee schools.

The Codified Discipline of Contracts

The contracts CEA created with the schools it funded defined the scope and contours of its relationships and, by extension, served as a critical disciplinary mechanism. Each school in CEA's portfolio had to sign a grant agreement contract with CEA before it received funding. As the goal of CEA's investment in schools was to catalyze a measurable improvement in student achievement, these contracts formalized the disciplinary framework CEA implemented to manage and improve its school investments. In these multi-year contracts, schools agreed to allow CEA to perform

hierarchical observations, normalizing judgement, and examinations¹: contracts included stipulations about school observations aimed at instructional and cultural improvement, performance benchmarks, and examinations of student achievement outcomes and school wide metrics through both data sharing and school achievement presentations.

In this chapter, I will show how the contract CEA implemented with its partner schools codified and legally bound schools to these three disciplinary practices. While my analysis focuses heavily on the specifics of one contract and observations from a contract agreement meeting between members of the investment team and an executive director of a Charter School Network, it is informed by other data I collected during my time at CEA, which allowed me to understand the importance of contracts in shaping relationships. I will show how this contract defines the disciplinary investor/investee relationship CEA created with its partner schools. This contract formalized how the investment team at CEA will implement observation, judgement, and examination to train its schools to improve their students' academic outcomes. Each disciplinary technique was found in the contract, and in their discussion, the investment team made it clear they have the "sole discretion to terminate (the contract) if the benchmarks are not hit." (Field notes 5-22-19). In the next chapter, I will describe how these contractual disciplinary techniques were operationalized in the school observations, End of Year school performance evaluations, and data analysis practices CEA used to produce the knowledge and the behaviors that CEA wanted from its educational investments. If schools wished to receive funds to support students, they had to agree to be disciplined,

¹ The grant agreement contracts describe these practices but do not use these specific terms.

and the grant agreement contract both outlined and enforced that disciplinary relationship.

Grant Agreement Contracts

CEA connected with its partner schools through multiple channels; school leaders reached out to the investment team to pursue funding, there were network connections on which partner relationships were built, and the investment team also cold called school leaders of schools that, based on available student achievement data, they believed would be a good investment. A great deal of due diligence came before a grant agreement between CEA and a partnering school was finalized. The investment team included four former “high performing” school leaders in urban education and one data specialist with experience working for an urban school district, who reviewed the risks and rewards before investing in their partner schools. They reviewed school level data in detail, including not only math and literacy test results, but also racial, poverty, and disability demographics, enrollment, and (for high schools) SAT and ACT test scores and college matriculation. School visits were performed, school leadership was assessed, and schools had to provide a line-item financial projection for the previous year before funds were distributed, and schools were required to provide financial auditing information for the duration of the grant.

The team made an investment calculation based on the cost per classroom seat and the team presented its analysis to the board-run investment committee composed of financial, business, and education leaders. This board voted on the contracts and evaluated recommendations for future investments (Field Notes, 8/16/19). Once a grant

was approved and this partnership reached the formal stage, then a grant agreement was drawn up and agreed upon before the first allotment of funds were dispersed.

The contract as a disciplinary framework shaped the relationship between investor and school throughout the grant window and beyond. It illuminates how CEA used benchmarks and partner agreements to promote a specific kind of schooling, one where schools were measured by how well students met projected performance goals². In addition to performance benchmarks, in its contracts, CEA required access to all formative and summative student achievement data, all curricular programming, and a financial audit of school finances was performed by an independent CPA. Any school and/or network leadership and operational changes must also be reported to CEA. Included as well was the stipulation that the school must create and fill as many new student spots as were in the agreement, and that grantees had to enroll in various CEA and district led initiatives. Specifically included in the contract was an obligation to participate in a charter school unified enrollment system in the district, a program that was created and managed by CEA, which was in its second year at the time of my observation. Through this contract, CEA legally directed the behavior of its grantee schools. If a school did not adhere to this agreement, a process of “remediation” began with external consulting and could end in a suspension of funds. Though a school may have flexibility to meet performance benchmarks, schools knew that their financial,

² CEA shared two grant agreements with me and mentioned that these agreements could serve as a general example of the contracts they make with partner schools, though specifics may change depending on the funding and educational needs of the school and CEA’s investment goals. Due to the nature of the Non-Disclosure Agreement I signed to gain access to my research site, I cannot share direct quotations from this grant contract. I will therefore be summarizing its contents and highlighting key clauses that signify the legal means that CEA uses to discipline its investment schools.

curricular, and institutional decisions were being surveilled by their benefactors, a surveillance that, above and beyond a threat of loss of funding, disciplined their decision making.

The contract disciplined a school's financial decisions as well. Though focused on the use of grant funds, the contract allowed for observation and management of grantee schools' budgetary priorities. The grant had to be spent in accordance with attached financial projections, projections which revealed school budget operations, which were subdivided into "Enrollment," "Revenue," "Expenses," and an "Operating Net Income." Schools had to also submit an accounting of all grant expenditures and a narrative that explained variances greater than 10% from the proposed budget. The grantee school had to inform CEA of any leadership changes or materially important events, and schools had to retain records of all grant expenditures and data submitted to CEA for at least 4 years after the completion of the grant. These records had to be provided to CEA upon request at any time. If budgets truly revealed the priorities of an organization, this contract inserted CEA into a discussion of those priorities in its grantee schools.

Interestingly, included in the contract was specific language outlined in the document that a grantee had to use to describe CEA if the grantee wished to publicly announce its partnership. In this language, CEA described their VP mission to create and grow "quality" schools. CEA required its grantees to publicly use the terms, "invest," "provides growth capital," and "measures success," a success which was described explicitly as based on student achievement data (Grant Agreement, 2019). This contract disciplined even the way that schools could publicly describe CEA as an organization, controlling the narrative about its involvement in schools.

Benchmarks

Benchmarks were one of the primary disciplinary drivers CEA used to shape school behavior. These benchmarks served not only as a roadmap for success and a vision for quality schooling, but also as a metric that could secure or lose money intended for the benefit of children. Legally defined and contractually enforced benchmarks both disciplined the management of schools and the teaching and learning that occurred in classrooms. Schools were given the freedom to achieve these benchmarks as they saw fit, but to achieve these benchmarks required schools to adopt the disciplinary oversight CEA modeled for them. The specific numbers of the benchmarks were tailored for each school, but the benchmark categories themselves were consistent between k-8 and high schools. Contracts stated that the benchmarks were agreed upon by both CEA and school leadership, that benchmark data were to be submitted four times a year, and that the benchmarks themselves were open to annual revision to keep them applicable to a high standard of rigor.

CEA determined whether these benchmarks have been met or not and grant funding was tied to the achievement of the outlined benchmarks (Grant Agreement, 2019). This reporting was connected to the right for CEA to terminate, reduce, or divert its grant disbursement if benchmarks were not met. Normally, schools who did not meet their benchmarks had to discuss their results, why they occurred, and plans for correction at the End of Year grant review meeting. Sometimes the benchmarks would be adjusted, other times the investment team would recommend various instructional tools or technologies to achieve the benchmark. Some schools however, continued to miss their

benchmarks even after the investment team would conduct multiple school observations, data reviews, and consultation meetings.

For example, during the observation period, one school that had a change in leadership and did not meet its data reporting requirements, had their grant partnership paused, the suspended partnership not to resume “until we believe in them again” (Field Notes 8-12-19). This relationship grew apart rather than broke apart with the investment team showing frustration at the lack of organizational discipline at the school, demonstrated by the leadership vacuum and failed data reporting. There was some discussion on the team that with a new principal they might restart the relationship, but the school was not responding to inquiries from CEA, and they considered the partnership functionally ended. In another school, the investment team determined that school leadership needed to be remediated, and grant funds were diverted to a principal leadership coaching consultant recommended by the team. CEA was serious about its contractual oversight. It considered partnerships with schools to be mutually beneficial, and when schools did not fulfill their end of the agreement, specifically in regards to leadership, data sharing, and benchmarks, a partnership would be terminated.

The prominence of benchmark goals and their direct connection to much needed funds were one of the most important disciplinary tools CEA used to reform schools, schooling, and students. These benchmarks synthesized normalizing judgement, hierarchical observation, and examination together to promote schooling reliant on student and school data as the arbiter of educational quality. These benchmark goals demonstrated what CEA believes “quality” education was by defining and normalizing the production of student achievement outcomes, outcomes which set a standard against

which a school could be judged. Many of the benchmarks in the contract will be familiar to anyone who works in modern education administration, as these metrics have become the symbols of successful education. These were benchmarks such as: student attendance and student retention, an increasing percentage of students scoring as proficient or advanced in state testing in reading and math, and a benchmark tracking overall school academic growth in reading and math, according to an external academic assessment tool. Contractually, schools had to produce and supply this benchmark data for the investment team to observe and examine and school leadership was held accountable to this data when they were further examined by the investment team in their End of the Year meetings.

Student Enrollment Growth and College Matriculation

As one of CEA's stated goals was to increase the quantity of quality places for students to attend school, it was fitting that it the most prominent benchmark and the stated purpose of the grant award in the contract was to grow the number of students over the course of the grant. For example, RTA, a charter high school, was expected to increase its enrollment by 90 students or by 18.75% in the four-year grant period. Similarly, in another grant agreement with Day Academy, a charter elementary school, it stipulated that school enrollment was to increase by approximately 30% in four years. Both contracts were growth grants, designed to take a promising school model and increase its impact. Operating true to the VP model, CEA sought to increase the number of students attending "quality" schools by investing in schools with promising achievement results and giving them the funds to grow and replicate these results with new students.

CEA's discipline towards increasing student achievement through quality educational options was reflected in its desire to increase the city's college going population. College completion amongst students in the city was a goal expressed to me by CEA's executive director, those on the investment committee of the board, donors, and executive board members as a method of increasing the city's economic prospects and reducing poverty. CEA's executive director expressed this mission of quality education to create "more college graduates and more employable low income and minority young adults who are going to then start creating wealth for their communities and their families" (Interview, 2/12/20). Contracts for high schools also included several benchmarks pertaining to college admission and completion. Schools were expected to send a certain percentage of students to college and to achieve 6-year college completion rate of over 30%. CEA also required nearly all seniors to take the SAT with a benchmarked increase of SAT Math and Reading scores.

Staffing and Facilities

Two benchmarks that demonstrated the reach of CEA's influence into the management of schools related to staffing decisions and facility operations. CEA contracted a benchmark that gave it discretion over the retention and removal of teachers. This benchmark consisted of a percentage of teachers retained whom the investment team identified as worth keeping on staff. Notably in one contract, this benchmark included language that called for every teacher whom the team wanted to "counsel out" to no longer work at the school.³ Further, the investment team was often talking to principals

³ Note that the investment team members all used to work at charter schools which allowed them the leeway to fire teachers they did not deem sufficient, and that CEA staff,

and school leaders about teacher staffing issues as a crucial part of school leader effectiveness. This contracted level of involvement in staff retention and possible dismissal was surprisingly involved for a funder or intermediary organization and demonstrates the scope of the influence CEA and its donors had to shape the education in their grantee schools.

CEA contracts also included specific facilities benchmarks, tailored for every school to meet its enrollment expansion needs. For example, in one finalized contract, this benchmark included building renovation deadlines, net operating budget, and monetary reserve requirements. It also required that the school be open to students by the second year of the grant. Indeed, this requirement appeared to be so important that the contract included the stipulation that, if the school was not moved into this renovated building and there was no second option for accommodating the enrollment expansion, the agreement would become null and void. In these school facilities and planning clauses, CEA again does more than provide a grant, it directed their funding to specific goals and discipline their partners if these goals are not met.

The contract contained several stipulations that disciplined schools, teachers, and students to perform specific behaviors to achieve CEA's desired ends. Benchmarks further defined the goals of the CEA/school partnership. A key feature of this oversight was the examination of contractually mandated student and school data which schools were required to share with CEA to maintain the funding partnership, the examination of which determined school progress towards performance benchmarks. The investment

board members, and donors frequently lamented the power of teachers' unions to protect "bad" teachers.

team operationalized their disciplinary oversight over their investment portfolio through their judgement and examination of instructional and student benchmark data.

Examination of Schools and Schooling: Benchmark Progress Reports and Data

Sharing in School Contracts

Examination is a very specific form of disciplinary observation which not only draws out knowledge from those under examination, but it also produces knowledge about those subjected to it. A focus on measurable student test outcomes constrains and shapes education, and the current context of standardized testing in modern urban educational reform requires the use of these metrics for progress monitoring, quality control, and for uninvolved parties to manage schools from afar. CEA was no exception, and in addition to the use of student achievement data as a function of completing benchmark goals, CEA promoted an even more involved and regularly occurring formative testing regiment to determine whether students were inculcating the rigorous instruction required to meet state grade level standards (See Chapter 6 for a more detailed look at CEAs promotion of intensive formative testing).

The contract defined the CEA/School, grantor/grantee relationship as one that included disciplinary examination of the school partners. This examination came in the form of the production of student data through standardized testing and the examination of student and school data for organizational oversight. The grant agreement outlined that schools were required to submit student level data quarterly and present benchmark progress reports either by telephone or in person to receive their quarterly grant payments. Schools also had to submit an annual narrative at the end of the school year consisting of two parts, a full accounting of the use of grant funds, and a narrative

progress analysis of the previous school year including successes achieved during the year relating to benchmarks and other goals, why benchmarks may have not been met, and if so, a remediation plan to get back on track. Schools were required to also address institutional difficulties in this narrative report including plans to address these setbacks, changes or planned changes to the school model, external support secured during the year, leadership changes and facility updates, and an update on several student level data points such as student attendance, academic achievement, and demographics.

To secure the grant, as mentioned previously, each school had to provide a full balance sheet of their revenue, expenses, and income for CEA to review. The contract included a financial projection of these expenses through the life of the grant and the school were required to submit their CPA conducted financial audit annually to CEA to determine whether the budgetary practices of the school were in accordance with the financial projection outlined in the grant. Grantee schools also had to disclose any financial changes that might have affected the fulfillment of the grant. This financial examination was disciplinary because it laid bare the financial operations of the school for review by CEA as a condition to receive grant funds. As a result, CEA could exert more influence over the school expenditures within its portfolio.

