Courting corporate sports partners in education: Ethnographic case study of corporate philanthropy in urban public schools

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Department of Teacher Education, Special Education,
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Program of Curriculum and Instruction

COURTING CORPORATE SPORTS PARTNERS IN EDUCATION:
ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY IN URBAN
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PhD Dissertation
By
ALEX M. GURN

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

COURTING CORPORATE SPORTS PARTNERS IN EDUCATION:
ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY IN URBAN
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This dissertation examines the nature of the longstanding cross-sector relationship
between an urban public school district and a corporate-owned team franchise in the
National Basketball Association (NBA). The study found that while this collaboration is
often talked about as a partnership, in practice, it advances a corporate philanthropic and
promotional relationship that is characterized by mutual affinities but not mutually agreed
upon goals. This philanthropic connection to a powerful national sporting institution
provides benefits to local public schools through incentives for perfect student
attendance, motivational assemblies with professional athletes, and periodic, one-time
donations in much needed technology. However, this relationship also raises key
questions related to the mechanisms for social accountability in leadership decision-
making, the effective and equitable use of school and corporate resources, and the
indirect and inadvertent consequences when schools rely on commercialism and sports
stardom to sell the meritocratic value of getting an education to a generation of students.

The dissertation addresses the implications of the rise of corporate philanthropy
within the context of economic austerity in public education. A multi-disciplinary review
of research, drawing on four bodies of literature, considers the assumptions underlying
counter-related discourses about corporate involvement in the public sector: 1) Corporate

Social Responsibility (CSR), 2) CSR as Greenwashing (i.e. disinformation disseminated by a firm to present misleading public images of corporate responsibility), 3) Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in education, and 4) PPPs as privatizations in education. The constant comparative method was used throughout to analyze multi-modal data from an ethnographic case study of one city's cross-sector collaboration with the NBA, including participant observations, review of news and media, and extended field interviews with thirty district leaders, school administrators, teachers, counselors, and coaches in three K-8 schools. The result is a critical examination of the confluence of altruism, elite professional sports, and the marketplace in urban public education.

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In memory of my father, Robert M. Gurn (1940 - 2008)

Any place is walking distance if you have the time.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Corporate Sports Philanthropy and Public Education in Fractured Capitalism

In America, these last several decades have been ones of complexity, chaos, and contradiction. The world's largest superpower has thrust itself into a period of continuing socio-economic restructuring. At the same time, the wealthy and their protectors have dug deep to resist increases in their taxation responsibilities, while the disparities between rich and poor are growing wider than in any other advanced economy. The constraints leveled on public service, including public education, are great, and corporate philanthropy is encroaching ever more aggressively into the holes in the social safety net that its very own wealth base has created. Among the many ways in which these fast moving forces are expressed is the philanthropic engagement of professional sporting organizations in the financially shrinking sector of public education. Concurrently, tax-subsidized professional sports have been buttressed from economic recessions and have benefited from expanding profits.

This dissertation investigates the curious crosscutting forces that are evident in the rise of corporate philanthropy in public education. Through multi-disciplinary review of literature, extended interviews, observations, and in-depth analyses of public documents, this study examines public schools' perspectives on the social and institutional relationships that were enacted in a cross-sector collaboration between a National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise and an urban public school district. The central finding is that, while this collaboration often labeled and talked about as a partnership by both organizations, in practice, it represents corporate sponsorship and charity, characterized by mutual liking but not mutually agreed upon purpose or goals.

In sports, the phrase 'Leave it on the field' is used to stir up players' emotions and excitement for a match and set aside anxieties about the impending outcome. Yet the saying also evokes another sense of containment or separation of the game *on the field* from social and political realities that transpire *off the field*. British author Harry Pearson jested about this logic when he wrote about the game of football (soccer):

> People who don't follow football think of it as just a game, something that can be packed away when it is finished and forgotten about. But the game, played out by twenty-two men in an hour and a half, is only the kernel of something greater. The game is the core, you might say, of *the Game* (cited in Armstrong & Guilianotti, 1999, p.1).

Contrary to popular discourse, sports constitute complex cultural phenomena that influence and are influenced by socio-historical dynamics both on and off the field (Carrington 2010; Sandvoss, 2003). In his foundational post-colonial ethnography of cricket, CLR James (1983) wrote about the broad societal relationships that intimately link individuals' dreams in sports to the business behind the game, asserting, "How society can nurture the dream without cynically exploiting it may be the true sports challenge of the century" (p. 11).

Arguably, professional sports occupies one of the most ingrained aspects of national and local cultures in the western world (Burdsey, 2007; Rowe, 2004), taken for granted in the cultural, political, and economic structures of society (Hylton, 2008). Cumulatively, worldwide, over 250 million people are actively involved in sustaining the spectator sport of professional soccer, including coaches, referees, players, trainers, and of course fans and consumers (FIFA, 2006). It has also been estimated that more than 210 million people play soccer, with over 100 million in Asia and approximately 50 million in Europe (Stewart, 2007). While professional football outside of the United States is the most popular and by far the most profitable sport in the world, it is but one of

many globalized professional sports that occupy the public's imagination and purse strings (Humphries & Howard, 2003). Large professional sporting organizations in North America and beyond[1] have drawn on the popular cultural cache of elite athleticism and the intense passion and "love of team" engendered among youth and adult fans/consumers to immensely lucrative ends (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009).

Moreover, professional sporting organizations in North America have tended to enjoy a protected status in society, occupying economically advantageous positions underwritten through public tax dollars (Quirk & Fort, 1997). Heavily sought after and desired by local communities, major-league teams have been able to seize upon this social reality to help generate immense profits for team owners and shareholders (Quirk & Fort, 1997). In order to attract and secure a major-league franchise, city governments will frequently offer lucrative deals that include "an array of incentives, including public financing of the construction or renovation of a facility, favorable lease agreements, infrastructure improvements, and direct cash payments" (Sparvero & Chalip, 2007, p.2). Additionally, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) presents franchise owners with significant tax opportunities to capitalize and write off the estimated value of operating a team and player contract depreciation. For this reason, even for professional franchises that show financial losses on paper, these paper losses often translate into significant, actual gains by claiming losses against taxable team revenue and personal net income (Fort, 2008). In this way, professional sports franchises reflect larger capitalist structures anchored in the accumulation and protection of wealth for the ruling class (Delacroix, 2007).

Throughout dynamic times in the U.S. economy, the professional sports industry has performed exceptionally well financially. In an industry analysis of emerging financial trends in professional sports in North America, Moag & Company (2002) found that "during bear markets and periods of market instability, businesses in the sports industry experience either no decline or less of a decline than the broader market. One, therefore, may classify sports businesses as *bear resistant*" (p. 1). Valuations of most team franchises continue to thrive even during periods of poor economic market conditions. In the 1990s, professional teams in all major U.S. sporting associations experienced average annual rates of appreciation that were significantly higher than average returns to common stock ownership in that same period: 6.91% for the S&P 500, as compared to 11.3% for organizations in Major League Baseball (MLB), 17.7% in the National Basketball Association (NBA), 10.75% in the National Hockey League (NHL), and 12.7% in the National Football League (NFL) (Zimbalist, 2003, p. 508). The business of professional sports has been buttressed from economic recessions, an outcome that is intricately connected to the processes and products of globalization.

Over the last several decades, there has been a transition in society from more factory-oriented, Fordist economies to a more knowledge-based, globalized economic system (New London Group, 2000). These have been times of chaos and contradiction— a world characterized by volatility, uncertainly, complexity, and ambiguity (Berliner, 2009a; Johansen, 2007). This has both necessitated and produced certain innovative organizations and individuals who can capitalize on, integrate, or even synergize globalization's fast-paced, rapidly emergent markets (Drucker, 1993; Senge, 2006). Within this new economy, a range of organizations such as firms and corporations, for-

profits and government organizations have achieved integral, if diffuse, control over the means of production and ownership. Increasingly, companies have achieved success by being niche-oriented, flexible, and dependent upon strategic applications of science and technology. These developments mean that public and private organizations must transition from vertically integrated, large–scale institutions to horizontal networks that thrive in an ostensibly flattened world in which the national boundaries are rendered progressively obsolete as a result of technological innovations (Castells, 1996, 1998).

The socio-economic dynamics of globalization have a deeper and darker side as well, though. They produce and are the product of asymmetries of power and structured inequality (Barlow, 2003; Castells, 1998; Dorling, 2010; Katz, 2004). Power is increasingly consolidated into the hands of fewer and fewer individuals and organizations (Reich, 2008). The immense profits realized by professional sporting organizations are also a symptom of these wider social problems stemming from ongoing waves of global economic restructuring.

In an ethnographic study of children experiencing the effects of continually shifting capitalist environments[2], Katz (2004) posits that contemporary societies are complexly conditioned by "fragmented global capitalism." How people socially reproduce themselves and their material practices is constantly shaped by their access to the prosperity, efficiencies, and technologies of globalization. Globalization produces, on the one hand, structured opportunities for those "in" power to expand their own interests, and on the other, structured exclusions from the accumulation of capital for those on the "outside". These fractured economic conditions simultaneously generate and are the outcome of uneven material social practices.

In this way, manifestations of unbridled wealth are perpetually in tension with those of extreme and long-term poverty. From this perspective of fragmented global capitalism, the guiding business principle to continually pursue financial growth and profits, which neoclassical economist Milton Friedman (1970) says is "the only one responsibility of business to society" (p.33), is thus premised on the existence of fractured spaces defined by the exclusion of predominantly poor people and communities of color from secure access to socio-economic privileges. From a critical legal perspective, law scholar Joel Bakan (2003) contends that this perpetual quest for profit epitomizes the essential *pathology* of the corporation. He argues that, "the corporation's legally defined mandate is to pursue, relentlessly and without exception, its own self-interest, regardless of the harmful consequences it might cause to others" (p. 2). Gross and growing profits of corporations are made possible by socially stratified inequities. Placing global economic structuring in sharp relief, Katz (2004) argues:

> The globalization of capital, which reworks the scale and temporality of uneven development, has serious and often deleterious local and embodied effects. The complexity of investments at a transnational scale is often mirrored and sustained by a narrowing of investments, and thus productive activities, in particular "locals". The struggle for viability in these narrowed landscapes of production and reproduction takes a serious toll on children coming of age: their bodies and their fortunes riddled with, as much as riddles of, global, national, and local effects and processes. (p. 157)

Thus, global economic restructuring creates fissures throughout society between people and places *with* capital and those *without*. These ruptures serve to rearticulate and reify existing power relations through intricate social connections that simultaneously implicate both powerful institutions and players—such as corporate owners, shareholders, and executives—and people in forgotten places from the "third" and the "first" worlds—such as those living in inner-city, ghettoized spaces dotting the urban landscape (Kozol,

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2005; Oakes & Rogers, 2006), those struggling in poor rural communities overshadowed by the growth of cities (Lyson & Falk, 1993), and those trapped in and escaping from lands ravaged by modernization (Bauman, 2003).[3]

As a consequence of this socio-economic restructuring, one of the most pronounced manifestations is the rapid expansion of income and wealth inequality. "The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer at a rate never seen before in world history" (Barlow, 2003, p.64). The United States, the world's largest economic superpower, has experienced particularly sharp increases in socio-economic disparities. According to evidence collected in the Luxembourg Income Study, the United States exhibits "the highest overall level of inequality of any rich OECD nation" (Brandolini & Smeeding, 2007, p.1). *Figure 1.1* illustrates this trend in the U.S. towards increasing income inequality, which began to pick up pace in the mid-1970s and has been rapidly growing since that time.
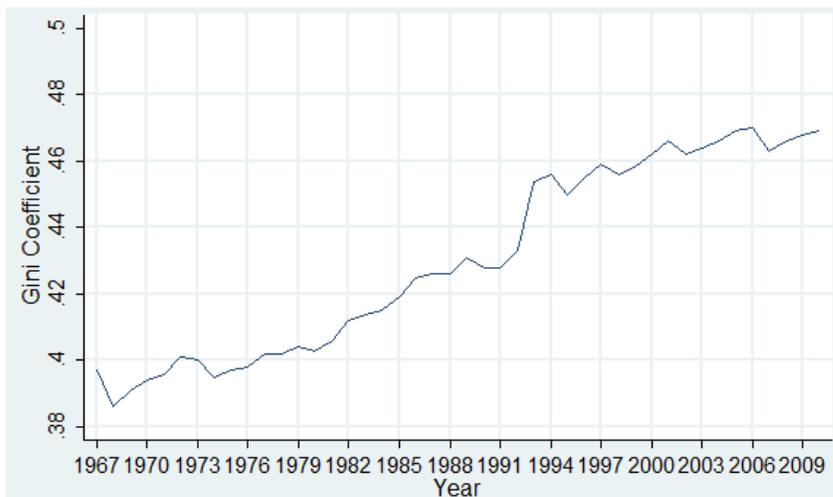
Figure 1.1: Household Income Inequality (Gini Index), 1967-2010. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Table A-3. Retrieved from: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/inequality/

The U.S. houses many of the world's wealthiest individuals, while producing some of the most acute and enduring poverty. The richest 1% of the US population

controls approximately one-third of the world's wealth, and the richest 10% controls

almost three-quarters of the nation's wealth (Waddock, 2008, p.24). At the same time,

those people and places deemed *non-valuable* from the standpoint of capitalism (i.e.

those holding limited economic, social, and political capital) tend to be overlooked or

forgotten. Mostly poor people and communities of color are often "bypassed by flows of

wealth and information, and alternately deprived of the basic technological infrastructure

that allows us to communicate, innovate, produce, consume, and even live, in today's

world (Castells, 1998, p.74).

Concurrently, in the past decade, fiscal constraints have increasingly tightened the

budgets of public sector institutions such as public schools, which are charged with

creating and maintaining the social safety nets for many of these poor, minoritized,

bypassed people and places. Beginning in the early 2000s, a slightly down turned

economy and new public expenditures assumed for antiterrorism measures and national

security in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, led to decreases in many forms

of state and federal support for public education (Alm, Buschman, & Sjoquist, 2007). In

the late 2000s, the precipitous collapse of Wall Street's mortgage-backed house of cards

started a great recession—"the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, so

deeply rooted that even unprecedented interventions by affected governments have, thus

far, failed to contain it" (Crotty, 2009, p.563). The unsettling repercussions of this

"dance of the trillions" (Palma, 2009) are still only partially understood. Yet, the

immediate menace in the form of a pile of toxic debt has drastically exacerbated the

financial problems facing public schools (Jimenez, 2009; Palma, 2009).

However, problems of public school financing date back prior to the recent recession. These problems are in part based on the erosion of the corporate tax base over the past 50 years. "In the 1940s, corporations paid 33 percent of the federal tax burden. By the 60s this was down to 27 percent; 15 percent by the 80s; and currently corporations contribute less than 10 percent" (Saltman, 2004, p.158). *Figure 1.2* represents the proportion of federal tax revenues coming from individual income taxes, payroll taxes, and corporate taxes. The precipitous drop in the corporate tax base belies the profits that corporations have realized over this same period. Although public schools receive much of their funding from local property taxes, the loosening of tax regulations on corporations significantly impacts the overall U.S. tax burden and has helped to concentrate wealth upwards. This trend of decreasing taxation responsibilities for the wealthy contributes to the growing problems associated with social inequalities, which urban public schools grapple with everyday.
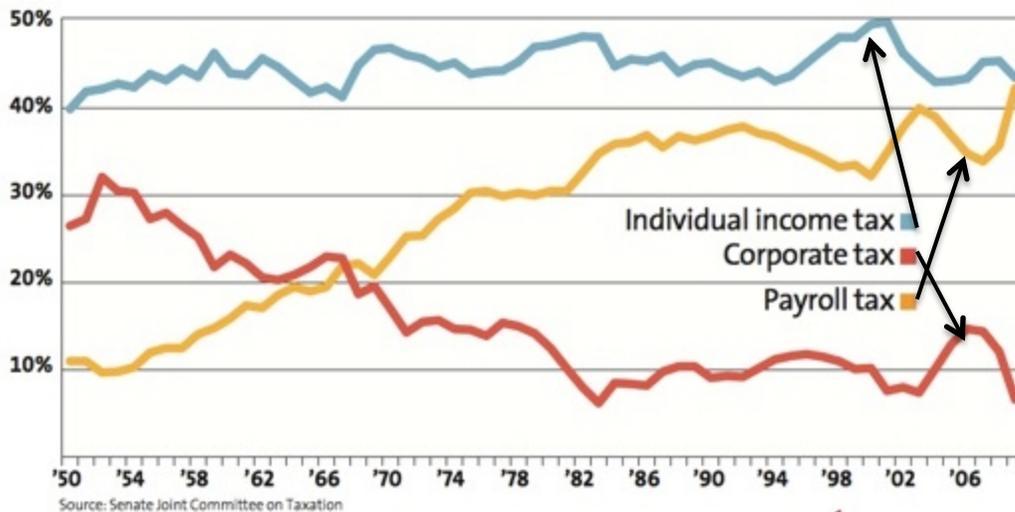
Figure 1.2: Share of Federal Tax Revenue. Reprinted from Gilson & Perot (2011)

The costs on the viability of public service are immense. Public school officials have been asked to deal with regular annual budget shortfalls that are expected to

continue into the future (Alm, Buschman, & Sjoquist, 2007; Reschovsky, 2004).

Repeated budgets cuts to school funding over time may in fact aid in solidifying

economic and political conditions of austerity in the public administration of education.

This reality has led government and school leaders to seek out alternate means of

resourcing schools and renders private sector solutions to public educational problems

ever more expedient (Forrer, Kee, Newcomer, & Boyer, 2010). More and more schools

have looked to corporations for support, and these decisions can be wrought with unique

advantages, as well as complications and challenges.

Buhl (1996) explains that corporations are granted many societal privileges,

including a relatively unregulated business environment, which comes with certain

expectations to participate in the public's welfare:

> In return for a fairly unconstrained marketplace and the license to hold on
> to the lion's share of their earnings, corporations are expected to help
> support the civic problem-solving and service-providing capacity of their
> communities, as expressed through non-profit, tax-exempt organizations.
> Their understanding has been validated by corporate practice across the
> 20th century and encouraged by tax law (p. 135).

Corporations are frequently expected to use their institutional muscle to help

improve society in some way, for example, through corporate philanthropy aimed at

addressing public sector dilemmas (Ravitch, 2010). Corporate engagement in

philanthropy has aggressively expanded the reach of corporations as a means to reduce

gaps in public social provisions that its very own wealth base has helped to exacerbate.

At the same time, there has been a rise in professional sports philanthropy within

the financially shrinking sector of public education. Many professional sporting

organizations have sought to engage schools, as well as poor and marginalized youth,

through the philanthropic arms of their organizations and networks (Babiak and Wolfe,

2009; Extejt, 2004; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). As tax-subsidized professional sports have benefitted from global capitalist restructuring, corporate sporting organizations have magnified their position and viability to address deep-seated social problems. Yet, as we will see, core issues of accountability and social equity arise from the fact that questions related to what, where, why, how, and how much to "help" are left almost entirely up to the corporation to decide.

Although there is a relatively wide body of literature on the involvement of corporate philanthropy in the public sector, the sports industry has not been situated within the discourse of corporate responsibility, and thus not a focus of research until recent years (Sheth & Babiak, 2010). In one review of the field of philanthropy in professional sports, Extejt (2004) estimated that some 350 charities and foundations are associated with professional teams and individual athletes providing over $100 million each year to charitable contributions. Yet he also observed that, while philanthropy is relatively widespread in professional sports, the majority of team franchises donate less than 0.5% of income to these pursuits.[4]

In the U.S., the National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB) have typically donated to and partnered with large non-profits that target poverty and youth, such as the United Way and the Boys & Girls Club. Philanthropy in the National Basketball Association (NBA), the particular focus of this proposed study, has historically been directed at local public schools through grant-making, in-kind donations, player and coach appearances in schools, and cause-related marketing (Exejt, 2004; McGowan & Mahon, 2009; Ratten & Babiak, 2010). Professional sporting organizations opt into philanthropic relationships with youth-serving institutions such as

schools for a variety of reasons, ranging from altruism and charity to strategic brand

management aimed at bolstering fan support, enhancing sources of revenue, and

improving public relations and marketing strategies (McGowan & Mahon, 2009).

Building organizational connections to schools offers corporations a tax-deductible

means of funneling resources into public institutions that can likewise put their corporate

brand in direct contact with a captive youth audience (Boyles, 2005; Molnar, 2005).

From an array of motivations, professional sports teams have sought to create, support,

and sustain local youth communities through philanthropic provisions.

The Sports-Industrial Complex

Corporate sports philanthropy is part and parcel of larger social processes

associated with globalized capitalism that have helped transform professional sports into

a "sport-industrial entertainment industry" (Bent, McIlroy, Mousley, & Walsh, 2000, p.6)

or *"sport-industrial complex"* (Maguire, 2004; Zirin, 2008). This sports-industrial

complex, like the military-industrial complex or the prison-industrial complex (Schlosser,

1998), spreads itself far and wide to produce variegated networks of bureaucratic,

political, economic, and social interests that promote greater spending on and

consumption of professional sports, as well as elite collegiate and Olympic sports

(Hylton, 2008; Maguire, 2004; Scherer, Falcous, & Jackson, 2008; Zirin, 2008, 2010).

This vast, spatially interconnected system encompasses a dizzying array of public and

private organizations, groups, and individuals that consciously and also unwittingly

participate in sustaining the business of professional sports. These include:

- Professional sporting organizations, frequently organized as privately owned

  firms, that maneuver to harness sports in diverse economic markets at global and

local levels (Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, Stewart, & Nicholson, 2006; Leeds & Von Allmen, 2002; Quirk & Fort, 1997);

- Fans tuning in locally and around the globe to consume regular doses of digitally televised sporting performances and to consume an array of products, merchandising, and lifestyle choices associated with the team (Humphreys & Howard, 2008);

- Corporate public relations (PR) departments and management consulting firms that create and implement professional sporting organizations' *branding strategies,* framing owners', teams', and players' public images in the mass media so as to strengthen their brand value in public discourse and the marketplace (Boje & Khan, 2009; Chun, 2005; Mark Andrew Group, 2012);

- Politicians, team owners, concerned citizens, and lobbying groups, such as in the construction industry, who saber rattle for public investment in professional sports and are often associated with the underwriting of new stadium development (Miller, 2002; Stossel, 2012; Zirin, 2010);

- Local businesses that ostensibly rely on professional sports to stimulate city and regional economies (Coates & Humphries, 2003);

- City governments that offer lucrative incentive packages, which include public funding of stadium construction and renovation and even direct cash disbursements, in order to attract or retain professional sports franchises in their town (Shropshire, 1995; Spavero & Chalip, 2007);

- Local public sector organizations, such as schools, libraries, and community centers, whose public funding may be cut or reduced when government funds are

used to support a professional sports franchise (Spavero & Chalip, 2007);

- Low-wage workers who may endure appalling work conditions in factories to produce Nike Air Jordan sneakers and other pro sports apparel at costs exponentially below retail prices. For example, Chinese factory workers earn about $1.50 per pair of shoes that sell for around $100 **(**Beder, 2002; Lim & Phillips, 2008);

- Nike Inc. shareholders and executives who, on the one hand, profit from strong annual revenues, $24,128,000,000.00 in 2012 with a 5-year compound growth rate of 8%, and strong returns on invested capital, 22.2% in 2012 (Nike, 2012), and on the other hand, cannot afford to ensure that factory workers earn a living wage in their respective countries (Keady, 2012);

- Activists and organizers that wage grassroots campaigns to persuade individual consumers and institutions such as universities and city governments to boycott or divest from companies such as Nike and Adidas (corporate partners to the NBA and NBA franchises), based on ethical grounds in order to place pressures on corporations to stop, or at least take steps to reduce, environmental and human rights violations in the supply chains of their globalized brand (Sage, 1999; Vogel, 2006; Teamsweat, 2012; United Students Against Sweatshops, 2012; Worker Rights Consortium, 2012);

- NBA super star athletes who get in front of cameras on the court, in the community, and in schools to sponsor those sneakers and other apparel manufactured under potentially dubious environmental and labor conditions, while promoting the NBA's particular brand of caring and corporate responsibility

(Mason & Howard, 2008; NBA Cares, 2010);

- Young people who buy and wear team-sponsored athletic gear and emulate professional athletes; privileged white kids who look to professional basketball culture and its commodities as a means to assume black masculine identify or swag[5]; poor kids who hustle to get their hands on the latest merchandise, sometimes even dying over a pair of sneakers (George, 2005; Kitwana, 2008; Lane, 2007; Leistyna & Chomsky, 1999)

This partial list only begins to name the seemingly disparate individuals and institutions that are directly and indirectly implicated in this complex globalized "network that connects points and intersects with its own skin" (Foucault, 1986, p.22). It offers a politicized and politicizing lens through which corporate sports philanthropy is refracted. Professional sports are inextricably intertwined with the forces and operations of global capitalist economies but not universally reducible to them.

