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The Discursive Construction of Superintendent Statesmanship on Twitter

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Abstract: The modern school superintendent fulfills a unique role in the U.S. public education system. He or she is structurally empowered as the de facto head of the local educational system, thereby granted with a certain amount of trust and authority regarding educational issues. At the same time, the superintendent is, in most cases, an employee of a politically appointed school board. While norms have traditionally encouraged superintendents to use caution with respect to political discourse (Boyd, 1974), social media has created a new platform upon which they can reach a broad range of stakeholders regarding many issues, including politics. This study seeks to better understand the emerging practice of political discourse by superintendents on Twitter. Employing discursive psychology principles (Potter & Wetherell, 1992), I will analyze the political tweets of superintendents and position current practices in relation to established role conceptualizations of the position. Findings include that superintendents utilize Twitter as a tool to establish their positions as political insiders and as advocates for students.

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La construcción discursiva de la política del superintendente en Twitter
Resumen: El director de la escuela moderna desempeña un papel único en el sistema de educación pública de Estados Unidos. Él o ella está facultado estructuralmente como jefe de hecho, el sistema de educación local, así concedida con una cierta cantidad de confianza y autoridad en temas educativos. Al mismo tiempo, el superintendente suele ser un empleado de una junta escolar de designación política. Aunque las normas que tradicionalmente han animado a los superintendentes tener precaución con respecto a la expresión política (Boyd, 1974), las redes sociales han creado una nueva plataforma en la que pueden lograr una amplia gama de partes interesadas sobre muchos temas, incluyendo la política. Este estudio busca entender mejor la práctica que emerge del discurso político de los supervisores en Twitter. El empleo de principios de la psicología discursiva (Potter y Wetherell, 1992) analizan los tweets políticos de superintendentes y posicionarei prácticas actuales con respecto a la conceptualización de los roles establecidos de la posición. Los resultados incluyen los superintendentes utilizan Twitter como una herramienta para establecer sus posiciones como actores políticos y promotores de los estudiantes.
Palabras-clave: Superintendencia; política; Twitter; las redes sociales; psicología discursiva

A construção discursiva do superintendente política no Twitter
Resumo: O superintendente escolar moderno cumpre um papel único no sistema de educação pública dos EUA. Ele ou ela é estruturalmente habilitada como chefe de fato do sistema educacional local, concedido assim com uma certa quantidade de confiança e autoridade em relação a questões educacionais. Ao mesmo tempo, o superintendente é geralmente um empregado de um conselho escolar politicamente nomeado. Embora as normas tenham tradicionalmente encorajado os superintendentes a usarem de cautela em relação ao discurso político (Boyd, 1974), as mídias sociais criaram uma nova plataforma sobre a qual eles podem alcançar uma ampla gama de interessados em muitos assuntos, incluindo a política. Este estudo busca compreender melhor a prática emergente do discurso político dos superintendentes no Twitter. Empregando princípios de psicologia discursiva (Potter & Wetherell, 1992), analisarei os tweets políticos dos superintendentes e posicionarei as práticas atuais em relação às conceitualizações de papéis estabelecidas da posição. Os resultados incluem que os superintendentes utilizam o Twitter como uma ferramenta para estabelecer suas posições como insiders políticos e como advogados para os alunos.
Palavras-chave: Superintendência; política; Twitter, as redes sociais; psicologia discursiva

Introduction

Technology has significantly changed the way public figures interact with and influence the public at large. For politicians and other public officials, social media may be either an opportunity or a liability. On the one hand, it allows for easy communication with potential constituents and the development of networks of supporters and colleagues to share ideas. This is nowhere more apparent than the role Twitter plays in modern electoral politics, particularly in the 2016 presidential election. However, at the same time the permanent nature of shared information, the lack of ability to target intended audiences, and potential out-of-context interpretations has the potential for detrimental results.

For school superintendents, navigating online engagement with constituents has the potential to be even trickier. Superintendents work in politically charged environments, frequently buffeted by the desires and demands of elected officials, special interest groups, board members, and other community stakeholders (Björk & Keedy, 2001; Kowalski, 2006). The idea of school officials acknowledging and participating in overt political actions has not always been widely accepted. For much of the 20th-century political engagement by school leaders was antithetical to the ideals of public education (Kowalski, 2006). Such sentiments find their origin in the apolitical shift of education in the early 1900s as schools and school officials sought a separation from the locally controlled political machines which frequently held sway over districts and used the school as a tool for granting political favors (Reese & Lindle, 2014).

The modern superintendent does not have the luxury of ignoring the politics inherent in the position. Shifting cultural norms and an increasing politicization of the educational system have forced superintendents to become active political players. Everything from the content standards to public school financing is fodder for political dialogue playing out at the local, state, and even national level. In response, superintendents must develop coalitions among broad stakeholders within their communities regarding policies and political topics inside and outside of the schoolhouse. As Marvin Edward's (2006) has noted, due to the modern landscape of educational politics, superintendents are "no longer able to choose whether or not to get involved in the political arena, (they) must asses the politics of their districts and determine how to best work within it" (p. 138).

Cox and McLeod (2014) argue that, like politics, social media is no longer an optional practice for school superintendents. The social media platform Twitter has firmly established a presence within the realm of educational leadership over the course of the last decade. Many scholars have explored the power of social media as a tool for developing professional learning networks and collaborative communities (Cho, 2013; Couros, Jarrett, McLeod, & Lehmann, 2012; Sauers & Richardson, 2015). In a recent study of school superintendents, Roth (2016) found that approximately 17% of current superintendents across the United States had a Twitter account in which they identify themselves as a superintendent. This number will only continue to grow as the platform reaches more participants and more tech-savvy superintendents enter the field.

This study seeks to better understand the dynamic between superintendents' roles as political leaders and their use of social media as a professional learning network and communications platform. In particular, this study seeks to better understand how school superintendents interact with and discuss policy and macro-political issues on Twitter. The importance of such a study lies in the realization that as methods for communicating with the public evolves, the practices and methods for engagement by school superintendents must also evolve. As such, this study is guided by the following research question: What discursive strategies are school superintendents employing when using discussing political issues on Twitter and how does that inform their roles as political leaders? To answer this question, I will employ discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological framework to analyze the macro-political tweets of superintendents.

Conceptualizations of the Superintendency

The evolution of the role and function of the superintendency mirrors the historical evolution found in the development of the public school system. As schools have moved from small autonomous institutions to political flashpoints in state and national conversation, the requisite skills and functions for superintendents have had to evolve. In the following section, I will address the varied and contested roles of the superintendency as they have been outlined by scholars in the field.

Without question, the role of superintendent has become increasingly complex as ardent political debates have shaped the nature of its work (Björk & Kowalski, 2005; Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2006). Primary to my understanding of the nature of the superintendency is Callahan's (1966) conceptualizations of the role of the school superintendent. In analyzing the position between 1850 and mid-1960s, Callahan identified four conceptualizations of the position of superintendent that evolved in a normative fashion, wherein superintendents focused on the roles required by the demands of the day. Callahan's conceptualizations were: (1) teacher-scholar (1850 to early 1900s), (2) organizational manager (early 1900s to 1930), (3) educational statesman (1930 to mid-1950s), and (4) applied social scientist (mid-1950s to mid-1960s). While all four conceptions of the superintendency are essential for effective practice, the importance of each has varied greatly over time and individual superintendents may excel in one or more conceptualizations (Kowalski & Björk, 2005).

Kowalski has noted that as American society transitioned from a manufacturing to an information-based society, the expectations of the superintendency took on one of a communicator as well (Kowalski, 2005). The conception of the school superintendent as a communicator is framed within two conditions: "the need to restructure school cultures and the need to access and use information in a timely manner to solve problems of practice" (Kowalski & Björk, 2005, p. 86). Most scholars in the field have come to accept such conceptualizations as normative constructions, wherein superintendents, in practice, perform a variety of roles but focus on particular roles demanded by the day (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Brunner, Grogan, Björk, 2002).