This budgetary and benchmark narrative report, which was examined by the investment team, and which school leaders needed to further defend in their End of the Year performance meetings, (see Chapter 6), was a central disciplinary measure of CEA's school partnerships. When writing about the disciplinary power of examination in medical, penal, and educational settings, Foucault notes that examination has several productive functions, it allows for the objectification of the individual subject and it

reifies a domain of knowledge to understand and analyze that object, specifically allowing for judgements to determine its distribution within a population, in effect “constituting individuals as correlative elements of power and knowledge” (Foucault, 1977, p 194).

Examination makes the learning process visible, allowing schools to be objectified and providing a foothold for a funder like CEA to use its power and influence to change schools and schooling towards their ends, which in the case of the contract were the goals set forth in the benchmarks. Examination creates a visibility that is an exercise in power over the school and its operation, the teacher and their pedagogy, and the student and their learning. For Foucault, “examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification” (Ibid., p. 187). We will see that the EOY school performance meetings enact this examination ceremony, where schools demonstrated how successfully they have implemented disciplinary examination to manage their teachers and students. To support its this disciplinary management, CEA also contractually mandated hierarchical observation for its portfolio schools, ensuring that these schools were observed by the investment team in the first two years of their partnership.

Hierarchical Observations: Contracted Oversight of Schooling and Pedagogy

CEA disciplined portfolio schools and the schooling they provided through several layers of observations, surveilling, within student privacy guidelines, almost all facets of the education that was funded with CEA grant money. CEA outlined its role as a disciplinary observer in the grant agreement, citing its right to conduct a formal evaluation of the grantee’s work at any time, and further that the grantee was required to comply with any and all requests. Contractually, CEA could exert the power of a funder

and manager of the grant over its grantee schools, and in this hierarchical manner they required access to schools and classrooms to conduct observations. As opposed to the visibility obtained in the data collection of examination, these observations provided a visibility of behavioral surveillance. Observation, particularly when coupled with a hierarchical power dynamic found in the CEA grant agreement contract, is a practice Foucault outlined as a key element of disciplinary transformation, particularly within the goals of educational transformation in schools and schooling.

The grant agreement contract outlined that CEA could evaluate the work of its grantee schools, which in essence was all that occurs within the school itself. Beyond the data collection and examination outlined in other parts of the contract, this writing specified that grantee schools allow CEA hierarchical observation of any materials or activities associated with the grant, a practice that included allowing CEA to perform at least two formal observations of the school in the beginning and the end of the school year, access to all school assessment data collected by the school, and access to all curriculum and academic programming used by the school. These evaluative observations were framed in the contract and by investment team members as both an act of supportive consultation and as a tool to determine if grant funding needs to be terminated, adjusted, or diverted if benchmarks were not met. Implicit in this contractual relationship was that as a funder, CEA could collect and analyze the educational data, practices, and materials of their portfolio schools and in so doing used the surveillance power of observation to disciplinarily manage the pedagogy, curriculum, goals, and vision of their investments.

The Goal of Contractual Discipline

The contract outlined above was central to the work that CEA conducted with schools. The student academic and school operating data that this contractual discipline aimed to produce was the social good return on CEAs investment, especially as CEA, its donors, and its network, believed that this data signified student and systemic educational quality. Ideally, this contractual definition of “quality” and the agreed upon growth in student enrollment in these quality schools would provide not only tangible “improvement,” in the achievement of schools and students, but also it would demonstrate the viability of CEA’s urban school reform agenda through the disciplinary production of “proof points of excellence” in grantee schools.

Schools who wished to access grant funding and the consulting support CEA offered with its grants, were required to submit themselves to disciplinary oversight and management. CEA contractually required schools, including their leadership, teachers, and students to be examined, judged, and observed. Teachers, students, parents, taxpayers, and the public did not choose to submit themselves to this specific discipline. However, as I will discuss in the next chapter, when I observed the investment team perform formal school observations, students and teachers behaved as if they had already internalized the examination, judgement, and observational discipline CEA enacted in its schools. CEA did not create these disciplinary technologies; it only used its monetary and relational influence to implement educational disciplinary technologies that have been in common use for centuries. It was rather the power dynamic of CEA’s role as a VP investor in education and its goals and vision for discipline over the practice and products of urban education that made its work so unique and worth analysis.

A passage from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is instructive to understand how CEA deployed its discipline over its grantee schools through the contracted elements of observation, judgement, and examination:

The regime of disciplinary power...brings five quite distinct operations into play: it refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of the following overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards which one must move. It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals. It introduces, through this 'value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal (Foucault, 1977, p 182-183).

The discipline CEA exerted over grantee schools, made concrete in this grant agreement contract, promoted both a quantitative and managerial style of pedagogy and a human capital understanding of the purpose and practice of education. The goal of the productive power of CEAs discipline was to take that vision for education and enact it in its individual grantee schools, its school leadership, its teachers, and arguably most directly, its students.

The Investment Team

Diane, the Director of the Investment team, was a bubbly middle aged white woman who grew up and went to public school in the city before her career as an educator, most recently as a charter school leader out west. Diane described herself as the type of high school student who would be the "market" for several of their grantee schools, one who did not have attendance or behavior issues but who "played around"

academically during their middle school years and were not going to be accepted into the highly selective magnet schools in the city (Field Notes 8-6-19).

Though she was not always as vocal about her commitment to a highly disciplined, “no excuses” style of education, Diane, as leader of the investment team, demonstrated her alliance to disciplined pedagogy through her consulting advice and investment choices of schools, saying about the education sector of the city that, “there’s a lack of talent that is pushing the envelope around what’s possible... a mindset about what’s possible for kids rooted in racism and classism (with a) lack of accountability for student results” (Interview, 1/31/20). Diane believed that the disciplined instruction the team pushed for in their portfolio schools could address the perennial problems of racial and class-based equity and opportunity in the city.

Diane’s colleague John was a tall, slim, and energetic white man in his late 30s, early 40s, who came to CEA after a successful stint as an urban charter school principal in a different city. John’s view on schools and schooling most exemplified on the investment team the work hard, no excuses, disciplined approach endemic to urban education reform. He “loved talking about data,” saying to a group of school leaders in an EOY meeting after excitedly analyzing data he considered particularly “robust,” that combing through school and student data was the “real work” (Field Notes, 8-12-19).

Felisha came to CEA, in her words, as a “sabbatical” from her work as a secondary school administrator (Field Notes, 4-17-19). Felisha instantly conveyed the confidence, charisma, and energy that is associated with successful urban school principals. As one of the two Black women on staff at CEA during my field work there, Felisha was a fierce advocate of the aptitude and success of students of color, unafraid to

bring the obvious racial dynamics of the city's education needs to the table in an organization that often stayed in safer colorblind discourse. Always colorfully dressed and with an easy laugh, Felisha was a particularly valuable participant, not only because of her depth of knowledge and her keen eye, but also because she was rarely hesitant to discuss the realities of working at CEA and in urban education philanthropy.

Mary was another former school administrator who had come to the team with prior experience as a public and charter schoolteacher and administrator. Compared to the rest of the team, Mary was more reserved, a demeanor which she complimented with a more conservative style. Mary's passion for education and students was obvious however in the care, consideration, and attention to detail she brought to her work. Though Mary would hang back in meetings and let the more vocal members of the team drive conversations, when she weighed in on a topic the rest of the team were quick to listen and incorporate her input.

Contract Agreement Meeting

During my research, I was able to follow a single charter high school (RTA) from its contracting process through the observation and recommendation aspect of its grant cycle. This included sitting in on a phone conference meeting during which CEA held a contract agreement meeting with what became a portfolio school. These data provide insight into the overlaps between the disciplinary language in the grant agreement contract and how CEA staff members understood the contracts and disciplinary relationships they framed. Ultimately, they show how the CEA Investment Team used the tool of hierarchical observation to enforce the contract and manage their investment, at multiple levels and over an extended period of time. This contract agreement meeting

occurred on a phone call between Diane, the director of the CEA's Investment Team, John, a CEA investment manager, and the executive director of RTA's charter network. RTA was a charter network that manages a k-8 and a high school, and this was the first contractual relationship between CEA and RTA. The meeting was to review the grant agreement contract CEA had drawn up before the two parties signed and formalized their partnership.

We sat in a meeting room used for team meetings as well as for End of Year (EOY) grantee presentations. A white room with a mid-sized meeting table manned by a grey conference call phone, the room had a whiteboard on one wall, usually with the notes from the previous meeting still visible, a blank wall for projecting presentations, and windows on one side that looked out on the backs of larger corporate buildings and the alleys below. The room was without color or adornment for months, until one day a set of pictures appeared on the wall.

The five new pictures provide important insight into how CEA strove to project itself to its partners and donors. They were modestly framed, with three depicting scenes of urban education and urban student success. The first picture showed a smiling Black teacher helping her Black and Brown students. The other was a picture of a smiling Black family in front of a school with a happy father, mother, and two boys. The third was a picture of students of color in graduation attire. The fourth picture was an overhead shot of the high school fair, a school choice event administered by CEA every year that resembled a college fair where students and families could learn about high school options in the district. The last was a picture of the executive director of CEA, a middle-aged white man, handing a 434-thousand-dollar oversized novelty check to a group of

four other middle aged white men and one white woman who upon closer look ran an organization that promoted specialized trades training in the city. In contrast to the other pictures in the room, this picture had only one person of color, the Black male superintendent of the city's school-district. Each picture epitomized an educational effort of CEA during my observations there. CEA wanted to promote its work in quality urban teaching and learning, its commitment to urban families, its efforts to increase graduation rates in the city, its work promoting school choice, and finally its support for educational job training in the trades and other in-demand fields.

It was in this room where I sat and listened to Diane and John discuss the \$250,000 contract with the executive director of the RTA charter network before they finalized the grant agreement. Conducting the grant agreement conversation over the grey conference call speaker phone, John and Diane began with some pleasantries before delving into the meat of the call, the opening of which pointed to how the team wanted to frame their partnership with RTA. Diane had asked John to lead the discussion so he could get some practice with these formal contract conversations. He highlighted that though the charter network also ran an elementary and middle school, the grant agreement, and the discussion of it during this call was for the high school alone. John said that it was the Investment team's goal to increase the high school enrollment by a hundred seats. He continued in an assertive but encouraging tone, observing that after the team reviewed the school data, they were confident in the high school's student retention but less confident in the charter school's elementary and middle school data. Therefore, if the charter organization wanted to grow its elementary and middle school enrollment with CEA grant money, they would have to negotiate a separate agreement.

John established the disciplinary relationship early on in the discussion. For example, he made sure to mention that CEA retained the “sole discretion to terminate (the contract) if the benchmarks are not hit.” Here his voice hardened a bit, taking on the tone of a principal giving a firm directive, expressing that there was some “wiggle room” around these benchmarks but that if the numbers remained flat or began to regress, CEA would begin conversations around remediation (Field notes 5-22-19). This opening statement placed CEA’s disciplinary stick on the table right from the start⁴.

The formal discussion of the contract began with money and the conditions CEA required before it would grant this money to RTA. John gave clarification of the details of the grant disbursement schedule, connecting these disbursements to the disciplinary benchmark requirement he made just before. John made clear the language in the contract, that the school’s submission of performance reports and benchmark progress was the “Condition” required to receive the grant money in the installments outlined on a table included in the document (Grant Agreement, 5/7/19). He then asked the charter school ED if this arrangement met with her approval. She said that she was fine with the 6-month check in schedule which she felt would “keep us on our toes,” and in terms of the monetary disbursement she said in a resigned and almost blasé tone that this decision was “yours and not mine” (Field notes 5-22-19).

The executive director of RTA appeared to be signaling the belief that disciplinary oversight was in fact beneficial for her school. In doing so, she may have been embodying Foucault’s idea of the internalization of external discipline. Of course,

⁴ It is worth noting that John’s direct references to termination and remediation contrasted with Diane’s more understated style.

another possibility is that, knowing her school needed money, she was saying what she thought John and Diane wanted to hear. In any case, John and Diane looked at each other with surprised approval after this frank acceptance of the terms, apparently used to pushback and more aggressive negotiation from their school partners.

Observation and Examination

John quickly mentioned that there is no unlawful discrimination allowed in the contract before he reiterated the contractual language that CEA intended to conduct disciplinary observation and examination over the school to manage its investment. Using the same forceful language as in the contract, John said the school would need to keep all data and records open and available for audit at any time, including beyond the terms of the grant disbursement., outlining that CEA will be conducting assessments to locate areas of strength and growth at the school, collecting formative and summative data, and examining curricular perspectives in the name of improving school success. John concluded this explanation of data examination requirements by saying there is “a lot of info to collect to maintain quality across the board,” and that CEA will need access to this data at any time, using the discursive framing CEA uses to promote its work (Field notes 5-22-19). As an aside, John noted that CEA needs to be informed of any management and/or leadership changes made at the school, cementing the disciplinary relationship to RTA school leadership CEA wanted to create with this partnership. In a charter school like RTA, a school leader has influence over personnel, curriculum, and pedagogy. As CEA wanted to have a hand in managing these processes, they needed to be kept in the loop when it comes to school leadership changes. Here, John and Diane were beginning a conversation and potentially using their experience with their principal leadership

development program and their knowledge of the education sector to consult and influence a choice of new school leader.

As the meeting proceeded, Diane tried to shift the way they were describing their partnership, from one of a disciplinary overseer to one of a consultant. While John's approach emphasized the power CEA would wield, Diane wanted to frame this power as supportive of RTA, the ED, and the mutual educational goals they outlined in this contract. Offering the investment team's expertise in assistance beyond their contracted responsibilities, Diane mentioned that although the grant was for the high school specifically, her team was willing to conduct school reviews of the elementary and middle schools because "we see you as partners." She thus framed disciplinary observation in entirely positive terms, as a benefit of the partnership, akin to bringing in an outside consultant to improve the school and not explicitly a part of a behavior modification program. John did not pick up Diane's consultancy framing however and returned to describing the negative outcomes of failing to achieve the contracted benchmark goals, mentioning that CEA reserved the right to restrict funding and bring in a partner or a consultant to work with school leadership and/or teachers if the school is struggling, as well as the right to terminate the partnership entirely if the agreement was not met. Diane, perhaps trying to soften the threats underlying John's statements, did mention that it was rare for funding to be cut.

