Examining Parental Perspectives on Standardized Testing, Selection, and Meritocracy: An Exploratory Study of Highly Selective Public Magnet Schools

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Abstract

This interview-based qualitative study examines the ways that parents of high-achieving students who attended prestigious and selective public magnet high schools understand notions of academic merit, fairness, and selection. Using thematic analysis, I identified four emergent themes, which are that parents placed confidence in objective testing for selection, extrapolated the meaning of test scores, preferred a like-minded educational environment, and accepted segregation by ability as a desirable future. After presenting these emergent themes, I conclude by offering a set of critical guiding questions that can inform future educational research on selection practices and their justifying ideologies.

Keywords: *meritocracy, standardized testing, selection, segregation, magnet schools*

In *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870-2033*, the British sociologist Michael Young (1958) satirically described a futuristic society in which the significant advancements of psychology made it possible "to predict with some degree of accuracy the ultimate level of a child's intellectual powers" (p. 58). As the "reliable age" of determining a child's ultimate educability through intelligence quotient testing steadily plummeted over time, the educational system in this fictional world was consequently re-structured:

> The test-ages at which highly reliable predictions could be made have become steadily lower. In 2000, the reliable age was 9; in 2015, the reliable age was 4; in 2020, it was 3...the real justification for a common education in primary schools for everyone up to 11 was that no one could be quite sure of the ultimate value of any young boy or girl...but when ability could once be tested and identified at the age of 3, there was really no point at all in the bright children going to the same co-intellectual school as others who would almost inevitably retard their development. (Young, 1958, p. 143)

In such a society that Young (1958) described, the intelligent did not have to be schooled alongside the un-intelligent, and public educational resources did not have to be wasted on those with inferior intellectual capabilities. The few no longer had to be sacrificed for the many in the "name of equality" (Young, 1958, p. 36), and thus an unparalleled degree of social efficiency was purportedly actualized.

At the time, Young (1958) was critiquing the newly enacted Education Act of 1944, which established and separated children into "three main 'streams' or categories of schooling—grammar, secondary modern, and technical…on the basis of an examination at the age of 11" (UK Parliament, n.d.). Although this tripartite system was supposedly designed to ameliorate inequalities in British secondary education, Young (1958) argued that selection into a particular educational track according to "merit" (determined by an examination) would merely establish a new structure of social stratification. This educational reform would not truly redress existing inequalities but rather cloak the status quo under a new guise (Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008; McKenzie & Phillips, 2016), and further, a system built around "objective" high-stakes testing would eventually lead to a dystopian society in which a person's educational and career track is ultimately assigned at birth.

Standardized testing and other forms of selection remain fundamental features of the U.S. educational system, and in this interview-based exploratory qualitative study involving parents of high-achieving students who attend prestigious and selective public magnet high schools (n=12), I explore the ways that a group of parents understands notions of academic merit, fairness, processes of selection, the distribution of scarce resources, and (in)equality. This study highlights the perspectives and voices of parents whose views remain under-represented in educational research. Parents are an important population to examine because they make critical decisions concerning their children's education and have a relative degree of power to enact change and/or resist institutional authorities in concrete ways within their local contexts (e.g., Lareau et al., 2018; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012). Based on the emergent themes of my analysis, I ultimately offer a set of exploratory theoretical questions that I argue can be a useful starting point when examining a variety of educational practices.

Theoretical Perspective: The Meritocratic Achievement Ideology

A meritocracy—a term first coined by Young (1958)—is a theoretical social system in which an individual's social position is determined by achievement rather than ascriptive characteristics (e.g., caste, phenotype, sex, birth order). Although the degree to which meritocratic principles are realized in modern institutions and societies is debated, the concept of a meritocracy is generally perceived as a desirable and ideal structure that provides equality of opportunity (Kim & Choi, 2017; Lipsey, 2014). Concerning the distribution of social goods, Grusky and Weisshaar (2014) argue that the average person is typically willing to accept inequalities in outcomes and resources on the condition that the opportunities for attaining these social goods are strictly distributed based on merit. However, the concept of merit itself (i.e., the quality of "being good" or "being worthy") lacks an absolute or universal definition; rather, merit can and has been defined in varying ways depending on particular social, historical, and cultural contexts (Guinier, 2015; Lewis & Doyno, 1983; Karabel, 2005; Kim & Choi, 2017; Noh, 2020; Sandel, 2020; Tagg, 2022). Noting the pluralistic possibilities of alternative views regarding what constitutes merit, Sen (1999) argues that "there is no escape from the contingent nature of its content, related to the characterization of a good—or an acceptable—society and the criteria in terms of which assessments are to be made" (pp. 9-10). For example, in some cultural contexts, intelligence and merit are judged by the quickness with which students complete tasks, while in other societies, slow deliberation is a more positive and desirable characteristic (Anderson-Levitt, 2005; Booth 2002; Wober, 1974).