Politics and the Superintendency

The first superintendents were employed in the 1830s in Buffalo, NY, and Lousiville, KY (Kowalski, 2005; Sharp & Walter, 2004). However, these leaders held nowhere near the autonomy or power of their modern brethren. In fact, Kowalski (2005) has noted that their roles may be best considered as a clerk to the board, rather than an autonomous leader. This may have been a purposeful construction as early political machinery feared the power and influence that might consolidate under the leadership of superintendents if left unchecked. In response, the superintendents came to be seen as the key instructional leaders and left matters of policy and politics to the school board – a relationship that was codified by the Committee of Fifteen report in 1895 (National Educational Association, 1895).

The intervening 120 years have brought many changes to American education and the role of the superintendent. Shifts in organizational management, such as the rise of Taylorism and scientific management principles in the early 1900s, brought larger societal discussions to bear on the management of public schools. More recently, the performance of our educational systems have become a frequent topic within the political realm. Perhaps, most notably, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner et al., 1983) called attention to the outcomes of the country's educational system and encouraged wide-spread reforms in order to better position America in the future. In effect, the report politicized the nation's educational systems, bringing lawmakers and educators to common topics and setting in motion a conversation about schools that continues today.

Long before the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, however, the position of superintendent was already becoming increasingly political. Boyd (1974) noted that "nonpolitical" ideology of many educational leaders was ultimately detrimental to their abilities to fulfill their duties and, perhaps, led to high rates of attrition. In fact, he recommended the development new training "designed to increase political sensitivity and foster the acquisition of skills and attitudes needed for successful conflict management" (Boyd, 1974, p. 4).

For Callahan (1966), this political role came was categorized under the role of educational statesman. The term statesman was applied to this role because of the growing importance of the superintendent as a linchpin between the school and the community. Quoting Ernest Melby, Callahan states, "The concept of administration… recognizes the centrality of the community in strengthening the democratic process. It conceives of education as a process of creative living and of administration as creative leadership. It sees the entire community as an educational resource…" (p. 215).

While Callahan envisaged the educational statesman as a politically savvy leader, forming coalitions to influence policy and practice in and around the school, Björk and Gurley (2005) have argued convincingly that the descriptor "statesman" in itself is misguided. They make the case that Callahan's appropriation of the term "statesman" was simply a misnomer. They reached this conclusion by analyzing the historical application of the term.

The traditional definition of statesman has been rather narrow: "Statesman: A skilled, experienced, and respected political leader" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). Björk and Gurley (2005) looked beyond the dictionary definition, however, and specifically analyzed how Plato and Alexander Hamilton applied the term at two distinct points in history. From the Platonic perspective in *Politicus*, a statesman is a highly skilled and educated individual who governs benevolently for the betterment of individuals and the commonwealth. Hamilton, on the other hand, conceived of the statesman as elevated from the public and engaged in the process of influencing and working with other elite decision-makers. Both perspectives distinguished the statesman as a political agent working on behalf of others, separated from his constituents by position, authority and capacity but, nevertheless, acting on behalf of his constituency at all times. Noting that neither of these definitions accurately reflect the role of the superintendency, many scholars have come to the reject the term statesman altogether, instead embracing other terms, such as political strategist (Boyd, 1974; Brunner, Grogan & Björk, 2001) or democratic leader (Björk & Gurley, 2005).

It is important to delineate the type of politics in which superintendents engage. Much of the existing literature on the politics of the superintendency focuses explicitly on micropolitics (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Blase & Blase, 2002; Lindle, 1994; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Willower, 1991). While a clear definition for micropolitics does not exist, it may be characterized by more localized, person-to-person politics that dominates the everyday life within organizations. Macropolitics, on the other hand, refers to larger cultural narratives. Surprisingly, little has been written on the prominence or practice of macropolitical engagement by superintendents.

This paucity may be a result of the historical taboos associated with the combination of education and politics. In addition, most states have superintendents' associations, which provide an avenue for school leaders to engage in macropolitical conversations within a closed group. The rationale for being cautious on this front is easily recognizeable. Most superintendents serve as employees of politically elected boards, placing them very much in a political position in which their opinions, if not accepted by all, might jeopardize their effectiveness. Furthermore, superintendents serve broad groups of stakeholders with divergent opinions and beliefs. To engage openly in political discourse would risk alienating some constituents and undermining the superintendent's ability to garner buy-in for his or her goals. Finally, discussing political topics or issues as an employee of the school district places the superintendent in a very risky position with the school board, which has the ability to limit the political speech of employees in certain situations (Ohio School Boards Association, 2016).

Therefore, it is not surprising that in a 2010 survey of superintendents, only 5% indicated that they participate in overt political actions (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Yet, superintendents do engage in macropolitical discourse. Counter to Boyd's (1974) finding

that school superintendents prefer a "nonpolitical role," (p. 1) many superintendents are actively engaged in political activities, including local convenings, radio interviews, testimonies before legislatures, and more and more frequently, online through blogs and social media.

Image Management

Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001) studied the tacit knowledge that reputationally successful superintendents appear to possess. One defining ability of successful superintendents was with respect to image management. The authors state, "reputationally successful superintendents appear to use numerous avenues to strengthen their roles and their images" (p. 107). In short, superintendents are to not rock the boat, be a pillar of virtue within the community, and care deeply for the students he or she serves.

This finding posits that superintendents see themselves assuming and filling a role within the community. Much like Goffman's (1959) role theory, superintendents assume the clothing of the position upon taking office and must strive to fulfill the role that the various stakeholders expect. In one account within Nestor-Baker and Hoy's (2001) study, a participant stated: "You don't go into a bar, you don't drink in the district. You always have to be a role model. You have to be careful about wearing your blue jeans. Sometimes I get tired of it" (p. 108). This comment underlies the inherent tension when an individual must fulfill the culturally expected role, even though it may clash with the individual's own sense of identity.

Twitter

One way in which superintendents are engaging in political discourse and shaping their public images is through the social media platform, Twitter. Twitter has come to play an increasingly powerful role in modern life. What started as as a simple messaging platform in 2006, has now become a pervasive tool that provides a unique insight into social, cultural and political movements across the world. Its ubiquity in modern culture speaks to how much it has changed the way modern individuals interact with and receive information. Currently, Twitter has 316 million active users, sending 500 million tweets a day (Twitter, 2016). The core component of the service is the capability of users to create a tweet, which consists of a short message, limited to 140 characters or less. The initial concept of the tweet was intended to answer the question "What are you doing?" The very construction of this question begs the user to share person information. In 2009, responding to the realization that Twitter usage had moved beyond short updates about personal details to include larger, societal narratives, Twitter made the decision to change the prompt for a tweet to "What's happening?" (Twitter, 2009).

Once created, users can share a tweet, making their message available to any other user who chooses to follow him/her or search for similar messages on Twitter. While limited to 140 characters, tweets have the capacity to do quite a bit. For instance, users have the ability to embed hyperlinks to take readers to websites of interest. Nearly any website one visits has the ability to mechanize the sharing of hyperlinks through a tweet button, which frequently auto-populates text and links to share on the Twitter.

Hashtags (#) are another important component of Twitter. Hashtags have been used in online environments since the late-1990s in Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels and other online sharing tools, such as Flickr (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). In 2007, technologist Chris Messina began advocating for the use of hashtags on Twitter as a strategy to develop informal networks and to categorize the always flowing stream of information that occurs on Twitter (Messina, 2007). Today, hashtags are a ubiquitous technology icon that are used inside and outside Twitter for everything

from marketing to social activism. In many professional communities, including education, hashtags have become a mechanism for creating conversations within professional learning networks with respect to specific topics. It is easy for individuals to engage in larger discussions regarding standards or professional practice simply by following or tweeting hashtags like #commoncore or #edchat.