This contrast between framing CEA's role in their grant partnerships as a watching disciplinarian or a helpful consultant did not conflict in practice or purpose, rather they symbolize disciplinary oversight and management in education in a broad sense, using carrot and stick punishments and rewards to change behavior and produce

results. The investment team was conflicted about their role as consultants or disciplinarians however, divisions which became clearer when I observed them conducting the contracted observational school reviews. Diane often tried to frame their involvement as supportive partners whereas John wanted the team to hold school leadership more accountable for the state of their schools and push them to address observed inadequacies.

The discussion then moved to the creation of specific benchmarks CEA was writing into the contract to determine school improvement, and formalizing the outcomes required to continue funding. John told the ED that his team normed benchmarks around the school performance review numbers of the previous school year, using those numbers as baseline data. The contract saw an increase in attendance from 43% of students attending 95% of school days to 45% the following year. Though it was not discussed on the call, the contracted benchmark has 53% of students attending 95% of days by the end of the grant (Grant Agreement, 5/7/19). In contrast to her earlier acceptance of other terms in the contract, the ED raised some questions about this goal, both wondering how the team arrived at 45% and expressing concern about her organization's ability to meet it, given all it was already doing to increase attendance through incentivizing parents and students. Diane responded that they crafted this attendance benchmark by averaging high school attendance rates from across the state and not from an average of the schools in their urban district because, as John said, "CEA aims to create proof points of excellence across the country" not just excellence within their traditionally underperforming district (Field notes 5-22-19). Diane mentioned that they were willing to hear feedback if the ED and her team thought the benchmark was too aggressive, to which the ED said she would

talk it over with her team and get back with recommendations. John mentioned it was a “stretch goal” but the investment team believed it was not unattainable.

Both Diane and John expressed confidence that with CEA money and support that this high school could continue to excel and prove what is possible in urban education. The ED, offering the only strong pushback and negotiation in the whole meeting, continued to highlight the difficulty of reaching the attendance as well as the graduation benchmark, bringing up contextual and structural barriers to getting children to school. Student attendance is a perennial concern in urban education, being heavily dependent on student’s home life. The ED brought up the difficulties of managing student attendance in urban settings, mentioning that many of her network’s students experienced housing instability, which led to high levels of transience – a factor that was beyond the schools’ control. This particular charter high school also required more credits to graduate than other district schools, and the ED found that Juniors who wanted to graduate more quickly would transfer schools for their senior year, hurting grade-to-grade retention numbers. Hearing these concerns, but not addressing any of them specifically, John mentioned that there was still time to negotiate any of the benchmarks before the first disbursement of funds.

This exchange was the main point of contention during the call and demonstrated how CEA implemented its vision for education in the city. John and Diane kept a level tone and did not look surprised that the ED did not readily accept their attendance benchmark, commenting after the meeting that many education leaders in the district have low expectations for success. The ED wanted to contextualize her frustration with the attendance benchmark, citing the housing insecurity of RTA students and precious

attendance initiatives. Meanwhile, CEA wanted to set aggressive benchmarks, eliding the structural realities of RTA students by comparing and benchmarking their performance to state-wide data, and setting big goals to create “proof points of excellence” that would resonate anywhere in the country, no matter if students had a stable living situation or not.

Concluding the meeting, John and Diane reviewed the particulars of the other benchmarks with the ED and concluded by framing the benchmarks as a fluid starting point for discussion. John quickly mentioned the final contracted benchmarks like staff retention, a benchmark that Diane said was based on the team’s experience as school leaders, the school’s participation in CEA’s staff and student surveys, and a college readiness benchmark of a 10% SAT reading growth in five years. The ED signed off by saying that she would get back to John and Diane around the end of the school year after speaking with the school’s leadership team. John concluded by reiterating that these benchmarks were merely CEA’s opening presentation and that the investment team thought they were a good set of benchmarks. Perhaps worried that he came off a bit too strong with a potential partner, John’s concluding statement framed the contract discussion as flexible, contrasting the take it or leave it tone struck previously, by describing the benchmarks as more of a discussion starter rather than a final offer.

The call ended and Diane said after a sigh, “people don’t like our benchmarks” to which John replied, “we are raising the bar” (Field notes 5-22-19). Both noted however that they were pleased to see that schools are actively engaging with the benchmarks and negotiating with them. The team wanted input on their benchmarks from their partner schools even as they wanted to push schools to achieve better performance numbers.

Seeking to craft “proof points of excellence,” the investment team builds their academic benchmarks to reflect the performance of schools not only in the urban environment but across the state, placing these benchmarks as a “stretch goal” before hearing feedback on contextual constraints from their partner schools.

After the call, Diane explained that there was some disconnect with how the investment team used to operate and how the current iteration manages their partner schools. This change in discipline was still being felt out by the investment team because the disciplinary oversight of this new team extended beyond school budgets and into the educational operations of the partner schools, which surprised some of their older schools’ relationships. She said the current investment team, which is comprised of all former principals, is more school data and achievement driven than the previous team. Her understanding was that the previous team included only one teacher and others with no education experience. I would later learn that this former team was made up of primarily finance and business professionals and that this shift in team and process caught some school leader partners off guard.

The new investment team was seemingly built to discipline portfolio schools more directly towards measurable student outcomes. Diane quoted one bewildered partner, who, after reviewing the new agreements, with their data collection, benchmarks, and observational requirements, exclaimed “the disbursements used to be based on trust,” implying that such oversight shows CEA’s lack of trust in their school partners (Field notes 5-22-19). The former investment team may have been more adept at reviewing and managing the financials of running a school, but in the previously six years it failed to produce the academic achievement CEA and its investors wasted to see, hence this new

team and approach. Diane believed her team could find success if she “invests well in good people and good schools” (Field notes 5-22-19).

Another point of tension for these former urban principals was the struggle their partner school leaders had envisioning success unconstrained by the structural realities of urban education. Diane and John expressed frustration that, like the ED on the call I observed, so many educators in the city want to base their success on other schools in the district, which as a whole, were not achieving nearly at the same rate as other schools in the state or the country. They said they wanted not just a great school for poor kids but a great school period, and that the biggest problem in the city’s schools was a “mindset of what is possible.” This sentiment, that the issues facing urban education can be addressed by investing in competent school leadership, quality curriculum, and best teaching practices, is often at odds with current research on the correlation between poverty and education as well as findings about the inability for schooling to overcome the problems of entrenched historical poverty at scale (Spring, 2013; Rothstein, 2004; Downey, 2016; Darby & Rury, 2018).

This focus on schools and schooling while ignoring the social, historical, and material realities of education in the city was a common theme both in the VP practice of CEA and its theory of change. Whenever I would approach the structural issues facing the district, the city, and its people with staff and board members of CEA, these issues would be dismissed as a distraction from the very real work of “creating proof points of excellence” in schools and with students. For example, when talking about socioeconomic factors like race and poverty in urban education, the executive director of

CEA used a market fundamentalist framing common within CEA and their network of donors,

In the school district a third of students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade. And the city as a whole it's about 40 percent. That's not nearly good enough. You know if we could move that number to 60 percent this city would be transformed in the next 20 years economically because that would lead to more high school graduates, better prepared high school graduates, more college graduates, more employable low income and minority young adults, who are going to then start creating wealth for their communities and their families. And you know that's how we move poverty; that's how we shrink the percentage of people in poverty (Interview 2/12/20).

Addressing structural issues at scale was not in the “locus of control” of CEA and the investment team. Investing in schools that were proven able to teach low income and minority children to read was a “realistic” and attainable goal. Rather than focusing on closing the “opportunity gap” this framing of addressing structural inequities through improving the educational outcomes for populations of individual students and their families ran through CEA’s project as a VP and as an organization.

What stood out in this conversation was the continued rhetorical (and legal) pressure of disciplinary data accountability and oversight, even as Diane and John were willing to be flexible with the specific numbers in their benchmarks. CEA required complete access to all data, even beyond the life of the grant, although it was not the only funder in this charter school. In many ways, CEA’s assertion of power during this meeting resembled an invasion by an outside force over the internal workings of another organization. This contract was being hammered out by two parties who wanted this partnership, though each had its own reasons for engaging. The quantification and reduction of the educational lives of children, reduced to benchmark metrics, was not given a second comment by RTA’s executive director, with little to no pushback at all.

Instead, her main contention with the contract and the only time that issues relating to poverty and the larger context of urban education entered the discussion, was that housing precarity made hitting the attendance and retention benchmark difficult.

Conclusion

Technocratic and managerial forces in urban education form the water in which teachers, administration, and students swim. This approach to improving education is hegemonic “common sense,” not only among charter school administration and education reform advocates, but also in traditional education policy and practice (Gramsci, 1999). Data are the price schools must pay to attract money for their school. The grant agreement contract and the partnership discussion with the ED of RTA highlight that CEA’s mission is the production of successful student data. The disciplinary framework CEA employs to reach that goal is the production of “quality” students.

CEA occupied a unique position in the education sector. It sought to intervene in minute aspects of school administration and teaching, yet it was not directly involved in the day-to-day operations of its portfolio schools. Its grant contract firmly implemented observation, examination, and judgement to discipline school practices. With the intention of producing successful outcomes that could be replicated beyond its investment portfolio, CEA wanted these outcomes to serve as symbols of the success of its education model. Beyond disciplining schools and schooling, CEA aimed to change the “mindset of what is possible” in urban education. To change minds and expand horizons however, CEA had to prove that their discipline could overcome the structural forces that, while not insurmountable, still constrained student achievement. Implicit in CEAs benchmarks was the belief that there is enough power within a school to affect a

student's home life and to shape students into engines for personal and economic growth, and further, that this process could be done at scale and not only for the most motivated of students.

The contract established the disciplinary means CEA used to achieve the end of educational improvement. It set out specific benchmark goals against which it could judge schools as institutions and put in place the disciplinary technologies of student data examination, behavioral observation, and managerial surveillance, to both reify these practices within investment schools and to monitor and ensure that schools progressed towards CEA (and presumably the school's) stated goals. This discipline was a central tool to manage grant/investment funds and the disciplinary framework outlined in the contract aimed to produce schools, schooling, and students that align with the goals of CEA, its board, and its funders.

CHAPTER 6

INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT: OBSERVATION, JUDGEMENT, EXAMINATION, AND THE PRODUCTION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Introduction

Venture philanthropic investment aims to produce a measurable social good. In return for the funding it received from donors, CEA sought to invest in a portfolio of high performing schools that increased student attainment. Attainment was understood through a number of student achievement metrics, such as standardized reading and math scores, college matriculation, and SAT scores. CEA's return on investment was therefore student achievement data, understood as a direct result of school instruction. CEA wrote school benchmarks into its grant agreement contracts to ensure that schools prioritized their instructional practice and increased measurable student learning. Responsible for the success of their school portfolio, CEA looked to the investment team to nurture positive student outcomes.

Improving the quality of instruction was central to managing the success of CEA's school investments. CEA's theory of change involved the implementation of two disciplinary techniques codified in its grant agreements, Observation/Judgement and Examination, used to enact a specific model of and vision for successful urban education. In this chapter, I will examine how the investment team operationalized this disciplinary framework to influence the instructional practices and culture of their portfolio schools, first by performing school review visits where the team observed and judged the classroom instruction at their grantee schools, and second by reviewing how the team required their grantee schools to submit to data examination practices.

Part One - Shaping Successful Instruction: Observation and Judgement

According to the School Review Form the investment team would give to their portfolio schools after observing instruction, “The purpose of the school review visit is to... analyze performance, culture, and instructional practices... that will increase student learning and achievement outcomes” (School Review Form, 2019). To improve student achievement, the investment team used observation and judgment to discipline instruction in three ways. The first was that CEA and the investment team had a very specific instructional model they wished to enact in their schools. The second was that, because surveillance of instruction, curriculum, and student products was an integral part of this model, the team conditioned students and teachers to be observed and to see surveillance as an aspect of successful education. The third way the team disciplined instruction was through monitoring and correcting school culture. Portfolio schools were contracted to be open to observation and evaluation, and to accommodate any and all requests made by CEA pertaining to its grant, including the internal operation of a school and all of the schooling that happens within it. To understand the observation and judgement practices of the investment team, I accompanied them on several formal school visits where they observed and evaluated schools and schooling, using their gaze to manage administrators, teachers, and students, towards “rigorous” instruction and a “culture of learning.”

Observation and judgement are interconnected disciplinary technologies the team employed during their school review visits. The point of observing instruction was to judge classroom behaviors as “ineffective” or “skillful,” and this judgment of instruction was framed by an Observational Review Rubric and its accompanying School Review

Form, both of which defined the team's approach and their model for education practice. Beginning with a description of a typical school review process, this section will move to an overview of the formal School Observation Rubric and the School Review Form, against which classroom instruction was judged. To demonstrate how the investment team operationalized disciplinary aspects found in the grant agreement, I will chronicle in detail an observation at RTA, the school covered in the grant agreement conversation described in the previous chapter. The investment team's assessments at RTA, a highly structured urban charter high school, will be compared with their approach at The Project School (TPS), a project-based, restorative-justice model, district-managed school. This description will also include observational data from other school visits to craft an account of the school observation/judgement process.

The Observational Approach and A Typical School Review Visit

The team aimed to complete two formal school observation visits for each grantee school, every school year for the first two years of the grant agreement. In the full day, full team formal observation school visits, the team would break up into groups of two and travel to each classroom. Most classroom observations would last no more than five to ten minutes before moving on to another classroom. The observation process would often entail looking at student curriculum, content material, and completed work, while taking notes on instructional delivery and assessing student engagement and classroom culture. A team member would fill out the School Review Form for each teacher and class on their laptop, and these results would be compiled into a shared document. After visiting and observing each classroom, the investment team would come together to discuss overarching instructional trends they observed as a team, and to determine school

strengths and to formulate suggestions for addressing instructional inadequacies. After the team came to a consensus around their instructional feedback, these observations would then be shared through the School Review Form and also in a meeting with school leadership, often the principal and/or instructional administrators.