The NBA Cares: It's More Than a Game

Although a dearth of empirical research exists on the philanthropic engagement of professional sporting organizations, a cursory glance at almost any professional sports team's website reveals the significance of philanthropy and community relations in company branding and business strategy. In the United States, the NBA has longstanding community relationships that include sustained emphasis on public education. This study inquires into corporate philanthropy in professional basketball because of its enduring institutional presence in public schools that will provide salient examples of a corporate apparatus through which social identities are continually remade.

NBA Cares is the NBA's self-described corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, "addressing important social issues in the United States and around the world" (NBA Cares, 2010a). According to Commissioner David Stern, since 2005 when the league established the initiative, "the NBA family has contributed more than 1.4 million hours of hands-on service, raised more than $145 million for charity, and created more than 525 places where children and families can live, learn, or play" (NBA Cares, 2010). Many professional leagues, including the NBA, require that athletes participate in service activities and events in the community. For instance, the NBA players' collective bargaining agreement stipulates that each athlete attend at minimum five individual and five team community events (Sheth & Babiak, 2010).

NBA Cares did not initiate individual teams' and players' philanthropy, which has been going on for decades (Thomas, 2012, 2005). For example, the public schools in this study had participated in community relations programs with the local NBA team for more than two decades. Rather, the overarching NBA organization developed a new CSR program that would conceptually connect each individual team's efforts and provide consistent messaging that might bring expanded media coverage of NBA volunteerism. Commissioner Stern said, "Our teams were doing so much individually, but we weren't feeling the connection to each other. We wanted to show the collective impact that we're having" (Bucher, 2006).

While professional sports teams often arouse and provoke very passionate opinions from sports fans and commentators, these typically revolve around a team's sporting performance, its *on the field* responsibilities, connected to issues like win-loss record, coaching decisions, and player trades. Dominant discourse in the popular press

tends to overlook aspects of the *off the field* performance of social responsibilities of professional sporting organization. ESPN journalist Ric Bucher (2006) explains that while sports reporters generally receive numerous press releases every day announcing philanthropic events run or attended by professional teams and individual athletes, these activities are usually ignored:

> It's drummed into most reporters early on to toss such announcements aside, the idea being that it's PR material and that's not part of our job. There was also a prevailing notion among my early editors that readers didn't care about what a player did in the community; they only wanted to know what he did on the floor. Unless, of course, it was something egregious off the floor…Whatever the reason, the majority of the volunteer efforts that NBA players make never get much public play, at least not through independent media outlets.

The NBA hoped to alter this dynamic and create a more omnipresent social-cause-related brand in the mediascape. By aligning its philanthropic image across all thirty NBA teams, the league has aimed to increase public awareness of its good deeds through collective social branding. *NBA Cares* is a "sincere and straightforward way for the league to contribute to and participate in improvements within communities and groups" (Jozsa, 2011, p. 202). While this altruistically oriented rendering of the *NBA Cares* initiative provides understanding of its purposes, it also relies on an oversimplified origin story. This national CSR initiative was not only established to raise consciousness of NBA efforts to "revitalize and rejuvenate schools in urban communities," as one local news channel put it (CBS 42, 2012). *NBA Cares* is also a management strategy to revitalize and rejuvenate its own racialized "urban" image, which had been marred by years of controversy (Farred, 2007). Launched in 2005 in the wake of public scandals surrounding professional basketball, *NBA Cares* became the league's largest philanthropic initiative ever, aimed at framing the league, its teams and players, as "good

guys" in the media (Giannoulakis & Drayer, 2009). Beginning in the late 1990s,

controversial incidents of physical assault, sexual assault, drug possession, and other

criminal prosecutions involving star players such as Dennis Rodman, Latrell Spreewell,

Allen Iverson, Kobe Bryant, and Ron Artest, increasingly appeared in the media.

However, on November 19, 2004, the NBA experienced its worst-ever public

image catastrophe when numerous NBA players and fans brutally fought in the Palace of

Auburn Hills, Detroit during a live national broadcast on ESPN. With less than a minute

to play between the Detroit Pistons and the Indiana Pacers, the Palace lit up with

violence, which was characterized by ESPN's Steve Berthiaume the next day as, "not a

brawl but full-scale riot, and one of the ugliest incidents of player-fan violence that we

have seen in this country" (ESPN, 2004).[6] With 45 seconds left in the game, and the

Pacers winning by 15 points, Ron Artest (Pacers) fouled Ben Wallace (Pistons). Wallace

erupted at Artest (the player now known as Metta World Peace). A fight broke out

between the two men. They shoved, pushed, and slung insults. The referees intervened

and were momentarily able to ease tensions.

Artest retreated from the scuffle and laid down on the courtside table, but the

melee was only beginning. While the refs, coaches, and several players tried to quell

other players who had gotten involved, John Green, a season-ticket holder, hurled a full

cup of beer at the court that hit Artest square in the face (McCarthy, 2006). *Figure 1.3*

shows Green wearing a blue jersey and white baseball cap, in the far left of the photo.

Bolting into the stands with fists up and leaping several rowing of seats, Artest went after

a man who he thought had thrown the cup (Artest, 2009). Instead, he tackled and

pummeled Mike Ryan, a different white fan who had seen the incident and who was

apparently waving his hands at Artest to try and tell him what happened.   John Green

came up behind Artest and tackled the player, punching at the back of his head, while

other fans dumped beer, took swings, and threw food.

Figure 1.3: Artest attacks bystander/fan [Source: ESPN.com]

Figure 1.4: Fans brawl with Artest [Source: ESPN.com]

Fighting then broke out in several locations as fans threw drinks, fists, food, and

even chairs at players. Players on both teams, as well as Detroit's radio announcer Rick

Mahorn, rushed into the stands to try and separate the fans from Artest. The brawl lasted not more than 5 minutes before police intervention. What became popularly known as the "Malice at the Palace" and Detroit's "basketbrawl" resulted in misdemeanor assault and battery charges for five NBA players (all of them were ultimately sentenced to a year probation and community service), multi-game suspensions for nine players, and criminal charges for five fans who were also banned from the stadium for life (NBA Press Conference, 2004; Peters & Robbins, 2004).

The basketbrawl became a watershed moment for the NBA. Facing a torrent of bad press and backlash from corporate sponsors and fans alike, commissioner Stern doled out strict though temporary punishments to the NBA offenders and took a series of actions meant to demonstrate that the NBA was serious about challenging and changing the league's negative public relations and image problems (NBA press conference, 2004; Griffin, 2008, Luscombe, 2004). Those five minutes of nationally televised ugliness that took place in Detroit's Palace, described by commissioner Stern as "shocking, repulsive, and inexcusable" (NBA press conference, 2004), shattered the league's reputation, which the NBA has since been working to restore (McGowan & Mahon, 2009).

In an attempt to rebuild its image and brand, Stern later negotiated changes in the NBA players' collective bargaining agreement that included a dress code requiring players to wear "professional" clothing when attending league events and not in uniform. At the same time, certain forms of clothing that represented hip-hop culture such as do-rags, chains, medallions, t-shirts, shorts, and hats were banned (Eligon, 2005; Griffin, 2011). Other contract changes included an age limit restricting playing contracts to players at least 20 years of age (McGovern, 2006). The dress code changes and age

restriction caused some observers to question the underlying racial motivations of the institutional move (ESPN, 2005; Griffin, 2011; Sports Briefings, 2005), but Stern has continually maintained that the steps were necessary and in the best interests of the game and its diverse supporters (Bucher, 2006; Lane, 2007; NBA press conference, 2004).

The fight in Detroit sorely exposed racial tensions that had been simmering for years, stemming from cultural dissonance arising between an affluent mostly white fan base and mostly black NBA player pool (Boyd, 2004; Starr, 2004). According to McCallum (2004), the image of the black players fighting with mostly white fans "will not sit well with those white fans who see some African American players—lavishly paid, richly tattooed, and supremely confident—as the embodiment of all that is wrong with sports." Furthermore, players' identification with hip hop culture coupled with players' immense salaries meant that, as popularized public figures, many stars frequently exhibited extravagant gold chains and teeth, sported baggy pants and throwback jerseys, released their own rap albums, and used explicit language in the public eye—performances that simultaneously attract and bristle with dominant upper and middle class American cultures (Lane, 2007; Smith, 2007).

As Boyd (2004) notes, through his appearance, comportment, speech, and style of play, Ron Artest clearly embodies hip-hop culture, which emerged out of the streets and housing projects in New York. Beginning in the 1990s, there could be "a real meanness to the hip-hop vibe...the comparatively lighter rap music of the 1980s gave way to the hostile subgenre of gangsta rap, launched with seminal albums like N.W.A.'s 1988 *Straight Outta Compton* and Dr. Dre's 1992 *The Chronic*" (Lane, 2007, p. 29). As hip-hop culture was developing in basketball and in mainstream American culture, many

NBA and hip-hop stars also glorified an array of major global brands, including but not limited to professional basketball. For instance, iconic NBA figures promoted apparel brands such as Nike, Adidas, Starter, Tommy Hilfiger, and Ralph Lauren. Mega stars' fashion preferences, sometimes underwritten by corporate sponsorships, gave consumer boosts to brands suddenly seen as hip in the hip-hop world (George, 2005).

In turn, corporate leadership quickly realized that if they could harness and marketize hip-hop's swag, they could tap into immense commercial potential among wide segments of consumers across ethnic groups. Drawing on toned-down images and messages, hip-hop was commercially exploited in successive NBA advertising campaigns and woven into various marketing strategies (Andrews, 2001; Lane, 2007). Yet, the images of young black millionaires flaunting cultural norms exist in tension with mainstream middle-class values, which created both branding opportunities and complex public relations problems for the NBA. At the same time, McCallum (2004) observes that "some NBA players see, in the white faces of the fans, the embodiment of their frustrations: criticism from the media, the 24-hour sport blabathons that dissect their performances, racist remarks from the stands."

Despite a dominant racial ideology color-blindness—"the assertion of essential sameness between racial and ethnic groups despite unequal social locations and distinctive histories"—people and communities of color must face the ever-present conflation of blackness and criminality (Rodriguez, 2006, p.645). Being young and black often gets equated with a propensity for violence and criminal behavior (Collins, 2005; Oliver, 2003; Thangaraj, 2012). Black professional athletes' statuses as superstars do not separate them from racism structured in American society (Griffin, 2011).

Simultaneously revered for their physical prowess and reviled for their assumed social pathologies, NBA celebrities may be multimillionaires but cannot be permanently sheltered from a dominant gaze that frames most black men as latent criminals. Basketball is a reflection of broader social tensions between what Yousman (2003) calls, "Blackophilia" and "Blackophobia."

Amid these complex contradictions, the *NBA Cares* initiative was one additional crisis management strategy that commissioner Stern employed and can be viewed as a shrewd tactic to control the troubling racial divisions between players, on the one hand, and fans and corporate interests, on the other (Bucher, 2006; McGowan & Mahon, 2009). Aimed at supporting and marketing player and team charitable causes, and at altering the public's perception of professional basketball as a bunch of "thugs" to that of "good guys" (Giannulakis & Drayer, 2009), NBA Cares is part of a series of institutional moves in which "the NBA helps to 'articulate' the corporate with the popular, largely through an implied racial project that manages race relations by continuing to equate corporate interests with Whiteness" (Hughes, 2004). Coupled with corporate codes for player conduct and dress, *NBA Cares* plays a role in mitigating business risks associated with public images of the sports, thereby marketing, managing, and "making black men safe for (white) consumers in the interest of profit" (ibid, p. 164; see also Griffin, 2011). By highlighting the many good deeds of NBA players and teams in local and global communities, the NBA hoped to draw public attention away from negative stereotyping and towards role modeling more aligned with dominant cultural values.

Since 2005, NBA games on television have featured *NBA Cares* commercials, and documercials tout the charitable work of teams on the jumbotron during halftime.

These corporate service announcements (see video below) are an integral feature of the NBA's corporate philanthropy. They form part of the *NBA Care*'s cause-related marketing (CRM) strategy, which business scholars Vandarajan and Menon (1998) describe as "a way for a company to do well by doing good" (p. 60). More precisely, CRM allows a firm "to market goods and contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives" (p. 60). In essence, CRM creates a direct connection between a corporation's products and a social cause, such that each time a customer buys a good or service, a fraction of the profits are passed on to a charitable organization partnering with that corporation or to support a social cause (Hajjat 2003). By consuming the NBA brand on television, at the stadium, in clothing stores, and other retail spaces, fans are materially supporting the NBA's philanthropic efforts. The implication is that fan purchasing is itself an act of volunteerism and charity.

While Vandarajan and Menon's conceptualization of CRM above outlines the expectations of the business strategy behind CRM, it never questions the outcomes and effects of the action, nor does it examine the larger sociopolitical realities (King, 2001). CRM is as much about selling products and generating revenues as it is about the social construction of compassionate corporate citizens assisting communities and populations deemed at risk (Austin 2003; Shamir, 2005). Corporations use the images, voices, and stories of those "at risk" communities to frame and market their cause-related identities. However, research on CRM has paid little attention to the social and economic conditions of those communities or how people within those communities experience CRM.

Research Questions: Entering the Field of Study

Based on large-scale descriptive statistics and coverage of team-sponsored events in the media cited above, we know in a general sense that professional sporting organizations interact with public schools, as well as the probable terms of interactions between these private and public sector organizations. We also know in general what corporate sporting executives and star athletes profess as to why they conduct philanthropy (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009).[7] However, academic scholarship on corporate philanthropy has yet to illuminate the interlocking, nuanced, and uneven interactions between corporate sporting organizations and public schools.

This dissertation explored the inter-institutional relationships that were created and maintained through a long-term philanthropic partnership between the *River City Public Schools* (*RPS*), a medium-to-large urban school district, and the *River City Cobras* (*The Cobras*)[8], a successful NBA franchise that was owned and operated by a privately held corporation. Using a case study approach (Yin, 2009), I examine the contradictions and affordances that come into view through this school-to-corporate arrangement. Empirically, I conducted ethnographic observations of Cobras-sponsored school events, searched news and multi-media, and led extended interviews with thirty school district administrators, school leaders, teachers, counselors, and coaches over the course of two years. The overarching research question of this study was:

1. What is the nature of the relationships that are enacted through an institutionalized philanthropic partnership between an urban public school district and a corporate sports organization in the National Basketball Association?

1.1 What kinds of relationships are established and maintained through this partnership?

1.2 How do school professionals understand these relationships?

Evidence for this case depended on questions of access, obtaining viewpoints from a variety of organizational positions, and securing more than public relations responses during the data collection process. For these reasons, the study operated from the schools' perspectives (district administrators, principals, teachers, coaches, counselors, and other school professionals) and not corporation's (corporate executives and staff in the Cobras organization).[9] In addition, I found no empirical study of professional sports philanthropy that was based in schools or focused on school perspectives.[10] Given how long many professional sporting organizations have engaged in charitable relationships with schools (e.g. the Cobras have deployed philanthropic activities in RPS for more than twenty years), research is needed that examines how professional sports philanthropy actually operates in public schools, why public schools choose to accept these philanthropic relationships, and how school professionals understand the phenomenon.

Listening to individuals' stories about what it meant to be in partnership with a corporate sporting organization, I used this case study to delve theoretically into the boundaries of public schooling and capitalism. By focusing on the intertwined relationships in this collaboration, I considered the ways these boundaries were traversed in practice. The dissertation shed some light on how sports philanthropic relationships were carried out in public schools and how school practitioners experienced and reproduced these relationships. In addition, the study appraised the reasons and means to

make effective and equitable use of those corporate investments by resource-rich institutions within the school community.

Major news and other media outlets regularly celebrate corporate philanthropy. In the words of one leading scholar and advocate of corporate participation in public education, mainstream news and scholarship have largely "failed to ask hard questions, challenge assumptions, or shine much light on philanthropic activity" (Hess, 2005, p.9). This generally uncritical treatment of corporate philanthropy constrains public information on the subject and creates an absence of "public scrutiny" (Hess, 2005, p.12-13). Corporations are free to do as they see fit in public education with little or no expectation of being held publicly accountable for those decisions and actions. There are many stories of corporations deploying philanthropy in the public sector[11], illuminating their intended benefits and advantages. Yet it is much more difficult to locate in-depth accounts of philanthropy that consider its downsides or dark sides, while at the same time attending to potentialities (Ball, 2007). Since I collected interviews from school-based players, but not from the corporate sports sector[12], I sought a more balanced perspective by also gathering and interpreting publicly-available documents created by the Cobras organization that highlighted its school relationship (e.g. press releases and promotional videos), as well as documentary raw video footage taken by school personnel at special school events sponsored by the Cobras.

Outline of the dissertation

This study is composed of four additional chapters. Chapter 2 critically explores the conception of schools partnering with other sectors. It reviews theoretical and empirical research in four counter-related bodies of literature and wider discourses, which

offer varying accounts on the role of corporations in society: 1) Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR), 2) CSR as Greenwashing, 3) Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in

education, and 4) PPPs as privatizations or corporatizations in education. Chapter 3

presents the research design and methods, addressing theoretical and pragmatic issues in

conducting this qualitative case study. It contextualizes the research problem, presents

the research sites and participants, and discusses the methods of data collection,

interpretation, and analysis. Chapter 4 discusses empirical findings from the case study

in which both altruism and the market complexly shaped relationships of fandom,

stardom, and corporate philanthropy in the NBA. Chapter 5 offers conclusions and

addresses leadership implications of these findings for research and practice on corporate

social engagement in public education.

CHAPTER 2: MULTI-DISCIPLINARY REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mapping the Discursive Terrain of Cross-Sector Arrangements in Public Education

Introduction

For generations, legal and ethical struggles over the envisioned role of corporations in public society have been waged in the social sciences, in political forums, court systems, schools, and corporations themselves (DeBray, 2006; Horowitz, 1982; NEA, 1929; USGOA 2000, 2004; Spring, 2005; C. Stone, 1988; D. Stone, 1997; Waddock, 2008). These struggles are not just over the social construction of language, ideas and knowledge, but also battles for material power, social influence, and redistributions of wealth (Bakan, 2004; Barlow, 2003). Although schools and corporations have interacted complexly since the dawn of public schooling (Cuban, 2004; Bowles & Gintis, 1977), the landscape of K-12 public education is shifting rapidly towards increasing amounts and degrees of private sector involvement (Ball, 2006, 2009; Barkan, 2011; Beder, 2002; Boyles, 2005; Buras, 2011; Burch, 2006, 2009; Feurestein, 2001; Giroux, 2002; Hess, 2005; Himmelstein, 1997; Hoff, 2002; Kowalski, 2010; Molnar, 2005; Ravitch, 2010; Robertson, 2005; Saltman, 2000, 2005, 2010). Currently, in public education "there are no surface areas which are exempt from private sector participation, although there are some where it appears, as yet, only infrequently" (Ball, 2007, p. 13). Similar trends have been observed in other sectors, such as health care, prisons, and transportation (Hodge & Greve, 2007; Hodge, Greve, & Boardman, 2010).

Corporate philanthropy in education is but one branch of a broad and complex spectrum of private/corporate institutional mechanisms that operate within K-12 schools in the United States and beyond. Some other corporate mechanizations include exclusive

contract rights for commercial services like food and transportation, waste management, assessment services and data warehousing, research services, tutoring and supplemental education services, traditional advertising in schools, marketing in schools and online learning environments, and private/corporate educational management like Edison Schools or the KIPP network (Ascher, Fruchter, & Berne, 1996; Molnar, 2005). In her critique of the permeation of corporate cultures across all facets of schooling in North America, Robertson (2005) maintained:

> The shadow of the private sector is being cast all over aspects of school reform, from how we think about learners and learning to how schools should be governed and financed; from who produces curriculum to who (or what) 'delivers' it; from whether public education is viewed as a remarkable accomplishment or an anachronistic failure (p. 116).

The growing nexus between public education and the private sector creates educational imperatives that deserve closer scrutiny. In Edens and Gilsinan's (2005) words, "although partnerships are popular, demonstrating their effects for good or ill remains an illusive goal" (p.123). This dissertation ponders the nature of relationships that are enacted when schools 'partner' with corporations in philanthropy. Through the lens of a critical case study, I explored the institutional relationships that were created and maintained through a long-term philanthropic arrangement between the *River City Public Schools* (RPS) and the city's NBA basketball team. This research offered a window on school practitioners' textured understandings of school contact with a corporate sports organization and a means to explore linkages between these school-based understandings and corporate representations of partnering across sectorial divides.

The study operated on two basic levels. The first level burrowed deep into the local particulars of partnership between the public school district and private corporate organization. The second level attended to broad societal trends and transformations in

education through the diffuse forces of fractured capitalism (Patel, 2013). Working

across the localized, empirical layers of River City on the one hand, and the moving

dimensions of global socio-economic restructuring on the other, created theoretical

challenges and opportunities for understanding what happens when schools transact with

corporations. What could a single instantiation of a school-corporate partnership tell us

about private sector participation in public schools? How might cultural spaces and

practices of public schools get refigured through their relationships and associations with

the private sector? This thesis both advanced and challenged taken for granted notions of

corporate responsibility and public education that press upon educational research and

schools in surprising ways. The images, voices, and stories in this study were woven

through a framework that is multi-perspectival and explicitly political, thus interested in

questions related to power.[13]

The remainder of this chapter is divided into five sections. The first section

provides a conceptual overview, in which I first discuss my researcher orientation and

guiding assumptions that shape my ways of seeing the object of inquiry, and second,

sharpen and define the idea of partnership. The next four sections review research on two

dominant bodies of literature and wider discourses that take varying, interrelated

positions on the role of corporations in society:

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**
- **Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in education**

Each discourse and its operating assumptions holds analytic value in the case study and

raises problematic issues that are taken up and reconstructed through it. Discussion of

these dominant discourses is juxtaposed against counter discourses that view:

- **CSR as Greenwashing**

- **PPPs as Privatizations in education**

Research Orientation

The driving purpose of this study was to understand rather than to evaluate what happens when public schools choose to partner with a corporation as part of that corporation's philanthropy. The intent was to not rush quickly into judgment about the phenomenon in order to "get farther into it, see more and more things in terms of it or 'through' it, use it as a hypothesis to climb higher and higher to a point from which more can be seen and understood" (p. Elbow, 1998, p.163). Each instantiation of partnership must be understood within the context, merits, and evidence of the individual case. Questions such as *who benefits* from a partnership and *how* cannot be justifiably answered outside of the localized, material workings of those relationships. Thus, I assume it is unproductive to argue that corporate partnerships unconditionally represent a promise or a pitfall for public schools. Some partnerships lead to substantial, much-needed school change, while others may be detrimental to schools, teachers, or youth. They may also simultaneously yield paradoxical effects, having positive and negative implications for either or both parties in partnership.

In a study of public-private partnerships within television broadcasting and health care, Leys (2001) asserts that, as a result of broad societal changes taking place through globalized capitalism, "the analytical task has become more complex…the main causal links no longer converge conveniently" (p.5). In other words, the social, political and economic context of private sector influence in the public sector is characterized by opacity and uncertainty. Thus, research on partnerships must account for this

complexity. The shifting socio-political dimensions of cross-sector interactions create an uneven cultural landscape requiring conceptual footing that is adaptive, multi-modal, and pragmatic (Ball, 2007). Broadly, this study adopted a socio-cultural theoretical approach, based on the assumption that people's worldviews develop through interactions with others within the social and cultural contexts in which they reside (Gee, 1999; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). Knowledge about the world is intricately constructed through a socially mediated lens for seeing the world. Discourse embodies these ways of seeing, making up "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network" (Gee, 1999, p.131).

Within social institutions such as a school, the discourses of that place ripple through what is construed as commonsense, natural, normal, irrational, controversial, problematic, as well as what is not thought about at all (Foucault, 1977; Gramsci, 1971). Discourses are productive in that they continuously work to construct reality. Insiders of a group tacitly understand how to "be" within that community because the group's tacit assumptions and generalizations about the way the world works or should work (Gee, 1999). Discourses serve as a kind of ideational and ideological shorthand. They provide cultural schemas, which influence people's expectations, how they behave and interact, and how social phenomena are interpreted. Discourses create cohesions and continuities within social groups. They are what make someone intuitively know she is a member of a group. People tend to interpret the world in ways that adhere to these taken for granted views. This pattern has a self-reinforcing effect, whereby once a social phenomenon is

assumed to carry truths about the world, people will expect and look for confirming examples (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Discourses are never neutral, though group insiders may view it as objective reality. As language and social practices mediated by historically constituted power relations, discourses are not created equal. Certain discourses, dominant ones, are valued more than others. Dominant discourses are imbued with greater social and cultural capital that can be used to acquire more capital and power. Rogers et al. (2005) thus characterize discourse as continuously shifting "between reflecting and constructing the social world. Seen in this way, language cannot be considered neutral, because it is caught up in political, social, racial, economic, religious, and cultural formations" (p. 369). Thus, discourse offers dynamic representations of culture and ideology, discourse "never just *is* but instead *does*" (Thornton, cited in Heath & Street, 2008, p.7).