The meritocratic ideal is closely tied to education, arguably due to the substantial influence of Blau and Duncan's (1967) status attainment model. To briefly summarize, Blau and Duncan

(1967) argue that education has an independent and causal effect in inducing variation in eventual occupational status, independent of initial family position. In other words, the expansion of education in the U.S. has effectively promoted the importance of achievement over ascription in determining one's social position. The meritocratic achievement ideology rests on the assumptions that academic success is solely a consequence of individual effort, ability, and competence (Batruch et al., 2022; Calarco et al., 2022; McKenzie & Phillips, 2016; Oakes & Rogers, 2007; Warikoo & Fuhr, 2014) and that academic performance is the causal link to occupational and economic success (MacLeod, 2009). Within the context of educational institutions, the meritocratic achievement ideology also asserts that each individual is equally positioned for success (independent of an unequal social structure) and that the educational system is a mechanism that objectively discerns individual ability and effort and therefore fairly distributes its rewards.

While it may be the dominant paradigm in mainstream public discourse surrounding education, the meritocratic achievement ideology has been strongly critiqued as deceptive, illusionary, and responsible for perpetuating deficit perspectives and reproducing educational and social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; MacLeod, 2009). Much research has been devoted to mythicizing meritocratic beliefs, narratives, and practices (Au, 2016; Calarco et al., 2022; Clycq et al., 2014; Cobb & Russell, 2015; Park & Liu, 2014; Talib & Fitzgerald, 2015; Warikoo & Fuhr, 2014). For instance, Au (2016) argues that the neoliberal educational project, which structures education as a competition for resources, is a modern-day racial project in which one of its most prominent forms, high-stakes testing, is used to "justify an ideology of meritocracy, built on the presumed objective measurement of human intelligence" (p. 43). Thus, as Au (2016) argues, high-stakes testing is a form or structure built to legitimize the meritocratic achievement ideology, and it does so by functioning as a mechanism for selection, separation, and social efficiency—all under the deceptive guise of objectivity.

However, while the notion of an educational meritocracy has been systematically mythicized in the academy, the ways that teachers, school leaders, and other educational stakeholders, such as local community members, citizens, and parents, understand academic merit, measures of ability, and selection have not been adequately examined. These perspectives, viewpoints, and beliefs must also be included in educational research. This study focuses specifically on the voices of parents, a group with a long history of resisting and challenging educational polices (Lareau et al., 2018; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012; Roda & Wells, 2013; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). In an effort to understand the parental perspective, I examine a particular subset of parents—parents of children who have successfully tested into a highly selective and prestigious magnet high school. The two overarching research questions that guide my inquiry are as follows:
   (1) In what ways do parents of high-achieving students at selective magnet schools conceptualize academic merit, measures of ability, and selection?
   (2) What visions of education policy are perceived as most desirable and optimal?

Method

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with parents (n=12) whose children attended a nationally ranked and test-dependent public magnet high school (during the data collection period in 2022). Magnet high schools generally offer a specialized curriculum (e.g., health professions, science and technology, engineering, etc.) and draw applicants across traditional district boundary lines. The seven public magnet high schools included in this study are located in the northeast of the U.S., and according to the U.S. News & World Report rankings, each of the

high schools is consistently ranked within the top 150 high schools in the country and top 10 within their respective states. Due to a prestigious reputation for academic excellence and elite college preparation, these public magnet high schools have limited space and therefore use an admissions process that relies heavily upon standardized testing to allocate its acceptances. Earning acceptance into one of these public magnet high schools is a highly competitive and desirable but scarce resource.