The investment team awarded grant money to RTA because they had confidence in RTA's abilities to drive student achievement and hit the benchmarks outlined in their grant agreement contract. This confidence came, in no small part, from the alignment between RTA's educational approach and the investment team's pedagogical belief in rigorous instruction and disciplined school culture. The team was also confident because John, the investment team member who led the grant agreement call with RTA's executive director, performed what he described as the "due diligence" required to make an informed investment into RTA, believing that with some management consulting, they would be able to improve the school's instructional delivery and produce results. CEA and the investment team needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of its investments, and RTA's mission and model for improving outcomes in urban education made the school a prime site for further disciplinary management.

A project-based learning school in their portfolio, The Project School (TPS) was a former traditional district school whose newer project-based learning model had been implemented through a provider that had some success in a nearby city. TPS used its CEA grant to expand to this school. Compared to the more "no-excuses" model of highly disciplined urban education found at RTA, TPS had a more progressive approach, emphasizing such core values as; the individual and collective power to create positive change, mindfulness, interconnectedness, responsibility, courage, and transparency.

Promoting a “Rigorous” Instructional Model: The School Observation Rubric

The team relied heavily on an observation rubric to discipline, manage, and improve the teacher and student behavior that they believed drove student achievement⁵. When the investment team observed schools in their portfolio, they used this observation rubric to create a normalizing judgement of the teaching they observed in classrooms. This observation tool served a dual function. First, it allowed the investment team and anyone else who wished to perform hierarchical observations of classrooms to grade the teaching and learning they observed, thereby simplifying the qualitative data of a classroom into numerical values which could be aggregated to identify schoolwide instructional trends. Secondly, the use of this rubric for scholastic assessment standardized the instructional model, creating an idealized “normal” model of what should occur in a classroom for optimal student achievement results. This model was held up as the standard to which the team compared and judged all observed teaching and learning. The observation rubric was a disciplinary tool; it codified what successful instruction was and gave a framework for both observation and judgement.

CEA’s rubric was designed to give observers a common language to evaluate best practices for “rigorous” teaching. The rubric provided teacher feedback and development along 5 performance competencies; “Culture of Learning,” a classroom culture of student engagement in the material, “Essential Content,” content alignment to grade level and student competency standards, “Academic Ownership,” student responsibility over the

⁵ This rubric was created by another organization, Sound Teaching Strategies (STS), a longstanding partner of CEA.

cognitive load of the classroom learning, “Demonstration of Learning,” a monitoring of content inculcation through student products and behavior, and “Student Agency,” a student responsibility to engage in their own learning process and that of the classroom. Each of these designations had a corresponding qualitative description for each competency accompanied by a section for ‘Core Teacher Skills’ that were aligned with each competency. (Observational Rubric, 2016).

The rubric included a guide for the observer to identify classroom behaviors that demonstrated each competency. Student engagement, for example, could be seen when students stayed on task with good learning postures and practices (sitting up straight, note-taking, etc.) The student engagement rubric assessed student engagement by tracking the percentage of students that performed learning behaviors, how well the class internalized and replicated classroom learning and behavioral procedures, how well the instruction was paced, and the extent to which students could self-direct their learning activities without teacher input. For example, the rubric considered instruction to be “Minimally Effective” in student engagement when “students are idle while waiting for the teacher... for one to two minutes at a time.” However, student engagement in schoolwork was judged as “Skillful” when “students assumed responsibility for routines and procedures and executed them in an orderly, efficient, and well-directed manner, requiring no direction or narration from the teacher” (Observational Rubric, 2016). The rubric thus provided a clear description of ideal student engagement and how to identify deviations from that ideal behavior.

The team adapted this observational rubric to create the School Review Form, a short deliverable for school leaders. This form communicated both strengths and

weaknesses and the team's 1-4 quantitative assessment of four out of the five instructional competencies. Each competency was broken down into specific observable behaviors which were themselves judged on a 1-4 scale and averaged into a final instructional competency score. For instance, in the "Demonstration of Learning" competency, the observed behaviors judged from 1-4 were, "Data-Driven Instruction," "Use of Academic Language by Students," "Evidence of Learning in Student Work," and "Evidence of Students on Track to Meet Student Goals." Behaviors that would be judged to demonstrate the "Culture of Learning" competency were "Completion of Tasks," "Follow Expectations," "Transitions," and "Engaging Pace." The "Student Agency" competency was conspicuously absent and was not assessed by the team (School Review Rubric, 2019).

Framing School Review Visits with the School Observation Rubric

In their portfolio school review visits, the investment team was observing and judging against the education model drawn from the STS School Observation Rubric, looking for behavior they referred to as "instructional rigor." The team believed that managing and promoting rigorous instruction in all classrooms would produce student achievement, and the school review rubric simplified this process by asking observers to note and compile the frequency of classroom behaviors which aligned with a maximally efficient use of class time. When observing a classroom, the investment team would assess the rigor of the teaching and the materials in a class by observing both the extent to which content was aligned with state standards, and what percentage of students were engaged in and completing their coursework. Rigorous instruction therefore involved an "aggressive monitoring" of student achievement against grade level standards and

competencies (Field Notes, 11/7/19). Most of the observational effort of the investment team went towards determining the rigor of classroom instruction and content, with John defining rigor as, “when teachers are tracking students’ standards within their teaching” (Field Notes, 11/7/19).

The team’s observational style was directed to assessing rigorous instruction, and their feedback to principals reinforced the model. This practice seemed to impact how principals themselves thought about instruction, or at least how they discussed it with the CEA team. For example, the principal of TPS, who had worked with CEA for several years, appeared to have internalized the team’s priorities. In a meeting with the CEA team, she signaled to the investment team that their instructional priorities were her priorities by using the framing of “instructional rigor” and asked the team to focus on three aspects of classroom instruction during their observations: student engagement, rigor of instruction, and classroom environment. While it is not clear that she actually believed CEA’s priorities to be more important than other goals, that she was speaking to the observational strengths of the team, or that she was trying to say what she thought the team wanted to hear, the principal’s use of the investment team’s terminology in this meeting suggested that the team had made her keenly aware of what they looked for in regard to instruction.

Team members framed their observations and the instructional needs of their schools through the School Observation Rubric. For example, when they were observing at RTA, John and Diane were especially concerned about the low levels of rigor in an environmental science class, particularly noticing the ineffective “Culture of Learning.” In a lesson on resource distribution and food deserts, a student brought up Popeye’s

chicken and the whole class got off track for 10-15 seconds before the teacher reeled them back in. John and Diane looked at each other and noted this disruption in their observation rubric. Not impressed by this teacher and his classroom, Diane observed as we walked out, “at least students are compliant in this class.” That was the only positive attribute she observed (Field Notes, 11/7/19). In another instance, while observing a 9th grade English class at TPS, Mary remarked that the classroom needed instructional scaffolding to keep students on task, and lacked a “culture of learning,” which she defined as instruction combined with engagement. Concerned with the “Essential Content” in a math class after hearing from the teacher that he had planned for a factorization activity for the last half of class, Mary questioned whether “this (activity and instruction) is robust enough for a whole class?” (Field Notes, 4/17/19).

During the instructional feedback meetings, the team discussed the feedback from their School Review Form. For example, at TPS, the team all agreed that the school needed to increase its urgency and expectations for students, and that the overall learning in the school is not rooted in skill levels or content. At TPS they wanted to see projects that were well planned, that incorporated competencies and standards, and that required and monitored student skill building. Some on the team were concerned that the low student engagement at TPS was connected to its issues with project-based learning. But Felisha claimed that the problems at TPS were not unique to their instructional model but rather reflected the low standards of education in the city itself, “This (problem) is not about PBL, and I haven’t seen high expectations, teaching, or learning, in any high school in (this city)” (Field Notes, 4/17/19). At both RTA and TPS, the team concluded that students were compliant and not actively disruptive, but that much of the instruction they

observed was not rigorous. Because of this ineffective instruction, the resulting lack of student engagement became its own type of disorder that needed to be corrected.

The investment team was not always critical. For example, the most skillful instruction observed at RTA was in a sophomore English class led by a teacher who, incidentally, was the only teacher whose race and ethnicity visibly mirrored those of her Black and Brown students. According to the team, the class exhibited a strong “Culture of Learning” and “Academic Ownership,” as students were engaged in class discussion, felt comfortable speaking openly about their frustrations, and owned the content by doing the majority of the work in the classroom. The teacher supplemented her instruction by holding her students to high standards and with visually appealing, informative, and effective power point slides that displayed “Essential Content.” For example, the teacher passed out a handout to the class and some students noticed that it said “Honors English.” They assumed that because this class was not an Honors English class, the teacher had made a mistake. She told them that the difference between Honors and this class was that they received slightly different books to read but that “you are all Honors to me, and I teach you all the same” (Field Notes, 11/7/19). John and Diane nodded and marked this as a demonstration of high standards on their School Review Rubrics. When the team came together to review their observations, they all agreed that this teacher was the best English teacher in the building.

Conditioning Students and Teachers for Surveillance

The process of observation and judgement that CEA conducted in their school review visits, in addition to collecting and analyzing school wide instructional behavioral data, promoted its own subtle instructional and cultural classroom behavior. These

disciplines conditioned students and teachers to behave as if surveillance was or should be a normal part of classroom instruction. The team expected that students and teachers would accept frequent, unannounced visits and observations, and in nearly all the classrooms at RTA, and in most of the classrooms at TPS, the team faced little resistance to their observations. This conditioned reaction to surveillance points to two features relating to the team's observational discipline. The first was a demonstration of the extent that teachers and students are subjected to observation, both by the team and as an aspect of current managerial education practices. The second was an obedience to the judgmental gaze of a multitude of observers, including the investment team. The investment team promoted and reinforced a disciplinary gaze which allowed the team to both assess instructional content and assess student's "Demonstration of Learning." To determine the extent to which students were learning the required content, the team assessed the "evidence of learning in student work" and "evidence of students on track to meet learning goals" in their observations (School Review Form, 2019). Though they were not explicit in their connection between an acceptance of surveillance and high-quality instruction, the team often rated instruction as skillful when they were able to seamlessly observe classroom instruction and examine and assess student work as they chose.

During school visits, the team moved easily through the schools, generally attracting little attention. Though relative strangers in the classrooms they observed, team members were able to enter each space and, without explanation, talked to students, examined their assignments and curricula, took notes, and left, often without being acknowledged or questioned by those in the room. In the "skillful" English class

described above, the fact that the teacher and her class did not miss a beat of instruction or engagement while being observed was itself taken as an indication of effective instruction.

The extent to which hierarchical observation and surveillance had become normalized was clear during one visit to an honors history class at RTA. When the team entered the quiet classroom, a student got up from her seat to welcome us to the class and to tell us that they were studying the reconstruction era of American history by creating ads for the Federal Freedman's Bureau. I learned from Diane that this student introduction was a common tool encouraged in classrooms that were accustomed to numerous and often unfamiliar observers. The teacher, sitting at her desk, had also so internalized surveillance that she did not seem to notice our presence, nor did she inquire what we were doing in her classroom. The team rated the instruction in this class, a class in which both teacher and students appeared to have internalized expectations about behavior, self-control, and surveillance, as "skillful."

The team's assessment of instructional rigor also extended extend to an examination of student work. According to CEA, students should demonstrate "effort," "oral or written evidence," and "evidence of learning," while engaging in "appropriate instructional materials" and "activities aligned to learning goals" and "grade level standards" (School Review Form, 2019). For example, in the compliant honors history class discussed above, Diane, trying to judge the curricular standard of the classroom work, asked a student who was working on her ad for the Freeman's Bureau, if she could look through her work folder. The folder was a perfect medium for Diane to judge student comprehension, as it contained printed out and completed assignments.

Presumably, this student had never met Diane before, and yet the student wordlessly complied with this request to review her classwork. While observing classrooms, John would often prowl around the room, looking over student's shoulders at their classwork, checking on both student completion and the assigned material. He would also frequently sit down next to students and ask what they were working on, even if, as in one class at TPS, the student was obviously watching videos on their phone. These behaviors went unremarked upon by students who seemed accustomed to being watched and judged.

The model of rigorous instruction, as defined in the STS School Observation Rubric and assessed on the CEA School Review Form, also promoted surveillance as a necessary instructional method to provide student specific, standards-aligned, and competency-based instruction. At RTA for instance, to provide this instruction, Felisha recommended that "aggressive monitoring should be implemented in every classroom" (Field Notes, 11/7/19). Felisha described aggressive monitoring as involving a teacher knowing the precise extent to which each student is comprehending the material. This monitoring of student understanding requires ideally, a constant surveillance of student learning as demonstrated by student work. Surveillance is thus promoted by the investment team both as a behavioral conditioning practice for teachers and students, and a feedback mechanism that, in an effort to increase student learning, surveilles student knowledge to tailor specialized instruction.

Surveillance is a central feature of the team's school review visits and to their model instructional framework. These practices promote compliant behavior from both students and teachers and make the entirety of the methods and results of instruction visible to power. As they want to improve the student outcomes of instruction, CEA and

their ideal model of instruction created a panopticon where ideally classroom behavior and student work could be observed at any time. The secondary result of this practice of observation is a classroom culture of compliance, and even a desire to conform to this system of surveillance and its transformative power for both instruction and student achievement.

Shaping School Culture

Finally, CEA disciplined schools by monitoring and correcting their culture. Through their observation documents and their commentary, the team expressed three beliefs about school culture. First, that the effectiveness of instruction is deeply connected to school culture. Second, that school culture is best represented by and analyzed through the behavior of students and teachers. And third, that school culture should be crafted and maintained by school leaders.

The “Culture of Learning” the team wanted to impress at RTA and TPS went beyond simple compliance. Students were, for the most part, well behaved at both RTA and TPS. They were respectful to their teachers, followed the school behavioral guidelines, and were not disruptive during class time. Though this discipline was appreciated by the team, they still believed that student engagement was low and that teachers did not always guide student behavior towards the most effective use of class time. They sought to use their school reviews to promote what they believed was more important, a culture of complete attention.