For these reasons, I have sought to understand the socio-historical undercurrents of power that influence public schools' expectations and interactions with corporate sports philanthropists. School teachers' and leaders' perspectives on corporate philanthropy must be understood within the cultural and material surroundings of schools, within the many layers of meaning in which these school-corporate contacts take place. Organizations such as schools (or corporations or professional sports teams, for that matter) are culturally laden institutions, where social norms, expectations, and institutional histories intricately influence individuals' collective reasoning, decision-making, perceptions, and experiences (Meyer, Rowan, Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Rowan, 2002, 2006). Thus, "the practices and policies adopted by schools and governing agencies reflect the rules and structures in wider society" (Burch, 2009, p. 16).

Organizational change occurs through complex institutional linkages characterized by loose coupling, decoupling, congruence, and conflict between social sites, spaces, and actors (MacKenzie & Lucio, 2005). Educational problems are socially constructed as policymakers, administrators, community leaders, teachers, and others characterize certain aspects of the world such as schools, teachers, teachers' unions, and students as troubling or problematic. How each problem is socially constructed will also have a bearing on how 'appropriate' solutions get crafted (Coburn, 2006). In turn, educators make sense out of and implement policies in light of past experiences, knowledge, personal proclivities, and other cultural baggage, as well as local, regional, and national isomorphic conditions surrounding schooling (Binder, 2002).

Individuals' assumptions about the world will shape how they come to view school relationships with businesses and corporations (Savas, 2000; Schiro, 2008).[14] For instance, most educators have become familiar with well-known examples of corporate involvement in schools, particularly commercial ventures such as Pizza Hut reading programs, Coke and Pepsi days, Prego spaghetti sauce science experiments, candy sales managed by private companies to raise funds, and Channel One news. Some observers believe that these arrangements are beneficial to all parties: the corporation can cultivate brand loyalty, and the school or district can enhance educational programming or garner cash and in-kind resources (Gonsalves, 2003; Hicks, 2000; Thompson, 2000).

Chris Whittle's infamous Channel One beams an MTV-style news show with corporate advertising into classrooms using "no cost" multi-media equipment donated by Whittle's company (Consumers Union 1998; US GAO, 2000). When Channel One was introduced, many researchers, educators, and administrators celebrated the news program

as a viable way to invigorate curriculum in schools that were facing ever-dwindling budgets and suggested the program led to increases in student test scores (Beder, 2002; Greenwood, 1994; Whittle, 1989). The venture also ignited protest from a number of sources. Parents and advocacy groups regarded it as a violation of civil rights and a "corporate raid" on education to brandish commercial advertising to a captive youth audience (Kozol, 1992). Cultural critics on the left argued that these commercial arrangements were inherently dangerous, since they "offer the not-so-subtle message to students that everything is for sale—including student identities, desires and values" (Giroux, 2002, p. 38; Boyles, 2005; Molnar, 2005). Conservatives claimed that Channel One served as an agent for "disseminating sexual messages" to children and objected to content related to safer sex practices, drug use, and rock & roll, as well as corporate influence over curriculum that circumvented local decision making (Baker, 1999; Eilperin, 1999; Walsh, 1999; Williams, 1998). In spite of the protests, however, Channel One (now a subsidiary of Alloy Media produced in partnership with CBS News) is still shown everyday to almost "six million teens in approximately 8,000 middle schools and high schools across the country" with hundreds of hours of additional 'on demand' educational videos linked to McREL national standards (Channel One News, 2012).

In thinking about the changed and changing landscape of public education, in which the boundaries between public and private interests are increasingly blurred, and in which the private sector is deeply vested in educational policymaking, infrastructure, services, advocacy, lobbying, and researching, what is exclusively 'public' in public education is not at all obvious (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009; Rowan, 2002). This study set out to paint the broad picture of principles, motives, rationales, and actions at play behind

corporate involvement in public education. In doing this, I followed recommendations by

Michelle Fine and her colleagues (2002) for conducting socially responsible educational

research that exercises "theoretical rigor and political savvy" (p.199). Moving beyond

simplified and impassioned rhetoric that unilaterally exalts or castigates corporate or

school actors, I aim to offer, along with writers like Charles Payne (2007), honest and

even handed dialogue on the opportunities and tensions of urban public schooling within

contemporary capitalism.

Partnerships as complex, embedded, moving relationships

Merriam-Webster (2012) defines 'partnership' as:

1: the fact or state of being a partner (as in an action or in the possession or enjoyment of something)

2a: a legal relation existing between two or more competent persons who have contracted to place some or all of their money, effects, labor, and skill in lawful commerce or business with the understanding that there shall be a communion of profit between them

b: an alliance or association of persons joined together in a partnership

c: the persons joined together in a partnership

d: the contract by which a partnership relation is created

3: a relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities (as in a common enterprise)

Generally speaking, the idea of *partnership* or *partners* carries a positive

connotation. In everyday conversation, partners refer to people who jointly operate a

business, who dance together, who play together on the same team against an opposing

side, or who share an intimate relationship. Partnership is never simple. It requires

practice, communication, and reiteration that follows patterns but cannot be

predetermined. Partnerships are grounded as much in feelings and senses of each other,

as in rational or analytical considerations. When two people are joined together, while simultaneously following individual trajectories, they inevitably face situations and problems that converge upon and diverge from each other's pathways. The partnership is always in motion but not always in lock step. Partnerships are complex and never static. This dissertation wrestles with the intricacies of partnership reflected in the literature and empirically in my case study. It is important to always bear in mind the mutually constitutive, shifting nature of partnerships as complex social interactional relationships.

Dominant Discourse and Research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR is a complex social phenomenon emanating largely from inside the business community, which allows a corporation to demonstrate some commitment to factors that extend beyond strictly the financial "bottom line" (Carroll, 1999; Subhabrata, 2007; Waddock, 2008). Understanding this discourse offers a view on corporate engagement in education from inside business. The dominant perspective in business management literature is that corporations involve themselves in and support the public sector out of philanthropic intentions. CSR was particularly relevant to this study since River City Cobras' owners and executives were versed in it and made public statements about the team's relationship with the schools reflecting CSR discourse (e.g. using words like responsibilities, stakeholders, giving back, investing in community).[15] CSR has been described variously as:

- 'Enlightened self-interest' (Keim, 1978; Steiner, 1971);

- 'Enlightened value maximization' (Jenson, 2000);

- 'Good neighborliness' (Eilbert & Parket, 1973, p. 7);

- Moving "beyond the narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements of the

firm" (Davis, 1973, p. 312) and "beginning where the law ends" (ibid, p. 313);

- "Good corporate citizenship" (Carroll, 1991, 1998);

- Responses to diverse stakeholders of corporations (Jamali, 2008);

- Implicit social contract between corporations and society (Davis, 1979; Wood & Logsdon, 2002);

- "Business decision-making linked to ethical values, compliance with legal requirements, and respect for people, communities and the environment" (Business for Social Responsibility, cited in Dahlsrud, 2008); and

- "The continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large" (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, cited in Dahlsrud, 2008).

Business practitioners and scholars increasingly use the term CSR or Corporate Responsibility (CR) to refer to a set of strategic and practice-integrated corporate sustainability activities (Visser, 2010). Waddock (2004) defines the broad notion CR as:

> the degree of (ir)responsibility manifested in a company's strategies and operating practices as they impact stakeholders and the natural environment day-to-day. Some level of responsibility is integral to any corporate action or decision that has impacts. Corporate responsibility cannot be avoided because it is integral to action, and thus forms the root or foundation of corporate citizenship. (p. 10)

To exist in perpetuity, a corporation or industry thus needs to attain and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of its stakeholders, or a social license to operate. CSR intersects with a range of issues in corporate management and governance, such as corporate actions to reduce or counter discrimination in hiring and promotion practices, establishing equitable wages and benefits for employees, making working conditions safe, actively

reducing a firm's carbon footprint, as well as participating in philanthropic or charitable efforts.[16] "CSR is frequently operationalized community relations, philanthropic, multi-sector collaboration, or volunteer activities" (Waddock, 2004, p. 10). For empirical reasons germane to the River City case study, this dissertation largely restricted usage of the term CSR to corporate philanthropy.[17]

CSR is a widespread phenomenon in organizational research and practice, and the press (Crowther & Capaldi, 2008; Lockett, Moon, & Visser, 2006). The idea has been defined and applied so broadly that some scholars deem CSR to be a "tortured concept" that encapsulates everything and nothing (Godfrey & Hatch, 2007), or deem it "a vague and intangible term which can mean anything to anybody, and therefore is effectively without meaning" (Frankental, 2001, p.20). Regardless of academic struggles to make sense of CSR discourse, business owners and practitioners make use of the concept to structure and frame philanthropy, in which they increasingly are expected to engage. As well, a growing private industry has emerged to shape and support it in practice (e.g. Cone Communications, 2012; Corporate Knights, 2012; Corporate Responsibility, 2012; CSR Consulting Ltd., 2012; Ethisphere, 2012).

The business management field undertakes the majority of research on CSR. As such, most of this literature explores questions that pertain to the business world, resonating more with corporate executives than school leaders and teachers. It leaves largely underexplored the roles of schools and communities in philanthropic relationships and the composition of those relationships from schools' vantage points. This section supplements business management literature with research from education to provide a more complete account.

Scholars of CSR have argued that the immediate and long-term benefits of private wealth, from which owners and shareholders profit, exist as a privilege of incorporation that implies social responsibilities as legal members of society (Wood & Logsdon, 2002). Implicit in this perspective is the assumption that corporations must first and foremost seek economic profitability, while at the same time behaving "responsibly." As Dodd (1932) put it, the corporation is "an economic institution which has a social service as well as a profit-making function" (p. 1148). The precise make-up of a corporation's social service function, as well as if/how that social service connects with its profit-making functions, is left up to the corporation to decide.

While the idea that businesses should attend to certain responsibilities that connect to and go beyond profit is not new, widespread social consciousness about the privileged positions that corporations hold in society, as well as the sheer frequency of corporate controversies in public view, has led more and more corporations to engage in philanthropic endeavors that present themselves as altruistic social actors and good corporate citizens (Waddock, 2008). According to Manteaw (2009), "more than ever before, public awareness about the impact of corporate activities on the environment and communities in which they operate is compelling firms to account not only for their financial bottom lines, but also for their social and ecological performances" (p.200).

CSR in the U.S. is historically situated in private philanthropy and rooted ever more deeply in aristocratic conceptions of 'noblesse oblige,' a dominant discourse during colonial times that has continued to echo in the prevailing cultural mores of contemporary Western societies (Adams & Knutsen, 1994; Cain & Hopkins, 2002;

Mangan, 1981). Early 20th century American industrialists assumed significant roles in

providing institutionalized care and services for the poor. According to Godfrey (2009):

> The origins of corporate philanthropy—and what would later become CSR— lie
> in the 19th century as large corporations, such as steel companies, railroads,
> communications, and financial houses, assumed a prominence in American
> society that dwarfed in size and resources their public sector counterparts. (pp.
> 700-701).

At the time, many corporations funded the establishment of local schools, libraries, and

other social services largely as a means to attract and retain workers in factory towns

(Cox, 2012). These early pioneers of American private industry also understood that

schools were important civic spaces with the potential to support business principles by,

for example, developing a stratified economy and building the professional and

workforce resources needed for the marketplace (Tyack, 1974). Supporting schools to

produce a functionally literate pool of workers was considered "a distinct competitive

advantage; transferring this cost to the public purse markedly limited the expense

incurred by employers in training their workforces" (Robertson, 2005, p. 118).

By the early 20th century, the notion that business needed to pay attention to

leadership decision-making of schools related to such things as what was being taught,

the use of psychometric assessments, and how students were tracked had become largely

take for granted among American businessmen (Hall, 1994). Well before the start of the

Great Depression, most leaders in the business community "had come to believe that

long-term profitability required a stable, self-sustaining, and self-renewing economy; and

that this, in turn, required sustained and generous investment in human capital" (Hall,

1994, p. 213). Schools became a primary site to invest in this human capital, helping to

secure a seat at the table with educational leadership.

One popular business strategy to participate in school governance was to serve as school board members of local school districts (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Cetron et al, 1985; Hall, 1994). The earliest documented instance of this kind of linkage between the private sector and education was in the 1860s in New York City when a business representative from the Chamber of Commerce sat on the public school board (Cetron et al, 1985). From that time on, business leaders increasingly participated in this public service with the intent of reforming education through the promotion of business-management-oriented practices that would prepare youth for roles in a stratified work force (Timpane, 1984). By 1916, although business professionals made up only about 11% of the total U.S. population, they represented nearly 80% of school board committees across the country (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). Through a variety of means, Hall (1994) asserted:

> School systems were reorganized and became closely tied to serving the needs of the economy through new curricula, which promulgated not only the values and skills needed to sustain the new consumer-oriented economy but which, through home economics, shop, personal hygiene, and other offerings, actually taught young people how to consume (p. 213).

Business leaders understood the cultural potential of schools to instill values and behaviors that would encourage the consumption of goods and services that the private sector sold. From elite tycoons such John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie to small, local-owned companies, the private sector directed significant tax incentivized attention, time, and resources into how public schools operated.

However, throughout the 19th century, opposition to corporate philanthropy mounted within the business community, and major court cases were taken up to contest the practice based on the legal doctrine of *ultra vires*. This traditional doctrine argued, "corporations' activities were strictly defined by charter and moving beyond those

powers (ultra vires) constituted an abuse of proper managerial agency" (Godrey, 2009, p.

701). While the logic still echoes in scholars' arguments against CSR or any business

activity not directly aimed at maximizing capital (Freidman, 1979; Jenson, 2002), by the

middle of the 20th century, the matter was decisively settled in the courts. In the case of

A.P. Smith Manufacturing vs. Barlow, philanthropy was deemed a legal and justifiable

application of managerial authority (Adams & Knutsen, 1994). Well before this decision

in 1953, philanthropy had already been well established in business practice and awarded

status as a tax deduction for nearly two decades (Adams & Knutsen, 1994; Godfrey,

2009).

Following this pivotal ruling, CSR has evolved through the development of

institutional mechanisms that have been put to an array of business uses. Increasingly,

business owners and practitioners have seen reasons to engage in charitable works and

public service. In a review of the field, Whetten et al. (2001) highlight four distinct

benefits of companies following CSR: to serve as rationale to reduce government

regulation or prevent increases in regulation, to foster social and economic conditions

favorable to business success, to enhance a brand's reputation among current and

potential consumers, and to help entice and retain high quality employees.

For these and other reasons, corporations see more and more value in showing the

public that they are "*good corporate citizens,* explaining why and how they care about a

sustainable future and what they do for their employees, both at home and abroad"

(Maak, 2008, p.353). The movement for corporate responsibility calls for the

examination and advocacy of a range of activities, actions, and accountability measures

on the part of corporations to engage in voluntary relationships with stakeholders in local

and global communities. Private firms and corporations have utilized philanthropy as an adaptable means "to improve an important aspect of society or relationships with communities or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (nonprofits)" (Wadoock, 2004, p. 10). Just how the authorities of CSR define and operationalize "improvement" varies markedly across corporations and communities, and also in academic theory and research: two key and influential examples of which now follow.

Foundational Theories and Typologies of CSR

Foundational scholars of CSR have attempted to organize the theoretical terrain so as to provide some conceptual clarity for researchers and practitioners. Carroll's (1991) Pyramid of CSR [see Figure 2.1] is one of the most frequently cited organizational frameworks on corporate responsibility. It is used below to illustrate underlying problems with a dominant theoretical perspective in business that economic productivity is the most important social obligation of a firm. While reasonable that a business attend to financial matters that can sustain itself as a business, the danger of elevating profit maximization above all else rests in the "privileging of key publics such as shareholders over what are deemed to be peripheral publics (i.e., the masses of people who bear the brunt of corporate actions)" (Munshi & Kurian, 2005, p. 415). Central to this dissertation is the examination of peripheral publics' knowledge and experiences with CSR and the acknowledgement of unequal power among peripheral and key publics.

Carroll's Pyramid of CSR encompasses four types of social responsibilities— economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary—that represent separate, though related, hierarchical categories of decreasing importance to a corporation. According to Carroll's model, the most essential category of CSR is economic responsibility, which Carroll

sums up in the motto, *be profitable*. "All other business responsibilities are predicated upon the economic responsibility of the firm, because without it the others become moot considerations" (p.41). If a firm cannot become profitable, it will eventually go out of business, in which case, it would have no point in pondering the law, ethics, or charitable endeavors. There is thus an overriding imperative to continually seek to expand wealth and profits. Legal responsibilities are the next level in the pyramid, as companies are expected to fulfill their economic responsibilities within the confines and regulations of the law. Once these first two conditions are met, a corporation's social responsibilities extend to ethical considerations: "those activities or practices that are expected or prohibited by society members even though they are not codified into law" (Carroll, 1991, p. 41). Lastly, at the top of the pyramid are discretionary responsibilities, or voluntary expenditures that may support society at large, as in corporate philanthropy.
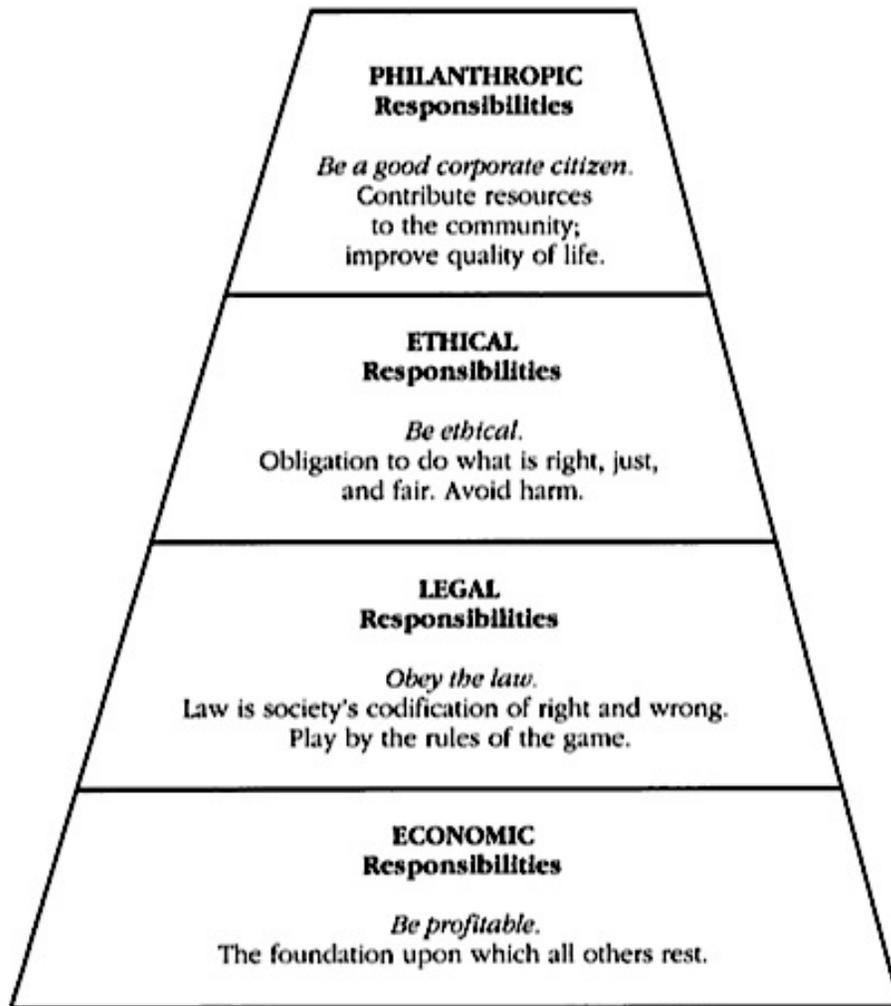
Figure 2.1: Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (Source: Carroll, 1991)

Carroll's framework is a useful starting place to understand different dimensions of corporate social responsibilities. First, Carroll advocates for the basic "understanding that social responsibility is not separate and distinct from economic performance but rather is just one part of the total social responsibilities of businesses" (p.503). Therefore, a corporation's economic interests should not be viewed as mutually exclusive of its ethical and discretionary responsibilities. Theoretically speaking, there is thus a sizable amount of overlap and interdependence among the four different categories of CSR. What a corporation does to be profitable may closely relate to the ethical questions

it encounters or the philanthropic actions it takes. At the same time, certain conflicts may exist between the various responsibilities. "The different types of obligations are in a constant tension with one another" (Carroll, 1991, p.42).

Carroll's four categories offer a set of differentiating terms to discuss CSR and a typology to readily identify and describe a firm's economic and extra-economic responsibilities. His model can be used to consider the contrasts and connections between what is fundamental to business (economic responsibilities), what is mandatory (legal responsibilities), what is contingent on particular societal norms (ethical responsibilities), and what is deemed optional (discretionary responsibilities). The hierarchy of Carroll's model also illustrates how economic profitability serves as a bottom-line organizing principle in corporate philanthropy. It is the first order of corporate social responsibility, upon which "all other business responsibilities are predicated" (Carroll, 1991, p.41).

In contrast to economist Milton Friedman (1970), who argued that "the only one responsibility of business towards society is the maximization of profits to the shareholders within the legal framework and the ethical custom of the country" (p.33), Carroll's framework encompasses social responsibilities that are roused by a sense of duty to volunteer corporate resources for improving some aspect of society. However, similar to Friedman's theories, economic questions are still fronted before anything else, with the ultimate objective generating wealth and profits. The discretionary responsibilities of civic-oriented engagement and participation are seen as subordinate to and fashioned through economic considerations. As Windsor (2001) explains, "a leitmotiv of wealth creation progressively dominates the managerial conception of

responsibility'' (p. 226). The implication of Carroll's work is that capital accumulation is the foundation of what it means for a corporation to behave responsibly. Ethical and legal responsibilities are marginalized. This advances a narrow perspective of social responsibility that the only true obligation of business is economic, and other issues are merely voluntary, discretionary, and disposable. As Frankenthal (2001) pointed out:

> Most CSR is motivated by a desire for an eventual return: a more compliant workforce, a smoother granting of planning permission, more amenable customers, or in the jargon of today's corporate affairs manager 'gaining a license to operate' or 'reputational assurance' (p. 20)

In a comprehensive review of the literature on CSR, Margolis and Walsh (2003) reported that because of the focus on wealth creation in CSR, factors other than financial performance have been largely ignored in this discipline. This emphasis on profits and capital accumulation has meant that CSR research tends to emphasize the business case for philanthropy, while taking much less notice of its various social conditions and consequences. CSR has been examined and framed for instrumental purposes by strategic management scholars. Kanter (1999) and Porter and Kramer (2002, 2006) have prodded corporate leaders to apply shrewd business principles to philanthropic expenses in order to harness the potentials of philanthropy as a vehicle that can boost a company's bottom line. They argue that strategic philanthropy creates opportunities for business to innovate and realize previously untapped markets while also strengthening constituent relationships to enhance corporate reputation. Thus, CSR becomes a means to influence the competitive advantage of the firm (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

From this perspective on strategic CSR, distinctions between a corporation's social and economic performance do not apply. Philanthropy is primarily a tool to serve economic functions. Thus, market assumptions continually push and pull on the rhetoric,

policy, and practice of corporate social responsibility and corporate philanthropy, both locally and globally (Banjeree, 2008; Garriga & Mele, 2004). However, the purpose and process of corporate giving cannot be simplistically reduced to economic considerations. The purposes of philanthropy are complex, shaped by notions of citizenship, ethical questions, legal requirements, in addition to the commitment to be profitable.