For this study, I recruited participants via e-mail using publicly available information on school websites. As a result, each of the parents in this study also served on the school's parent-teacher association or parent support organization. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes. The three guiding questions that I asked all participants are as follows: (1) Why do parents want to send their kids to this school? (2) What is the admissions process like? (3) What do you feel like your child has gained as result of attending this school? I provided space for the participants to freely discuss and share their perspectives about any relevant topics, and then I asked probing questions related to the research questions.

After completing each interview, I transcribed the audio recording using an online transcription service and then edited the transcript for accuracy. I specifically followed the six-phase progression of thematic analysis as detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing of themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing and producing the report. In addition, I approached the thematic analysis from an inductive data-driven perspective, rather than a theoretical thematic analysis. During initial open-coding of the interview transcripts (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I coded using an in-vivo coding approach in order to maintain and preserve the authenticity of parental speech in the analysis (Saldaña, 2014). After the initial open-coding process, I then reviewed the in-vivo codes in search for common themes and grouped the codes into broader emergent categories (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Given the limited number of participants interviewed, this small-scale study is intended to be exploratory. My goal is not to synthesize broad findings that can be universally applied to all parents but rather to offer a set of emerging themes that can be productively used in future research. Interestingly, Guest et al. (2006) argue that, for thematic analyses, saturation or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data can be reached within the first 12 interviews of a study. I raise this point not to suggest that no benefits can be gained by increasing the number of participants interviewed but to argue that key themes can be identified even with 12 interviews. An additional caveat is that I only interviewed actively involved parents with children who successfully earned admission into a selective high school and therefore I was not able to capture the full range or variation of parental perspectives.

Of the parents interviewed (n=12), 5 self-identified as White, 5 as Asian, 1 as Latinx, and 1 as Black. 8 of the participants were mothers, while 4 were fathers. The averaged racial composition of the 7 high schools represented in the study, based on publicly available data from 2021, is as follows: 25.9% White, 6.6% Black, 12.3% Latinx, and 50.3% Asian (I choose to present the averaged racial composition to protect the anonymity of the schools). In other words, the schools in this study are predominantly white and Asian American. In this present analysis and discussion, I do not examine or discuss the discourse surrounding the racial representation of the student population at these schools. When incorporating parent quotes into the findings, I opt not to specify the racial identification of the parent. The themes and findings regarding the ways that parents actively avoid racial discourse yet at the same time contribute to Asian American racialization are presented in a critical discourse analysis elsewhere (Hu, 2023).

Emergent Themes

In this section, I present the findings from the thematic analysis of the interview transcript data. I call these "emergent themes" to highlight the need to further develop and corroborate these initial findings in future work. The emergent themes are (1) placing confidence in objective testing for selection, (2) extrapolating the meaning of test scores, (3) preferring a "like-minded" educational environment, and (4) accepting segregation by ability as a desirable future. Each of these themes is evident to varying extents in the majority but not all of the interviews. Finally, I have ordered the emergent themes based on a logical thematic sequence. The first and third themes appear most frequently in the transcript data, followed by the second and fourth themes.

Emergent Theme #1: Placing Confidence in Objective Testing for Selection

Prospective students are required to take a standardized admissions examination when applying to these elite and selective magnet high schools. Although the actual items and the format of the test differ by district and state, the parents in this study consistently mentioned both the high level of difficulty of the admissions test and the high-stakes nature of the test results. To explain the admissions process, many parents compared the test to the SAT but often qualified this comparison by stating that the high school examination is significantly more difficult. In fact, an entire test-preparation industry has flourished as a result of parental demand. Many parents pay significant amounts of money to send their children to test preparation services, "cram" schools, and/or after-school tutoring, specifically in preparation to take this high school admissions examination. Some parents expressed that the situation has become so severely competitive that some families have started preparing their children for the test as early as elementary school. However, the general perception is that parents are still willing to invest the time and resources into deliberate preparation because of the rewards associated with a high test score. Although the exact formulas and algorithms that specific school districts use to determine their acceptances are not publicly available, the parents I interviewed were aware that the student's score on the standardized examination carries the greatest weighting in the admissions process. Without a high score on the test, earning an acceptance into the high school is not possible.