As part of their school review process, the investment team judged the “Culture of Learning” in the classrooms and the building as a whole. In the school review form they

share with schools they assess this competency against four indicators, “Completion of Tasks,” “Follow Expectations,” “Transitions,” and “Engaging Pace” (School Review Form, 2019) The STS Observation Rubric defines “skillful” “Culture of Learning” behaviors as when, in addition to students completing instructional tasks and following behavioral expectations, “Students assume responsibility for routines and procedures and execute them in an orderly, efficient, and self-directed manner with no direction or narration from the teacher.” When “Class has a quick pace and students are engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish.” And when “Students demonstrate a sense of ownership of behavioral expectations by holding each other accountable for meeting them” (STS Observation Rubric, 2016). This ideal classroom instructional culture contains a complete disciplinary structure, where students’ time, space, bodies, and knowledge are made useful through internalized routines and interpersonal surveillance, extending beyond behavioral compliance to enact disciplinary regimen of continuous attention designed to improve student academic outcomes efficiently and effectively.

The team considered teacher and student behavior the indicator of instructional culture and assessed instruction against the ideal articulated in the STS Observation Rubric. For example, when Mary observed an English class that was working on grade level standards, she was nevertheless concerned that the teacher did not address the chatty group of girls in the back who were clearly not engaged. In another classroom where students began packing their things before the bell rang, Mary observed that this teacher did not teach “bell to bell,” thereby losing instructional time (Field Notes 4/17/19). Similarly, in the hallway at RTA, John reinforced the need for compliant student behavior, comparing it to speeding on a highway, where if everyone knows that they can

go 10 MPH over the speed limit without repercussions they will. Looking at his watch, John then clocked how long students took to transition between classes. The length of time was clearly unacceptable to him and symptomatic of a school culture that did not respect learning time. John noted that maybe the rules of his former school were too harsh, but he justified his methods because his former charter school network received the Broad prize for charter school excellence. To John and the other team members, student engagement was not only the passion and interest students expressed in classroom content, but it was also an attention that never wavered from the instructional task at hand.

Even though both schools had behaviorally compliant students, the students' inattention to instruction observed at both RTA and TPS was a sign of an insufficient culture of learning. After noticing that the student engagement survey results at RTA placed them in the lowest quintile nationally, Felisha mentioned that after the school's 20 years of focusing on culture work, students were "compliant, but there's no mechanism to address the apathy that students have for the material" (Field Notes, 11/7/19). At TPS, where they estimated they observed 75% of classes with under 50% student engagement, the team agreed that a culture of low behavior and academic expectations was the core problem that affected student engagement. Echoing her cultural judgement at RTA, Felisha said that "You can quell chaos, but then you have to deal with apathy and complacency. Apathy and complacency is disorder" (Field Notes 4/17/19). Agreeing that TPS had addressed its former behavior issues, Felisha told the principal that now "the hard hard work began" that she said was all about "systems, systems, systems" (Field

Notes 4/17/19). The systems that would solve the disorder of apathy and complacency being a culture of learning and rigorous instruction.

The team believed that a culture of efficient and effective instruction began with school leadership, who could then implement and reinforce this culture through management and instructional coaching. Citing a difference in class content and instructional delivery at RTA, Diane questions the ability and effectiveness of the school administrative team to observe and coach teacher instruction. It was here that Felisha expressed that schools need a “waterfall of instruction,” meaning that a culture including quality instructional discipline is the responsibility of the principal and administrative teacher coaching (Field Notes, 11/7/19). This instruction flows from principals down to students, students who are disciplinarily primed and behaviorally compliant to receive standards based, “rigorous” instruction and demonstrate their learning.

At TPS, John was visibly agitated and frustrated with school leadership because he held them responsible for the cultural flaws of the school. Agreeing with Felisha when she said that “I don’t believe this is a teacher issue,” John expressed that as school leadership drives school culture, that it is the principal’s job to address the culture of low expectations they saw at the school. His frustration with TPS leadership is that they seemed unwilling or unable to address the cultural failings he observed, saying with agitation, “If principals see this (lack of engagement) in their observations what is their follow up question?” and ‘if they agree (that lack of engagement was a problem) we can ask what they want to do?’ John wanted to confront the school leadership team at TPS over their inability to address school culture. Instead of confrontation, John communicated to the principal that he was more than willing to support the principal with

school culture by returning for more observations, saying “your eyes get tired, and it is helpful to see with fresh eyes” (Field Notes 4/17/19). The tenor of their feedback notwithstanding, the team saw themselves as “thought partners” with the school leaders of their portfolio schools, as the team believed that these school leaders were the most influential touch points to shape the culture and the “waterfall of instruction” in their portfolio. Even when it came to school culture, the investment team took a managerial approach, believing that if they could manage their portfolio principals the right way and promote the right practices, that more students would be pulled from the “chaos” of apathy and complacency into the order of instructional engagement.

Believing like John, that, “Students should come to school and work hard,” the team all prided themselves on the school cultures they built as former principals. They promoted the idea that a culture of behavioral and instructional discipline would produce the best results for students. Equally, the production and maintenance of a disciplinary school culture was a central feature of the team’s observational and judgment practice. Not unsurprisingly, the team was also tasked to provide these positive student achievement results as a return on investment for their donor contributions. In this way, the observation and judgement discipline CEA enacted at their portfolio schools strove to make students not only behaviorally and instructionally compliant, but also compliant to the desires of CEA and their funders.

An Inherent Tension Between Compliance and Agency

A tension between student compliance and student agency is at the center of CEA’s instructional model. The instructional model, reinforced through the observation and judgement of the team, prioritized students taking “academic ownership” of their

behavior, effort, growth, learning, and future goals through “monitor(ing) their own progress” and “self-assessing whether they have achieved the lesson objective” (STS School Observation Rubric, 2016). At the same time however, students had to simultaneously be compliant, receptive, and participatory in a highly prescriptive instructional curriculum and culture. As my data suggests, the team sought a culture of learning that incorporated instructional rigor with an aggressive monitoring of student standards achievement. Thus, the team promoted a very particular kind of ownership, one in which students had little say over what they actually do, just how well they perform their role. In other words, ownership in this context means students discipline themselves and their classmates, are compliant with control over their body, speech, and time, and adhere to a prescribed standards-aligned curriculum.

This tension between compliance and agency was most pronounced in The STS School Observation Rubric. It defines skillful instruction in the “Student Agency” competency as students bearing most of the work in a classroom, including self-surveilling their behavior and progress towards their own educational and personal goals. It also defined skillful instruction as occurring when “Students have many choices in their learning process (e.g., what they learn, when they learn, where they learn, how they learn (mode), how they demonstrate knowledge), have sufficiently high-quality information and skills to make decisions, and most or all students make quality decisions aligned to their learning needs and/or goals” (School Observation Rubric, 2016). This description of the “student agency” instructional competency stood in contrast to the disciplinary “culture of learning” competency, both found in the STS Observation Rubric.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the School Review Form the CEA team used to make, assess, and communicate their observations did not include this reference to student agency. While all other parts of the School Review Form matched the STS rubric, this element was noticeably absent, and the team did not observe or assess student agency as part of their school reviews. This choice reflects the approach CEA and its investment team took with students, one that privileged compliance and performance and sidelined other goals for education.

Indeed, student agency did not surface in any of the conversations I observed or participated in during my time with CEA. Instead, members of the team sometimes seemed hostile to the idea of student autonomy or agency. For example, in our conversation about Project Based Learning, John, the investment team member who was frustrated with the lack of engagement and rigor at TPS, reiterated his belief in a highly disciplined schooling model for urban students saying, “there’s an immense freedom in structure.” John also questioned the commitment to student voice and choice in the PBL model saying, “I would not let my child choose their education on their own” (Field Notes 4/17/19). To John, there was a connection between the freedom of project-based learning and a freedom of behavior that contributed to low engagement, rigor, and student learning output. Even though research points to the correlations between student engagement and voice in their educational journeys (Baroutsis et al, 2015; Toshalis & Nakkula 2021), *and* CEA’s own data pointed to a lack of student engagement as a concern at both RTA and TPS, the investment team did not suggest that students might want to have ownership over their schoolwork.

The framework that CEA used to influence and manage their schools to achieve student outcomes did not have the space or time for students to experience voice and choice in schools. Students were encouraged to own their education and do the lion's share of the work themselves, but this freedom lied in achieving goals which were predefined for them. The observation and judgement CEA and the investment team performed in their portfolio schools, disciplined school instruction through promoting and normalizing a particular instructional model, high levels of surveillance, and a specific "Culture of Learning." For the investment team, students were ideally at the bottom of a waterfall of instruction, which flowed from a wellspring of school leadership, state standards, the capacity of the school, and the influence of intermediate organizations like CEA. In this waterfall, students were shaped by the power of the water with little to do but own getting wet.

Part 2 - Examination

Introduction

In addition to their use of observation and judgement, CEA and its investment team implement examination practices to discipline their portfolio of school investments. These examination practices were central to CEA's work in education, both its investment work and the investment team's management of grantee schools. Examination both produces education data and analyzes it, and it is through examination that the quality of education is understood and communicated. CEA's school examination practices included the contracted oversight of school standardized testing outcomes, school budgets and investments, and school population data. Another examination practice was the investment team's annual portfolio school examination, the end of the

year (EOY) school performance review. In this granter/grantee relationship, examination served two main functions: it constituted knowledge about the performance of their investments, and by making the educational processes of their portfolio schools visible, these processes could be subject to the power and influence of CEA. CEA was, by its own account, a “data driven organization” and it understood educational effectiveness through the metrics that it measured (Interview, 1/15/20).

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes, “Discipline organizes an analytical space” (Foucault, 1977, p 143). To organize their educational investments, CEA determined its return on investment (ROI) through student achievement data, and it contracted school performance benchmarks to track and improve those data outcomes. CEA promoted examination because it provided visibility to teacher and student performance, objectifying the constantly changing phenomena of schooling, allowing for observation and judgement to manage fixed rather than moving pieces. More than observation or judgement, examination creates the raw data that stands in for what happens in schools, an indispensable practice when trying to shape schooling. The discipline CEA and the investment team implemented over its grantee schools was aimed at organizing the disparate elements seen within and across schools so that analysis could occur and a set of remediations could be prescribed.

CEA used two examination practices to discipline the education in their portfolio schools. The first examination practice was the promotion of data management tools and examination as a disciplinary practice. CEA’s practice of instructional surveillance was a two-pronged strategy of instructional observation and an examination of student data. Described in the previous chapter on observation, the investment team both used

observation to assess the instruction at their portfolio schools, and promoted the use of observation to portfolio school leaders as an instructional coaching practice. The team's examination practice followed a similar technique. With the goal of making data informed investment decisions, the investment team used examination to collect and analyze school data. The team also promoted the use of instructional examination tools to their portfolio school leaders, so that these leaders could make data informed instructional decisions. Constant Checkup and Landscape were education examination products that the team incentivized schools to use through grants (Constant Checkup), or through contract (Landscape). These tools provided visibility for both CEA and school leaders into instructional processes beyond the data gleaned through standardized test scores.

CEA's most prominent use of examination discipline over the education at its portfolio schools, however, was the End of Year (EOY) school performance reviews. These EOY reviews were contracted examinations of a school's performance against the stipulations outlined in the grant agreement contract. In addition to providing their school data to the investment team for review in advance of the meeting, each school had to formally present a review of their school year and their benchmark data. As the goal of the investment team was to improve school performance outcomes, examination tools and the EOY school examination/review distilled the education provided at portfolio schools into specific data points, to which each school would have to address in detail. In the first section, I will review the use of examination through instructional management tools, and in the second the EOY performance review as a total disciplinary practice.

Improving Instruction Through Examination: Constant Checkup and Landscape

As part of their commitment to instructional rigor, the investment team was supportive of an aggressive monitoring of school data. The team saw data analysis and instructional rigor as complementary aspects of an iterative educational improvement practice. Instructional coaching, student standards achievement, and school wide performance were all dependent on understanding and analyzing student data, and the investment team promoted the use of examination and data management tools within their portfolio schools so these schools would be able to better enact instructional reforms. The first tool that the team promoted was Constant Checkup (a pseudonym). Constant Checkup was a customizable standardized testing program that allowed teachers and schools to create personalized standardized tests as well as have access to pre-programmed tests which examined student understanding and performance of educational skills against a standards-aligned curriculum. The second tool was Landscape (a pseudonym), a student and teacher survey program that would help the team identify school wide trends of engagement and instruction.

Constant Checkup

The team wanted to reshape the way that the high schools in their portfolio addressed benchmark goals, and they believed that their high schools should use Content Checkup, a technology that allowed schools, principals, and teachers to create their own standardized tests that were tailored to curriculum that aligned with SAT and ACT standards. The beauty of Constant Checkup for the investment team was that it optimized the rigorous instruction the team wanted to reproduce in their schools. Constant Checkup produced standardized tests which monitored individual student data, enabling teachers to

determine the needs of individual students around topics like vocabulary, textual analysis, algebra, or geometry skills, allowing instruction to be aligned directly to which skills each student needed to master. The Constant Checkup program cost about three to four thousand dollars a year per school, as it consisted of both hardware for producing and scanning tests and software that included state standards aligned examinations. CEA was going to provide all of the funding for the first year for the schools in the room, hoping that school leaders would see the value in it and continue to fund it out of their own budget in the future.

To improve their instructional delivery, and in this instance to promote effective use of this examination technology, the team would strongly encourage their portfolio school leaders to attend what they called “instructional collaborative” meetings. These “IC” meetings would include trainings on best practices where school leaders could work with each other to improve their instruction. I attended one such meeting, where John and Felisha had invited a representative from an education technology company to give a presentation on Constant Checkup to teams of administrators from four portfolio high schools. The meeting was led by a former 10th grade English teacher who believed in Constant Checkup because, as a teacher, she had found herself under increasing pressure as more and more of her work centered on the production and management of student data. Praising its content written “for teachers, by teachers,” the presenter told the group that Constant Checkup supports their teachers as it allowed them to test students less while collecting more meaningful data, saving teacher time, and lessening their workload, saying “That is why I love (Constant Checkup)” (Field Notes, 8/15/19). When speaking to this presenter during the lunch break, she explained that though she did not personally

approve of the disciplinary testing environment of modern education, she did not believe it was ever going away. Through her work with Constant Checkup, she believed she could lessen the burden this discipline imposed onto teachers and students. Rather than advocating the elimination of student examination, she saw the technocratic solution of less burdensome testing as a more realistic solution.