Refining Carroll's model of CSR, Wood (1991) explored corporations' motivations for engaging in CSR, as well as the managerial processes of corporate responsiveness and its myriad outcomes, developing a prominent typology of business responsibilities in society (see Figure 2.2). According to Wood's model, how CSR is defined, implemented, and realized in practice varies greatly with context. The motivating principles behind how a corporation constructs its social responsibilities are considered at three interrelated levels of analysis: institutional, organizational and individual (Wood, 1991). At the institutional level, a corporation may be motivated by the principle of legitimacy to maintain the credibility of its image as a socially responsible institution: "Society grants legitimacy and power to business. In the long run, those who do not use power in a manner which society considers responsible will tend to lose it" (Wood, 1991, p.696). The implication is that society can penalize or dissolve a corporation for illegitimate corporate behavior. At the organizational level, a firm's motivations connote a shared sense of public responsibility "for outcomes related to their primary and secondary areas of involvement with society" Wood, 1991, p. 696). In other words, a corporation may promote CSR and take responsibility for its business activities as a reflection of cultural values within the organization related to civic engagement and charity. At the individual level, motivations for CSR may emanate from

the ethical and moral prerogatives of business managers or leaders. "Managers are moral

actors. Within every domain of corporate social responsibility, they are obliged to

exercise such discretion as is available to them, toward socially responsible outcomes"

(Wood, 1991, p. 696).

The Corporate Social Performance Model

Principles of corporate social responsibility

Institutional principle: legitimacy
Organizational principle: public responsibility
Individual principle: managerial discretion

Processes of corporate social responsiveness

Environmental assessment
Stakeholder management
Issues management

Outcomes of corporate behavior

Social impacts
Social programs
Social policies

Figure 2.2: The Corporate Social Performance Model (Source: Wood, 1991, p.694)

Wood (1991) argues that the more normatively oriented motivating principles of

CSR must be coupled with the critical element of action or responsiveness. These more

action-oriented processes are classified into three interconnected groupings:

environmental assessment, stakeholder management and issues management. First, CSR

requires "sophisticated and rigorous techniques for scanning and analyzing the

environment" and then using this "knowledge to devise strategies for adapting to the

environment or, conversely, changing it" (Wood, 1991, p.704). Second, stakeholder

management relates to the complex relationships between a corporation and its external

stakeholders as well as the business tools (e.g. public relations strategies, cause-related

marketing, corporate social reporting) that have been developed to influence these relationships. Third, issues management encompasses a corporation's approach and policies regarding the ways in which a firm goes about "devising and monitoring internal and external processes for managing a company's responses to social issues (Brown, 1979), with the purpose of 'minimizing surprises' (Wartick & Cochran, 1985)" (Wood, 1991, p. 706). The last dimension of Wood's CSP model, the outcomes of corporate behavior, is divided into three categories: the social impacts of corporate behavior, the social programs that a firm implements to fulfill its responsibilities, and the social policies a firm develops to deal with social issues and stakeholder interests.

Wood's (1991) model reminds us that philanthropy must be understood as a function of internal and external environments in which a corporation operates. She tries to account for institutional, organizational cultural, and individual personal factors that shape corporate social engagement, which creates a complicated picture of influences on corporate actions and decision-making in philanthropy. However, as Waddock (2004) observed of Wood's research, "it largely ignores (except for a bow to stakeholder management) the integral responsibilities of companies that are associated with impacts on stakeholders" (p. 21). Both Carroll's and Wood's conceptual models fail to adequately capture the perspectives of community stakeholders or illuminate the broad social costs of doing business. The interests of communities are given voice in these approaches mainly as an afterthought. These theories, like most research on CSR, were created by and for scholars and practitioners of business, not the community or schools. In this way, community stakeholders, including those in schools, are presented as essentially targets of discretionary corporate philanthropy. What motivates schools to

accept philanthropy or what consequences schools experience as a result of philanthropic relationships are simply not questioned. Assumptions about the shape, direction, and results of giving from the corporation down to the community are rarely challenged, at least not from within the business community.

The decision of a corporation to engage in philanthropy, and how it carries out that decision, depend on many factors. We know that corporate philanthropic actors are motivated by interests in addressing a broad range of social issues such as reforming urban public education (Eckert, 2011; Hess, 2005); combatting poverty (Brugmann & Prahalad, 2007), fighting breast cancer (King, 2001), reducing childhood obesity (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), and improving access to literacy education worldwide (Utting, 2007). However, it often proves much more difficult to pinpoint the precise objectives and actions of corporations in philanthropic pursuits (Brown, Vetterlein & Roemer-Mahler, 2010). In part, this is because of the ambiguity of concepts like corporate social responsibility, and in part because of the shroud of privacy or black box that corporations (particularly, private corporations) are afforded legally (Bakan, 2003; Blokhuis, 2008; Quirk & Fort, 1997). This means, for instance, that private corporations are required to make only limited information available to the public related to philanthropic or business functions, such as general financial statements of tax deductions claimed from in-kind charitable donations. Corporations do, however, volunteer information regularly and sometimes copiously, in the form of press releases, company websites, promotional videos, social responsibility audits, and case studies of their CSR efforts.

This section has discussed some of the reasons and ways that firms draw on the discourse of CSR to shape their brand identities as socially responsible corporate citizens

through complex sets of institutional policies, actions, and actors. Though the prevalence

of corporate-produced material to promote CSR branding has elevated public awareness

of corporate good deeds just as it has provoked accusations of corporate duplicity. The

dominant discourse on CSR generally underplays the institutional imperatives of profit

maximization and shareholder wealth creation. This silence constricts the viability of

corporations as agents of social justice and creates confusion around the reality that the

institutional imperatives of profit do not always create beneficial scenarios for non-

shareholding stakeholders (Banjeree, 2008). For instance, Reich (2008a) contends that

CSR has limited the capacity of states to regulate corporations and to generate corporate

tax revenues that maintain the social provisions for the poor, working, and middle classes

(Reich, 2008a). Bakan (2002) argues however that the vast social and economic

influence enjoyed by corporations actually creates opportunities for the public to

challenge corporate abuses of power when they occur:

> Corporations now govern society, perhaps more than governments themselves do;
> yet ironically, it is their very power, much of which they have gained through
> economic globalization, that makes them vulnerable. As is true of any ruling
> institution, the corporation now attracts mistrust, fear, and demands for
> accountability from an increasingly anxious public. (p. 25)

As corporations craft images as compassionate capitalists to counter negative

stereotypes of big business as corrupt, they have turned to CSR as a means to assuage the

public's concerns and build trust in their brands. At the same time, "branding is the

Achilles heel of the corporate world. The more these companies shift to being all about

brand meaning and brand image, the more vulnerable they are to attacks on image"

(Klein, cited in Beder, 2002a, p.25). The following section will address one set of

challenges from corporate watchdogs who condemn corporate claims of altruism that do

not match their actions.

Counter Discourse: Challenging CSR as "Greenwashing"

The discourse of CSR shapes corporate cultures through complex sets of institutional policies, procedures, events, and actors. Contemporary corporations have been substantively altered by CSR, as they have moved away from the previous dominant corporate discourse of "primitive (or bloody) Taylorism" to one that acknowledges and attempts to reduce collateral business damage to the public (Lipeitz, 1997). Firms have increasingly sought to redefine themselves through CSR—to project ideals, both internally and externally, that the corporation cares about the public, that it is compassionate, ethical, and environmentally sustainable. The discourse of CSR works to promote these qualities across companies through voluntary institutional change mechanisms and to reassure everyone involved that by opting into social responsibility, corporations can 'do well by doing good' (i.e. making profits and making the world a better place).

The narrative of progressive social improvement that generally surrounds CSR has been challenged by a counter-discourse of 'greenwashing,' which frames CSR primarily as an instrument of capitalist deception. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2012) defines greenwashing as "disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image." CorpWatch (2010), a private non-profit "investigative research and journalism" organization devoted "to expose corporate malfeasance and to advocate for multinational corporate accountability and transparency," offers a more politically charged definition:

> **green*wash**: (gr~en-wosh) -washers, -washing, -washed. 1) The phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations attempting to preserve and expand their markets by posing as friends of the environment and leaders in the struggle to eradicate poverty. 2) Environmental whitewash. 3) Any attempt to

brainwash consumers or policy makers into believing polluting mega-corporations are the key to environmentally sound sustainable development 4) Hogwash.

The discourse of greenwashing has been adopted and applied by a wide variety of writers and activists. Anti-corporate literature has developed and used the concept to expose branding strategies that effectively manipulate a corporation's reputation as a social do-gooder and/or divert attention away from unethical, irresponsible, or even criminal aspects of the firm's record (Beder, 2002; Bruno, 1997, 2001). Beder (2002) provides detailed accounts of the expansive and growing public relations cottage industry that exists for the purpose of greenwashing corporations (see *Figure 2.3* for examples of greenwashing tactics). Grassroots organizers have used greenwashing discourse to mobilize supporters or publicly disgrace corporate practices they see as ethically deviant, thus challenging the corporation's legality and social license to operate (Keady, 2007, 2012; Global Exchange, 2012; Team Sweat, 2012).

Figure 2.3: Greenwashing Tactics: Fronting, Confusion, Posturing		
Fronting for industry	*Creating Confusion*	*Posturing*
• Use 'front groups' or coalitions of organizations (created, funded, or led by corporate actors) to promote corporate interests or support/oppose legislation • Use front groups to conduct 'independent' research and evaluation of firms • Employ front groups to limit corporate reforms to moderate proposals • Use front groups to	• Create doubt about the seriousness of the problem and downplay threats from corporate actions, often employing think tanks and sympathetic scientists • Highlight uncertainties or ambiguities about the nature of the problem • Admit a problem while casting doubt	• Branding to promote image as pioneer or leader in socially responsible practices • Convey image of corporate culture devoted to continuous improvement • Exaggerate philanthropy and other projects to demonstrate corporate cultures that is caring and committed to social causes • Publicly, often financially, supporting non-governmental (NGO) and grassroots organizations involved with a issue or cause that poses a risk to the corporation • Affiliating with NGOs offering

study, define and revise social responsibility standards	on potential solutions • Corporate rebranding to disassociate from a tarnished image	accreditation for corporate responsibility lacking rigorous accountability or third-party verification • Discrediting opponents as radicals and extremists
Adapted from Beder (1998) and Laufer (2003).		

Business management scholarship has also taken up and adopted greenwashing discourse in order to reconsider CSR in light of what anti-greenwashing activists and scholars have exposed. Godfrey (2009) acknowledges the value of dissent but chides greenwashing as overly reductionistic and limited by its unrelenting view of CSR as merely "a palliative offered by corporations to counteract a number of social harms, as blood money to atone for past sins, or as image production and projection that masks naked self-interest" (p.699). Other business authors have taken a different position, assuming theoretical propositions of anti-greenwashing discourse as a lens to interpret institutional mechanisms of CSR in practice (Alves, 2009; Laufer, 2003; Vos, 2009). These authors agree that greenwashing discourse offers pragmatic opportunities for positive social change from outside of and within corporations.

The discourse of greenwashing provides conceptual tools that can heighten the public's attention to more subtle manipulative capacities of social institutions and actors to present exaggerated or misleading images of corporate responsibility. This provides an analytic frame for detecting asymmetrical power relations of corporate social involvement, which the dominant discourse on CSR treats as a "taboo" subject (Kallio, 2007). Greenwashing offers a means to locate unequal relationships between corporations and their diverse constituents, including schools, as seen through strategic management in action. Corporate philanthropy is identified as a key area where

companies may engage in greenwashing, particularly through posturing on social responsibility initiatives to exaggerate a firm's social performance or deflect public attention away from controversial or problematic issues. Given the frequency and depth of corporate scandals, which have splintered the public's confidence in corporations to "do the right thing," CSR offers popular solutions to encourage more responsible business practices and opportunities for corporations to claim status as defenders of social justice. Greenwashing activists evaluate those claims, challenge corporate opportunism, attempt to hold power-bearing institutions to higher civic standards, and .

Few corporations voluntarily institute substantive changes to company practices without the external enforcement of regulations or the imminent threat of regulations (Vos, 2009, p. 134). The voluntary, discretionary nature of CSR helps to direct attention away from regulatory steps that could make corporations more accountable to the public. Alves (2009) maintains, "In the absence of a compulsory system, corporations will continue to hold a strong incentive to appear socially responsible while avoiding the costs of actually doing so. The result, expectedly, is greenwashing" (p.15). Having control over where, when, and how to be socially responsible "suffers from a legitimacy deficit, because what is good for the social good is often not what is good for business" (*ibid*). Greater transparency in, and accounting of, CSR practices is a prerequisite for keeping corporations answerable to the public. However, merely railing against corporate exploitation or greed is not a viable long-term solution for change. Corporate institutions "need to be 'incorporated' socially as well as legally" (Lee, 2007, p.70). The onus is on public actors and institutions, as much as the corporations, to ensure that this happens.

This case study took up the institutional site of schooling as a space where questions about corporate responsibility and public answerability could be posed. However, the literature on both CSR and greenwashing are relatively silent on the connections to public educational matters. The following section examines an alternate set of discourses that more explicitly address institutional arrangements between schools and corporations.

Focusing on School-Corporations Intersections: The Dominant Discourse on Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in Education

A clustering of research on partnerships between public and private institutions has been given a variety of names, including *public-private partnerships* or PPPs (Austin, 2000; Hodge & Greve, 2007; Relave & Deich, 2007; Rosenau, 2000; Savas, 2000; Wettenhal, 2003), *school-business collaborations* (Mann, 1987), *school-business partnerships* (Cook, 2005; Cromarty, 1997; Burke, 1986), *cross-sector collaborations* (Babiak, 2009), *cross-sector partnerships to address social issues* or CSSPs (Selsky & Parker, 2005), and *social partnerships* (Waddock, 1988, 1989, 1991). Like CSR, PPPs represent a complex social phenomenon encompassing a broad range of managerial practices, institutional arrangements, and professional fields.

Broadly, PPPs have been defined as "cooperative institutional arrangements between public and private sector actors" (Hodge, Greave, & Boardman, 2010, p. 4). In more specific terms, "PPPs are a form of relational contracting between the public and the private sector for the organization and delivery of services that involve risk sharing and mutual learning between the parties involved" (Verger, 2012, p.114). PPP is a semantically expansive concept that envelops diverse activities such as private companies

assuming leadership and management of public services; government agencies

contracting with firms to provide services; or collaborations between corporations,

philanthropies, and government bodies to address a social problem, which occur in a

wide range of domains. These include infrastructure and construction, utilities like water

treatment and electricity, hospital and health care management, prison management,

security services, military, and education. PPPs mean different things to different people

and groups. The term can refer to the various agency types that go into partnership, such

as government bodies, businesses, schools, universities, community-based organizations,

foundations, parent advocacy groups, or teacher unions, describing "an almost infinite

variety of combinations" (Edens, 2005).

Powell and Glendinning (2002) characterize PPPs as relational contracting and

maintain that the concept "is largely a rhetorical invocation of a vague ideal" (p. 3). This

conceptual ambiguity, in which the same term is used to label fundamentally different

ideas, has helped partnerships remain a "poorly understood phenomenon" in academic

literature (Googins & Rochlin, 2000, p.133). In practice, however, PPPs are

"increasingly professionalized, technical and rational" (Hodge et al. 2010, p. 3). Thus,

despite lack of agreement among intellectuals over how to define PPPs and what they

consist of, these public-private hybrids have become well established in local, state,

national, and international public policies (Hodge, 2006). In academic, policy, and

government circles, PPPs are frequently viewed as "the default solution to government

problems and needs" (Forrer, Kee, Newcomer & Boyer, 2010, p. 475).

PPPs also make up a fast growing corporate industry with considerable influence

over public sector reforms. Large management consulting firms, such as

PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte and Touche, Grant Thornton, Ernst and Young, KPMG, McKinsey, and the Hay Group, provide strategic advice on PPPs and internationally dominate the market for educational consulting (Hodge 2006, p. 100). Between 1980 and 2003, their market value rose 800%, totaling $120 billion in 2003. Many smaller companies also dot the landscape of educational management consulting (Hodge 2006, p.99; Greve, 2010). Greve (2010) explains that in terms of "sheer expertise in the development of the legal frameworks concerning PPPs and the actual practice on the ground in leading countries, the global consultancy firms, given their superior knowledge of how PPPs are progressing, have few rivals" (p.506).

The discourse of PPPs was relevant in the case study since public school officials in River City referred to the school district's philanthropic arrangement with the Cobras NBA franchise as a corporate partnership. This partnership related to an umbrella school district goal of building strategic relationships with for-profit, non-profit, community-based, religious, and other governmental organizations in the River City community. The school district states as a priority in its five-year school system improvement plan, a commitment to strengthening partnerships with parents, students, and the wider community as a major reform strategy (C.E. 16).

The dominant view of partnerships, in public opinion and academic literature, depicts the melding of public and private spheres as a new and powerful instrument of social improvement by and for agents of change who are generally thought of as motivated by altruism (e.g. Babiak, 2009; Burke, 1986; Cook, 2005; Cromarty, 1997; Hoff, 2002; Hess, 2005; Himmelstein, 1997; Rosenau, 2000). Cross-sector scholars suggest that these collaborations offer unique opportunities to address "wicked issues" in

education, such as persistent academic underachievement or school dropout (Kanter, 1998; Selksy, 2005; Waddock & Smith, 2000). However, the different organizational logics of schools and corporations pose significant challenges to mutual exchange and collaboration across sectors (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Partnerships seem to be everywhere and are usually assumed to connote positive relationships that mutually benefit the public and private sectors, representing a win-win for society at large. As two scholars and advocates of public-private partnerships maintain:

> The literature on partnership tends to be both positive and prescriptive, focusing on the benefits of partnership and how these might be increased. It is also a practical literature, concentrating on real benefits from real partnerships (MacDonald & Chrisp, 2005, p. 307).

> The rhetoric of PPPs resonates very well politically. The past five U.S. presidential administrations, including two Democratic presidents, have supported various forms of public-private partnership, and Congress has enacted laws enhancing private firms' entrée into the public sector, once considered the exclusive realm of government agencies (Bulkey & Burch, 2011; Burch, 2009). Similar trends can be seen in the United Kingdom, Canada, and elsewhere (Linder, 1999; Robertson, 2006). Part of the political salience of PPPs derives from what Linder (1999) describes as:

> Its status as a portmanteau idea, bringing together programmatic reformers and ideologues of different stripes. The more prominent among these ideologies draw upon neoconservative and neoliberal ideas. Consequently, the concept of partnership will appear protean, making it less amenable to simple technical or programmatic definition (p. 37-38).

In other words, the particular meanings that people and groups attach to partnership can be shifted to accommodate different viewpoints based on a logic of blurring boundaries between the public and private sectors. The concept of partnership is both culturally salient and instrumentally malleable.

Given the range of terms, meanings, and applications associated with PPPs, Hodge & Greve (2010) propose viewing partnerships as both a *language game* and a *governance arrangement*. Language games encompass the elaborate ways that these public and private organizations and the social actors within them make sense of their partnering work and of the rhetoric that is used to frame partnerships. Governance arrangements refer to the institutional relations and linkages that come into being through formal and informal processes of partnering. The River City case study examined these discursive games and institutional arrangements, considering both the word plays and the material social realities surrounding the Cobras' corporate philanthropy in schools.

PPPs in theory

There are numerous typologies of the forms of interaction between public and private sectors (Austin, 2000; Kanter, 1994; Seitandi & Ryan, 2007; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Waddock, 1991). Austin's conceptual model (2000) presented a "collaboration continuum" consisting of three basic stages of institutional partnering between for-profit and public/non-profit organizations: *philanthropic*, *transactional* and *integrative*. This continuum assumes that, as cross-sector relationships move from philanthropic to integrative approaches, "the strategic value of the collaboration escalates from modest to major" (p. 34). In the first stage, encompassing traditional forms of corporate and private philanthropy and charity, the underlying social contract revolves around in-kind donation of resources (such as infrastructure, goods, services, labor, cash, discounts) from a business beneficiary to a public/non-profit organization such as public schools. Because the corporate benefactor may not expect direct financial rewards, Austin's model assumes the givers' underlying motivation is altruistic. Although public

recognition does occur as, for example, in a firm's name appearing on materials and lists of donors, and although businesses can economically benefit from tax incentives for charitable donations, the primary exchange between the benefactor and a school is considered one-way giving with no expectation of direct economic or non-economic returns to the giver (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007, p. 248).

In the *transactional stage*, business organizations shift the basic terms of involvement to include direct rewards. Through techniques such as corporate sponsorship, cause-related marketing, and exclusive contracting, a business will provide financial or other resources to a school in exchange for some direct compensation such as advertising space or marketing opportunities. Sponsorship was developed to emphasize the marketing potential existing within charitable endeavors. Businesses sought to legitimize sponsorship as a quantifiable commercial activity. Including measurable rewards to the corporate sponsor creates institutional relationships based on market principles, whereby both parties stand to benefit directly. Early on, businesses realized that if they wished "to exploit the commercial potential of sponsorship, the sponsor had to invest further monies…to leverage the sponsorship" (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007, p.251). For example, on top of resources provided to a school, a business may spend an additional 50% on things like merchandising, advertising, incentives, awards, and competitions that help render the sponsorship commercially viable.

For this reason, this form of sponsorship is typically called 'commercial sponsorship' and described as "an investment in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity" (Meenaghan, 1991, p. 36). While introducing strategic commercial practices has

strengthened the business case for social investments, integrating "the language of exploitation" in the conceptual vocabulary of sponsorships has also provided openings for social critics who challenge the practice as a dangerous trade-off for public education to engage with businesses that view schools and other public spaces as commercially exploitable markets (e.g. Beder, 2002; Boyles, 2005; Burch, 2008; Consumer Reports, 1999; Molnar, 2005; Saltman, 2002, 2005, 2009). Perceiving the unequal power relations governing PPPs, which generally favor corporations over social organizations, these critics warn that schools' interests may be undermined or squeezed out as corporations exploit the profit-oriented benefits of partnerships and philanthropy.

Partly in response to criticisms of commercial orientation, the movement for corporate social responsibility developed an alternate approach of 'social sponsorship.' This form of corporate interaction ostensibly seeks to re-establish the philanthropic foundations of corporate involvement in the public sector, while still attending to the interests of business in strengthening brand identity and reputation. Wragg (1994) explains, "social sponsorship is the hybrid between sponsorship and charitable donation" (p.14). The essential motivations behind commercial sponsorship and social sponsorship are slightly different. In commercial sponsorship, the primary motivation is "developing brand association, increasing sales promotion or advertising a product or service" (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007, p.253). In social sponsorship, the primary aim is "to meet social needs hence facilitating the company to address its social responsibilities" (ibid).

Although both forms of sponsorship are used to promote the corporate sponsor in social and economic terms, there is a difference of degree and purpose. Commercial sponsorship provides resources to social organizations in exchange for tangible benefits

that the company can measure, such as advertising space and time, whereas social

sponsorship aims to build intangible benefits of public goodwill and positive brand

association by investing in social organizations. As a result, social sponsorship relies less

heavily on traditional advertising or direct marketing in schools. Both kinds of

sponsorship provide resources to schools, such as the running, support, and/or publicizing

of school assemblies, events, and contests, the provision of school sporting equipment, or

the renovation of schools' educational or athletic facilities. However, in commercial

sponsorship, the corporate donor's image usually appears more prominently.

Austin's (2000) last level of collaboration, the *integrative stage*, includes

partnerships representing higher degrees of interaction that are more fluid and mutually

structured than other cross-sector relationships. Central to this conceptualization is

Waddock's (1988) definition of 'social partnerships':

> A commitment by a corporation or a group of corporations to work with an
> organization from a different economic sector (public or non-profit). It involves a
> commitment of resources—time and effort—by individuals from all partner
> organizations. These individuals work cooperatively to solve problems that affect
> them all. The problem can be defined at least in part as a social issue; its solution
> will benefit all partners. Social partnership addresses issues that extend beyond
> organizational boundaries and traditional goals and lie within the traditional realm
> of public policy—that is, in the social arena. It requires active rather than passive
> involvement from all parties. Participants must make a resource commitment that
> is more than merely monetary. (p. 18)

From this view, social partnerships tackle intractable societal problems that

individual organizations find too overwhelming or complex to deal with alone. The

social issue taken on by a partnership affects all organizations involved, though perhaps

not in the same ways or for the same reasons. Each organization must contribute

substantially and not simply monetarily. Individuals from all parties play active roles in

developing and implementing the partnership, a condition that "contrasts with the more

passive forms of involvement possible…by donors in philanthropic endeavors"
(Waddock, 1991, p.483).

Social partnerships possess some powerful organizational characteristics not realized in other forms of cross-sector interaction. For example, successful partnerships have been identified as reflecting "reciprocity, system openness, an atmosphere of trust and commitment, and compatible organizational structures" (Beder, 1984, p. 85). In a report on school-community partnerships (including those with business), Cahill (1996) extended an analysis of the factors that make up a successful partnership, identifying several strategies in practice and highlighting the importance of clearly spelling out the goals, purposes and assumptions of each partnering organization. Furthermore, partners continually develop resources and benefits that are of value to each partner. Other research supports the notion that each organization must realize discernible benefits if the partnership is to be sustainable over time (Kanter, 1994; Austin, 2000; Waddock, 1988, 1991). However, Smith & Wohlstetter (2006) maintain, "a reciprocal arrangement does not mean identical (or even symmetric) benefits or resources are expended; what one partner receives may differ significantly from the benefit enjoyed by another" (p.250).