Users may also interact with one another on Twitter by indicating a message intended for a single person or organization. This is accomplished through the inclusion of the @ symbol and the specified Twitter handle. These tweets are still open and public for all to see (unless the sender's account is private), however the @ symbol makes known for all that the message was specifically intended for that recipient. Furthermore, the intended recipient of the tweet will receive notification that they were mentioned in a Tweet. Such a structure has the ability to create open conversations between individuals or groups around common topics.

Finally, users have the capacity to retweet something shared by another user. Frequently preceded by RT, though not always, a retweet allows a user to share another user's tweet to his/her own followers, thereby spreading the initial message to a broader audience. Retweeting is a core component of Twitter and the amount of retweets is readily visible at the bottom of every tweet.

The four resources for composing a tweet outlined above shows that users may be able to accomplish complicated and varied tasks in the limited space of 140 characters. This linguistic freedom has allowed for interesting, and surprisingly complex discursive interactions. Twitter has enabled individuals to develop new ways of interacting with culture and shifted the manner in which colleagues and peers communicate across technology. Because of this complex dynamic, Twitter has become a topic of great interest to scholars from numerous fields, including computer sciences, biology, psychology to education.

Twitter Research

Twitter is now more than a decade old and scholars have begun to recognize its importance on society and have developed varied methods to analyze its usage. Broad studies of Twitter activity have primarily focused on social network analysis methods to better understand the development of networks among individuals (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Wang, Sauers, & Richardson, 2016). While useful from a meta perspective, such analyses do not provide insight into the content of specific tweets.

Other scholars have sought to better understand linguistic practices using more finite quantitative measures. For instance, Cunha et al. (2014) analyzed hashtag usage among men and women in order to better understand gendered discursive practices on Twitter. Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Gamon and Dumais (2011) employed a probabilistic framework to study the nature of conversations between individuals on Twitter, finding that individuals adopted stylistic accommodations among social groups on the platform. Perhaps the fastest growing methodology used to analyze twitter form a discursive perspective is sentiment analysis. Eichstadt et al. (2015) employed sentiment analysis to tie linguistic practices to elevated likelihood of atherosclerotic heart disease.

Qualtitative approaches to Twitter analysis are significantly more difficult due to the sheer volume of tweets. Ybarra, boyd, Korchmaros and Oppenheim (2012) and Marwick and boyd (2011) have used surveys to overcome such barriers and gather user feedback regarding Twitter usage. While such methods provide unique data, the methodology disconnects the findings from *in situ* discursive practices and may not provide a clear understanding language use on Twitter.

There is a relatively small sample of scholars employing discourse analysis techniques to better understand the discursive practices of individuals on Twitter. Page (2012) employed content analysis, using tenets of critical discourse analysis to analyze the use of the @ symbol in tweets. Such

linguistic structures that are unique to computer mediated discourse requires purposeful and distinct approaches to analysis that expand upon the frameworks traditionally employed by discourse analysts (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester, & Reed, 2016). The barriers in place for scholars, including technological barriers to gathering data and volume barriers in terms of how many tweets there are, make any meaningful examination of Twitter usage through deep discourse analysis very difficult.

School Leadership and Social Media

Recently, scholars of school leadership have begun to embrace social media as an important topic to explore as it relates to school leadership practices. In particular, researchers have sought to better understand how the use of tools like Twitter may be impacting the practice of school leadership. Many have focused primarily on interconnectivity of Twitter as a tool for developing new and expanded professional learning networks (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Cho, 2013; Couros et al., 2012; Sauers & Richardson, 2015).

Cho (2013) conducted interviews and content analysis in an attempt to better understand the practices of school leaders on Twitter. His findings indicated that school leaders discussed various topics on Twitter, including technology, announcements, personal promotion, and educational policies. This finding was confirmed by Sauers and Richardson (2015), who concluded that Twitter is a platform that is providing educators new ways to "communicate, learn and grow" (p. 141).

In a study of school superintendents' use of social media, Cox and McLeod (2014) found that Twitter can be a powerful tool in developing a two-way communication channel with community stakeholders and colleagues. It provides an opportunity to not only share important professional information, but also professional practices across communities. Likewise, Roth (2016) found that superintendents utilize Twitter as a means of forming a PLN and sharing information. In addition, Roth found that Twitter has a particular ability to provide a level of transparency to the profession, allowing superintendents to "communicate a vision for purposeful change, advocate for funding and policy, and model effective technology" (p. V).

One particularly interesting finding from Cho's (2013) study is that school leaders are very much aware of the dangers involved in discussing political topics on Twitter. One participant shared his rule of "don't put anything out there that you wouldn't be comfortable showing to board members" (p. 28). Another participant noted that there is definitely politics and faith interspersed within his Twitter account that he uses in relation to his role as a school leader. His rationale was "Who I am is what people get" (p. 29). This indicates school leaders are not stepping into the world of social media blindly. There is at least some awareness of the potential consequences and, perhaps, some strategy to its usage. As more school leaders begin to use Twitter, however, a dialogue regarding expectations and, ultimately, comfort must occur with regard to what and when to share political information.

Methodology

Discourse analysis has come to be a blanket term used to describe any methodological examination of the way language constructs and is constructed by the social world. This broad appropriation of the term is due largely to the fact that variant forms of discourse analysis have emerged simultaneously in a number of different fields. Psychology, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, literary studies, philosophy, media and communication studies have all claimed some form of discourse analysis; all of which grounded their approach in varying philosophical and theoretical perspectives (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). For this reason, critical to using discourse

analysis as an analytical method is the ability to define the historical perspective and academic tradition that one adopts.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to adopt the discourse analysis perspective that has arisen over the last half-century in the field of social psychology - discursive psychology. This approach brought together many traditions from the social and psychological sciences and gave birth to a variant of discourse analysis known as discursive psychology. In the following sections I will identify the academic tradition and key components of discursive psychology. I will then outline how the methodology has been applied in previous studies that are relevant to my study.

Discursive Psychology

Discursive psychology is a distinct approach to discourse analysis that is grounded in the field and practice of social psychology. Pioneered by Derek Edwards, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, discursive psychology emerged as a critique of many of the precepts of cognitive psychology, which viewed language either as a reflection of global societal realities or inner mental processes (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). In contrast, discursive psychology takes a social constructionist stance, which questions the reality of inner cognitive functions and challenges the stability of global realities. Discursive psychology views language use as purposeful constructions oriented towards social action (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Wood and Kroger (2000) identify three aspects that distinguish a methodological approach that uses discursive psychology. For them, the discourse analyst places: "(a) an emphasis on talk as action, (b) an emphasis on talk as the event of interest, and (c) an emphasis on variability" (p. 18). An emphasis on talk as action is, in many ways, unique to discursive psychology and discourse analysis broadly. For the discourse analyst, a distinction lies between "talk as words, and talk as what people are doing with words" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 5). In other words, talk does not exist outside of purpose; all language is purposeful and constructive.

The methodological roots of discourse analysis may be found in conversation analysis. Conversation analysis is an ethnomethodological approach to discourse that examines everyday talk in social interaction (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2014; Sacks, 1992). As an approach, conversation analysis focuses heavily on the organization of talk, such as turn-taking patterns and conversational repairs, that individuals use to navigate social interaction (Woofitt, 2014). However, such a mechanistic approach has led to a rather limited perspective on language. Conversation analysts constrain their analyses to the talks and text at hand and do not concern themselves with larger societal discourses or semiotic imagery.