Constant Checkup epitomized the prevalence of discipline that Foucault predicted a few decades earlier, “We are entering the age of infinite examination and of compulsory objectification” (Foucault, 1977, p. 189). John and Felisha praised the program because Constant Checkup provided “infinite data” (Field Notes, 8/15/19). This program could help teachers support skill-based instruction through examining whether individual students had mastered instructional skills and competencies. Test questions could be assigned a point value while having specific skills attached to them such as state standards, common core standards, and ELA standards, all of which were available to drag and drop into the tests themselves. Constant Checkup also allowed skills and standards/competencies mastery to be assessed at the class, grade, and school level. Data was available on the skills mastery level of each student, how many times a student had been tested on a skill, and how many times they had demonstrated that skill on a test. Administrators were also shown how they could build testing aligned to skills and standards by pulling questions from Constant Checkup, which had a full bank of standards aligned questions ready and waiting.

When she was presenting the portfolio performance results to CEA’s executive board, Diane was pleased to tell them that, “schools are getting better at presenting data to us, both raw and rolled up data and they are better at accountability” (Field Notes,

2/20/20). This appreciation for schools who excelled at data collection and analysis is why investment team promoted Constant Checkup as an examination tool. Because tools like Constant Checkup not only reinforced the team's instructional model, but it also provided an additional layer of school level instructional data that the team could examine with their grantee schools.

Landscape

The second examination tool the team used to determine and support schoolwide instructional recommendations was a computerized teacher and student survey I will call Landscape, which was required for CEA's portfolio schools, a further disciplinary examination of school data. The investment team used Landscape because it allows them to compress qualitative data into aggregated quantitative measurements, creating codified knowledge of the culture and instruction at the school which could be used to identify areas of improvement to drive measurable results. In addition to other survey data, Landscape provided the team with raw and comparative data on student and teacher engagement, morale, and school satisfaction.

School leaders and the investment team could gain meaningful data from Landscape that could help them to understand and reform school culture and instructional practice. An example of this practice occurred when the team was analyzing their observations at RTA. When the team agreed through their observations that low student engagement in classrooms was a problem at RTA, Mary looked more deeply at the Landscape student engagement scores and noted that only 14% of students reported feeling excited by class. Landscape provided further data that this low student engagement was combined with equally low scores in teacher support and enthusiasm.

Landscape also allowed the team to compare survey results against district, state, and national aggregate results, and they found that RTA was in the lowest quintile nationally for student engagement. Before and after making instructional recommendations, the team used Landscape examination results to help the team determine and confirm the validity of their school observations and whether their recommendations were viable solutions to the schoolwide instructional issues they observed.

EOY School Performance Meetings

The investment team codified examination into the relationship with their portfolio schools through the grant agreement contract, which used predetermined benchmarks to define the progress of academic and cultural performance. This judgement rested on two types of examination. The first was the examination of school data against the specific numerical goals outlined in the benchmarks. The second was an examination of school leadership against the outlined production of those student outcomes. As part of their contractual relationship, grantee schools, were required to present an End of the Year report in person to the investment team, in addition to their quarterly and narrative reports, in-school observations, and data and financial audits.

The EOY school presentations across charter, Catholic, Christian, and district schools all followed basically the same format. Administrators or executives, in the case of charter networks, would come to the CEA office and would present their school performance in a conference room. Near the end of their grant term, some schools would just send a principal, while other schools would send teams of five or six, including reading specialists and/or deans of culture or behavior to the review. Occasionally there was pushback from schools, usually one person on the team who was not happy with the

benchmarks or the involvement of the team in school affairs. More often however, school leaders expressed appreciation, seemingly happy to have the support, guidance, and counsel of the team of former principals. One administrator was so appreciative of this feedback that she lightheartedly asked Felisha, “Can I take you home?” (Field Notes 8/6/19). In response to poor results or insufficient answers from school leadership, the team was assertive but respectful, asking probing questions about staffing, curriculum and instruction, student demographics, and student instructional and behavior management tools.

The team saw these meetings as one of their primary chances for oversight and feedback with some of their grantees, and they wanted to discipline school leaders whom they felt were “playing school and not doing school” (Field Notes, 8/15/19). John’s ideal presentation would be 5 minutes talking about a mural or an event, 30 minutes on benchmarks, and 20 minutes on the school budget, because the “real work” in these meetings was data examination and data analysis (Field Notes, 8/12/19). The team was intentional about structuring the school’s EOY presentations according to CEA’s priorities, sending a slide deck to their schools to help them prepare their review presentation. This deck reflected CEA’s data centered disciplinary practices as it had one slide for presenting highlights from the school year and one slide for strengths and challenges, leaving the remainder of the presentation devoted to a review of contracted benchmark performance data (EOY Slide Deck, 2019).

The EOY performance reviews positioned school leaders as responsible for meeting contractual benchmarks and the investment team as the judgmental observers holding these school leaders to account. It will be described in this section how these

reviews both forced a visibility into school processes, and disciplined portfolio school leaders and the instruction in their schools, in three distinct and overlapping ways. First, this examination made visible the successes or failures of the past year through an analysis of school performance and demographic data. Second, this examination instilled a confessional relationship where school leaders had to make their leadership decisions visible, often displaying that they reciprocated and/or internalized the disciplinary instructional framework of the team. Finally, this examination allowed the investment team to analyze school performance data to diagnose performance failures and to prescribe interventions, thereby influencing the instruction in portfolio schools. The EOY meeting was a disciplinary practice of examination that CEA as investor/grantor used to make schools visible and receptive to their power and influence and to hold their investments/grantee schools accountable to their commitment to produce a ROI in the form of measurable student performance.

Making Schools Visible to Discipline: Examining Outcomes

CEA's oversight of school performance and demographic data was a primary feature of the EOY school performance review. This practice both extracted knowledge about the inner workings of the school and produced knowledge of the school's ability to produce student achievement outcomes, making the instruction of the school open to judgement and influence. CEA's role as grantor/investor provided it with the hierarchical power to make the schooling in which it invested and the students it produced visible to its power. To determine a ROI and to nurture its growth, the EOY school performance review was a necessary disciplinary practice.

The investment team's appreciation of a school partnership was in direct proportion to the amount of school data the school shared with the team in these EOY reviews. For example, one partnership was on shaky ground because the school had not prepared any data for the team for their EOY meeting, Felisha declaring it, "The worst presentation I have ever seen" (Field Notes 8/8/19). Conversely, a portfolio charter school provided extensive school data to the team, enabling more detailed analysis of school performance. John told these school leaders that he "loves talking about data and your data is especially robust," and that this data analysis was the "real work" of education. John was particularly pleased in this meeting, because the school's data allowed John to help them improve their special education instruction by isolating the impact of the program across different demographic groups. The data showed John that the school should examine the disproportionate outcomes of race and ethnic cohorts in their special education program, questioning whether the school was "teasing out the Latino and black cohorts in ELA and math data because there was a discrepancy between those students who have IEPs and those who do not" (Field Notes 8/12/19). John and the investment team viewed the examination of school data as a valuable tool in this regard because they believed it could address disparities across racial, ethnic, and disability cohorts while helping schools to isolate and remediate blind spots in their instruction.

The data examination in these EOY school reviews allowed the team to hold school leaders to account for the performance in their schools, often in the form of the team addressing a school's failure to meet benchmarks. At a private Christian school, the team was concerned that students were not on grade level in reading, with Diane commenting that their academic results were "mixed." The school directors noted that in

response to these results, the school had cut Bible and Spanish classes to focus on hitting these performance benchmarks (Field Notes 8/6/19). At an EOY meeting for a charter high school, after the school presented achievement data that did not meet performance expectations, the team addressed this inadequacy by comparing the school's performance against other high schools in the city, revealing that its students scored around the 50th percentile in reading and the 35th percentile in math. Chastened, the administrators admitted that almost half of their teaching staff was new that year. In the same meeting Felisha brought up that over sixty students had been coached out of the school for behavior reasons in the past year. A school administrator admitted that the "benchmarks highlight the need for this discipline and expulsion conversation," and that the school was holding disciplinary disproportionality meetings for staff and a reassessment of the code of conduct (Field Notes 9/18/19). The team often expressed that their goal was to improve the outcomes for Black and Brown students who were too often left behind by the city's education system. They believed that the examination of school data they performed provided accountability to the students that they felt deserved an equal opportunity to achieve school success.

The Visibility and Internalized Discipline of School Leadership Decisions:

Examination as Confession

Many EOY performance review meetings were notable for the confessional tone principals and school leaders took with the investment team. These meetings were an opportunity for grantees to talk about the struggles of their profession with a team of former principals and school leaders familiar with the difficulties inherent to urban education. Many of these school leaders entered into a partnership with CEA because

they had an aligned interest in improving the educational outcomes of urban students. The examination the team practiced in these meetings included an examination of the decision making of portfolio school leaders, many of whom appreciated the constructive feedback and reciprocated and internalized the discipline of the team.

Staffing and staff development were often topics of discussion in EOY meetings and principals used the opportunity to discuss this perennial issue in education while the team saw examining staffing as an integral part of school performance. The benchmark of teacher retention was always discussed, and these meetings were often the space where the team would consult on which staff was or should be “counseled out,” teacher compensation and retaining high value teachers, and whether “staff diversity mirror(s) the student body” (Field Notes 8/6, 8/8, & 8/12/19). Felisha considered staff retention and talent development to be a place of improvement in the city’s education sector, giving a workshop on the topic that was open to school leaders from across the city. In this meeting, Felisha told principals that they should think of themselves as “Chief Talent Officers” (Field Notes 1/30/20). Felisha felt too many school leaders in the city did not treat teacher hiring, retention, and development with the respect it deserved, especially as in the current school marketplace, teachers had many options for career growth. Because she considered staff talent as a key lever for driving student achievement, she brought this focus and perspective to the EOY meetings, telling administrators that they should consider talent development as part of their jobs as instructional leaders.

EOY meetings were also a place where school leaders would demonstrate an internalization and alignment with the instructional discipline of the investment team. A principal of a Catholic high school which was nearing the end of its grant window said he

appreciated the EOY meetings because they “make us reflect on the year in a meaningful way.” In this meeting he also said that his instructional outlook for his school was to create student engagement and instructional rigor, saying “our job is to improve academic outcomes,” using the phrase “aggressive monitoring” to describe instruction at the school (Field Notes 8/8/19). When a charter high school principal was asked about his priorities and goals for the upcoming year, he said he was focused on school culture and putting together structures and systems that hold students to a high level of accountability. The Dean of Culture at the school was also present at the meeting and he said that his goal was “to gather as much data as he can to run interventions,” mimicking the investment team’s perspective on the importance of examination and data. Another administrator from the school, who interestingly had been a former member of the investment team, was thankful for the team’s oversight, saying as they were leaving the EOY meeting that she wants “(CEA) to come back to hold us to this high bar” (Field Notes 9/18/19). In these EOY performance reviews, the influence the investment team wielded with their grantees became apparent as school leaders often expressed their alignment with and appreciation for, the disciplinary accountability the investment team provided.

Shaping Schooling: Examination for Diagnosis and Prescription

In the same way that the investment team used observations to judge and correct trends in classroom instruction, they would use the examination of school level data to determine and address negative trends in school performance. In EOY meetings, the team could judge school level data production against the ideal school performance CEA had normalized in the contracted benchmark goals. Occasionally, school leaders would push back against the benchmarks goals themselves and the team on more than one occasion

said “we can be flexible” around benchmarks, particularly if the benchmarks were created by the former investment team (Field Notes 8/8/19). The team was quick to praise school leaders when their schools hit their production goals, but when schools failed to hit a benchmark, school leaders had to account for the discrepancy and recommend how they planned to remedy the situation. The investment team would use this opportunity to add their perspective, often suggesting strategies for staffing, school enrollment, curriculum, and the use of management tools and external consulting.

One example of this dynamic was a discussion around student enrollment and marketing education with Urban Academy, a network of private Christian schools in the city. The school had received a growth grant from CEA, and looking at enrollment data that did not meet the benchmark goals, Diane asked “how do you boost enrollment?” (Field Notes 8/6/19). The director said that they were looking for growth in their middle schools and they planned a three-pronged strategy starting with academics, hiring a new principal, and building a new building. The principal also mentioned that they were going to spend \$25,000 on an enrollment coach and hire a communications director because he believed, “advertising is a weakness for us.” The conversation then turned to how best to attract parents and students as customers in different school levels. Felisha mentioned that there was a “market to grow” Urban Academy’s enrollment in their high school and the director responded that “the high school marketplace is very different from the elementary marketplace.” Everyone agreed however that what mattered most to high school parents was college attainment, but Diane made clear that the school would need to meet their enrollment benchmarks before CEA would consider another growth grant in the future (Field Notes 8/6/19). The growth of student enrollment at schools providing

“quality” education was a high priority for CEA and a ROI for its donors. This EOY meeting was an example of CEA promoting its mission and achieving it through its investment team helping a portfolio schools to provide quality instruction and to successfully market that quality to parents.

When instructional goals were not met and needed improvement, the team would often suggest curricular and instructional solutions. For example, at an EOY meeting with an independent Catholic school, the school had a goal of 85% of students improving their outcomes in reading and math, a goal they missed with 60% of students improving their reading scores and 53% improving their math scores. The investment team first talked about implementing a specific math curriculum that incorporated content aligned student testing. For reading however, Mary began a discussion on the importance of guided reading with the principal, demonstrating her expertise from her past roles as a teacher and an instructional coach, a supportive perspective that was clearly valued by the school leaders at the table. In conclusion, Diane recommended that the school leaders connect with another portfolio school that they felt had strong 3rd through 5th grade reading curriculum. This EOY meeting demonstrated how the team used their EOY data examination to assess instructional issues, giving the team an opportunity to leverage their network, curricular knowledge, and instructional coaching experience to shape instruction.

The team also promoted the instructional model in the EOY meetings that was seen in their school review visits, highlighting the importance of rigorous instruction and student formative benchmark testing as a key lever for producing student outcomes. Urban Academy had internalized this feedback and shared that it had implemented a

“universal benchmarking” model that aligned itself with the SAT and other standardized tests (Field Notes 8/6/19). A principal at a charter school said he wanted his school to be successful at both state testing and benchmark testing. In this meeting, Felisha quickly asked if they had aligned their student benchmarks to the standards of the state test. Another school administrator mentioned they were using a program the team was not familiar with, and Felisha responded, “is that an online benchmark program?” “Somewhat,” the admin responded, a bit flustered, adding that they had an instructional coach to teach standard aligned testing for teachers. When schools were not achieving their performance benchmarks, the team would reinforce that they wanted their portfolio schools to use additional student testing tools like Constant Checkup to improve standards aligned instruction and student outcomes.