As colleges and universities are increasingly moving towards test-optional admissions policies, it is particularly notable that standardizing testing remains such a significant component in magnet high school admissions and that some parents have not demanded a similar policy change. On the contrary, many of the parents I interviewed expressed a high degree of trust and belief in the objectivity of the standardized admissions test. From their perspective, the test is unquestionably fair and objective. For example, when I asked a parent about the final score that the test produces, the parent responded, "It's totally objective. It's that number." This parent explained that the school does not take into account subjective measures such as "personality," intended area of study, and non-cognitive characteristics, and because there's "zero consideration for any of that," the test score or "that number" determines the bulk of the applicant's admission probability. Similarly, another parent described the admissions test in this way, "It's really black and white. There's no personality. There's none of that…they take all of the subjectivity out of it." Thus, many parents in this study tended to view the admissions process through a dichotomous lens: personality is a vague, unreliable, and subjective measure, while the standardized test score is the clear, objective, and ultimately preferable measure.

In addition, the parents I interviewed expressed great confidence that the admissions test serves as an equalizer of opportunity and that each student taking the test has an equal chance of being selected. Such a view aligns with the meritocratic achievement ideology, but while the meritocratic myth can often remain an abstract belief about schooling in general, the existence of a singular standardized admissions test further makes visible or embodies the meritocratic ideology. One parent commented that "you have to use some objective means of gauging a student's ability…you have to have something that puts people on a level playing field, and that I guess is the test." Another parent similarly expressed confidence in the equalizing effect of the test, arguing that "[the test] is the most equitable criteria for admissions. Of course, a lot of people still feel that privilege goes into, but I don't think so." There is certainly variation in perspective regarding the degree to which the admissions test is desirable or optimal, especially when considering available alternatives. On one hand, the former parent stated that the test is a reasonable objective selector of student ability specifically "compared to what the alternatives might be." This parent suggested that the test is neither perfect nor ideal but "it's better than nothing." It seems that, to this parent, there are no other legitimate and/or just criteria by which to select students. On the other hand, the latter parent acknowledged that admissions testing has been controversial, but to this parent, the test is undeniably the "most equitable" and fairest criterion for admissions.

The majority of the parents I interviewed preferred a testing-based system over a college admissions system that uses subjective measures such as transcripts, letters of recommendations, personal statements, etc. For instance, a parent explained that, at the high school information sessions, the school openly explains the admissions criteria and that "they're pretty transparent" about the fact that they examine both middle school grades and standardized test scores. A parent at another school expressed similar sentiments, "The school is really transparent on that…they pretty much weigh a student's grades and then the results of the written test. There's no interview. They don't look at other things." This same parent, at a later point, compares the high school admissions process with the college admissions process, explaining that "the college admissions process is much less transparent. You don't have any idea of what your chances are." This parent used anecdotal evidence of various high-achieving students with exceptional grades and test scores who did not earn admission into elite universities to critique the unreliable nature of university admissions. Thus, in direct comparison to a subjective system of holistic review, standardized testing offers an objective, fair, and transparent measure.

Emergent Theme #2: Extrapolating the Meaning of Test Scores

A second emergent and more tacit theme that extends from confidence in the objectivity of standardized testing is that some of the parents I interviewed presented the admissions test as not only the best available selection criterion but also a predictor of future ability and potential. To some of them, the test serves a dual purpose: it is not only a measure of current ability or knowledge but also a predictor of future life success. School districts may use these standardized tests for a specific intended purpose (i.e., offering admission), but parents (and others) interpreted and constructed their own meaning from these scores. In other words, because test scores do not have a singular universal meaning, interpreting and assigning meaning to the test scores are contested social processes.

Several parents added their own interpretation and extrapolated the meaning of the standardized test scores to be an indicator of ability and future life success. For instance, in contrast to those that doubt the test, a parent asserted, "I think that the test is a very good predictor of ability.