While discourse analysis draws heavily on the foundational understanding and methodological approaches of conversation analysis, discourse analysis diverged from conversation analysis in two important ways. First, discourse analysis incorporated many of the continental approaches to discourse presented by Michel Foucault (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). This led to an awareness and consideration of broader discourses in society that may be drawn upon and used for specific purposes. This awareness directly impacted the second divergence of discourse analysis; namely a focus on rhetorical organization as a strategy to counter alternative positions or arguments (Billig, 1991). Conversational analysis, instead, views language as sequentially organized, prioritizing the structure and nature of language over purpose.

Philosophical Roots of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is unique as a methodology in that theory and method are inexorably intertwined. For this reason, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) have referred to discourse analysis as a "complete package," noting that "it is not to be used as a method of analysis detached from its theoretical and methodological foundations" (pp. 3-4). Furthermore, Potter (2011) has noted, "this

is not just a method; it is a broad approach to social life that combines meta-theoretical assumptions, theoretical ideas, analytic orientations and bodies of work" (p. 188). Therefore, it is necessary to unpack key philosophical perspectives related to discourse analysis.

Social constructionism is a theoretical orientation to taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 2003). While it is nearly impossible to provide a universal definition for social constructionism, Burr (2003) has provided some key premises that are common to all social constructionist perspectives. First, social constructionists take a critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge. This premise stands in opposition to other positivist or empirical traditions and encourages practitioners to be critical of observational reality. To the social constructionist, truth and reality do not exist independently, but instead are socially constructed by individuals and society. Of particular importance to the discourse analyst is the proposition that the construction or reality is accomplished through language. As Burr (2003) has noted, "knowledge of our world… is not derived from the nature of the world as it really is," instead, "it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated" (p. 4)

Another key premise of social constructionism is that truth is historically and culturally specific. Therefore, the categories and truths that individuals associate with society are flexible and dependent upon one's place. As Burr (2003) has noted, the notion of childhood is highly dependent upon what century one lives in. In much the same way, what society considers as right and wrong can shift dramatically across communities and time. As such, the actions societies accept are sustained through individual constructions of the world.

Like social constructionism, poststructuralism is a complex philosophical prospect that is the subject of much debate regarding core tenets and application. Nevertheless, an overview of key poststructuralist ideas is helpful to better understanding the discourse analysts perspective.

Built largely on the writings of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, poststructuralism views the world as a flexible construct built on related realities. With respect to language, poststructuralism places emphasis on the every day nature of language (parole) rather than on linguistic structures (langue) (Potter and Wetherell, 1992). This position is a direct reaction to Saussurian structuralist position, which theorized language as a fixed medium with constant meaning and relation (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Poststructural theory is also particularly concerned with power dynamics and the role that language plays in constituting and sustaining power. Michel Foucault conceptualized power as productive force that was sustained through its connection to knowledge. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) provide the example of crime, wherein "it is hard to imagine the modern prison system without criminology" (p. 14). In this example, the prison system is the basis of power but utterly impotent without knowledge of the concepts related to criminology. It is this linking of power to knowledge, and the reliance of discursive processes to create knowledge, that has been of great importance to discourse analysts. Therefore, within most discourse analysis questions, the realization that talk and text does something, begs the question also of how the discourse might also support or undermine traditional power structures.

It is necessary to define my use of the term discourse. I have adopted Potter and Wetherell's (1992) "open" definition of discourse to include all forms of "spoken interaction and written texts of all kinds" (p. 7). Such an approach does not necessitate a two-way communicative structure. This is important when discussing discourse as it relates to social media as a singular, uni-directional statement qualifies as discourse. Furthermore, every textual element of that statement (i.e. hashtags or @ statements) is discursive in nature.

Validity

It is important to attend to how one, as an analyst, warrants claims in discourse analysis. Potter (1996) noted four possible ways the discursive psychology analysts might warrant claims: 1) attending to participant orientations; 2) attending to deviant cases; 3) coherence and 4) reader evaluation. This study will warrant claims through attending to deviant cases and reader evaluation.

This study is at its core a study of deviant cases. The discussion of political topics by superintendents is abnormal according to our institutional expectations and the roles associated with practice. Therefore, those tweets that do address policy and/or politics challenge our assumptions of the field and deviate from normal superintendent discourse.

In addition, I have sought to warrant claims throughout by attending to reader evaluation. Reader evaluation "both results form and is encouraged by the greater transparency of discourse-analytic work" (Wood and Kroger, 2000, p. 168). As such I have sought to clearly articulate the analytic process inherent to this study and to be reflective throughout regarding my own internal biases and understandings of the texts at hand. A first step in such an approach is to clarify the perspective I bring to the research through a positionality statement.

Positionality

Alcoff (2006) has posited the concept of positionality as a means to clearly identify the perspectival influences that act upon the research at hand. While Alcoff has traditionally applied this concept to gender studies from a critical feminist lens, any study appropriating a social constructivist lens, particularly one utilizing discourse analysis as a methodological framework, may benefit from clearly articulating the researcher's positionality. Therefore, I will attempt to expound upon my own positionality as it relates to the study at hand.

I come to this research with a social constructionist positionality. I adhere to Burr's (2003) four premises embraced by social constructionists: employ critical approach to taken for granted knowledge, knowledge is historical and culturally specific, there is a link between knowledge and social processes, and there is a link between knowledge and social action. The historical and cultural specificity is primary to my philosophical grounding in this study. Through this lens, the I positions my understanding of social reality as situated in historicity. Therefore, there is no enduring reality and all social understandings are contingent (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

In addition, for the last eight years I have worked in what may be described as an educational policy subsystem (Thurber, 1996). In this position I have worked closely with public school superintendents around school design and innovation processes, while at the same time working with policy makers and governmental institutions to support such initiatives. This background has influence my perception of the superintendency; I have come to know many superintendents as passionate educators seeking the best opportunities for their students. Yet the political nature of their role requires caution and political astuteness as they work with political organizations and discuss policy issues broadly.

Population

An initial database of superintendents was constructed by adding participants from the Twitter hashtag, #suptchat, and following an already developed, public list of superintendents constructed by Kevin Case (@KevinCase253)[1]. Kevin Case's Twitter List of superintendents consisted of 814 superintendents when the initial data set was pulled. I used the software, TwExlist (Docteur Tweety, 2015) to export all members of the list to an excel database, which included

[1] The public list is available at: https://twitter.com/KevinCase253/lists/superintendentstofollow

information about each account. From this list, I conducted an initial scan of participants for the purposes of narrowing down my sample.

Previous studies of Twitter have given great thought to the criteria used to qualify participants for analysis. For instance, Veletsianos (2012) developed the following criteria for participant inclusion in his study of higher education scholars' use of Twitter. Users must:

- have a public Twitter profile,
- have a Twitter network with more than 2,000 followers,
- have an active presence on Twitter, and
- have a K-12 school title in his or her Twitter profile.

Other studies have changed particular criteria. Sauers and Richardson (2015) included a requirement that participants have tweeted more than once per week, while Cho (2013) included only participants that had more than 100 tweets in their history.

I have purposefully chosen not to include such a criterion for this study. The rationale for this decision is based largely upon theoretical considerations. From a discourse analysis perspective, the unit of study is the discourse, not the individual constructing the discourse. As such, a single tweet from a superintendent adds to the larger body of discourse. Furthermore, in some ways, from an analytical perspective, that single tweet may be more illuminating than a random tweet from an account with 5,000 other examples. The act of the single tweet was purposive and unique; therefore, it is a punctuation that indicates something worth analyzing.

That is not to say that there were not any criteria for inclusion, however. I set forth two criteria that were critical to the analysis. First, all participants must have been users of Twitter within the entirety of data range for analysis and the users must have self-identified as superintendents within their profile. I removed all superintendents who had not created a Twitter account before the initial date in my analysis range (August 1, 2014). Next I analyzed all of the biographies that the participants had provided for their Twitter profile. I made the decision to only include those superintendents who explicitly stated their role as superintendent within their profile in this dataset. The rationale for this decision was that this required a clear, explicit statement of their role and affirmed their position outside of their inclusion in the initial list. This left me with a total database of 570 superintendents.