Felisha, like she did when promoting Constant Checkup, continued to stress to these administrators the importance of good formative testing as a “quality control point.” She recommended that the school principals and not teachers should make the tests because blind standards tests can be used to examine if teachers are truly teaching instructional standards. Felisha and John found that when teachers make their own formative assessments, they will often test what they are teaching even if it is not standards aligned content. John described good formative testing like training for a marathon in the mountains, that the tests should be really hard in class so that when students take standardized tests, they find them easy after “gasping for air” while being tested in class (Field Notes 9/18/19). The team believed in the effectiveness of examination to improve the instruction and outcomes at their portfolio schools. They also wanted schools to discipline students into good test takers, because the team believed that

a successful future awaited students who had the skills and the ability to do well on other standardized tests like the SAT, ACT, GRE, LSAT, and MCAT.

Conclusion

CEA and the investment team believed that when it came to education, in the words of Felisha, “Success is something you can see and measure, not just something you can feel” (Field Notes, 8/15/19.) This quote is a perfect distillation of CEA and the investment team’s approach to education. In their minds, the problem with much educational practice was that it was too “touchy-feely,” too emotional, and its evaluation and assessment are too often based on the anecdotal feelings of teachers, principals, and parents. The team did not believe that feeling-based assessment was misguided and needed to be removed from education, or that the perspectives of teachers or parents were not important. Instead, the team believed that, in our modern era of data collection and management, there is a way to track student achievement data, it should be done well, and it should be used to inform instruction. Further, the team believed that instructional discipline, examination, and rigor should be used to bring students who have fallen seriously behind their peers up to a level where they can succeed in school, in college, and in the workforce. For CEA and the investment team, “Success” in education therefore is literally something you can measure, that was why the team loved the “infinite data” provided by a tool like Content Checkup, and why the team wanted to send a message to their portfolio that “data is important” (Field Notes 8/15/19.)

CEA’s investment model and theory of change in urban education was predicated on the assumption that student achievement data was indicative of school instructional success and predictive of students’ future success in meeting college and career goals. To

create just this return on their donor investment dollars, CEA charged the investment team with disciplining the instruction of their portfolio schools towards achieving positive student achievement data. In practice, this discipline consisted of observation, judgement, and examination of school culture and instruction through school visits, the use of instructional rubrics and assessments, data collection and analysis, and the examination of school leadership decision making.

The perspectives of both CEA and of the investment team on the necessity of this discipline for improving schooling and students, shows how prescient Foucault's disciplinary theory and analysis remains today. The discipline CEA enacted over its grantees, points to the "effective" use of surveillance, both through behavioral observation and an examination of data. This discipline had several productive functions, it allowed for the objectification of the individual student, and it reified a domain of knowledge to understand and analyze that student, in effect "constituting individuals as correlative elements of power and knowledge" (Foucault 1977, p 194). CEA's reliance on data as an indicator of successful education required extensive and continuous testing that both extracts from and produces knowledge of students. Students were both known through testing and shaped by it, "enabling the teacher, while transmitting his knowledge, to transform his pupils into a whole field of knowledge" creating a "pedagogy that functions as a science" (Foucault. p 186 & 187).

CEA framed the investment discipline it conducted over its portfolio of schools as donor accountability. CEA's manager of data and analytics described it as such,

We have to be accountable for the money that we're spending if we are providing large grant dollars, and not do anything that is not worth the philanthropic money that we are spending on the accountability side... I

think that the accountability is to make sure that the trust that is put in us by our donors, as the professionals in the sector, is that those schools or those entities are doing good things (Interview 1/15/20).

The investment team used disciplinary practices with their schools to fulfill what CEA leaders and the executive board saw as a fiduciary commitment to donors, many of whom, as finance professionals, practiced their own discipline over CEA so it would produce their desired growth in the education sector. This discipline flowed all the way down to students who were ultimately subject to observation, judgement, and examination, all in the hopes that through the power of this discipline, CEA could create students who had an opportunity to be successful.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have argued that, in the case of CEA, venture philanthropy actively and intentionally shaped the meaning, practice, and outcomes of urban schools. This shaping occurred most directly through the school investment practices that CEA conducted with its portfolio. In the case of CEA, venture philanthropic investment in schools and schooling took very specific forms that were legally outlined in the investor/investee and grantor/grantee agreement contract. CEA and its investment team used its grant agreement contracts to define and implement a disciplinary framework, with the intention of managing the instruction of grantee schools toward the production of measurable student achievement. This student achievement was understood by CEA as the fiduciary responsibility the firm had to its donors. The discipline CEA enacted with schools was the theory of change the firm adopted to provide to their donors a student achievement return on their investment. In this chapter, I will first, summarize my findings and second, I will place these findings in a broader context. Third, I will point to the implications of this research has for, practice, theory, and policy. This chapter will conclude with topics for further research.

Overview of Key Findings

The contract CEA created to structure its relationships with grantee schools emerged as a key tool for promoting particular practices and understandings. In Chapter Five, I examined CEA's contract in depth, showing that it defined the disciplinary relationship that CEA created with its schools in four ways. First, the contract codified performance benchmarks that schools were expected to achieve if they were to continue

to receive grant funding. Second, the contract required that schools submit to CEA's surveillance of their institutional and instructional practices through CEA's observation, judgement, and examination of school instruction and culture, curriculum, performance and demographic data, financial budgets, staffing, and leadership decision making. Third, that at the end of every school year, school leaders had to attend an examination and judgement of their school achievement against the goals outlined in the grant agreement, an examination conducted by the CEA investment team. Fourth, that CEA makes clear in its contract and in their discussion of that contract that their goal was to improve student academic outcomes and that if the benchmarked goals, which themselves were designed to promote an increase of student achievement are not met, then grant funding would be diverted to more intensive instructional and leadership coaching/consulting or it would be severed completely.

In Chapter 6, I demonstrated how the investment team operationalized the disciplinary framework codified in CEA's grant agreement contract. The investment team disciplined portfolio school instruction through two main practices. The first practice the investment team employed was school observation visits. The investment team used the STS School Observation Rubric as a model of instructional rigor, a model they used to judge the observed classroom instruction of their portfolio schools. The team adapted the STS School Observation Rubric to create their own School Review Form that communicated to portfolio school leaders how the team thought these leaders should discipline the instruction at their schools.

The second practice the investment team employed was the use of examination. The investment team employed the discipline of examination over their portfolio schools

through both the use of data management tools and through their assessment and interrogation of portfolio schools during the EOY school performance review. The team promoted the practice of “aggressive monitoring” of instruction and student learning through requiring the use of, and providing grants for, tools like Constant Checkup and Landscape that tracked student achievement. The team also used the EOY school performance reviews to judge both the benchmark data and the school leadership decisions of their school investments. CEA and the investment team used these disciplinary practices to make the instruction and internal decision making of their portfolio schools visible to CEA’s oversight and influence. This discipline was a production of educational knowledge and visibility that provided an avenue for CEA as an investor to influence the practice and production of urban education.

CEA’s Discipline of Education in Context

CEA actively disciplined the instruction of its portfolio schools with the explicit belief that it was obligated to provide a return on the investment funds of their donors. For the venture philanthropic investments CEA made and managed to make sense to donors and the public, and to have the influence shown in this dissertation, these investments need to be made within the existing market fundamentalist episteme and school choice marketplace. The work of CEA would not be possible without an ideological framework where it made sense to invest private money into schools, that promised to provide a return of marketable student test results. CEA and its investment team were not creating a fundamentally new form or practice of education; market-based and managerial approaches to schooling certainly predate CEA’s involvement, (Apple, 2010; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Cucchiara, 2014; Friedman, 1962; Lippman, 2011; Meyer,

2002; Mehta, 2012; Trujillo; 2014), but CEA believed that with intelligent investment management, it could both prove that impactful education could occur in urban settings, and that this success could be promoted and replicated through the competition of a marketized education sector.

As a “pass through” and a “quarterback” organization, CEA occupied an intermediate market position that allowed it to collect funds and strategically distribute and manage the investments made with those funds. But CEA was also a “pass through” organization for the market fundamentalist ideology that had penetrated the education sector of the city. For CEA to demonstrate its successful investment strategy, it needed a foundation of standardized testing, a consumer education market, and the episteme of managerialism and technocratic solutions, (Apple, 2010; Meyer, 2002; Mehta, 2012; Trujillo; 2014), and a “common sense” belief that education is a private good (Labaree, 1997). This foundation existed prior to the practices documented here, and CEA just sought to optimize these systems, relations, and disciplinary practices.

As Foucault theorized, observation, judgement, and examination have been used to transform students since the inception of institutionalized education. The disciplinary practices CEA employed made sense to their donors and grantee school leaders, because modern urban education employs many of these practices already and the investment team was merely consulting to help CEA, its donors, and its portfolio schools to achieve mutual goals. CEA aimed to preserve and promote marketized education through its portfolio school disciplinary management practices and through other public facing practices that were not the focus of this dissertation.

CEA's goal of improving student academic performance and future success is laudable, however this dissertation demonstrates that the form CEA believed that improvement required was highly disciplinary, and that it viewed students as objectified receptacles of knowledge and not as active participants in their education. The choice to remove the "Student Agency" competency from the investment team's School Review Rubric even though it was a component of their model for instructional rigor, symbolizes CEA's approach to students in school. In a Foucauldian sense, CEA produced students through instructional practices that disciplined students' bodies, time, knowledge, and culture. The result was students who may achieve all the skills and standards the state and the donor class required, but still lack the skill or ability to choose their own educational goals.

CEA's use of standardized tests, extensive student behavior and knowledge surveillance, and standards-based curriculum and instruction is implemented to a greater or lesser extent in much of modern urban education. The rigorous instructional practices the investment team enacted in their portfolio schools sought to align instruction with standards already set by the state. What was unique about CEA is that even though its practice existed within and reproduced larger educational structures, this VP could implement the educational mission of its donors directly onto the educational lives of students. And whether students liked it or not, they were disciplined to achieve the educational goals of CEA's wealthy donors. The true discipline CEA enacted in the schools it funded, then, was recasting students as a return on investment.

Reflection

In an era of increasing wealth inequality, philanthropies have emerged as a way for wealthy donors to make an impact both privately and publicly in the public sphere. Social problems in America's cities often seem intractable, and political gridlock and lack of political will make a direct route to addressing social ills more and more attractive to a "growth elite" who see their economic futures tied to the improvement of their communities (Bartlett et al, 2002). CEA sold a vision for improving education in the city and provided an avenue for local "growth elites" to pool their resources and make a more impactful investment in education than if their money was given to government institutions like the school district.

CEA cared primarily about the input of its board and not the input of public it sought to serve. Only towards the end of the observation period, did CEA begin to put together a parent engagement program, but this program was mostly a political and ideological project to promote school "quality" and school choice. CEA certainly included some feedback from their grantees and from the public in its mission and goals, but by and large almost all the decisions and the direction of the organization came from the executive board and CEA leadership. Parents and students were not consulted, as far as I could tell, on whether they wanted CEA's influence in their schools. As CEA's goals were college and career success for students whose communities were lacking in such success, it was assumed that the means to this end were acceptable to all involved.

The market fundamentalist framing and solutions CEA promoted to improve the education sector of its city reflected the biases of the "growth elite" donor class it served. CEA was in charge of how its investment money was used in schools, because even

though school leaders had some flexibility on how to hit their benchmarks, the discipline that CEA enacted made sure that school instruction and culture attended to their needs. The need in the city, especially in the eyes of CEA’s “growth elite” donors and board, was to prepare students to be “employable” and to successfully enter the job market. Seeing education as a way to increase human capital, CEA believed that the investment in instructional discipline would translate into better wages and jobs. A quote from CEA’s executive director demonstrates this point:

We need a lot more partnerships between schools and employers to create career connected learning experiences for students particularly in high school... we also need businesses being more clear about what success looks like for them. What will incentivize them to hire a high school graduate or a college graduate? That needs to be informing the curriculum and teacher training decisions that schools in elementary, middle, and high school are making. (Interview 2/12/20).

In this light, CEA’s investment discipline and management over instruction, and ultimately student achievement, makes sense as a win-win for both investors and students. Giriharadas (2018) described the flaws of “win-win” solutions however when very wealthy and powerful donors are helping those less fortunate. The problem with a philanthropic “win-win” solution is that a partnership like the one between CEA’s donors and individual urban schools and their students is not a partnership between equally influential parties. As a case in venture philanthropy, if CEA’s mission to improve education was a “win-win” for everyone involved, it begs the question, why did powerful donors need a “win” from underserved urban students at all?

A banking executive who was on CEA’s executive board and led its investment committee made the goal of CEA’s investment production plain, “The discipline of investing is the focus on what you can control. And the product is a student which is on

grade level and achieving their competencies” (Field Notes, 2/18/20). The students that CEA helped to discipline were the win-win proposition for its donors because these students were the future workers, scientists, mathematicians, and scholars, the human capital, that an investment economy needs for growth. CEA’s philanthropy, especially for students, came with a catch. If you want to succeed in the market, you will submit to our discipline.

Implications for Research

My findings have a number of implications for educational research. The research and methodological framework I use can be used to examine the meaning-making and institutional practice of other VPs and non-profit organizations. Institutions that promote a particular or set of social goods are often required to define their mission, goals, and theory of change. Rather than taking these things at face value, researchers could usefully interrogate the organizations’ assumptions and practices carefully, identifying the ways in which they produce new understandings and patterns of behavior. This dissertation also provides a framework for interpreting instructional discipline in educational and non-educational training. Other organizations and research projects can use disciplinary framework outlined in this project, that of observation, judgement, and examination, to analyze instructional discipline at a school or network level. Education is a process of transformation, and subjective transformation requires discipline. Using the tools identified here, an analysis of disciplinary choices can be undertaken in other contexts.