A crucial feature of developing mutually beneficial partnerships, and not merely adopting partnership rhetoric, is "a recognition, by all concerned, not only of the benefits of a partnership approach, but also of the inherent costs involved in taking such an approach" (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007, p. 254). Some identified costs include constraints placed on managerial autonomy when operating in coordination with another organization, structural barriers to collaboration, and the time and financial resources

required to sustain a partnership (ibid). Without overtly addressing these instrumental

costs, partnerships run greater risks of failing to achieve their intended goals.

In assessing the benefits of partnership, Austin's (2000) and Kanter's (1994)

research assumes that increasing collaboration will lead to increased levels of mutual

exchange and greater benefits to the partners. Although these authors write about the

importance of strong ties in enhancing benefits on both sides of a partnership, weak ties

may lead to equally important or improved outcomes (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Little

(1990) makes this point in her article on the persistence of privacy in teaching. She

argues that while much of the literature on teachers' professional relations focuses on

formal teacher collaborations, such as professional learning communities, which require

high degrees of collaboration, the research base has tended to overlook the influences of

informal exchanges on teaching practices. "The primacy that we as researchers place on

rational discourse may have led us to underestimate the cumulative and potentially rich

effect of staff-room stories on teachers' conceptions of their work" (Little, 1990, p. 514).

In the context of school-corporate partnerships, traditional forms of philanthropy

typically comprise a low level of collaboration. However, one cannot assume that greater

interaction inevitably creates circumstances that allow partnering organizations to better

address a social problem. A traditional philanthropic relationship, characterized by the

corporate donor's passive engagement with direct interactions primarily occuring only

among organizational leaders (Frumkin, 2003), can offer significant resources to a public

school while requiring schools to spend little time and energy to sustain that relationship

(e.g. regular communication, joint coordination of activities, and the handling of

administrative paperwork).

In response to organizational theories that favor strong collaborative ties as the pinnacle of interaction, Smith & Wohlstetter (2006) proposed a non-hierarchical typology that attends closely to the individual contexts and circumstances of partnerships. Rather than prefiguring the importance of different forms of involvement, these authors suggested a "flat typology" to describe school partnerships. A partnership can first be distinguished based on its origin (p. 254). By whom, for what reasons, and in what ways partnerships originate are crucial to understanding how they operate. Next, a partnership can be differentiated by its particular content focus and the resources exchanged (i.e. financial, human, physical, organizational). In terms of the partnership's content, it is important to understand the scope of the social issue being targeted, as well as the degree of interdependence among organizational players (Waddock, 1991). Third, partnerships vary by institutional form, ranging from formalized, contractual agreements to informal relationships arranged entirely through private conversations and a handshake between leaders. Lastly, Smith & Wohlstetter examined the depth of employee involvement and the organizational level at which the problem finds salience (Waddock, 1991). One-level involvement includes only a single layer of staff, such as organizational leaders, while multi-level involvement cuts across several levels of employees and other participants.

Smith & Wohlstetter's descriptive typology considers different types of cross-sector interaction on a case-by-case basis, attending to the history, aims, needs, and actions of individual school-based partnerships. At the same time, a major limitation of this and other typologies discussed earlier lies in the lack of explicit political orientation. Institutional relationships always include aspects of politics, as institutional actors jostle for position and power. Power and politics is always present, though often

unacknowledged, in the governance arrangements and language games of social institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Hodge & Greve, 2010). In Rowan's (2006) words, "education in the United States (and in most other advanced capitalist societies) is both *big politics* and *big business*" (p. 18). PPPs are not ideologically neutral policies designed to address agreed upon social problems. Which social and educational problems find greatest salience in the academy and in the media, and which ones are marginalized; whose interpretations of societal problems find voice, and whose get silenced; whose visions of reinvented educational institutions find footing, and whose get pushed out: these contested issues shape and are shaped by the politics of language and knowledge production.

Theoretically constrained by a view that brackets itself from these everyday political realities, Smith & Wohlstetter's typology suffers from epistemological reductionism in depicting a relatively neutral sociocultural space of partnerships. When they assess the merits of partnerships in improving school performance, Smith & Wohlstetter focus primarily on access to additional resources and expertise and then applying those resources in practical ways (see also, Choin-Kenney, 1989, Edelstein, 1989; Gonsalves, 2003). Ball (2007) argues that much of the literature on partnerships conveys "a sense of a benign and purposeful relationship between equals. The possibilities of *negative synergy* are usually ignored" (p.117). The existence of a partnership, its ability to sustain itself organizationally over time in competitive quasi-markets of education is often uncritically equated with success and societal value creation. Inquiring into the potentials for "negative synergy" would question PPPs' underlying logic.

While educational research on partnerships is needed that pragmatically addresses how to "facilitate their potential to address increasing financial difficulties, workforce needs, and demands for student learning and achievement" (Bennett & Thompson, 2011, p.3), equally so, research is needed that considers a gamut of organizational questions "not caught up with the assumptions and inscriptions of policymakers and the immediacy of practice" (Ball, 2006, p.20). This means interrogating aspects of policies and practice that move beyond questions of "what works" to consider for whom, why, or how PPPs work. The next section takes up some of these broader questions associated with ideological trends in partnership discourse, focusing on a counter-discourse that frames PPPs as instruments of privatization in education.

Counter Discourse: PPPs as Privatizations in Education

> *My approach is Leave No Dollar Behind . . . There are tremendous needs in this system where 85 percent of the kids are below poverty level. I'm not uncomfortable with corporations giving us money and getting their names on things. As long as it's not inappropriate* [e.g. tobacco and liquor companies]*, I don't see any downside.* (Paul Vallas, Chief Executive Officer of the Philadelphia schools, quoted in Lewin, 2006)

> *Private support for schools cannot just be about money to name school gyms and cafeterias. Rather, through strategic philanthropy, corporate America has the resources and manpower to invest in making education more equitable. Public-private partnerships can help change the way education takes place inside and outside the classroom, and create more positive relationships between disadvantaged students and successful adults…. Increasingly, urban high school students are outsiders to the American dream. Public-private partnerships have the power to change this by instilling new hope and offering real prospects.* (Weil & Ferrandino, 2006, A22)

The dominant perspective on PPPs in corporate philanthropy is aptly captured in the N.Y. Times editorial above, written by two industry leaders in philanthropy, Sanford Weil, former Chairman of Citigroup and the National Academy Foundation (NAF), and John Ferrandino, President of the NAF. They conjure emotive and persuasive images,

and sharply depict the enormity of the problem. There is a crisis in America's schools, which increasingly excludes urban youth from the promise of American exceptionalism. Corporate industry, poised and uniquely empowered, possesses the capacity to redress these inequities. Corporate participation in public education represents a guiding beacon of hope in change, drawing on the best of the corporate world, to deliver on the promise of education as the great equalizer in meritocratic society. These assumptions underlie the dominant discourse on public-private partnerships in education.

Often used in combination with notions of modernization and economic development (Levine & Trachman, 1988), partnerships conjure up rosy images of the government and the private sector joining forces to create a brighter and more efficient future. In this view, PPPs allow for coordinated institutional efforts and synergistic relations, whereby "the public sector draws attention to public interest, stewardship and solidarity considerations…(and) the private sector is creative and dynamic, bringing access to finance, knowledge of technologies, managerial efficiency, and entrepreneurial spirit" (Rosenau, 2000, p.218). Partnerships are thus viewed as a vital tool to combat "the bureaucracy and regulation (of) public schooling that stifle…the genius of the American system…to nurture ingenuity, foster voluntary cooperation, and provide opportunities for individual and entrepreneurial initiative" (Hess, 2005, p.3).

Particularly since the 1980s, the problems of public schooling are dominantly framed in economic terms and assumed to be enormous, growing, and intractable. As Smith & Wohlstetter (2001) assert, "urban school districts in the United States have come under increasing scrutiny and criticism for failing to prepare students adequately for entering the internationally competitive economy of the 21st Century" (p. 499). Critics

of public schools maintain that bloated and inefficient public institutions are incapable of providing high-quality education without the assistance, intervention, or emulation of the marketplace (Whitty & Power, 2000; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). Market-oriented educational reforms, including PPPs, are often seen as essential to establishing more efficient and effective educational systems, as practical alternatives to public governance, or as incubators of innovation to help solve recalcitrant problems of schooling, such as access, quality and equity issues (Patrinos, Osorio & Guáqueta, 2009).

Challenges on Multiple Fronts to the Prevailing Logic of Partnerships

While America's dominant culture generally supports close private or corporate involvement in public sector education, this proposition has been challenged on a number of fronts, garnering passionate if not widespread opposition from both the left and the right. From a neoclassical perspective, the notion that corporations should promote social goals or have a social conscience is "pure and unadulterated socialism" (Freidman, 1970, p.33). CSR discourse forced Freidman, and more classical liberal thinkers in business, to contend with its ideas and shift as a result. Neoclassical economic theories continue, however, to find ground in research and practice, as witnessed, for example, in the frequency of studies focused on the business case for CSR that aim to show positive correlations or causal links between a firm's social responsiveness and its financial performance (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Godfrey, 2005; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

Liberal progressive educators have also raised critical questions about the core motivations and outcomes of corporate philanthropy and PPPs. In a conceptual study of public-private partnerships, Kowalski (2010) demonstrates that educational PPPs often embody "democratic deficits," which render "these ventures incompatible with the

concept of local control and potentially detrimental to school reform" (p. 72). Fege &

Hagelshaw (2000) contend that partnering with corporations increasingly supplants more

than supplements the traditional base for school taxes as opportunities are created for

states, cities and towns to abdicate funding obligations in education. Thus, while many

school leaders choose to enter partnerships to enhance financial and other resources,

these decisions may erode public-financing options in the long run.

Liberal historian Diane Ravitch (2010) maintains that corporate philanthropy, as

an instrument of the market, is unsuitable to address public education's communal tasks.

Ravitch describes how the 'Billionaire Boys Club'—the Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation—have freshly

championed the market model in the American school system, targeting investments in

education to influence urban school reform through back channel means that circumvent

traditional mechanisms for public accountability in decision-making. Ravitch argues that

the power that corporate partners possess, their ability to make decisions without

stakeholder consultation, and the general "amiable conspiracy of silence" (Hess, 2005,

p.9) afforded corporate philanthropies by mainstream news outlets, policy experts, and

academics, cumulatively, lead corporate donors to take significantly greater risks than

government in tinkering with schools.

Overall, in relative proportion to state funding, philanthropic investments in

education are small, a mere "rounding error on local, state, and federal public budgets"

(Ferris, 2011, p.709), representing less than two-tenths of one percent of public schooling

budgets (Greene, 2005). Nevertheless, advocates argue that its institutional flexibility is

precisely what makes corporate philanthropic involvement in education reform attractive

(Frumkin, 2006; Hess, 2005). However, Ravitch warns that "before relinquishing control of public policy to private interests, public officials should be sure that they understand the full implications of the foundations' strategies" (p. 201). Although the Gates, Broad, and Walton foundations command the most influence and set the tone in the field, hundreds of philanthropies collectively contribute over $41 billion annually to K–12 education, though not exclusively in the public sector (See Figure 4.1).

Biggest beneficiary sectors

Religious organizations . . . . $100.63 billion (35%)
Other . . . . $89.1 billion (31%)
Education. . . . . $41.67 billion (14%)
Foundations . . . . $33.00 billion (11%)
Human services . . . . $26.49 billion (9%)
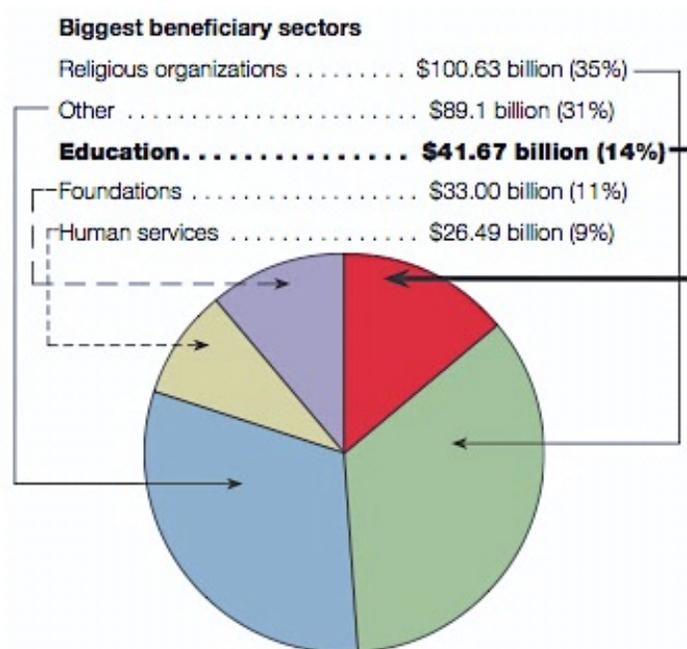
Figure 2.4: Biggest Beneficiary Sectors: Total 2010 U.S. charitable contributions, $290.89 billion. Source: Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University (2011).

Barkan (2011) argues that this billionaires' club has generally supported education

reform efforts that promote:

> Choice, competition, deregulation, accountability, and data-based decision-making. And they fund the same vehicles to achieve their goals: charter schools, high-stakes standardized testing for students, merit pay for teachers whose students improve their test scores, firing teachers and closing schools when scores don't rise adequately, and longitudinal data collection on the performance of every student and teacher. (p. 49)

Newer corporate philanthropies, such as Gates, Broad, Walton, Microsoft, the Wal-Mart

Family Foundation, the Donald and Doris Fisher Foundation (Gap Inc.), and the

Robertson Foundation, assume a more businesslike, data-driven, and results-oriented

approach to giving than older philanthropies, such as Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller,

which emerged at the start of the 20th century (Saltman, 2010; Scott, 2009). Through

educational policy and research funding, these philanthropies serve as a loose grouping of

powerful players and key drivers of U.S. and global educational change agendas. This

new and old philanthropic establishment comprises "a de facto advocacy coalition, they

often fund the same educational initiatives and organizations, gauge success according to

similar outcome measures, and pursue similar goals" (Scott, 2009, p. 107). Their policy

directives target in-school and out-of-school improvement initiatives for low income and

minority youth and focus directly on enhancing social outcomes and inclusion for non-

dominant populations.

However, the newer venture philanthropists tend to fund those educational

programs and groups that articulate the values, principles, and language of the market for

social exchanges. Moreover, this hybridized approach to philanthropy fuses concepts

from venture capitalism and business management with philanthropic giving in education

(Saltman, 2010). Adopting business techniques of venture capital results, for example, in

donors making "a small number of large bets. After making these bets, the (donor) stays

with the organizations that are funded for an extended period of time, assuming the

organization can demonstrate progress and results" (Frumkin, 2003, p. 11). These

methods rely on extended and intensified contact between corporate donors and

recipients through high engagement strategies, such as systematic tracking and

monitoring of outputs and outcomes and ongoing consultation provided by the donor for

continuous program improvement (ibid). In exchange, philanthropies expect high returns

on investments—not in financial returns but in data such as key performance indicators

of student academic achievement (Saltman, 2010).

Ravitch and others contend that the educational and social benefits of these

market-based reforms tend not to be supported by the peer-reviewed research literature,

nor many of the corporation-funded studies, when one considers measures other than (or

in addition to) standardized test scores. For instance, while education management

organizations like the KIPP network, which are heavily funded by venture philanthropy,

have posted record gains for students in achievement scores, graduation rates, and college

admission rates, selection procedures in these non-traditional schools have also been

linked to disproportionately low enrollment rates of students with disability, non-native

English speakers, and boys of color—groups that tend to register below average test

scores. Moreover, the strict discipline codes exercised in KIPP schools may contribute to

the high dropout rates they experience (David et al 2006; Woodworth et al, 2008). These

social equity issues arguably create greater pressures on traditional public schools, which

have witnessed budget cuts as funds are siphoned to these non-traditional schools. At the

same time, their enrollment rates show increased concentrations of so-called 'at-risk'

students (Ravitch, 2009).

Scott (2009) emphasizes another problematic tension in philanthropic policy-

making. She shows that many of these new philanthropies were formed in the 1990s—a

period marked by the emergence of "the greatest wealth gap in U.S. history," a trend

aided in part by the fact that "the majority of U.S. corporations have paid no federal

income taxes since that time period, allowing corporations to amass unprecedented

profits and for executives to enjoy record compensation packages" (p. 127). As a small

subset of Americans rapidly expanded their wealth, growing numbers of young people

and adults have been thrust into long-term and extreme poverty, increasingly left out of

the prosperities of globalized capitalism. The expanding social problems of poverty and

wealth inequality create serious repercussions for youth educational opportunities,

particularly because these youth face obstacles in gaining stable access to housing, food,

health care, employment, and physically and environmentally safe neighborhoods

(Berliner, 2006, 2009). Within this structured fragmentation between the super rich and

the poor, Scott (2009) exposes a key tension in the political economy of philanthropic

engagement in education:

> Wealth that comes largely from favorable public policies is now directed into
> mostly tax-exempt foundations, where trustees and philanthropists directly shape
> public policy for the poor, without the public deliberative process that might have
> been invoked over school reform policies were that money in the public coffers.
> (p. 128)

In other words, deregulating industries has contributed to vast wealth inequalities and

created opportunities for corporate elites to shelter their wealth in private foundations that

engage in educational policy making outside of the checks and balances of local school

board control. However, corporate philanthropists who choose to enter the "iron cage" of

school reform (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) face the realities of complex and uncertain

work. As Ferris, Hentschke & Harmssen (2008) explain of school policymaking:

> It is messy, unpredictable, and beyond the control of any individual or
> organization. As a consequence, it is risky in terms of producing the desired
> outcomes…The inherently public nature of elementary and secondary
> education—in terms of public funding, bureaucratic supply, the broad scale
> concern and expectations about education quality, and the entrenched interests of
> groups such as teacher unions and school administrators—makes efforts to reform
> schools risky. (p.707)

In spite of the obstacles, increasing numbers of corporations, private businesses, and affiliated foundations are engaging with public educational practice and policymaking.

Not all school-business partnerships are directly involved in educational policy. Many partnerships can be characterized along a related continuum of privatizations—that of schoolhouse commercialism. Critical pedagogues have reacted strongly to commercial interests in school-corporate partnerships, arguing that it erodes public schooling's democratic and civic functions and hampers young people's educational opportunities to become fully autonomous beings (Boyles, 2005; Giroux, 1999, 2002; Molnar, 1996, 2005; Saltman, 2005, 2010; Schor, 2004). These critics argue that integrating market-oriented interests into education destabilizes schooling's fundamental purposes in that these relationships "promote consumer materialism, thwart critical agency, and negatively alter what it means to be a citizen" (Boyles, 2005a, p. ix). In general, these authors reject the possibility of "positive synergy" arising from corporate engagement in education (Ball, 2007). They suggest that corporate philanthropy masks the ultimate goal of maximizing profits in a shroud of charity, community development, and corporate responsibility. Schools, educators, and youth are viewed as collateral damage from the encroachment of corporate culture into public education.

Schor (2004) argues that as a result of America's increasingly commercially saturated culture, "American teens and tweens have emerged as the most brand-oriented, consumer involved, and materialistic generations in history" (p. 13). Standing behind this reality is a "marketing juggernaut characterized by growing reach, effectiveness, and audacity" (ibid, p.20). More and more, marketers aim to aggressively target young people and create a "total advertising environment" in and out of schools "by blurring the

boundaries between editorial content and advertising and thus thoroughly infusing childhood with marketing messages" (Molnar et al, 2009, p. 3). These criticisms point to the obscuring of distinctions between the public and private self, both in and out of schools, as market relations seep into every facet of children's lives, thus altering what it means to be a person, student, teacher, or parent in today's world.

Something Old and Something New

For many critical observers, partnerships present a seemingly new and innocuous image in place of the more controversial and longstanding privatization agenda in education, which long predates the term PPPs (Ball, 2007; Boyles, 2005; Hatcher, 2006). Privatization has been defined as "the transfer of assets and service functions from public to private hands. It includes activities that range from selling state-owned enterprises to contracting out public services with private contractors" (Hanker cited in Mhone, 2005, p.1907). There are many varieties of privatization. "Although privatization is an imprecise term with different meanings in different contexts, it broadly refers to loosening governmental control over public operations" (Haubrich, 2007, p.481). PPPs represent one multifaceted set of institutional arrangements related to privatization. Each form of privatization spells out different financial arrangements and contracts, which implicate different ways of brokering relationships between owners, funders, managers, service workers (teachers), and clients (students) (Burch, 2009).

In education, certain forms of privatization are quite commonplace and reflect mundane realities of schooling. A wide range of activities have routinely and historically involved private sector ownership and participation, such as textbook publishing and sales (Apple, 1989), testing and assessment instruments (Lagemann, 2000), school

construction and renovation, and student transportation (Ball, 2007). However, privatizations have also morphed into other newer forms, and at a scale not seen in the past. "The state has always bought and sold property, purchased services and encouraged enterprise but the scale of privatization in the past two decades has been unparalleled" (Whitfield 2001, p.75). In the early 1980s, approximately 17% of U.S. K-12 schools reported engaging in some form of partnership with at least one private or corporate organization. By 1989, this figure jumped to 40% (Marenda, 1989). Today, almost all public schools, particularly urban schools, maintain at least one public-private partnership in wide-ranging initiatives (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009; Colvin, 2005; Greene, 2005).

Ball (2007) maintains that the current wave of privatization is composed of a "fundamental redesign of the public sector. This involves private and not-for-profit companies and voluntary and community organizations and NGOs and parastatal organizations in income–generating activities inside the public sector" (p.13). While public schools have long outsourced or contracted non-instructional services to the private sector, it is only since the 1990s that private firms have played central roles in delivering core instructional services, school management, test data storage and analysis, supplemental or remedial education services for 'at-risk' youth, and online curriculum and instruction (Ascher, Fruchter, & Berne, 1996). What once served as an apparent barrier to direct corporate influence and control has been ruptured. However, as private firms and corporations have intensified their actions in K-12 public education, the market relationships of this social phenomenon have tended to remain invisible to the public eye, creating what Burch (2009) calls, "hidden markets" in public education.

These hidden markets have generated large and growing revenues. Combined, private and corporate firms earn on average almost $4 billion annually through publicly funded contracts to provide management, curriculum, and instructional services to schools (Rowan, 2006). In 2003, the top-ten publicly traded national education firms cumulatively realized profits of $430 million. In 2008, these firms yielded $780 million (Burch, 2010). Textbook publishers aggregate over $1.85 billion each year from K-12 school contracts, and companies providing K-12 research (not including universities, some of which are also private and for-profit) make approximately $550 million each year (Rowan, 2006). Many see public education as representing a still vastly untapped market. For example, after acquiring a large education technology firm, Rupert Murdoch of News Corp. described K-12 education as "a $500 billion sector in the US alone that is waiting to be transformed" (Fang, 2012, p.17).

Since the 1990s, Molnar and his colleagues at the Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education have identified and tracked different forms of activities that for-profit business organizations deploy in schools. This research center publishes an annual report analyzing trends in schoolhouse commercialism, a particular form of privatization, based on its typology of business involvement in schools (see Appendix V). This research provides a detailed description of what for-profit firms do in schools. Although since the authors focus on commercialism, they exclude from their analyses activities related to the policy environment, such as business roundtables and corporate philanthropy.

Molnar (2005) and other cultural critics of privatization warn, "Education is being commodified, turned into something that is bought and sold in a market as if it was bread,

cars or plasma screen TVs. It is being treated internally as a business and put on a market like other businesses" (Apple, 2006, 153). They see commercialism in schools as an unsightly tradeoff of partnering with corporations, which results in schooling environments "where income is derived from vending machines, displays of sponsors logos and advent of TV advertisements streamed at students via Channel One television" (Fitz and Beers 2002, p.140). Boyles (2005) argues that, in most cases, school-corporate "partnerships exploit schools in the sense that they make unethical use of schools for their own profit" (p.218). Let us now look at one case in greater detail.

In today's schools, teachers have access to a vast array of "free" educational materials, such as computer-assisted tools and traditional text and multimedia environments, provided through corporate sponsors and readily available for classroom use. One of the earliest known examples of private business creating and disseminating educational materials is that of a paint company in 1890, which designed a pamphlet about primary and secondary colors to be used in art classes, and which displayed company advertising (Molnar, 2005). Molnar and Reaves (2002) estimate that, in the decade between 1990 and 2000, corporate sponsored educational materials grew exponentially, increasing approximately 1,875%. Throughout the history of public schooling, critical observers have expressed various concerns with these sorts of materials. For example, the enormous volume and steady stream of sponsored materials, sometimes referred to as industry "propaganda," tend not be reviewed or evaluated by other qualified educators (Harty, 1979; NEA, 1929; Spenny, 1996). Since these materials routinely enter schools at the classroom/teacher level, state and local school boards are not afforded opportunities to systematically vet them, which can unwittingly undercut

educational quality. In a mundane sense, an over abundance of sponsored materials can also be distracting for teachers and students who already contend with busy academic and testing schedules (Consumers Union, 1998; Molnar & Reaves, 2002).