Analysis proceeded in four steps. First, a random number generator was used to reorder the catalog of 570 superintendents. After this was complete, I utilized Nvivo for Mac (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2016) and the web browser extension, NCapture for Nvivo, to capture all tweets and retweets for the first 10 identified superintendents. This process automatically populated an Nvivo database where I limited samples to those that were shared between August 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015. After three rounds of this process a total dataset of 16,658 tweets were included in the dataset. I decided at this point that more than 15,000 tweets should provide a clear indication of practice.

The second stage of analysis was a broad scan of all tweets, coding those that were political in nature. For the purposes of this study, I have defined political as any tweet that referenced: politicians, legislation, educational policy, non-educational policy, and politically sensitive topics (e.g. Supreme Court rulings). This coding process identified 1,619 tweets as political in nature.

Step three of the analysis process included reading closely only those tweets that had previously been coded as political. After several close readings of all tweets, meta-themes began to emerge. It became clear that there were two broad categories of tweets within the dataset: those that were constructed by the individual and those that were shared content (re-tweets and link sharing).

Therefore, a second round of coding was conducted in Nvivo in which all tweets were categorized as either "Updates/Conversations" or "Retweet/Sharing."

For the purposes of this study, I have decided to focus only on those tweets coded as "Updates/Conversations," as the subject at hand individually constructs them. At this point I conducted another deep reading of all tweets coded looking for new themes. Step four of the analysis was the final round of coding, wherein political tweets that were coded as 'Updates/Conversations' in round three were further coded as 'Representations of Engagement' and 'Political Activism.'

Findings

Through my analysis, I found two consistent themes that emerged and characterized the political dialogue that emerged on Twitter: Representations of Engagement and Activism. It is important to note that while all of the data presented is publicly available, I have made a conscious decision to de-identify the tweets. This decision was made out of respect for the fact that political engagement is traditionally a complex role for the superintendency. I have not de-identified individuals mentioned in the tweets, however, as they are disconnected from the tweet construction itself and are important for the analysis process.

Representations of Engagement

Representations of engagement consists of tweets that actively construct an image of the superintendent communicating about sophisticated political topics and as player in the political system. This finding is very much related to the concept of image management and conforms with the findings of Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001). Superintendents are carefully constructing their images as political insiders so as to fulfill their rolls as political strategist.

At its core, Twitter was developed as a tool to share updates with a wide audience. It is for this reason that users are prompted with the question, "What's happening" in the composition box for every tweet. For many superintendents included in this study, this provided them with an opportunity to share their engagement in political matters. The samples provided below are a small subset, but display common discursive practices constructed in this way.

Relationships within Politics. Crane (2012) used discourse analysis as a means to examine how individuals utilized the construction of group membership to convey expertise. Building trust and respect by leveraging relationships and group participation is nothing new. When analyzing the dataset for this study, one of the most common features across all participants was the use of relationships. In some cases this was done by the superintendent showing that they are within the same room/group as powerful and important people. In other cases, it is through constructing informal dialogues with politicians, which indicates that there is a relationship in place. Such actions serve to place the superintendent within a privileged group, and thereby conveying some form of expertise to him or her. Example 1 does this in a particular way.

Example 1:

1. *Gov. Raimondo meeting with RI superintendents asking for input on search for new education commissioner. #NextinEd*

The phrase, "asking for input" positions the superintendents involved in the meeting as political advisors. As school leaders, they possess information and expertise that the Governor should listen to in the process of choosing a new education commissioner for the state. This positions the superintendent as the holder of privileged knowledge (Crane, 2012), and thereby reinforces his or her insider status. It may be presumed that the governor addressed other topics in the meeting as well, but the only topic explicitly tweeted about was the fact that the governor had approached them for input.

Another construction found within example one can be seen across the entire dataset. The political actor mentioned in the tweet is given a position of primary importance by being the first item mentioned. Examples one through five prominently display this construction.

Examples 2-4:

2. Illinois Gov. Rauner talking with suburban superintendents about education in Illinois. [photo][2]

3. Sen. Wiger and Rep. Loon at AMSD. Thanks for supporting education! [photo]

4. Thank you, Governor Dayton, for speaking at AMSD. We appreciate your support of Minnesota students! [photo]

5. Thank you Mr. Speaker for talking with us at the White Bear Chamber event! [photo]

In front-loading the tweet with the political actor, the superintendents have placed the importance of the communication on the individual addressed. Perhaps more importantly, in none of these cases is the actual Twitter handle of the political actors actually used. This is a surprising, but frequent occurrence within the dataset. It would be expected that if the superintendent was intending to communicate directly with the individual mentioned, he or she would include the intended recipient's Twitter handle. This would ensure that the recipient would receive notification of the Tweet. Therefore, creating a tweet directed towards an individual without a handle is a curious construction. It is entirely possible that Twitter handles have been omitted because the subject in question was not a Twitter user, which seems to be the case in some of the examples above. For others, though, the political figure does have an account but it is simply not used.

Another task accomplished by listing names rather than handles is clarity. Stating the political actor's entire name allows the superintendent to be absolutely clear about whom he or she is talking about very clearly. Therefore, it is the act of reaching out and acknowledging the political actor that is given primacy rather than the actual act.

Examples two and five also overtly include dialogic references. The phrase "talking with" is purposeful in both of these tweets. The inclusion of "with" places the superintendent as a co-creator of the talk. The political figure was not simply talking to, but engaging in conversation about critical issues that confront schools. Such a construction characterizes the superintendent as a political insider who has an avenue to discuss educational issues with policy makers.

The use of the word "thanks" or "thank you" was a common construction across the dataset. In the existing literature regarding social media and discourse analysis, there seems to be

[2] Tweets that include photos have been indicated with the tag [photo]. All such indications will include the photo in the appendix alongside the tweet.

very little attention paid to this particular type of construction. Morrow (2006) identified the prevalence of "thanks messages" as they relate to advice seeking on internet message boards, however I believe that the "thanks" in this context are doing something different. For instance, again, there is no direct link to the political actors' Twitter accounts, which means the "thanks" may not be intended to actually be seen. Instead, these "thanks messages" may do more to show a transactional relationship. For instance, by placing the superintendent in a position to say "thanks," he or she must be the recipient of some benefit from the act of the political figure. This further establishes the idea of a relationship between the superintendent and the political figure, whether it is based in reality or not.

Another anomaly that is present in examples two through five is the inclusion of photos depicting the superintendent physically at an event with the political actor(s). This semiotic representation is incredibly powerful to convey the insider status of the superintendent. He or she is not simply a school official with an opinion, but an active participant within the political world.

There are certainly exemptions to the constructions presented above. There are times when superintendents do rely on Twitter handles within their tweets. Two obvious exceptions to this are examples six and seven.

Examples 6-7:

6. Great meeting today @VaSecofHealth, @yostfordelegate, and our @PulaskiCoSchool partners, discussing early childhood education.

7. *Happy birthday @GovernorVA from the great #SWVA…*

In example six, the superintendent in question names two elected officials by Twitter handle alone. Interestingly, both of these accounts include the officials' roles within the handle; one does not include the individual's name at all while the other acknowledges that the delegate's last name is likely Yost. By using the Twitter handle, it may be assumed that the superintendent intended for the individuals to see the tweet. This example is purely an acknowledgement and thankful communication. As such, it may be more of an act of coalition building and relationship development than anything else.