I do. I do." It is unclear what "ability" means in this context; this parent might be suggesting that the test is an accurate predictor of future high school achievement or perhaps college achievement. Again, the meaning of the test results is subject to interpretation. However, to demonstrate this point further, a second parent offered his own interpretation of the test scores: "8th grade test scores are somewhat predictive of future life success…you can give people tests of cognitive ability and they are decently predictive on a statistical level." To this parent then, the high school admissions process is not only selecting students to enter its incoming class, but it is also selecting students who are most likely to succeed in the future and therefore those who are worthy of receiving educational resources. The other parents I interviewed were seldomly this explicit about their interpretations of the test scores, but this underlying theme raises critical questions about the intended uses and meanings of testing (and other forms of assessment). In this case, there was a discrepancy between official school district policy concerning the purpose of the standardized test and parental interpretation about what the test scores mean, the contested questions being: what are the intended uses of the test? What do they measure and what do they tell us?

Emergent Theme #3: Preferring a "Like-Minded" Educational Environment

The most frequent term that the parents in this study used to describe the student population of their child's school was "like-minded." For example, a parent praised the student body by explaining to me that "all the kids are super motivated…I think it's so nice that they're like-minded." Some parents suggested that it was their children themselves that wanted to be in this "like-minded" environment. For instance, a parent explained that "[my daughter] wanted to be challenged. She wanted to be around those who are like-minded." Other parents, on the other hand, explicitly noted that they themselves wanted to send their children to the school for this specific reason. Describing it more so as a general parental perspective, a parent explained that the school "connects kids with more like-minded kids and I think that's also part of the bigger picture as to why people want to send their kids there." Other parents were more personal; for instance, a parent admitted that "the reason I wanted my daughter to go to this particular school is because at least she'll be with like-minded kids."

The third emergent theme from my analysis is that parents preferred a "like-minded" educational environment for their children. As I will demonstrate in what follows, the notion of "like-mindedness" was used in a euphemistic manner to denote cognitive intelligence. When I sought clarification on what "like-minded" means, the parents I interviewed were willing to be more explicit with its meaning to varying degrees. For instance, beginning with the vaguest, a parent explained that attending the selective high school is highly desirable because "there's an expectation that it will provide an environment in which students with a similar profile are together." Then, another parent explained that her son was having a positive experience at the school because "he felt that he found his people because they are on a different level…with different values and ways of thinking." The students at her son's selective school are on a "different level" compared to the average high school student. Finally, the following parent was the most explicit regarding the meaning of like-mindedness. This parent recounted, "[my son] told me that he doesn't want to be with normal people. He likes being with other people who tested in and are really smart…he really likes the level of intelligence at [the school]." My analysis suggests that what these parents and their high-achieving students wanted—described in plain terms—was to attend a school with smart and intelligent students who tested in, not with those of inferior cognitive intelligence.

Emergent Theme #4: Accepting Segregation by Ability as a Desirable Future

Building on this euphemism of like-mindedness, the fourth emergent theme was that several parents viewed segregation by ability as a necessary and desirable education for their children. Many parents consistently lamented the hypothetical situation in which their children would attend their local district high school and be surrounded by peers of all ability levels. Instead, these parents preferred for their children to attend a different school in which all the students of "high ability" would be grouped together. In many cases, as made evident by the aforementioned examples, the parents I interviewed suggested that it was their children themselves who preferred this arrangement. While it seems that their children chose to attend these schools on their own volition, the parents themselves acknowledged that they also encouraged and pushed their children. For example, one parent admitted to me that "super-driven parents are the backbone of this whole thing. This whole machine is driven by the parents." When I asked another parent if student achievement was driven more by the parents or by the children, she quickly and confidently responded that "it is driven by parental involvement."

In addition, a parent explained to me that, at their local public high school, "there is no healthy competition at the school," and the primary reason why she wanted her daughter to attend the magnet school was so that she could experience high-level competition. The implicit belief was that by segregating their children in schools of ability, their children would be motivated to participate in a degree of healthy competition, which would then produce higher expectations, aspirations, and ultimately achievements. Due to the negative connotations that the word "segregation" carries, the parents in my study were seldomly explicit about what they desired for their children's education. However, one specific parent's statement encapsulated this theme:

> There is always going to be some sort of segregation by ability, whether within an institution or between institutions. We have segregation by ability. I personally don't mind it. In normal high schools, they have honors classes anyways, right? There's already tracking and segregation by ability…that's a part of life.

In summary, many of the parents I interviewed believed that an environment in which their children are surrounded only by "like-minded" intelligent peers affords the best possible and most desirable education.