Still more troubling issues arise when the corporate sponsor's underlying motives conflict with the educational interests of schools. For instance, take the goal of developing students' critical thinking skills for participation in a democratic societt. In tension with one another are the schools' responsibilities to educate youth and the corporations' economic responsibilities to generate profits. Corporate critics fear that market-based motives continually push corporate sponsors to attempt to "create student experiences and shape student attitudes in ways that support, or at least do not undermine, the corporate bottom line" (Molnar, Boninger, & Fogarty, 2011). In an extensive and critical review of "industry propaganda" in U.S. schools, Harty (1979) remained skeptical of corporate involvement, warning, "as far back as Horace Mann, industry has seen public education as a vehicle for indoctrination – both for the general status quo and for their own private profit purposes" (p.1).

One recent illustration of the tensions between the functions of schools and corporations comes from Scholastic Inc., the children's publishing company and long-time corporate partner in education. In 2010, Scholastic began producing and marketing sponsored educational materials for two organizations in the energy sector: Shell Oil, a global conglomerate of energy and petrochemical companies (http://www.shell.com/). Shell's "Energize Your Future" curriculum, developed for middle and high school students, teaches about the social imperative to develop alternative energy sources and touts Shell's socially responsible initiatives to produce innovative solutions to the world's

energy problems (Molnar, Boninger, & Fogarty, 2011; Shell, 2012a). The sponsored

website, documercial videos (see *Figure 2.5* below), teachers' guide, classroom visuals,

28 different standards-based lesson plans, and suggestions for project-based learning,

cumulatively illustrate Shell's role as a leader in the development of new resources and

technology to address global energy challenges (Shell, 2012b, 2012c).

The curriculum takes participants through interactive learning environments,

which are intended to supplement classroom teaching and are linked to national

educational standards in science, mathematics, geography, engineering, and technology.

It explores examples of how, "around the globe, Shell companies work in partnership

with industry, government and society to deliver what is expected—economically,

socially and environmentally" (Shell, 2012). However, the curriculum presents the

current global problem of energy in terms that never question the underlying logic of

fossil fuel exploration, production, or consumption, while simultaneously promoting

solutions that will meet anticipated escalations in consumer demand.

Figure 2.5: Energized by Shell (retrieved at= http://www.shell.us/)

One classroom poster plainly frames the most pressing problem: "Challenge: By 2050, the worldwide demand for energy is expected to double. Solution: Get energy from many different sources" (Shell, 2012c). The materials provide details that demonstrate Shell's commitment as a leader in developing renewable sources of energy, such as wind, solar, and hydrogen. However, as CorpWatch (2012) reports, "Shell spends a miniscule 0.6% of its annual investments on renewables." Shell's posturing regarding its professed environmental protectionism amounts to greenwashing, or what Vos (2009) calls:

> Talking the talk without walking the walk. Most corporations do not greenwash their reputations by lying outright. Rather, they bend the truth or misrepresent their ecological stances. The deception often lies in the emphasis corporations place on their ecological projects, rather than in the existence of the projects themselves. (p. 679)

Shell was attracted to partnering with Scholastic because of its strong reputation and long track record of marketing and selling curriculum and literature to/in/with U.S. schools. The energy sector company sought to strategically exploit Scholastic's position and influence within schools so as to conduct cause-related activities that might divert attention away from environmentally problematic aspects of its industry and its company practices.

After Scholastic sponsored another energy producer's educational materials, it seemed caught off guard when community and parent groups, which were informed by special interest organizations such as the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (http://commercialfreechildhood.org/), effectively mobilized against its promotion of the American Coal Foundation's (http://teachcoal.org) curriculum (Lewin, 2011). As protests mounted, Scholastic made the decision to terminate corporate partnerships with energy companies, including Shell. Richard Robinson, the CEO of Scholastic, called the initial decision to disseminate these materials "a slip-up in editorial judgment" and explained that, "We have to improve our standards and make sure there's not a scintilla of anything that could be suggested to be biased" (Lewin, 2011). Such grassroots opposition to corporate greenwashing demonstrates community-based potentialities to stoke public debates over corporations' roles in K-12 education and to effectively challenge a corporation's social license to operate. In effect, this example illustrates what can happen when conscious citizens choose to resist "the 'givens' of an imposed 'real world'" (Greene, cited in Boyles, 2005, p.220) by deliberately countering hegemonic forces and the rationality of dominant discourse.

The discourse of privatizations offers a conceptual basis by which to interrogate the contested aspects of partnership relationships not usually explored in the dominant discourse of PPPs. Without having a framework that explicitly integrates partnerships' asymmetrical power dimensions, we might interpret Shell's "free" instructional resources differently. The lessons are designed intuitively with clear standards-based learning goals and offer activities that many teachers would likely find interesting and interactive. The accompanying website provides technology savvy teens the allure of web 2.0, with its fasted-paced style and manipulative digital tools. The curriculum is well produced and clearly made by professionals with a sound background in curriculum and instructional design.

While these sponsored materials do not directly sell Shell products to students, they do represent, in Sukarieh & Tannock's (2009) words, "corporate efforts to promote ideologies, identities, agendas, and viewpoints to children and youth, both in the classroom and beyond" (p. 770). Much of the critical privatization literature (particularly the anti-commercialism literature) focuses on the most blatant forms of corporate advertising and marketing to children without placing school-corporate interactions within broad socio-historical relationships and institutional structures. They fail to articulate, for instance, how the intermingling of schools and corporations over generations has contributed to fundamental transformations of the political and professional conditions in which education is carried out. In contrast, Ball (2006) investigates and explains how:

> The market has 'paradigmatic status' for 'any form of institutional organization and provision of goods and services' (du Gay, 1991, p. 41). All of this does not simply bring about technical changes in the management and delivery to

services—it involves changes in the meaning and experience of education, what it means to be a teacher and learner. (p. 127)

Throughout this chapter, I have provided some social, cultural, and historical context for the contemporary corporate presence in urban schools.[18] By exploring, from a variety of ideological perspectives, the meanings, intentions, and rationales for corporate-school interactions, I have sought to better understand the assumptions that motivate cross-sector relationships, where these assumptions originate, and in what ways they press upon the shape and texture of schooling. In other words, I have examined how the embedded nature of market-oriented values in our culture subtly influences the ways that schools are expected, and also expect themselves, to interact with corporations. I have discussed how historical cycles of corporate involvement in education have laid the foundation for "choices, ideas, and actions concerning school–business partnerships that are being embraced currently" (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2009, p. 772).

The discourse on privatizations adds crucial details to the landscape of partnerships, illuminating political, social, and economic factors. However, like other discourses, this one also has trouble seeing realities outside of its own ideological boundaries. In the previous section, I suggested that the dominant discourse on PPPs reflects a kind of 'epistemological monoculture' (Code, 2008) in its failure to incorporate power and politics in examining partnerships. The counter-discourse of privatizations reveals its own monoculture, though, in frequently rejecting the possibility that substantive good can come from corporate involvement in education.

When cultural critics of corporatization take aim at the most commercialized examples or obvious instances of greenwashing, but leave unmapped more complex corporate social responsibility initiatives or social partnerships, they metaphorically

construct a one-dimensional figure that they then mock for its simplicity. At the same time, exercising skepticism and casting doubt on the assumed wisdom of partnerships must not be conflated with a blanket presumption of exploitative motivations or oppressive outcomes.

Ball's (2007) research resists the urge to castigate all corporate influences in public education. While his accounts are sharply attuned to subtle maneuverings of power, he is careful to assess the multi-directionality of social change, which leaves conceptual room for complex portrayals of public-private partnerships' processes and products by considering their positive, negative, and paradoxical effects. Nevertheless, he is blunt in his rendering of "an emerging Market Society…which becomes embedded in our daily lives through an array of subtle processes that take shape as the flesh and bones of dominant discourse" (p. 185). Akin to what Foucault (1971) calls the "orders of discourse," the diffuse forces of globalized capitalism have brought about a "multi-dimensional regularity, a new 'order of things', a new set of conditions for the possibility of social relations" (Ball, 2007, p.185). In this new regularity, education is increasingly subject to the language and norms of economic competitiveness and market value. In educational policy, research, and practice, the economy does rein supreme, continually reshaping normative assumptions about what it means to teach, learn, and lead in schools today. More and more, education's complex nature is seen as something reducible into finite, standardized units to be measured, controlled, and harnessed for profit.

The research community's reaction to this creeping corporatization "cannot be based on a simple assertion that everything we now have has to be defended" (Apple, 2006, p.44). When Ravitch (2009) theorizes about the nature and consequences of this

collapsing space between public and private in U.S. education, she romanticizes a past in which the public sector worked in the common interest, protecting traditional values, ties, and morals. Similarly, Saltman (2005) claims that in the past schools were largely insolated from the interests of capitalism, and that prior to the advance of globalization, public educational institutions operated chiefly and justly in the public good (p. 199).

The problem with such characterizations is that "community consensus" on these traditional values is not at all agreed upon. Prior to recent waves of privatization, schools were not neutral or innocent places, or devoid of structured forms of racism, classism, and sexism (Bourdieu & Passaron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Macedo, 1994). Past-in-present educational inequities persist, particularly for youth from poor, working- class, and socio-linguistically minoritized communities (Bartolomé, 1994; Crawford & Bartolomé, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These socio-political realities of education remind us that shielding schools from the market will not return these public institutions to an imagined pristine or idyllic past that never existed in the first place. It is not possible to categorically defend public schooling against encroaching privatizations. Likewise, it is naïve to think that all forms of corporate participation, including "successful" ones, are always well intentioned or work efficiently in the interests of schools and youth. My readings of this literature lead me to "an acceptance that some kinds of private sector participation are more defensible than others and some public sector 'work' is not defensible as all that" (Ball, 2007, p. 187). Educators need to critically and fairly assess the breadth of interests, purposes, and effects of each partnership in which they engage.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed and refereed dominant discourses and non-dominant, counter discourses on partnerships. The aim of this work has been to adopt multi-disciplinary thinking and create, in Lorraine Code's (2008) words:

> Theoretical spaces *in-between*, which allow movement back and forth, into and away from the best that mainstream theories of knowledge have to offer, while simultaneously exposing and avoiding their more egregious limitations—or so I hope—and evading the risk of mere fence-sitting" (p. 187-188).[19]

Amidst the complex socio-cultural and techno-rational realities surrounding public schools, this dissertation study points itself in multiple directions to be "sensitive to the detail and larger patternings of human and 'natural' diversity" (Code, 2008, p.47). This means summoning multiple questions about the object of knowledge, such as, is it valuable, useful or efficient? Who realizes these impermanent benefits? How does it work, and for whom? Is it just, and for whom? This approach draws on "criteria and standards of knowing well that do in fact seek and respect empirical evidence, while urging another, arguably better, way of imagining knowledge and its place in social-political, geographic structures" (Code, p.47).

In the case study, coming to a deep understanding of one corporate philanthropic arrangement with schools necessitated ways of knowing that were attentive to the global, situated in the local, socially imaginative, and critically conscious. This "ecological thinking" seeks out multiple, subjective understandings of the world rather than a single, smoothed out, or objective version of reality. Each discourse sketched in this chapter is capable of seeing parts of the world that the others leave out, consciously or unconsciously. Drawing from only one source of knowing might place unnecessary constraints on the sorts of questions asked and the sorts of answers pursued. The salient

aspects of these discourses, in terms of what they have to conceptually offer the study of partnerships and what they tend to overlook, are summarized below.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	CSR as Greenwashing
•Offers a view on corporate decision-making from inside business •Assumes market dominated orientation •Limited consideration of community/school factors or interests	•Offers a critical view on corporate behavior from outside business •Assumes orientation attuned to subtle manipulative uses of public relations •May over-estimate the exploitative motives of corporations
Public-private partnerships (PPPs)	PPPs as Privatizations
•Focuses on institutional intersections •Emphasis on technical questions to enhance usability and efficiencies, i.e. what works? •Limited accounting for socio-political dimensions or negative consequences of partnerships	•Focuses on institutional intersections •Emphasis on unequal distribution of power in partnerships, i.e. works for whom? Is it just? •May over politicize PPPs, with limited insight to improve practice •Overly romantic images of schools and bleak images of corporations

Figure 2.6: Dominant and Non-dominant Discourses on Corporate Social Engagement

This literature review has illuminated the underlying assumptions of each discourse and highlighted key differences across them. Coming from inside and outside the field of education, this literature offers multiple views on the nature of relationships between corporations and public schools. Deconstructing the terms of engagement for school-corporate collaborations raises many more questions than answers. Does most corporate philanthropy that takes place in schools rely on some element of greenwashing? Does greenwashing result in actual harms to schools or youth? Are there any hidden benefits to greenwashing? How can scholarship reliably differentiate between a corporation exercising its business interest in cause-related marketing and presenting an

exaggerated or distorted public image of social responsibility? In what ways do public

schools use corporate images and branding to conduct their own social marketing? By

reflecting on both what gets taken for granted and what is controversial about corporate

participation in public education, this chapter has shed light on the opportunities and

tensions that transpire when corporations and public schools intersect—and has done so

from different perspectives. The case study, presented in the ensuing chapters, delves

into the nature of the longstanding cross-sector collaboration between an urban public

school district and a corporate-owned franchise in the National Basketball Association

(NBA). Through empirical analysis of school perspectives on the concept of partnership,

this case extends some of the questions raised in this literature review and presents new

issues related to the design and implementation of (in)effective and (in)equitable school-

corporate relationships.

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

Nested within the growing nexus between public schools and corporations, this qualitative case study explored the nature of the longstanding cross-sector collaboration between the *River City Public Schools (RPS)*, an urban school district, and the *River City Cobras*, a corporate-owned professional basketball organization in the National Basketball Association (NBA). The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used throughout to analyze multi-modal data from an ethnographic case study of the city's collaboration with the NBA, including participant observations, review of news and media, public records, and extended field interviews with thirty school district leaders, school administrators, teachers, counselors, and coaches in three K-8 schools. Operating from a case study approach (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Yin, 2009), I examined school practitioner discourse on the corporate sports arrangement. Focused on the knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of school professionals, this study pursued the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of relationships that are enacted through an institutionalized philanthropic partnership between an urban public school district and a private corporate organization in the United States?

1.1. What kinds of relationships are established and maintained through this partnership?

1.2. How do school professionals understand the terms of these relationships?

Selection of Research Sites and Participants

This study included three RPS schools and RPS central administration based on purposive sampling—a strategy that can enhance the usefulness of information obtained from relatively small samples. I identified research sites that provided ample

opportunities for learning "not necessarily the worst case, best case, or typical case scenario" (Cook, 2005, p.59). The three K-8 schools in this study each received new technology labs sponsored by the Cobras in 2011. I targeted these schools since they would have had direct interactions with the team throughout the labs' renovation and public unveiling and because the technology labs serve as semi-permanent vestiges of the Cobras organization inside schools. The unveilings of the labs were press-covered events, which included appearances by players, owners, team mascot, corporate executives, and representatives from the affiliated foundations and other corporate sponsors. School-produced photo and video footage of the events is available, as well as team-produced promotional videos and press releases.

The first step in the process of recruiting and selecting research sites and participants was to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). In the spring of 2011, I received authorization from both Boston College's and the River City Public Schools District IRB offices. The initial IRB approval notice is included in Appendix I. Since that time, I have submitted and received continuing IRB approval each year. Following initial institutional approval, I sent letters to central administrators publicly involved in the Cobras partnership and to principals of the four K-8 schools that had received lab donations in the prior school year. A sample outreach letter is provided in Appendix II. Three principals and several district administrators responded with interest in participating. The fourth principal was too overwhelmed to consider my request. All three principals agreed to take part and approved the research in their school.

I invited a wide range of school practitioners to participate in the study. Research participants had at least minimal understanding or knowledge of the Cobras team and

players, team/player involvement in the schools, personal knowledge of the philanthropic

relationship, direct interactions or negotiations with Cobras representatives, or indirect

experience with Cobras' programs. Participants included district-level administrators,

managers, and specialists, principals and assistant school administrators, teachers, two

coordinators of external school relationships, athletic coaches, counselors, and

paraprofessionals. In total, thirty adult school professionals (n=30) took part in the study.

Numerous participants (n=10) were interviewed on more than one occasion, though some

(n=3) are not quoted in the dissertation. The number of participants varied across sites,

but at least six working adults were included at each school, and nine at the district level.

Table 3.1: Research Participants (n=30)
School 1 (n=7 participants)
1 school principal   1 assistant principal   2 coaches (soccer & basketball) who are also school-day educators   2 teachers, not coaches   1 school counselor who is also registrar
School 2 (n=6 participants)
2 school principals (due to turnover)   1 school administrator   1 coach and physical education teacher   2 teachers, not coaches. One of those teachers is also registrar
School 3 (n=8 participants)
1 principal   2 assistant school administrators (turnover)   1 coach (basketball) who is also a school-day teacher and after-school educator   1 coach who is a specialist in the school-day and volunteers after-school   3 teachers, not coaches
Central School District Administration (n=9 participants)
1 Assistant Superintendent for School Innovation & Partnerships   1 Chief of Staff   1 Senior Advisor   1 Director of Partnerships & Institutional Advancement   1 Chief Information Officer (CIO)

- 1 Assistant CIO
- 1 Director of Extended Learning
- 1 Director of Libraries
- 1 Consultant on school development and partnerships

The case study employed certain ethnographic characteristics. For instance, I maintained research relationships with schools and individuals for more than one year. We sometimes only spoke a few times a year, though in some cases, dozens of overlapping conversations took place. I am deeply grateful to each and every one who was willing to work to me and share their time, attention, questions, and perceptions. The fact that often over-burdened educational professionals found pause from their busy work and home lives to play a role in this work is testament to the intellectual engagement of K-12 educators. And it is inspiring for me. Quite often, these research encounters have led to other exchanges and more lasting relationships.

Like other public schools in River City and across the United States, the three schools in this study had many relationships with external organizations. For example, each school officially recorded at least 12 external school partners, which offered various supplemental services such as music and art instruction, after-school activities, organized sports, academic tutoring, teaching assistance, or administrative support. They also partnered with local universities, primarily to participate in university research and to provide student-teaching opportunities for prospective teachers, in which school-day teachers served as mentors. On any given day, numerous programs and professionals visited the schools to teach, to assist teachers, to support school leaders, to gather data, or observe happenings. As one principal explained:

To make this school work like it does, we need to partner with people outside of

these walls. I look for organizations that want to help us with what we're trying to do here. We need people willing to donate themselves and their time to the school... We contract out sometimes... I've co-written grants with other organizations. There are a lot of ways that we partner... But before I let you, before I let anybody, in my school, I need to know who you are...where you're coming from... and that your motives are good. (SA1.S2).

She said later this was both a general rule she assumed when considering potential relationships with any school outsider, and as a specific form of collegial push back directed at me. At this meeting, she joked and made it clear from the outset that she would not offer me special treatment, simply because we shared mutual colleagues. She did not know me personally, and if I wanted access to her school, I needed to convince her that my research warranted her time and that of her teachers:

We've seen a lot of college kids come through these doors to get their PhDs off our sweat and tears. And this is not a scenario that's paid off for us a lot of the time... Everyone's got an agenda. So, I want to know your agenda. What do you want to get out of your research, and what do we stand to gain from it?[20]

I made my research pitch. This pitch often focused on the topic of partnerships or corporate social responsibility, or corporate greed, or public school bashing, or something in between, depending on the audience. I talked about how I believe that, by reflecting critically on why, with whom, and how schools partner, and by applying certain careful or strategic thinking, school leaders, schools, and a collective school system hold the potential power to radically improve how partnerships work in the interests of schools and children. After this conversation, the principal granted me access to the school. Neither of the other two participating principals pushed back in such a direct way.

Meet the Partners: River City Public Schools (RPS)[21]

The research site of practice for this study was the *River City Public Schools* (Confidential Endnote, C.E. 1).[22] Approximately 33% of RPS students were Latino, 33%

African American, and more than 10% white. Almost 80% of RPS students were eligible for free and reduced price meals in school, and at least half of the students' families receive food stamps. More than 25% percent of students were labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs) or Limited English Proficient (LEP), while over 30% were native speakers of languages other than English. Less than 20% of RPS students were classified as having disabilities.

The RPS school system spanned many interconnected organizations and groups. There were less than 300 schools in RPS, from Pre-K to high school, which range widely in design and policy structures (C.E. 2). Many of these were considered more "traditional" schools that operated under one set of policies, which dictated, for instance, strict terms in bargaining agreements with the teachers' union and constrained the power of school principals to make decisions and actions on the hiring, firing, and evaluation of teachers, what kinds of external organizations could be partnered with or contracted, and under what conditions these contracts could be made. The three K-8 schools participating in this study were of this more traditional variety. There were also many newer, less traditional structures of schools, called by a host of names such as charter schools, in-district charter schools, and turnaround schools.

In recent years, River City experienced some of the advantages and complications associated with urban economic development, including the complex social realities surrounding urban gentrification and the growing divides between rich and poor (C.E. 3). Particularly since the 2000s, the city and regional economy witnessed development in technology, business, and entertainment sectors (C.E. 4). The city also played host to colleges and universities, a budding arts scene, and at least one professional sports team,

the Cobras. Although the state and city endured significant financial challenges in the wake of the burst housing bubble and recession, River City's overall economy remained robust. Like many other cities in the U.S., since the recession beginning in 2007, River City observed some decreases in aggregate crime rates, including violent crimes, a national trend that left many criminologists stumped (Florida, 2011; Jonsson, 2012; Wood, 2012). Comparing these rates by zip code, however, revealed heightened crime in neighborhoods of color. Average wages ranked better than many U.S. cities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). However, poverty rates remained higher than the national average, which rose to a staggering 15.3% nationally in 2010 (ibid; Lambert, 2011).

Traversing the neighborhoods with the largest percentages of students in the public schools revealed many long-term effects of poverty, such as vacant storefronts and unattended properties, homelessness, and high concentrations of liquors stores, rent-a-centers, and check cashing businesses. Societal inequities are manifested through a variety of health outcomes and in turn connected to educational consequences (Berliner 2006, 2009; Orfield & Lee, 2005). Taken together, persistent social ills such as poverty, racial and ethnic segregation, unemployment, hunger, and medical insecurity, pose ongoing and variegated threats to youth and adults living in cities like River City (Galeo, Tracy, Hoggatt, DiMaggio & Karpati, 2011). According to recent Census data, wealth inequality tend to be highest in cities that also experience older housing (Lambert, 2011). Approximately 20% of River City residents lived in poverty (U.S. Census, 2012), which disproportionately impacted children in families attending RPS, where over 80% of students were eligible for free/reduced lunch. The urban physical environment including air, water, and ground quality; noise levels; access to parks and public green space; and

access to the Internet and other technology can also influence the physical and mental health of urban youth (Galea & Vhalov, 2005).

Urban ecological conditions intricately intersect with socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and other stratifications that produce uneven outcomes in society. Far too many RPS students were affected by these socially stratified educational and health disparities. For example, on average, RPS students had asthma at rates higher than the state and the nation (C.E. 5). Five RPS schools reported asthma rates higher than 24% (C.E. 6). Student survey data indicated that less than 1/3 of RPS high school students were physically active several times per week (C.E. 7). In 2010, nearly 10% of high school students in RPS said they had been threatened or attacked with a weapon on school property at least once during their school history, and about as many said they carried a weapon to school at least one time (ibid). While these statistics may be common in urban schools, it was no less disturbing for that reason. Organized and disorganized crime was a serious problem particularly in poor communities of color, where the police presence was also concentrated. Each year, young people in RPS schools were gunned down or caught in crossfires. These everyday realities were symptoms of structured racism, which accumulated over time through complex patterns of oppression and which impacted young people's educational opportunities and outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The public school district had come under increasing pressure in the media and in the community for its apparent failures to realize passing achievement for large swaths of poor students, mostly of color, on the state standardized achievement test; to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks on the state test among its schools; or to effectively promote and graduate all students. Stories and reports in the local news

outlets frequently called attention to 'achievement gaps' that plagued school performance data, especially concerning RPS' majority population of black and Latino youth. While the city's average high school graduation rates for all students, including across all non-dominant groups, had risen over the last five years, almost 40% of African American students, and over 40% of Latino students, did not graduate within five years (C.E. 8). After five years, most of those students dropped out or were pushed out (C.E. 9; see also Fine, 1991). Major news and policy reports on the River City schools also contended that the school district, along with the state as a whole, struggled with pervasive and persistent problems in providing adequate instructional and supplemental services for students identified for special education, as well as English Language Learners (C.E. 10). Five-year graduation rates for Special Education students persisted under 50%, and remained just over 50% for ELLs (C.E. 11).