Example seven was a particularly unique construction that stood out during data analysis as distinct from any other construction. In this tweet the superintendent addresses the Governor's twitter handle, indicating a direct comment that he is sending to the addressee. In this case, however, it is highly likely that the Governor actually has a social media account manager who maintains his account, therefore, while ostensibly a direct comment to the person in question, it is likely known that in reality it will not reach it's intended recipient. In addition, the superintendent's wishing of a "Happy birthday" indicates a close connection between the two. Looking through the existing data for this superintendent's Twitter activity, there are no other instances of him wishing individuals happy birthday. Finally, the conclusion of this statement, "from the great #SWVA…" is a reference to a regional branding of Southwest Virginia. It is interesting that the superintendent does not reference his school district in particular, but a geographical region. Given that schools are far less likely to adhere to regionalistic ideologies, but regionalism is incredibly important to political machinery, one may conclude that this tweet is driven from political motivations. Finally, ending the tweet with an ellipses is a unique construction that has no parallel within the dataset; particularly after a hashtag, which is frequently used as a tweet conclusion. The ellipses may indicate that the

conversation is not over, giving further credence to the idea that this particular superintendent has an established relationship with the Governor, whether actual or not.

Example 8:

8. Get well soon @GovernorVA, I'm sure the hospital stay is driving you nuts!

The sentiment expressed in example seven is recreated by the same superintendent in example eight. In this case, the superintendent once again wishes good things for the Governor, but follows it up with a personal statement that indicates a strong relationship. For parents and followers of this superintendent, the reality that may be drawn from these tweets is that the superintendent has a very strong relationship with the Governor of the state, which may influence their perceptions and indicate that he is a political player with strong ties with the political system.

Example nine is an extension of the kind of close connection displayed in examples seven and eight. In this example, the superintendent thanks a Representative for a kindness paid to him recently:

Example 9:

9. Thank you @RepJohnKatko for taking the time out of your schedule to reach out when I was in DC yesterday to make sure I was in good shape.

The superintendent not only thanks the Representative for "taking the time out of your schedule," indicating that the Representative is a busy individual and his engagement was spontaneous and done because of their relationship. Furthermore, the rationale for reaching out is "to make sure I was in good shape," which indicates that there was no reason for the interaction other than simply as an act of kindness on the part of the Representative to the superintendent. Once again, such a construction creates the perception that there is an established relationship between the superintendent and the Representative in question, which indicates that the superintendent is a respected figure, and potentially even a colleague, within political circles.

Whether it is participating in a meeting or discussing personal connections to elected officials, the tweets in examples one through nine show superintendents constructing images of their relationships with elected officials. Such constructions indicate that they are insiders within the political system and have some standing to either discuss, or possibly influence, the political process at large. For the community members, parents, students, and teachers seeing these interactions the relationships become the primary take away.

Engaged in the Process. Not all representations of engagement were necessarily indicative of relationships with particular political actors. In other cases, superintendents shared instances of their work on legislative or policy issues, demonstrating engagement in the political system as an influencer from the outside.

Examples 10-12:

10. *I attended a budget workshop today to determine how the Governor's budget proposal will it affect PVSD.*

11. *Just wrapped up @amsdmn Exec/Legislative Board meeting. Working with districts across metro to position our schools for success in future.*

12. *Meeting with local supts today about Economic Dev, Legislative changes, budgets, and community partnerships. Future is bright in Wood Co.*

In examples 10, 11 and 12, superintendents present reflective tweets in which they share activities from the day, though it is unknown whether 12 is in situ or anticipatory. In all three of these tweets, however, the superintendent is sharing personal involvement in policy or legislative issues. In example 10, the author writes "I attended a budget workshop today to determine how the Governor's budget proposal will it [sic] affect PVSD." In this instance, the superintendent is sharing that he/she is proactive in learning how policy issues affect the district and will not simply listen to talking points provided by politicians, but will seek out professional development so that he/she can interpret the impact on his/her own. There is no further information provided as to whether it will affect the district positively or negatively, only that the superintendent is now equipped to make that decision. The omission of the conclusion is curious in this instance, leading the author to the conclusion that the tweet was constructed to further support the superintendent's role as a content expert rather than making any particular judgment regarding the budget proposal itself.

In examples 11 and 12, the superintendents share that they are working within a group of other superintendents[3] to discuss legislative issues. In neither of these tweets are any examples provided or actions to be taken given. Instead, the fact that they are engaged in the process is the subject of the tweet. In essence, updating their followers that they are engaged participants in the legislative process.

It is worth noting that examples 10-12 are all forward looking. Example 10 is about how the proposal "will affect" PVSD, example 11 looks to "success in the future," and 12 notes that the "Future is bright." Such constructions may be rhetorical in nature. They allow for the superintendent to focus on the possibilities that lie ahead rather than the problems that exist current; a common rhetorical construction within politics.

Example 13 combines elements of examples 10-12 and example one above.

Example 13:

13. *Mtg w/ legislators in Salem today with @KimStrelchun. TY to legislators Riley, Gallegos & McLain for listening today. [photo]*

On the one hand, the superintendent shares that he/she is engaged in the political process to affect change. In this case the superintendent notes that he/she and a colleague are meeting with "legislators" at the state capital. Following this, he thanks three specific legislators for "listening"

[3] The AMSDMN is the Association of Metropolitan School Districts of Minnesota.

today. The use of the term listening to describe what others were doing indicates that they themselves were there to share their opinion and/or complain about current issues. Where this example diverges from the other three in this set is that it does not indicate that solutions were actively being sought, only that things were being shared. Furthermore, like above, the non-use of Twitter handles indicates that the tweet may not be constructed for the audience ostensibly addressed in the tweet. This is further reinforced by the fact that a twitter hand is used to address the superintendent's colleague "@KimStrelchun."

The direct thank you to the individuals without the use of Twitter handles is particularly curious. One possible explanation may be that the individuals in question do not participate on Twitter. However, if that is the case, why would superintendents thank an individual on a platform that they know they are likely to never see. Perhaps the answer may lie in the fact that someone connected to the individuals will see the tweet and convey the thanks, but that seems to rely on chance far too much. I posit, instead, that the thank you really provided an opportunity for the superintendent to share his/her engagement with the elected officials and to further reinforce that they were "listening" to him/her; a reality that further indicates that the superintendent is a political actor engaged in the process.

The 13 tweets provided above display a range of activities wherein superintendents use Twitter to construct images of themselves as engaged within the political structure. Whether that be as a colleague or friend to political actors or an engaged professional providing feedback on policy, the superintendent is politically engaged as a core element of his/her job.

Activism

The above tweets demonstrate that superintendents are engaged in the political process, but do not go so far as advocating for and promoting particular legislative and/or policy choices. As was noted above, historically superintendents have exercised caution with respect to their over political nature. Instead, as Boyd (1974) noted, school superintendents prefer to rely on nonpolitical resources to accomplish their goals. While many leadership standards encourage superintendents to understand and engage in political dialogue for the benefit of their school (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011; The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015), the need for caution still exists. The advent of associations and various school-oriented interest groups have become their political voice, allowing superintendents to maintain their standing within their local context without alienating members of the board or their community.

The next group of examples focuses almost entirely on school superintendents challenging the traditional paradigm and publically engaging in discourse about political issues. In general, these tweets may be characterized as advocacy, in that they are explicitly in support or in opposition to particular ideas being discussed in the policy or political realm. The difference between Representations of Engagement and Activism are important. On the one hand, discussing engagement in the process indicates that the individual is a political player, further developing his/her role as a leader within the community. Activism for issues, however, ties purpose to action. It identifies the issues with which one associates and speaks to where the superintendent places importance in the political dialogue.

Policy Topics. Examples 14 and 15, superintendents use various discursive strategies to discuss policy issues that they hold important.