Discussion & Conclusion

Based on semi-structured interviews with parents of high-achieving students who attend prestigious and selective magnet high schools, I have examined and probed underlying parental beliefs and perspectives. The parents I interviewed have confidence in the supposed objectivity of standardized testing, and thus, the selection of students becomes a defensible and meritocratic practice on the basis that the standardized test accurately measures cognitive ability. In addition, the subsequent segregation of students by ability in a "like-minded" environment is a preferred arrangement because parents assumed that such an arrangement provides the best education, filled with challenge and competition.

Importantly, this exploratory study compels us to consider the ways that many educational practices and structures are undergirded by philosophical beliefs and justifying discourses and ideologies. While this study focused specifically on magnet school admissions, the emergent themes

that I identified can be flexibly applied to a variety of educational practices because many daily practices in contemporary formal schooling involve identifying and selecting students, making predictions or judgments about students' futures, and also sorting and organizing students based on these decisions (Domina et al., 2023). Therefore, using the emergent themes as a guide, I propose a set of guiding questions for future research that can be applied to a plethora of educational contexts that involve selection. The questions are:

> -How are students identified and selected? On what basis?
> -How are these processes subject to contested meanings?
> -How does the educational practice become defensible or legitimated? What are the underlying ideologies and beliefs?

For instance, in the context of this study, the standardized test results were only meaningful and significant to the extent that many parents interpreted the score as both a measure of current knowledge/ability and a predictive indicator of future life success. This selection process was justified by discourses of objectivity and fairness as well as meritocratic achievement ideologies.

This set of questions can be applied to a plethora of practices that involve selection. For instance, at the individual classroom level, we can examine the practices of dividing students into reading groups in the elementary school classroom (Webb-Williams, 2021), differentiating assignments by student readiness (Ziernwald et al., 2022), identifying students for pull-out "gifted and talented" programming (Roda, 2015), and other in-school segregation practices. At a broader school level, we can examine processes of selection related to tracking students into academic and vocational curriculums (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005), school choice systems (Singer, 2020), elite private schooling (Khan, 2011), etc. To offer a specific example as to how this set of questions can inform future research, consider the practice of constructing reading groups. A researcher might ask, how does the teacher make decisions concerning which students should be in which groups? How might students and parents themselves interpret this selection process and the meanings of the teacher's decisions? How are these meanings contested? Finally, how does this practice of grouping students by reading level become justified or legitimated in the school? What are the discourses and ideologies among parents, teachers, and/or school leaders that undergird this practice?

Returning to this study, one of the key underlying beliefs within standardized testing discourse was the existence of an inherent hierarchy of "natural" intelligence. If some individuals are more capable, more intelligent, or more talented than others, then there must be a means to objectively measure and quantify this ability. If there are systematic differences in ability, then these groups should be educated separately. Thus, one of the critical questions that this study raises concerns the nature of human ability and educability, which has been a source of philosophical inquiry and debate for many decades. For instance, in *The Fundamental Assumptions in the Report of the Committee of Ten*, Charles W. Eliot (1905) argued,

> If democracy means to try to make all children equal or all men equal, it means to fight nature, and in that fight democracy is sure to be defeated. There is no such thing among men as equality of nature, of capacity for training, or of intellectual power. (p. 13)

In a more contemporary work, the late American educational philosopher Nel Noddings (2007) also argued that "children are not equal in most capacities, and surely not in interests" (p. 29), and

therefore a democratic view of equality necessarily implies both a differentiated education and an inequality in aptitude and achievement.

However, to hold a view that ability and potential are inevitably hierarchical by nature is a dangerous viewpoint because there are always other categories of difference (race, class, gender, etc.) that can be used to justify and legitimize the hierarchical nature of ability. The alternative or counter-view is to embrace the radical belief that all persons are of the same educability, capability, and potential, and this viewpoint requires a drastic re-imagination of the fundamental institutionalized practices that permeate the current system. Dismantling systems of power and oppression begins with addressing their philosophical foundations, which is precisely why educational research that uncovers and highlights these beliefs, narratives, discourses, and ideologies is critical in working towards a more socially just future. These emergent themes and the proposed set of guiding questions provide a useful starting point for future work that engages these foundations.

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