However, while the language of 'achievement gaps' carries popular appeal, this gaze fails to illuminate that these outcomes actually reflect 'educational debts' derived from long-term institutionalized racism, which disproportionately affect poor people and communities of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). While highlighting the academic discrepancies that exist between dominant (mostly white) and marginalized youth, the discourse of achievement gaps overlooks the underlying causes for these outcomes and focuses merely on the symptoms, captured in achievement tests. This achievement gap frame, which dominates much educational discourse, implicitly operates on deficit models of learning that situate failure in the minds, bodies, and cultures of individuals, be they students, teachers, or parents (Brantlinger, 2003; Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010). In contrast, an educational debt perspective turns on situating student achievement in the

social, historical, and economic conditions that exert continuing influences on manifestations of achievement and failure (Ladson-Billings, 2006). From a debt perspective, disparate patterns of educational success also reflect the fact that middle-class and upper-class Americans of European ancestry predominantly control educational institutions and exert conscious and unconscious influences on the shape of schooling, leading to institutional structures that reflect white middle-class cultures (Bourdieu & Passaron, 1990; Delpit, 1995).

The RPS superintendent and leadership team were presented with periodic demands from the public to account for the district's actions in countering these troubling trends in educational outcomes, such as the persistently higher rates of school dropout among black and Latino students than either white or most Asian groups. School district leadership also frequently responded to challenges by well-organized community and parent groups, often racially and socio-economically segmented, of which River City had long traditions (C.E. 12). RPS school committee meetings were regularly attended by parents, parent groups, and community-based organizations representing different youth and family constituencies. These meetings often ran late into the night and became boisterous events.[23]

River City's school leadership was painstakingly aware of the statistical gaps bandied about these problems, and like other U.S. urban public school systems, much of the district's school reform agenda hinged on "closing the gap" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Some senior leaders spoke out about the effects of institutionalized racism on students' educational opportunities and readiness to learn. District and school leaders talked about both achievement gaps and opportunity or resource gaps in the nature of

educational problems facing RPS.[24] Achievement and opportunity gap figures were frequently used to place pressures from within and outside of schools on school leaders and teachers for educational change in River City, a commonplace practice nationwide (Payne, 2007). In general, the rhetorical environment surrounding these urban schools reflected mounting, widespread criticisms of the profession and bureaucracy of public education.

At the same time, amidst negatively skewed framings of RPS in public discourse, there was a prominent and positive narrative that depicted RPS as a high-performing school district and a model for urban educational reform. For example, one international authority in systems improvement described RPS as one of the most successful school systems to create and sustain standards-based reforms aimed at improving performance in student academic achievement data and closing achievement gaps (C.E. 13). The school district, as well as past and current superintendents, had also received numerous awards and accolades from major foundations and educational networks (C.E. 14).

All of these intersecting trappings point to passionately contested and problematic social environments surrounding urban public schooling—all of which needs to be considered when interpreting the case.

Meet the Partners: River City Cobras[25]

The River City Cobras brand was owned and operated by Sports Management Partners (SMP), a privately held corporation and registered limited liability company or LLC. (C.E. 15). SMP also had major holdings in other areas of private property, including but not limited to real estate investments. The Cobras organization associated with numerous corporate foundations, which acted separately and collaboratively within

the schools. The Cobra's 'Rattlers Foundation' was a private corporate philanthropic

foundation that was connected closely to the leadership, management, and policies of

SMP. Most of the Rattlers' funding came from SMP's direct in-kind donations and

cause-related marketing. However, the foundation received funds from a number of

sources, including other corporate sponsors and individual donations. Several star

Cobras players also established their own foundations, which overlapped with and

diverged from the Rattlers' goals, objectives, and initiatives, and were thus more loosely

coupled in structure to the Cobras corporation than was the Rattlers Foundation.

 While not all NBA franchises were structured as corporations, most of the 30

NBA teams were privately held firms. According to Forbes' annual NBA team

valuations, out of the top ten valued teams in 2011, only one publicly traded corporation

(NASDAQ: Madison Square Garden, Inc) owned a team franchise (New York Knicks).

Private corporations, owned by sole proprietors, partnerships, or investment groups,

operated the next nine valued teams (Badenhausen, Ozanian *&* Settimi, 2011). The NBA

parent company, National Basketball Association, Inc.*,* which oversaw game rules and

officiating, marketed individual teams and players, regulated franchise ownership, and

licensed broadcasting rights and corporate sponsorships, was a private corporation with

annual revenue of roughly $4 billion (National Basketball Association Inc., 2012).

Financially speaking, the NBA was the third most dominant sports league in the U.S.

professional sports industry (behind football and baseball), an industry that overall

realized combined annual revenues of approximately $30 billion (Investment Weekly

News, 2012).

 Table 3.2 presents the rankings and figures for the fifteen most valuable NBA

team franchises, which includes the Cobras. These estimates were based on the franchises' "current economics (unless ground has been broken for a new building) and do not include the value of real estate" (Ozanian, 2011). As a result, some NBA teams were sold for significantly higher values than Forbes estimated. For instance, in 2011 the Golden State Warriors ranked twelfth with an estimated value of $363 million. However, new owners Peter Guber and Joe Lacob paid $450 million for the team in 2010. One reason for this difference in valuation and purchase price was that the new team owners understood that when the franchise's "lease at the antiquated Oracle Arena expires in 2017, the building is likely to be renovated, with the team getting a more lucrative lease or a new building entirely" (Ozanian, 2011), usually funded in part through public expenditures (Quirk & Fort, 1997; Spavero & Chalip, 2007). In 2012, the Warriors were estimated to be worth $750 million.

Table 3.2: 2014 NBA Team Values: The Business of Basketball ($millions) [26]					
Rank	Team	Value	Revenue	Operating Income	Value, 1-year change
1	New York Knicks	$1400	$287	$96.3	27%
2	Los Angeles Lakers	$1350	$295	$66.4	35%
3	Chicago Bulls	$1000	$195	$52.2	25%
4	Boston Celtics	$875	$169	$46.8	20%
5	Brooklyn Nets	$780	$190	-$19	47%
6	Houston Rockets	$775	$191	$63.7	36%
7	Miami Heat	$770	$188	$29.2	23%
8	**River City Cobras**	**$768**	**$160**	**$35.5**	**16%**
9	Dallas Mavericks	$765	$162	$37.5	12%
10	Golden State Warriors	$750	$160	$43	35%
11	San Antonio Spurs	$660	$167	$39.4	25%
12	Oklahoma City Thunder	$590	$144	$33.3	24%
13	Portland Trailblazers	$587	$140	$30	28%
14	Los Angeles Clippers	$575	$128	$15	34%

15	Phoenix Suns	$565	$137	$28.2	19%
Source: Badenhausen, Ozanian & Settimi, 2014					

The 2011 average NBA team value was projected at $369 million, an increase of more than 1% since the previous year but "still 2.6% below the $379 million peak average" in 2009 (Ozanian, 2011). In 2012, this figure was eclipsed as well-paid television deals and the league's new collective bargaining agreement elevated the average team value to a record $393 million (Badenhausen, 2012). During the 2011-12 season, television ratings for NBA games climbed substantially both nationally and locally, "jumping more than 50% on regional sports networks for at least eight teams. TNT and Walt Disney's ESPN/ABC pay $930 million a year on average for rights to NBA games nationally" (Badenhausen, 2012). In 2014, the average NBA franchise was worth $634 million, an increase of 25% from the previous year (Badenhausen, 2014). The River City Cobras recently negotiated an exclusive media rights agreement with a regional telecommunications provider that gave the team a sizable equity stake in the television network and would substantially increase team media revenues over the next several years.

The RPS-Cobras Collaboration

Chapter One raised social, economic, and racial issues related to the origin story of NBA Cares, the league's overarching corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative founded in 2005. NBA Cares provided aligned messaging and cost sharing across all NBA franchises for national cause-related marketing expenses. Although some owners and sports executives were reputedly skeptical of, or dissatisfied with, the more

obligatory nature of NBA Cares than previous instantiations of the league's approach to charity that some see as a distraction from basketball and requires that team owners share in marketing expenses, however, all NBA franchises participated in the program (G. Johnson, personal interview, January 20, 2011).

While the Cobras' philanthropic activities connect to the NBA Cares program, the Cobras franchise initiated its partnership with the River City Public Schools long before NBA Cares was even conceptualized. Institutional relationships between RPS and the Cobras dated back well over 15 years. Long-term relational trends can be observed between many NBA teams and local public schools. In the late 1980s, the NBA league hatched its first school partnership program and encouraged individual franchises to implement it locally. Over the years, various programs were introduced within the RPS school system. However, no study or evaluation of these activities was available for public consumption. Some of the Cobras' school programs included the following:

- Beginning in the late 1980's, the Cobras introduced the NBA's Stay in School program, an incentive-based program to reward middle school students monthly and yearly on the basis of perfect school attendance and periodic writing or art contests, and to motivate students through player-attended motivational school assemblies. At the time of this study, almost all River City Public middle schools participated in this program.[27]

- In the late 1990's, the Cobras launched Read to Achieve in the RPS schools and community-based youth centers. Aimed at promoting young people's life-long interest in reading and encouraging adults to read regularly with youth, this program revolves around player appearances, school assemblies, book drives, and

establishing reading corners and learning centers for primary school children.

- In the past few years, some schools and teachers began participating in a community service program that provided small grants of less than $200 for individual schools or classrooms to complete short-term community service projects, such as school or neighborhood cleanups, organizing the school's library, or painting a school mural.

- Recently, the Cobras, the Rattlers Foundation and a player's private foundation also began donating school technology renovations in RPS. Before the start of the 2011-12 academic year, five schools were awarded a new technology lab. As of this writing, nine schools received these donations. All of the schools participating in this study received a technology donation.

Why a Case Study?

Since the primary aim of this study was to better understand school practitioners' perceptions of and experiences with this school-corporate relationship, a qualitative case study approach was appropriate. Yin (2009) calls for adopting the case study approach when "an empirical inquiry… investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). This approach allows for in-depth analysis of data from various sources of evidence in order to construct a contextualized and holistic description of a particular phenomenon. In this instance, the context of public schooling (e.g. organizational histories, multiple spheres of influence across city and schools, current socio-political pressures on schools, policy mandates, and leadership and organizational structure of schools) was crucial to understanding the phenomenon of philanthropic

arrangements between corporations and public schools. Since the connections between

the context and phenomenon of corporate philanthropy in K-12 public education were not

entirely obvious, the study benefited from analyzing multiple forms of evidence—a

hallmark of case study research. Through this study, I aimed not to represent some

universal or generalized truth, but instead, to bear witness to "local particulars" (Dyson &

Genishi, 2005, p.3) of corporate sport philanthropy in public education, "to probe the

material workings of some complex and abstract aspect of human experience" (Dyson &

Genishi, 2005, p.3).

Identifying the Case

I sought an array of constituent perspectives from administrators, principals,

teachers, coaches, counselors, and other staff across multiple schools and central

administration, using an embedded, single-case design. Each school and the central

offices represented a subunit of analysis within the RPS school district. It was crucial to

develop a theory during the case study's design phase. To this end, I offered a

preliminary review of literature, research, and theory on the topic. This literature

intimately influenced the reiterative construction of the research questions and the type of

data necessary to inform those questions. In addition, prior to settling on research and

interview questions, I reached out to some central administrators and principals. These

initial conversations helped to determine the nature of the research design, refine the

research objectives, and better understand what school professionals hoped to gain from

the study. This 'casing phase' (Dyson & Genishi, 2005):

> offers a researcher the luxury of looking through her lens, which is open to her
> interests, predilections, and particular skills. At the same time she works to keep

the lens clear enough so the questions she begins to formulate are relevant to the site; that is, they grow out of what she sees and experiences. (pp.38-39)

Similarly, Yin (2010) advocates for conducting a pilot case study as a final preparation for research questions and data collection plans, helping to refine the object(s) of analysis, the content of the data, and the procedures to be followed in collecting and managing the data. Although not a formal pilot case study, in Yin's terms, this dissertation's pre-proposal stage served to substantiate some lines of inquiry, to abandon others, and to offer emerging questions and problems for inquiry.

The Principles of Design

This section addresses the logic of design for the case study, from research questions I followed, to the sources of data I negotiated and collected, to methods of analysis. The study considered numerous methodological questions, such as: Where will I look for responses to my questions? What forms of evidence will I gather? How will I organize these multiple data sources to establish a case study database? How will I maintain a transparent chain of evidence that can be used to trace my decisions and interpretations made throughout the course of the study?

Multiple Sources of Evidence

According to Yin (2009), case study research might draw upon six basic forms of evidence, each comprising different strengths and weakness for the researcher to deal with. Appendix IV presents detailed examples of these various types of evidence, many, though not all of which, were used in this study, and summarizes the benefits and challenges of each. In general, the case study's conceptual power lies in "its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations"

(Yin, 2009, p.11). Furthermore, although case studies do not exclude quantitative evidence (e.g. Yin, 1981, p.58; Eisenhardt, 1989, pp.534-535), qualitative data usually outweigh the use of quantitative data (Kohlbacher, 2006). In order to maximize the respective benefits, I followed three guiding principles of collecting data: using multiple sources of evidence; establishing a case study database; and maintaining a chain of evidence. Alongside specific strategies for data collection, interpretation, and analysis, which are discussed below, this helped me deal with problems of trustworthiness (validity) and transferability (reliability).

Data Sources

This case study deliberately drew on multiple sources of qualitative and some quantitative data to address the research questions. *Table 3.1* (below) presents these sources of evidence. These data were logically organized to provide a broad array of 'raw data.' Each question necessitated certain forms of case study evidence, and these various data sources posed different opportunities and limitations for the research. (See Appendix IV for a description of strengths and limitations of various forms of evidence.) Each data source also raised a range of strategic choices about the appropriate field methods and analysis.

One data source figured most prominently in the research protocol: semi-structured interviews with school practitioners. I examined interviews alongside other data sources, such as observations of sponsored events, organizational documents, archival records, and physical artifacts. As I collected the case study evidence, I discovered the need to abandon certain forms of evidence, for example, archival records

that were exceedingly difficulty to access. In the Table 3.3 below, I include notation

when particular evidence was excluded.

Table 3.3: Multiple Sources of Evidence
• Institutional documentation, such as any articulation agreement(s) between the schools/district and the Cobras; school/district written policies related to the "case"; announcements and promotional materials of the partnership; minutes of meetings (e.g. in school, in district, or at school committee) related to the case; • Administrative documents, such as school climate report; district and school progress reports on external partnerships; • Academic and popular literature related to NBA's and Cobras' school partnerships (No formal study/evaluation of the same case was found); • News clippings, press releases, and videos appearing in the mass media, team and school websites, and community newspapers, related to the case • Archival records, such as, - Service records that indicate number of students served through the partnership over time (These records were kept by the Cobras and were unavailable); - Organizational budgets and other records at school or district linked to partnership activities, e.g. expenses, donations, or other in-kind support provided by Cobras; - Statistical data on student and school demographics, student attendance rates, grade retention, disciplinary incidents, suspension, truancy (Aggregate school data but not student-level data was available); - Maps and charts of the schools, partner organizations, and locations of partnership activities • Long interviews, both one-time and repeated in-depth interviews, with school and district-level practitioners (see Interview Protocol, Appendix II) • Observations of NBA events at the schools, including participant observations and documented video footage of partnership events • Physical or cultural artifacts directly associated with the "case," (e.g. physical, in-school technology labs sponsored by the Cobras; Cobra team paraphernalia, swag bags, or other physical products given to and worn by youth and staff at Cobras-sponsored programming).

Interviews

The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews, which, on average,

lasted 60 to 90 minutes. These interviews took on an open-ended form, in which I asked

"key respondents about the facts of a matter as well as their opinions about events" (Yin, 2009, p. 107). Given my aim to understand the case from a holistic viewpoint, I attended to the various, intersecting perspectives of people and groups involved in the research. In this respect, interviewing was a most valuable tool, "the main road to multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p. 64). Interviews may take a number of forms, ranging from highly structured and standardized survey interviews to open-ended, unstructured interviews. Fontana and Frey (2000) suggest that open-ended interviews "can provide a greater breadth of data than other types, given qualitative nature" (p. 652). Furthermore, these authors reason that "to learn about people we must treat them as people, and they will work with us to create accounts of their lives (p. 668).

I structured interviews with ample room for variability. I provided interview questions as a focusing tool for the conversation (see *Appendix II: Interview Protocol*), but the exact content, scope, and sequence of interviews varied markedly from participant to participant. Ideally, an interview is relaxed and conversational; the interviewee feels free to respond in ways they find relevant and meaningful. I provided interview questions as a starting point for discussion, but participants were free to respond in any way, or not at all. Follow-up questions not included in the protocol, often for clarification and elaboration, usually surfaced during interviews. *Table 3.1* (above) presents a list of research participants and their professional roles. Active recruitment of research participants continued through the winter of 2013.

Content Analysis

The aim of analysis is to bring order and structure to data. This case study led to hours of transcribed interviews, pages of field notes, many documents, and evolving

impressions. As a form of in-depth qualitative research, the case study is a method to situate an interested observer within a social setting. It thus offers a systematic means of looking at a research problem through "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world…attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.3). I remained open to engaging the ambiguity and contradictions within the case; and at the same time, I'll adhere to rigorous procedures for analysis. In searching for patterns, I sought "a holistic and comprehensive approach towards analyzing data material and thus achieve to (almost) completely grasp and cover the complexity of the social situations examined and social data material derived from them" (Kohlbacher, 2006, p. 24; see also Patton & Appelbaum, 2003, p.67). As I went through the iterative stages of data collection, reading, and interpretation, I attended closely to shunting back and forth, both within and across data sources.

Although I used some quantitative evidence to contextualize this study (e.g. descriptive statistics at school- and district-levels, financial figures for donations, tax-filings by the Cobras' corporate foundation, existing survey data of students, teachers, and administrators), the study's abiding objective was not quantification but to make sense of the case. For this reason, I analyzed data throughout the various stages of the research connected to the planning, collection, and initial impressions along with performing analyses after I completed collecting evidence (Stake, 1995).

Constant Comparison

In searching for patterns of meaning, I drew on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Originally developed as part of the theoretical framework of grounded theory, the method of constant comparison has since been applied as an

analytical strategy in a wide range of social research not necessarily associated with grounded theory (e.g. see Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Charmaz, 2006; Hesse-Biber & Leavey, 2004). Glaser (1969) described the constant comparative method in four stages: "comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory" (Glaser, 1969, p. 220). This method obligates the researcher to remain close to the empirical-research evidence throughout the iterative stages of research. I took up comparative content analysis to listen carefully to the voices, stories, questions, problems, explanations, and interpretations that surfaced in the course of study.

As I searched for connective stories, themes, and patterns, I spent long periods of time, throughout the data collection phase (March 2011-March 2013) and the analysis and writing of empirical findings and implications (April 2013-January 2014), thinking through my reasoning for those categories that were used in coding, and discussing my interpretations and reasoning with the thesis committee, research participants, and scholars in the field. In qualitative research, "there is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data" (Bryman, 2004, p.392). While published studies and research manual frequently employ this term "emerge" and the concept of categories and themes emerging from data, we often poorly understand the precise trajectory of researchers' decisions (Boeije, 2002). Descriptive or explanatory categories do not merely emerge from data, but instead come from the researcher's understanding of the broad context within which something is uttered, on the researcher's reflexivity, and on linkages drawn to existing literature and theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a starting

point of analysis, Yin suggests simply, "to 'play' with your data" (p. 129). While this

"play" can take on many forms, some of these manipulations might include:

- Putting information into different arrays

- Making a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within such categories

- Creating data displays—flowcharts and other graphics—for examining the data

- Tabulating the frequency of different events

- Examining the complexity of such tabulations and their relationship by

    calculating second-order numbers such as means and variances

- Putting information into chronological order or using some other temporal

    scheme (Miles & Huberman, cited in Yin, 2009, p. 127)

One will not find a single, definitive set of procedures for doing content analysis

in case study research.[28] For the emerging researcher like myself, at times the process

felt like an endless assortment of strategies and techniques of analysis. However, I have

come to understand the importance of adopting clear and principled analytic strategies,

the details of which can be communicated to others. Throughout analysis, I used research

memos to reflect on, why I chose to create certain categories, the evolving definitions and

descriptions of those categories, why a category was associated with certain bits of data,

and how a category related to the context in which it was being analyzed. The

trustworthiness of the case study findings relied on making these analytical choices clear.

In terms of process, this study applied the constant comparative method to each

form of evidence collected as part of the case study database. For example, interview

data were be compared on three basic levels:

1) Comparison within single interviews: I analyzed each interview to understand what the interviewee said. What words, phrases, and passages stood out? What core messages/meanings were made? What consistencies and contradictions occured within an interview? I worked to understand pieces of the interview within the context of the entire interview. I subdivided repeated interviews with a participant by session but considered it as part of one long interview for the purpose of organizing data.

2) Comparison between interviews within the same group: I analyzed participants' utterances within each school individually and within central administration, among principals and other administrators, among teachers and teaching staff, and among coaches.

3) Comparison of interviews from different groups: I made analyses between schools; between central administration and schools; between school leaders/administrators and classroom educators; between coaches and teachers.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. I read each transcript multiple times to determine what has been said. An initial layer of coding included descriptors related to the interview protocol's various components. These initial codes are listed in *Table 3.3*, below. At this stage, "in vivo" codes—using the language of participants— was also used to note each interview's salient features (Charmaz, 2006).

Table 3.4: Initial Codes	
1st level codes	Interview question
Professional role of research participants in the school and district (e.g. District administrator, Principal, Director, Teacher, Counselor, Coach, School-community liaison, Teaching Assistant, Administrative Staff)	1
Role of research participant in Cobras program/s (e.g. leadership, consultation, coordination, participation, passive observation)	2
Cobras/school/district/teacher/student/administrator role in	3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e,

Cobras programs	3f, 3g
Team motivations	4, 5a
School/District motivations	4, 5b, 5c
Stories about Cobras programs	4
Benefits to school	6a, 6b, 7a, 10
Costs to school	8, 10
Benefits to district	6a, 6b, 7b, 10
Costs to district	8, 10
Benefits to Cobras	7c, 10
Costs to Cobras	6a, 6b, 10
Ways to improve	9

I cumulatively reviewed the text associated with these first-level codes, refining and organizing them into categories. I developed this analysis largely through using research memos, but relied on other steps as well, such as a researcher journal, theoretical sampling, and member checks. Subsequent to each round of interviews, and following data coding sessions, I created a written research memo, which served as a means to document my researcher logic at the time I was making decisions (Glaser & Strauss, 1995). I used memos to describe thinking regarding observations and potential themes or patterns, which functioned as a meta-level description of the analysis process.

For Charmaz (2006), research memo writing is the catalyst that undergirds data analyses because "it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process" (p. 72). Memos illuminate analytic codes, provide depth to categories, and allow the researcher to make ongoing comparisons between data and codes, thus helping to establish logical chains of evidence. I often produced memos spontaneously, using language not encumbered by official form or jargon, to capture "fleeting ideas about the code and to probe data, not to share" (Charmaz, p. 80). I used early memos to explore what the data reflected, to describe and develop codes, and to influence other data collection.

During data analysis, I also used a researcher journal, theoretical sampling, and member checks. Corbin & Strauss (2008) contend that social researchers must acknowledge the reality that "our findings are a product of data plus what the researcher brings to the analysis" (p. 33). Cognizant of this subjectivity, I continually strove to reflect on how my own assumptions and experiences influenced my interpretations. Throughout data collection and the analysis of interview transcripts, organizational documents, and observational field notes, I maintained a journal to record personal reflections and questions as they arose. Theoretical sampling included consulting with a few scholars and practitioners in the field who offered feedback regarding specific data or responded to preliminary analyses. I conducted member checks with research participants to increase my confidence that I properly understood the participant and to allow for additional feedback.

Lastly, I enhanced my content analysis by connecting empirical observations to the existing literature and posing critical questions of those data and my findings. This meant using existing theory to probe the case. For example, the discourses of corporate social responsibility (CSR), greenwashing, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and privatizations each reverberated differently in the context of corporate philanthropy in urban education. Each discourse thus offered opportunities to query the data differently.