Examples 14-15:

14. *Critical thinking, problem-solving, reading & writing skills emphasized by #CommonCore will help prepare students for the SAT #CA4CommonCore*

15. *Early reports are NDSA Smarter Balanced Assessments have been working flawlessly…. #AprilFoolsday2015 #smile everyone #Keepperspective*

Example 14 is one tweet among a series shared by a single superintendent. The content of all of the tweets included sharing either examples from within the school or facts and details about Common Core. It must be noted that at the time of these tweets, Common Core was a highly politicized educational policy issue. Many parents and community members were polarized on the subject because of political narratives that had come to characterize the standards debate. For this particular superintendent, Twitter was a mechanism for sharing the positive aspects of Common Core, not through outright political campaigning, but by making the standards human-focused and showing how they benefit students.

Not every superintendent advocates positively for policy topics. Some use Twitter as a means of criticizing policies. In example 15, a superintendent references the highly politicized Smarter Balanced Assessment, which was closely linked to the development of Common Core Standards. Rather than posit a cogent argument for his/her dislike of the test, however, the superintendent uses hashtags as a means of comic relief. Using the hashtag, #AprilFoolsday2015 allowed the superintendent to criticize the role-out of the Smarter Balanced assessment; an act which not only defines his/her stance on the subject of the test, but also deflects potential criticism that may come to the district from parents and students regarding the testing process.

Examples 16 and 17 are both tweets about public policy issues that directly position the superintendents within a political camp.

Examples 16-17:

16. *Bad public policy is cured by an engaged citizenry. Are you holding your Rep & Senator accountable for this? http://t.co/DTHDZ9Uga4*

17. *Glad to hear that #SCOTUS is providing the right of marriage to ALL. I have many happy friends great day to be an American!*

In example 16, the superintendent links to a news article regarding a charter school not being held accountable for poor performance. The language that is used to describe how to solve such problems is rhetorical in nature. The superintendent states, "Bad public policy is *cured* by and engaged citizenry," which might indicate that the policy environment is sick or malfunctioning when issues such as those outlined in the article arise. It is the role of the citizenry to get involved in such issues and hold politicians "accountable." The use of the word "accountable" indicates that the superintendent is suggesting voting repercussions because of the article, not just complaints or discussions. As such, the superintendent is suggesting to his/her followers appropriate voting measures and acting as a political advisor on educational issues.

Example 17 touches on a larger social issue directly influenced by the Supreme Court decision to allow same sex marriage. It is noteworthy that the superintendent does not frame this tweet as a pro-same sex marriage tweet, but as a pro "marriage to ALL." In doing this, the superintendent clearly takes a stand on a potentially divisive political issue, but does so in a way that will not overtly offend constituents who may disagree with him/her. Such a construction is political by nature and shows a sophistication regarding political topics and navigating community biases, while at the same time having the courage to advocate for causes that matter to him/her.

One of the most frequent policy topics that superintendents share/discuss on Twitter relates to finances and educational spending.

Examples 18-19:

18. *K-12 spending in VA is at pre-recession levels. Delay is denial. If you want a 21st Century Workforce, it's time to invest in our future now*

19. *State Funding - The Rest of the Story http://t.co/4nBB8yrY9e*

In example 18, the superintendent makes the case that K-12 spending in Virginia is not at an adequate level. His/her reference for adequate is interesting, however, indicating that current spending is at "pre-recession levels." Given the superintendent's construction, it is assumed that this is a bad thing, but an interpretation could be posited in which this statement indicates spending is returning to pre-recession levels, which may indicate a recovery. In addition, the superintendent states, "Delay is denial," ruling out any potential alternative interpretation. Finally, the superintendent makes the leap that funding schools at higher levels will lead to a "21st Century Workforce," for which there is no evidence provided. In essence, this tweet is an example of a superintendent advocating for more funding for schools, justifying his position through a data point and linking it to student success and economic benefit.

Example 19 includes a link to the superintendents' school blog, where he proceeds to explain the complexity of school funding and where that money goes in schools. The language in this tweet does a couple of important things, first it harkens back for many to the famous radio program host, Paul Harvey. *The Rest of the Story* was a radio show hosted by Harvey and consisted of short stories that provided compelling backstories in an attempt to further illuminate the subject. In referencing this, the superintendent is, in a folksy way, setting the stage to explain the complexity and nuance of school finance.

Another construction found in example 19, which was certainly present across the dataset, but not a common practice, was the use of a personal blog to provide insight on complex political topics. Rather than try to address the whole of school finance issues within the limit of 140 characters, the superintendent instead used the platform provided by Twitter to direct followers back to his webpage where he could dedicate the necessary time and space to the subject at hand.

In the six examples provided above, the superintendents used sophisticated political rhetoric and devices to advocate for causes and issues that were important to them. Those causes may be directly related to outcomes within the school district, but as in the case of example 17, there are instances where the topics are broader social issues that impact everyone across the community.

On Behalf of Students. Overall within the dataset, mentions of students (including the words kids, kid, children, child) occur far less within tweets that have been coded as political as their occurrence in the data set broadly. For instance, the word student(s) is referenced 150

(9.3% of all tweets) times within the tweets labeled as political, whereas it is referenced 4,090 (24.5% of all tweets) in the complete dataset. The use of the term student(s) in those tweets coded as political are interesting from a discourse perspective though.

The following six tweets have all been selected because they are representative of tweets that mention students and are political in nature.

Examples 20-21:

20. *Terrific MSBA advocates for education meeting with Rep. Kline. Thanks for supporting Minnesota students! http://t.co/WvQqhX8kIU*

21. *Budget in Enosburg passes by huge voice vote from the floor! Great job supporting students voters of Enosburg!!!! FNESU#*

The first thing that is apparent among many of these tweets is that the use of the term "student" may be viewed as a rhetorical construction known as synechdoche. Deborah Stone (2002) noted that synechdoches are symbolic representations wherein a part is used to represent the whole. Such linguistic devices are import in "political life because we often make policies based on examples believed to be representative of a larger universe" (p. 138). In examples 20 and 21, the word "students" accomplishes this task. In both cases, it is posited that voters and politicians are "supporting students." In actuality, the tasks they are accomplishing support the school as a whole, but students are the more visible part and, frankly, the more persuasive from a rhetorical perspective.

Another important use of the student(s) among the political data set is to position the superintendent as the protector and benefactor of children.

Examples 22-23:

22. *Testifying on behalf of all Vermont students! Let's govern and make decisions for Students not for VT adults at the expense of kids*

23. *Looking forward to defending students and teachers tonight at a public forum in Lyncourt regarding testing and evaluation for schools.*

In both examples 22 and 23, the superintendent clearly places him/herself in a position of working on behalf of students. In example 22, the superintendent writes, "Testifying on behalf of all Vermont students!" Such a sentiment in essence positions the superintendent as the protector of kids. The superintendent goes on to write, "make decisions for Students not for VT adults," which is an expression found frequently across the dataset. In essence, this construction posits that students are overlooked because they do not have a voice in the political system. As a result, it is all the more important that the superintendent function as their voice and works on students' behalf for a fair system.

Example 23 is a slightly different take on a similar construction. Rather than positioning him/herself as a protector of students alone, this superintendent claims to be "defending students and teachers." It is worth noting the use of "defending" conjures images of battle, which is another

rhetorical strategy used to position one's position against another's. Regardless, this tweet conforms to the ideological positioning of the previous tweet in that it positions the superintendent as the defender of students and teachers, working on their behalf within a system set up against them.

Finally, students are often positioned as the reason why superintendents do their job and make the difficulties of the political system worthwhile.

Example 24:

24. *As @NYGovCuomo and @syracusedotcom beat me up I am reminded by a student why I chose this job… [photo]*

In example 24, the superintendent notes that he/she has suffered in a recent discussion with the Governor and the local newspaper. This tweet shares a photo, which may be seen in the appendix, in which a student writes a nice comment about the superintendent. This tweet is complex and does many things. First, as identified in the first section of this analysis, the inclusion of the Governor's twitter account and the newspaper positions the superintendent as an insider within the political system. By noting that these two "beat me up" calls forth battle imagery, as stated earlier, which rhetorically places the educational system in competition with the political system. In this battle, the superintendent is the representative of the school and acts on behalf of student. It is the note left by the student that provides refocusing and encouragement to continue the battle for this superintendent.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the superintendent does use the Governor's and newspaper's actual Twitter handle, indicating that he purposefully wanted them to see the tweet. The tweet is then finished with an ellipses, which may indicate that the conversation is not over. In many ways, this entire construction could be interpreted as a political positioning with the intention of telling the Governor and newspaper that the superintendent is the defender of kids and the battle is not over.