The theoretical and analytical framework of this dissertation could also be useful in examining the market fundamentalist education policy that laid the groundwork for CEA’s investment practices. Examples for policy analysis could be school choice

markets, the understanding of school performance purely through school data, the private management of public schools, and the k-12 public school application process. Each of these policies aims to discipline the practice of education, and this research can guide an analysis of the practices and effects of that discipline.

CEA was a quintessential case through which to study a venture philanthropy firm. Its investment model confirmed Gordon's (2014) conception of VP practices, including strong collaboration, well defined oversight and accountability measures, and a focus on return on investment. CEA also spoke to Grossman et al (2013) and Eshun's (2018) findings on the VP model as a catalyzing agent for systemic change, a factor for determining measures of outcomes, and placing VP at the intersection of philanthropy, venture capital, and entrepreneurship. The findings of this study contribute to a more robust analysis of the VP model and provide specific empirical evidence on how VP investment can be conducted in education.

This research also contributes to the growing body of literature on venture philanthropy in education, by filling gaps in the literature with empirical data. This study provides evidence addressing previously unanswered topics in VP education study, such as donor intention and reasoning, education and instruction management practices, the impact and influence of VP with school leadership, and the use of market fundamentalist theory to make sense of education. These findings engage with a theoretical and research conversation on VP meaning making, goals, and practices which includes (Tompkins-Stange, 2016; Scott, 2009; Reckhow, 2013; Quinn, Tompkins-Stange, & Meyerson, 2013; Trujillo, 2014; Russikoff, 2015; & Saltman, 2009), confirming many of their claims about the influence of philanthropy over education policy and practice. This study

also contributes to a building ethnographic research understanding on the confluence of education and “venture-style” philanthropy, specifically (Brown, 2015 & 2017; Allen & Bull, 2018; & Powell, 2018), demonstrating how marketized investment practices can shape the educational experiences of teachers and students.

Further, this study has implications for the use of ethnographic research methods for policy analysis. Building on the scholarship of policy researchers like Cucchiara (2013), Lipman (2011), Brown (2015 & 2017), and Bartlett et al (2002), this research was an attempt to understand how market fundamentalist education policies could be enacted directly in schools. This project used ethnographic methods because, like the work of CEA, education policy often uses quantitative outcomes to analyze and understand educational success. While this analysis can determine whether a policy intervention was successful, it does not answer why a policy intervention was chosen, how it was implemented, or what the impact was on the people involved. The ethnographic methods used in this dissertation collected valuable data on the meaning making, theory of change, and practices implemented by an educational organization that operates in a market fundamentalist and disciplinary policy environment. These data, though valuable, are often neglected by policy analysts who look at the results of policies rather than how they are understood and practiced. This research argues that understanding the means policies use to achieve their ends are just as important to the public as the ends these policies produce.

Implications for Theory

This study also has theoretical implications, primarily concerning the use of Foucault’s disciplinary education theory and his epistemic and governmental theory.

Other scholars have used Foucault's disciplinary theory to examine education⁶ but their theoretical work has been either philosophical, policy focused, centered on student subjectivity, or historical analysis. This research however has brought an analysis of the practical dimension to the use of Foucauldian disciplinary theory, in that it uses disciplinary theory to examine current educational practices ethnographically as they occur in schools and in classrooms.

My study has also brought theory on market fundamentalism and Foucauldian theory on governmentality to bear on the practice of VP in urban education contexts in novel ways. By tracking the rise of market fundamentalist theory in education and tying that theory to current trends in the governmentality of urban education, this study has laid a theoretical groundwork for understanding the choices, practices, and emergence of educational VP investment in urban education. Essentially, this work demonstrated the interrelationship between the work of VPs and the landscape of urban education, dominated as it is by a market fundamentalist governmentality that includes school choice, school performance ratings based on school performance data, and parents reframed as education consumers. This dissertation further demonstrated how a VP reproduces this governmentality through the discipline of its school portfolio, both by basing its instructional model on achieving state instructional standards using state standardized testing, and by reframing education as a set of consumable performance metrics for school leaders, donors, and the public.

⁶ Including Michael Peters (2007), Stephen Ball (1990, 2012, 2017) and Ansgar Allen (2012)

Implications for Policy and Practice

This dissertation research has two main policy implications, and both highlight the need for public involvement in public education. The first is that the marketized governmentality of current education policies like school choice, charter schooling, standardized testing should be open to direct review from local communities. The second is that governmentally incentivized philanthropic influence in education should also have more transparency and public oversight.

As CEA operated within and replicated an existing market fundamentalist governmentality in urban education, to check and democratize its influence would require reforming the disciplinary nature of urban education that is reinforced through state and local policy. It could be argued that the work of CEA was to successfully play a game of student performance, the rules of which were supported by CEA and other VP and philanthropic policy campaigns but are ultimately fashioned by state and local education policy. The state binds urban public schools through market fundamentalist policies. A form of public “schooling choice” should be available to parents who are not interested in subjecting their students to the disciplinary instruction that results from marketized education policies. New avenues should be explored where parents can choose schooling that is not bound by testing, markets, and human capital. Some parents may want a disciplined education for their children and those public schools do exist. However, there are parents and students who are subjected to the effects of marketized education policy against their will. These families should have the ability to call a referendum on these policies which condition disciplinary and non-disciplinary schools alike. Options should be explored for public education that is not conditioned to only regard success that

appears on a standardized test. TPS, the project based public school in CEA's portfolio could represent this type of education, if it could instill the excitement for learning in its students and better provide them the skills to vigorously explore the world.

A number of scholars and political observers have criticized venture philanthropy, and philanthropy more broadly for being supported by the state (through both tax breaks for wealthy donors and nonprofit status), while at the same time being invisible to the public, unaccountable to democratic oversight, and often aimed at changing education policy and practice (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Gasman, 2012; Giriharadas. 2018; Klein, 2007; Kovacs & Christie, 2011; Lipman, 2011 & 2015; Mehta & Teles, 2012; Quinn et al, 2013; Reckhow, 2013; Reich, 2010 & 2018; Saltman 2009, 2011, 2014; Scott, 2009; Scott & Jabbar, 2014). My findings support this critique. I show that CEA had an outsized impact over the education practices of a publicly funded urban school district, and its only oversight lay with an executive board that funded its activity and shared its educational mission. While many philanthropic projects have far reaching public influence and public consequences, the practices they use to achieve their goals and the results of their work itself remains largely opaque to research and the public, often intentionally. As an institution, CEA was skeptical of this research, and required an NDA to be signed to protect both the privacy of its donors and CEA's proprietary information before they would allow observations of their work. As this research showed the influence a VP like CEA can have over public schools and their instruction, work which was supported through tax breaks and incentives for the firm and for their donors, state and local policy should require that philanthropic practices be open to public review. The public should have oversight over how their schools function, and at the very least

districts should make clear the extent to which organizations like CEA are involved in schools.

Further Research, Limitations, and Next Steps

There are several ways this work could be further developed. Here I will briefly explore a possible extension of this project and suggest avenues for further research. First, my dissertation analyzed only a small portion of the data I collected during field research and a good deal of raw data was left only partially examined or as threads to be picked up at a later time. For example, in Foucault's lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010), he presents education as central to the formation of human capital, the economic health of populations, and the driver of "homo economicus" as a primary student subjectivity. My interview and observational data resonate strongly with Foucault's analysis, showing that CEA staff and donors had a vision of education that was almost entirely focused on building human capital.

Human capital can be loosely defined as the non-material value that an individual or a population can invest in their own economic growth. Hence, Foucault's articulation that "*Homo Economicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself" (Foucault, 2010, p 226). The disciplinary oversight CEA conducted over its investments, crafted and maintained an episteme of understanding and practice for not only its portfolio of schools but also for urban education itself. This oversight was aimed ultimately at improving the educational health of the city by improving the number of "quality seats" available to students amongst public, charter, and catholic schools. It was these "quality seats" that CEA believed would be the vehicles that would produce the highest individual and population economic growth, shaping the individual student into homo economicus by

crafting them as a site for the investment of human capital. While this topic is not fully developed here, it is definitely one I intend to explore in future writing.

Second, further research could usefully extend my analysis to students and teachers, particularly to the agency they exhibited within the disciplinary influence of CEA. Though research findings did point to teachers, students, and grantee school leaders as having agency in their relationship with CEA, it is a limitation of this study that the student and teacher perspectives on the practices that CEA promoted were not more closely examined. This research focused on the goals and meanings of CEA leaders, funders, and staff had about education and how they sought to actualize these goals through disciplinary practices. As a result of this focus the agency of those CEA's disciplined was elided in this research. That does not mean however, that this agency was not observed and did not exist, in fact this agency was documented in the interaction between CEA and RTA's executive director in the Grant Agreement Meeting in chapter five. With further review of collected data, examples of grantee, teacher and student agency could also be documented. This research examined the ways in which students and teachers were understood by the staff and by the instructional practices of CEA, but no data was collected on how students and teachers themselves perceived and understood their role in the CEA's mission and disciplinary framework. More research is needed to understand this vital dynamic at portfolio partner schools to corroborate the extent to which teachers felt disciplined by CEA and if students felt as objectified in their schooling as they were in CEA's instructional discipline.

Foucault's theory in *Discipline and Punish* is often criticized for dismissing the role of individual agency in favor of understanding the subject as being purely a product

of power and disciplinary forces, thus making this theory incompatible with an analysis of how students and teachers could exercise freedom and push back against the instructional and behavioral discipline imposed by CEA. However, Foucault's attention in his later work signaled a shift from structure to agency in his theories on the constitution of the subject, and he tried to grapple with this issue as he moved to understand the "care of the self." A useful quote here is from an interview with Foucault titled "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," where Foucault explains his refined position on structure and agency, describing "how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self" practices which are not "invented by the individual himself . . . but are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society and his social group" (Foucault, 1997). Here we see Foucault describing agency as the subject actively exploring the limits of modern forms of power and discipline, enacting an ethics of freedom as a conditioned and determined subject. Adding this later Foucauldian theory to the theoretical framework of this project would help me understand future research into how students, teachers, and school leaders demonstrated their agency within the confines of CEA's disciplinary practices. Documenting the student and teacher interaction with resistance to the findings of this study would be illuminating and deserves future research.

Finally, this dissertation has implications for the continuing research of American urban education VPs, especially as currently, this field is under researched and insufficiently understood. This and other research have only begun to understand the dynamics of venture philanthropy in education, as much of the research and practical

knowledge in the VP space is produced by and shared within a closed network with little peer review or examination (Goldstein, 2015). The connection between and influence of the marketization of urban education and the financial-style investment practices CEA employed needs more attention, and the purposes of this donor funded work remain to be explored. It would also be important to conduct causal quantitative research on the work of CEA, to examine not only the impact its work had on student achievement, but also to determine whether there is a causal link between CEA's investment management and school performance results. As this dissertation was a case study of a singular organization, it would be instructive for an understanding of the practice of school investment as a whole to conduct similar studies of other education VP firms. Similar studies could provide data that could identify consistent trends or dissimilarities between firms. Research participants believed that CEA was a representative case for education VP practices across the country, and their model of VP practice was consistent with the literature on the subject, but further comparisons could shed more light on how the findings from CEA can be generalizable to current education VP influence and practice.

CEA was a local VP with a staff of only twenty-five, yet its influence over the education sector in its city extended well beyond its modest size. The findings of this dissertation are important because they clearly demonstrate how much venture philanthropy can shape the understanding and practice of public institutions. Philanthropy needs to be transparent because it has the means, the influence, and the power to make its goals manifest. When the object of direct philanthropic impact is urban education, it runs the risk of objectifying and commodifying students. CEA's success in achieving its goals

is still an open question, but this dissertation shows why research interrogating the practices of venture philanthropy is so important: the ends do not always justify the means, and students are ends in themselves.

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APPENDIX

A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

External Affairs/Development

1. What drew you to this organization?
2. How would you describe the work you do?
3. Why philanthropic work in education?
4. How do you engage with donors?
5. Why are donors drawn to the work of PSP? What are they hoping to achieve?
6. How do you define success in the education space?
7. How do you see donors defining success?
8. What is the role of philanthropy in a public field like education?
9. What is the purpose of education?

Communications Manager

1. What drew you to this organization?
2. How would you describe the work you do?
3. How would you describe the mission of PSP?
4. Why philanthropic work in education?
5. How do you define success in the education space?
6. What programs/investments have been particularly fruitful?
7. How do you describe success in your work?
8. Relationship with the press?
9. What are some of your main challenges in your position, for the organization?

Donors/Board Members

1. What drew you to the philanthropic space?
2. Of all the sectors to be involved in, why education?
3. What is your professional background and how does that background influence your philanthropic work?
4. What drew you to work with a venture philanthropy as opposed to a traditional foundation?
5. What is your hope for urban education in the future?
6. How does your philanthropic work align with that hope?
7. What are the factors that you look for in a program in which you wish to invest?
8. What frustrates you about the current education landscape?
9. What is the purpose of education?

Community Engagement

1. What drew you to this organization?
2. How would you describe the work you do?
3. Why philanthropic work in education?
4. How do you define success in the education space?
5. How is success measured?
6. How were those metrics decided on?
7. What programs/investments have been particularly fruitful?
8. How do you view the relationship between PSP and the local education community?
9. What factors make you job difficult?
10. How do you strategically craft community partnerships?
11. What is your vision for advocacy, and for urban education?
12. What is the purpose of education?

Investment Management

1. What drew you to this organization?
2. What is your background, how did you come to do this work?
3. How would you describe the work you do?
4. Why philanthropic work in education?
5. Why is accountability of grantees important?
6. What procedures and practices do you implement to track investments?
7. How do you understand success in education, quality, principals, schools, and how is it measured?
8. How were those metrics decided on?
9. What programs/investments have been particularly fruitful/criticisms of the investment practice?
10. What are your frustrations with making change in education here in this city?
11. What is your vision for urban education?
12. What is the purpose of education?

Grantees

1. What drew you to apply for a grant?
2. How would you characterize the funding partnership?
3. What has the organization brought to the table other than financial resources?
4. What information do you need to provide to maintain your relationship?
5. How often do you communicate/meet with the funding organization?
6. Would you recommend this funder to other educators/administrators?
7. What is your definition of successful education?
8. What type of educational experience do you wish for your students?
9. How has this funding relationship changed your practice?