Discussion and Conclusion

The importance in the examples provided above lies not in what the tweets say, but in what they do. That is, each of the tweets construct specific relationships between the superintendents in question and the political landscape that exists outside of the school. For the first 13 examples, coded as Representations of Engagement, the discourse within the tweets positioned the superintendent as a political figure who either works closely with or has close relationships with other political figures. In the final 11 tweets, coded as Activism, the discourse within the tweets positioned the superintendents as either holding strong political opinions that constituents should listen to or as defenders of students from the political system.

In both cases, superintendents are defining their roles as political in nature and are using Twitter as a medium for sharing with a broad audience, despite the potential risks inherent in discussing politics with their constituents. In order to accomplish this, superintendents have employed discursive techniques, such as synecdoche and rhetorical allusions in order to create a positive narrative.

This analysis has led me to form a hypothesis that social media is enabling the establishment of an evolving role within the superintendency. Callahan (1966) viewed the role of Educational Statesman as an important component of the superintendency. He characterized this role as one

which required individuals to be politically savvy and capable of developing coalitions to better the educational opportunities for students. The term statesman, however, has proved problematic. Many scholars have noted that the term itself calls to mind an elevated individual, highly involved in the governing elite, working diligently to better the lives of their constituents (Björk & Gurley, 2005). Superintendents, however, work closely with their constituents and have historically sought to distance themselves from the world of politics (Boyd, 1974). Therfore, Björk and Gurley (2005) and Brunner et al. (2002) have convincingly argued that a term like political strategist more aptly suits the political involvement of superintendents as it is much more strategic in nature and heavily reliant upon micropolitics rather than macropolitics.

This study has indicated, however, that superintendents are utilizing Twitter as a means to construct an image of themselves as political insiders and advocates. The representations of engagement showed superintendents constructing images of themselves on Twitter wherein they had access to a broad range of politicians. They used mechanisms, such as dialogic representation and personal well-wishes to develop representative connections with the politicians who represent their community. Likewise, the examples of activism showed how superintendents publicly stood up for and fought on behalf of their students.

Therefore, I believe that superintendents are fulfilling elements of the role of "statesman" on-line in the 21st century. Through careful and strategic image management, superintendents are beginning to utilize Twitter as a platform for constructing their political identity. The political activity of superintendents on Twitter construct images of superintendents as benevolent benefactors engaged in the political system, either directly or indirectly, for the betterment of students. This action conforms to both the Platonic and Hamiltonian conception of statesman, and warrants further examination.

Limitations

The study at hand examines the tweets of a relatively small sample of school superintendents on Twitter. The intent was not to define practice, but to examine emerging discursive practices. For instance, Brunner, Grogan, and Björk (2001) and Grogan (2000) have argued that the there is a need for a reconceptualization of the superintendency from a feminist, post-modernist perspective. Likewise, examining discursive practices on Twitter would benefit from such a critical lens and likely illuminate new findings.

Discourse analysis as a methodology is grounded in a personal philosophical positioning. As such, others may interpret discursive practices or implications differently than I. Therefore, I welcome various perspectives on the subject at hand in order to more fully understand the nature of political dialogue by superintendents on Twitter. I believe as social media becomes more ubiquitous and superintendents turn to it as a tool for communicating with parents, teachers, students and community members, it will continue to be important to fully understand how their usage constructs their identities and roles as modern school superintendents.

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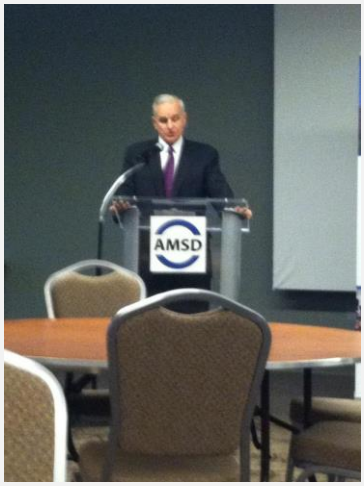
Appendix

1. Gov. Raimondo meeting with RI superintendents asking for input on search for new education commissioner. #NextinEd

2. Illinois Gov. Rauner talking with suburban superintendents about education in Illinois.

3. Sen. Wiger and Rep. Loon at AMSD. Thanks for supporting education!

4. Thank you, Governor Dayton, for speaking at AMSD. We appreciate your support of Minnesota students!



5. Thank you Mr. Speaker for talking with us at the White Bear Chamber event!

6. Great meeting today @VaSecofHealth, @yostfordelegate, and our @PulaskiCoSchool partners, discussing early childhood education.

7. Happy birthday @GovernorVA from the great #SWVA…

8. Get well soon @GovernorVA, I'm sure the hospital stay is driving you nuts!

9. Thank you to Rep. Fischer, Rep. Daudt, and Sen. Wiger for addressing the White Bear area Chamber of Commerce.

10. I attended a budget workshop today to determine how the Governor's budget proposal will it affect PVSD.

11. Just wrapped up @amsdmn Exec/Legislative Board meeting. Working with districts across metro to position our schools for success in future.

12. Meeting with local supts today about Economic Dev, Legislative changes, budgets, and community partnerships. Future is bright in Wood Co.

13. Mtg w/ legislators in Salem today with @KimStrelchun. TY to legislators Riley, Gallegos & McLain for listening today.

14. Critical thinking, problem-solving, reading & writing skills emphasized by #CommonCore will help prepare students for the SAT #CA4CommonCore

15. Early reports are NDSA Smarter Balanced Assessments have been working flawlessly…. #AprilFoolsday2015 #smile everyone #Keepperspective

16. Bad public policy is cured by an engaged citizenry. Are you holding your Rep & Senator accountable for this? http://t.co/DTHDZ9Uga4

17. Glad to hear that #SCOTUS is providing the right of marriage to ALL. I have many happy friends great day to be an American!

18. K-12 spending in VA is at pre-recession levels. Delay is denial. If you want a 21st Century Workforce, it's time to invest in our future now

19. State Funding - The Rest of the Story http://t.co/4nBB8yrY9e

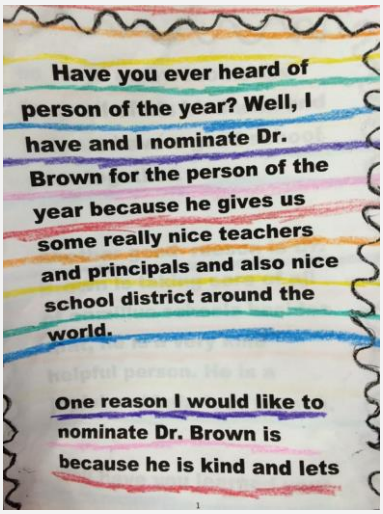
20. Terrific MSBA advocates for education meeting with Rep. Kline. Thanks for supporting Minnesota students! http://t.co/WvQqhX8kIU

21. Budget in Enosburg passes by huge voice vote from the floor! Great job supporting students voters of Enosburg!!!! FNESU#

22. Testifying on behalf of all Vermont students! Let's govern and make decisions for Students not for VT adult s at the expense of kids

23. Looking forward to defending students and teachers tonight at a public forum in Lyncourt regarding testing and evaluation for schools.

24. As @NYGovCuomo and @syracusedotcom beat me up I am reminded by a student why I chose this job…



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