Social Responsibilities of Educational Research

This study revolved in part around the social responsibilities that corporate professional sporting organizations may have to the communities within which they operate. However, corporations are clearly not the only entities with incumbent responsibilities beyond their own self-interests. The act of conducting educational

research raises issues about the obligations that researchers have to multiple communities. Fine, Weiss, Weseen, and Wong (2003) maintain that the primary responsibility of applied social research is to faithfully represent an aspect of the world through "theoretical rigor and political savvy" (p.199). This necessitates researchers have ideological clarity and pay careful attention to developing ethics of inquiry. The intellectual and political task of listening to and theorizing about public educators' voices and stories of corporate contacts in schools has compelled me (as situated researcher) to deeply reconsider my observations of present-day social and institutional conditions through critical, historicized perspectives on the intersection of urban public education and elite sports in society. I aimed to constantly rethink these cultural border crossings, and ensure I was not dwelling gratuitously on that which appeared negative or uncritically elevating that which appeared positive. With occasional tough love and support from both my dissertation committee and esteemed colleagues, my goal was ultimately was stay close as possible to the data and remain answerable to the scholarly communities I drew from, the school communities where this work was situated, and the corporate communities that were implicated. Fine and her colleagues' questions I returned to throughout the ongoing process of inquiry. As the study advanced through collection, reading, coding, re-reading, writing, and revising, I revisited many of their questions (pp. 199-201), asking:

- Have I connected the "voices" and "stories" of individuals back to the set of historic, structural, and economic relations in which they are situated?

- Have I deployed multiple methods so that different kinds of analyses can be constructed?

- Have I described the mundane?

- Have participants reviewed the material and interpreted, dissented from, challenged my interpretations? How do I report these departures/agreements in perspective?

- Who am I afraid will see this work? Who is rendered vulnerable, responsible, or exposed by these analyses? Am I willing to show him/her/them the text before publication? If not, why not? Could I publish his/her/their comments as an epilogue? What are my fears?

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Corporate Sports Partners in Public Education? Both altruism and the market in relationships of fandom, stardom, and corporate philanthropy

Introduction

Over the last three decades, local, regional, and federal governments have adopted new institutional mechanisms in the provision of social services, including but not limited to public-private partnerships (PPPs). In education, these changes have reflected the slowly progressing, quasi-marketization of public schools and their environments (Witty & Power, 2000). Concomitantly, corporate philanthropy is increasingly positioned at the center of solutions to the contested problems of urban public school reform (Manteau, 2009; Saltman, 2010). In the United States annually, philanthropies cumulatively spend over $40 billion "to support or transform K–12 education, most of it directed to schools that serve low-income children" (Barkan, 2011, p. 49). This figure represents less than two-tenths of one percent of public school funding, a mere "rounding error on local, state, and federal public budgets" (Ferris, 2011, p.709). However, proponents of philanthropy argue that corporate players are uniquely positioned to "leverage" public institutions in reform by injecting resources (such as, funding, professional knowledge, and social capital) and partnering in the public arena of schooling (Hess, 2005).

Three foundations—the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation (The Economist 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d) - command the most influence and scholarly attention in the field. Collectively, this *Billionaire Boys Club* (Ravitch, 2009) has quickly and dramatically

reshaped public educational policy and academic research both nationally and internationally. Often working in conjunction with one another through expansive networks, these largest corporate players define the broad national terms of public debates on accountability and reform of urban public education (Morsey-Eckert, 2011; Ravitch, 2009; Saltman, 2010; Scott, 2009). Although smaller foundations' efforts are decidedly less visible on the public stage, their engagement in the public sector provides a reflection on features of public education governance in what some have called the "shadow state" (Lipman, 2010). The movements of these smaller-scale corporate philanthropic institutions can have diverse impacts on educational leadership and policies, yet there is a paucity of research on the aspirations and actions of their benefactors who exercise their corporate social responsibilities in the contested political terrain of public schooling (Robertson et al., 2012).

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter weaves empirical findings in schools, corporate-sponsored school assemblies, and cause-related marketing, with theories of corporate social engagement in education. Focusing on one corporate philanthropic PPP in education—between the River City Cobras National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise and the River City Public School District (RPS)—it examines the language games, governance arrangements, and allocation of tasks across "the public-private divide" (Jessop, 2002, p. 199). Drawing on educational, business, and sociological literature, this chapter takes up three interlocking contexts (public schooling, corporate philanthropy, and professional NBA basketball) to analyze school practitioners' perceptions of social-institutional relationships created and maintained in partnership with the Cobras. Throughout this

case study, school participants will be given extended space, often through the use of long, condensed block quotes,[29] so as to thickly describe, qualify, and counterpoint the research claims and assertions.

The remainder of this chapter is broken into six parts. Part I revisits the notion of partnering between public education and other sectors. It contextualizes the broad landscape of partnerships in the River City Public Schools, and then unpacks official school district discourse on the Cobras relationship. Part II asks whether this PPP is seen as a "partnership" from the standpoint of central administration and of the three participating schools? (If so, why, and if not, what should we call it instead?) Part III contrasts the nuanced *Both/And* reasoning of school practitioners vis-à-vis this corporate social engagement with the more binary research logic that is frequently adopted in the literature on partnerships, (see Chapter 2) in which corporate philanthropy is ideologically framed as *either* compassionate capitalism serving mainly positive ends *or* as an underhanded privatizing encroachment into public education. Unlike the literature, research participants in this study exhibit blended conceptual thinking that fluidly crossed boundaries in discourses of altruism and the marketplace.

Parts IV and V extend this discussion of *both/and* practitioner logic with findings on complex sets of relationships in professional sport fandom and philanthropy. Part IV addresses the context of elite professional sports in the United States. It explores the communal relationships or affinity bonds that are cultivated when schools are seen as viable sites to develop NBA players' human relations skills as gentlemen athletes and to shape the NBA's corporate social responsibility image. Part V analyzes relationships in corporate philanthropy, illustrating the social affordances and tensions that arise when

altruistic motivations mix with commercialized consumption and media celebration. Lastly, a conclusion will tie together these multi-faceted relationships in charity and cause-related sports marketing, and consider the educational significance and limitations of the findings.

Part I: Troubling Notions of Partnership in Public Schooling

Whatever our views or feelings about the supposed dark sides or tangible positive benefits of corporate engagement in public education, partnerships between public schools and other sectors are present and growing. Educational practitioners and scholars who are uneasy about the advancement of corporations into the public sector are unlikely to stem the tide of these cross-sector developments that are taken for granted in the everyday texture of K-12 schooling (Ball, 2009; Robertson, Mundy, Verger & Menasha, 2012). However, what educational research can do is to provoke rethinking of the nature of public-private partnerships, and of the goals and terms of engagement in them. This, in turn, can prompt deeper reflection about the role of PPPs in relation to the core purposes of public schools within a social democracy.

If public schools fail to consider both the intended and hidden consequences of PPPs, they may unwittingly jeopardize children's wellbeing or the basic conditions for learning. For example, in an empirical study of leaders' perspectives across sectors, Feuerstein (2001) observed that business executives and managers often consider a successful educational partnership as one that helps enhance the for-profit firm's visibility and image or increases its marketing opportunities, while school administrators tend to focus ideas of success on potential outcomes for youth in learning, as, for instance, in the enrichment of educational resources.

In its efforts to address this complex phenomenon of partnership more systematically, the River City Public School District has recently established an Office of Partnerships and Institutional Development. Prior to its creation, the Superintendent had for several years appointed an academic superintendent or executive staff member to oversee cross-sector institutional developments, not limited to philanthropy. One former appointee described this role as "cover[ing] everything from charter schools, in-district charter schools, innovation schools, fundraising, development, private and corporate philanthropy, partnerships, all kinds of fun things" (District Administrator, DA1). The newly minted Office of Partnerships and Development, run by a full-time director and staffed mainly by part-time consultants, takes up the broad landscape of partnerships across the district among non-profit, community-based, foundation, private business, and corporate organizations. One district official described the immensity of this challenge, saying, "A lot of the partnerships, not just the Cobras, that we've had, have existed for a long time. And sometimes when you're looking at how it plays out at the school-level, it can be partners layered on top of partners layered on top of partners" (District Administrator, DA2).

By conservative estimates, the River City Public School District has well over one thousand separate institutional arrangements with outside organizations, of which the Cobras' NBA franchise and its corporate foundation is one. The most common corporate relationship in schools is not with charitable philanthropic organizations, but for-profit academic support services and data management storage and analysis. Some schools have no corporate or private philanthropic arrangements, though all schools in this study have more than one.[30] The Director of Partnerships sees his primary professional aim as

intentionally supporting processes across the district, "being more coordinated and strategic about what our comprehensive strategies are." This means applying basic management principles[31] to inform how the district approaches partnerships with its wide-ranging organizations. He added, "I think that that falls back on us, is what is our comprehensive strategy? So that we're looking at, how does this one partnership fit into our comprehensive strategy?" (DA4). The Director explained, this work is about trying to make increasingly pragmatic and evidence-informed decisions as to how the school district and individual schools can approach and integrate their assorted partnership relationships.

Given that formal diagnostic or summative evaluations of partnerships in the school district had never taken place systemically across schools, the Director of Partnerships and others said it was not at all clear how partnerships played out in every school or how they might have related to one another in one building or across the district, or even precisely how many partnerships were operating in schools at any one time. Since 2013, the Office of Partnerships has been conducting surveys and short interviews with school leaders to get a broad descriptive understanding of cross-sector arrangements across the school district, and to gather additional information about a few specific organizations partnering with schools. Neither the Cobras, nor any corporate partners, were included in these initial fact-finding missions, though the Director had started to plan ways of more directly assessing the district's relationships with for-profit organizations, including the Cobras organization.

Individual schools can have as many as thirty more-to-less formalized arrangements with non-profit, for-profit, community-based, and other non-governmental

agencies, as well as parent or special interest groups. All three schools in this study have

less than twenty-five external organizational arrangements. The River City Public School

District and some schools hire outside expert consultants to assist with institutional

development and partnerships[32]. One school counts a little under a dozen "partnerships"

that are maintained through living contracts and constant contact and approximately two-

dozen less demanding arrangements with "programs," including the Cobras. The same

school retains a full-service school director whose explicit administrative role it is to

coordinate public, private, and community partnerships and to marshal these resources

across the school through an approach to teaching the "whole child." One former

director in the position described its primary function as serving as "key point person to

coordinate a lot of partnerships across the whole school… A lot of these partnerships are

based around logistics and coordination, and also finding the right people to talk to, and

facilitating that communication" (SA2.S3).

In official school district discourse, the arrangement between RPS and the Cobras

is celebrated as a strong partnership. At one corporate-sponsored event for *Stay in

School*, a school district official praised the partnership before an audience of some three

hundred cheering students, fans, attentive listeners, and city and team officials:

> We are so excited about this partnership with the Cobras. They have been there
> for us, not just giving us tickets, because they have given us tickets… but they
> celebrate attendance, they celebrate staying in school. And in six of our middle
> schools, along with [star NBA player[33]], they have renovated new technology labs
> that are just absolutely fabulous with all kinds of technology. And every single
> year, with [locally based corporation], for the last five years, they have sponsored
> this wonderful *Stay in School* event where we get to recognize and award middle
> school students who have achieved, who stay in school, who have done their best
> job of attendance, and who make sure they do their best job everyday
> academically. (Research fieldnotes, May 2012).[34]

According to IRS tax filings over the past five years (990 Forms), the Cobras claim an average of less than $100,000 in annual tax deductions from philanthropic investments in local schools, and primarily from corporate-sponsored school technology labs. However, my interviews with district leaders suggest the total in-kind contributions to the school system are substantially higher (DA1; DA4; DA5). For example, although *Stay in School*, the Cobras' longest running initiative, does not appear in the Cobras' charitable tax deductions, the program costs approximately $60,000 per year to operate, which includes management and administrative costs, as well as expenses in sponsoring events and producing cause-related marketing.[35] These financial costs are not assumed by the corporate franchise, but by one owner's spouse, since the team last changed ownership:

> It's an owner's wife that funds *Stay in School*…which could mean two things. Not having an owner funding the *Stay in School* campaign could be even more screwed up though, because now, if any of the owners are making money from this, when it's not the owners but the owner's wife who really really cares, and knows that they're making money, and wants to put this back into the kids...(DA4).

This sort of loosely coupled financial arrangement is common in the world of private philanthropy, where charity often flows through informal agreements and handshakes offered in kind (Eckert, 2011; Eckert, phone interview, October 6, 2012; Babiak, phone interview, September 12, 2012). Moreover, IRS tax reporting requirements provide limited information or standards on the uses and expenditures of private corporate philanthropy. The president of Charity Navigator, a philanthropy watchdog group, said, "The IRS has a very narrow range of what it can review and hold a charity to account for. There can still be plenty that's wrong even if you 'pass' an IRS audit" (*Lavigne*, 2013).

Thus, tracing tax-reported deductions offers only a starting point for talking about a corporation's institutional transactions with public schools.[36]

Individual RPS middle schools choose whether or not they want to participate in *Stay in School*'s activities. All schools in this study have been doing *Stay in School* for more than ten years (one of them for as long as the program has operated). A school district official said, "It has been growing exponentially. It was out of control last year—how many kids that actually qualified to get recognized for their attendance benchmarks and art projects in the program, and how many schools are now doing it." This central administrator later explained:

> Although a lot of people would say it's really more of the softer side of programing, but they [the Cobras] have been here for us for longer than I've been around, basically forever, they've been committed to supporting attendance and celebrating students' achievements, and in the last couple of years, now they've started donating brand new state of the art computer labs to schools. They've given a lot to us this year, I mean, they've really put in a lot of time, hours, effort, with our kids, with our schools. (DA1)

Although schools' participation is voluntary, school leaders described how there were clear expectations at the district-level to partake in the Cobras' initiatives:

> Under various academic superintendents there's like more or less pressure to make sure we're all going to do this [Stay in School], everybody has to go, or everyone has to send a representative. So I've always made sure somebody in the school checks attendance and hands out the monthly awards. You know, they send pencils or lanyards, little bling things to give to kids. (School Administrator, SA1.S1)

Through this soft pressure from above, school district officials increase the frequency of school participation in a few corporate partnerships by rewarding behavior. Schools say it is fun and exhilarating to host the NBA in your school. Additionally, principals say the relationship requires almost nothing of them as a leader and places limited responsibilities on the school overall. For instance, staff members assigned to verify

daily and monthly student attendance, check email updates from the Cobras, and

administer students' rewards, say these actions typically take up one to one and a half

day's worth of time each month, which is spread out and sometimes shared over two

people's schedules. School professionals charged with this coordination are usually,

though not always, specialist educators (who have more flexible schedules) and/or

Cobras fans (who have a personal interest in the team).

At the same time, school principals understand that if they chose not to partner,

their school may not receive approval from some influential district leaders. One school

administrator described this institutional expectation to join in the Cobras' (and other

corporate firms') philanthropy with the metaphor of a lively game of chase that someone

plays with their pet:

> Have you ever played with a cat and toy mouse? ...It's a bit like that with *Stay in School*... the cat, that's us in the school... with the string, that's like [District Administrator 1][37] or the Superintendent... Anyway, the cat chases the mouse, plays with it. It's fun. And it's fun to watch the cat chase after the string...and, you know, the cat gets treats after... This relates to schools because you always have different assistant superintendents who have got like their pet projects, and in meetings or whatever, they make it clear they want you to participate, whether that's *Stay in School,* or one of these other partnerships... You don't have to participate, but if you don't... you're basically choosing not to play along.
>
> As a principal, if I didn't play along, I couldn't go to somebody like [District Administrator 1] and say, "Here's what our needs are in the school," and then expect him to do anything special for us... But that's not the case...I can have those conversations... I guarantee you that, when the opportunity came up for the (Cobras) computer lab donations, our school was on that short list, because I have good relationships with the people I need to downtown, and I was talking to people about how bad we needed the technology. Also, we've been doing *Stay in School* all along... So, it's worked out great for us this year... It's really inspiring to see (children's) eyes light up when they walk in the room, from what it was before, when the walls were falling down and we had basically no computer access for students, to now, it's amazing. (SA1.S2)

The positive encouragement to partner creates small-, medium-, and larger-scale benefits

for schools that play along (which are discussed in depth in Parts IV and V.).

Participation is easy and enjoyable. At the same time, if a principal opts out, her school

renounces both the direct charitable rewards and the indirect advantages of building

strategic relationships with district administrators in charge of, or interested in, corporate

partnerships.

Part II: Is it a partnership? If it's not a partnership, then what is it?

From the perspective of school district leadership, what kinds of relationships exist?

Most participants suggest this is not a partnership, but a more distant

philanthropic relationship between a long-term and caring corporate benefactor and

schools of often adoring fans. Several school district administrators though describe the

arrangements with the Cobras as a "mutually beneficial" partnership between the team

and the school district, but not necessarily at the school-level (DA1; DA2; DA3; DA4;

DA5; DA8). One district leader called it a district-level partnership because there are

benefits for both organizations:

> It's a partnership…if you think about partnerships as offering various services or
> supports that provide a mutual benefit, I think that this would definitely be
> characterized as that… the Cobras are widely respected, admired, and can be seen
> as role models. So, I think they're helping, even at the margins, to turn the culture
> about how school and school success is regarded, whether it's cool to go to
> school, I think they can have an impact… With the technology labs, the benefits
> are pretty clear… We have a lot of schools that either don't have labs or they're
> old and outdated… So [the Cobras] help bring us in the 21st century…. Also, the
> Cobras, they have a positive brand, and so I think that there are positive
> reputational benefits both for the school district as a whole, but also for the
> individual schools when the Cobras come to their school… Let's say that you're at
> any individual school and the Cobras come, that's something that people get
> excited about. It's something you can tell your families about, and it's something
> that can be attractive to families when they're deciding should I attend this school
> or not. (DA2)

In this way, associating with the NBA and the Cobras franchise, which people widely

support and often dream to meet, allows schools to better market themselves to students

and parents choosing whether to attend.[38] Most recently, corporate-sponsored technology

makeovers endow schools with access to digital tools in spaces covered in beautiful

Cobras branding. Thus, the corporation gains opportunities to place its product in

schools and launch cause-related marketing in the media, and a school earns the

opportunity to rebrand itself using the Cobras image.

> For the Cobras… It's the whole NBA cares thing, yeah. I think it's the marketing and reputational benefits for them. Right. They're not just living here in the city where people are paying huge prices to go to games, but it's like they're being good neighbors. They're investing in and caring about the community which they are a part of. (DA2)

> The longest serving school district liaison to the team, no longer employed by

RPS, calls The Cobras relationship a "strong partnership" (DA1). When I enquired if he

had ever asked for anything or suggested changing how things were run, he described the

generous supports that were offered by the Cobras:

> [Cobras Community Relations Director] calls me all the time, just to check in, see how things are going, talk about the team, give updates on things… I mean, I don't think I've ever picked up the phone to say, here's what we need or here's what we can do... I've never once asked them for anything. They've always come to me… Now I'm feeling all self-conscious… because… I mean, there's a point where you… they've given a lot to us this year. I mean, they've really put in a lot of time, hours, effort, with our kids, with our schools, and then if you want to be...to kind of...go back and have big asks for other things, that might seem a little crazy to me. (DA1)

Although this administrator explicitly labels the relationship with the Cobras a

partnership, which he also describes as a professional friendship with the Cobras

Community Relations Director, the flow of this inter-organizational union is more or less

one directional. It is more suggestive of charitable contribution than a partnership.

Another district leader with experience in philanthropy qualified her claim that

the Cobras were a partnership by specifically acknowledging "the distinction between

corporate philanthropy that is really just about name recognition and branding, versus

corporate philanthropy that's much more in-depth, much more intentional" (District

Administrator, DA3). For example, she explained, "If you get money from (International

Food Company)'s Foundation, you don't expect really anything from them other than

putting their brand label on the festival or concerts." On the other hand, she said:

> The Cobras piece…it's a little bit on a higher plane. It's a little more in-depth than the kind of name-brand thing that happens with most business and most corporate giving, but it's not quite all the way over to the other side of the spectrum, where we're sitting down together, we're planning about how to resolve youth violence, and we're going to now figure out how to work the Cobras' influence into it, from the perspective of how do we get an anti-gang message to kids from the team. I'm sure that you have players who'd be willing to speak about violence and literacy and other kinds of things, but in general to be able to move discussions to some depth, it takes a time investment. From an organization of that type, I just don't see it. (DA3)

District administrators can easily rattle off benefits to schools and business benefits of

this educational programming, such as, PR, fan development, the marketing of

merchandise, and cause-related marketing. The former school district liaison to the

Cobras explained:

> I think it's important for the players to feel like they're giving back to kids. I think the team...you know, they benefit from the fan base. Our kids aren't buying tickets to games, but they buy the gear, the jerseys, the sneakers… They (team) benefit from public relations, they benefit from...showing that they're doing right by kids. I think that it's clear the Cobras make some money, and so when they have something to spend, we're glad they spend some of it on us. And we're grateful for that… I'm sure that there's serendipitous (business) benefit, but it feels more like they really care… I haven't had any crazy, like, photo ops where we have to do this or whatever. I mean, there's always cameras at events and stuff, but they're almost always doing it in a low-key way. It's always professional. (DA1)

PR is seen as an institutional given, and in the case of the Cobras, it is done

professionally. No one I spoke with in central administration thinks that the business

benefits outweigh the educational rewards. However, district and school administrators

also acknowledge that much of what happens in this partnership operates on a one-off

basis in a series of one-time events that are transactional in nature, but that fail to

establish ongoing reciprocal relationships where educational problems are being tackled

jointly.

From the perspective of schools, this is charity, not partnership.

With the exception of one teacher, almost no one working in the schools

categorizes the Cobras' relationship as a school partnership, though many school leaders

and teachers assume that a relationship of that kind does exist between the school district

and the corporation.

> No. Not from my perspective. I'm sure there's people in central administration who would say differently, coming from the district perspective… There's probably people who see this as a true partnership, or would you say that it is, but I doubt you'll find many people in the schools who call it that, call it a true partnership. I could be wrong, maybe other schools have a very different kind of experience [with the team] but from what I've seen, I don't think you can call it a partnership… It's charity, and I'm grateful for what they've given us, but it's not a partnership. (School Administrator, SA1.S2)

> I would not call it a partnership… The Cobras offer a program that brings value for us in terms of school resources… I'm assuming there's more of a partnership between the school district and the team…but personally couldn't say." (School Administrator, SA1.S3)

> It feels less like a partnership and more like corporate largesse that we get from the Cobras. (School Administrator, SA1.S1)

> Again, I wouldn't call the Cobras a real partnership with our school. It's a relationship that we've benefitted from and one that I hope continues, but the way it runs now, it's not a partnership. It's charity. (School Administrator, SA2.S1)

> It's not a partnership… To me it feels like its…they're doing the right thing, and their intentions are good, but it doesn't seem like it's a giant priority... It comes almost down to almost like a handout, you know what I'm saying. It feels more like handouts than a mutual partnership. (Teacher, T1.S1)

> It's really more about charity than having a mutual partnership. I wish it was a more active partnership, I really do, but I also think we get a lot out of it… That charity goes a long way (Teacher, T3.S2)

School participants say the Cobras' philanthropy does not rise to the level of

partnership with them primarily because it lacks the mutual flexibility and ongoing communication to jointly assess and shape the team's initiatives in the schools. When a school chooses to participate, the corporation sets the basic course. One school administrator offered, "The Cobras program is like cookie cutter, a cookie cut out…We don't get to decide how the cookies are made, but, you know they make good cookies" (SA1.S2).[39] Another school administrator explicitly linked the celebrity worship of sports to the team's charitable approach in schools, dubbing the Cobras *fly by philanthropists*:

> People look up to them…follow their movements from the ground… The fans and in the media, we treat them almost like deities… Every once in a while, these gods float down, and in like an instant they change what's happening in the school… They do an assembly and it's complete pandemonium… Or like when they gave us the new computer lab. It took them a snap… But, the thing is, they're here and then they're gone. They go back up in the clouds… So, with the computer lab donation, I have no expectation that they're coming back to check up on things. There's no evaluation of the lab, or checklists they ask us to complete… They don't ask what we're doing with the donation, and if we don't take the initiative to say anything, they won't know. To me, that's not a partnership… It's fly by philanthropy. (SA3.S2)

Practitioners understand and are largely untroubled by the fleeting or "fly by" nature of the schools' interactions with the Cobras. The weak ties to the corporation provide economically scarce schools with sponsorship that can partially fill gaps in desperately needed resources, which schools get to decide how to use.

For schools, though, definitions of partnership hinge primarily on the mutual constitution of goals and on the terms of engagement. Being in partnership means these terms are negotiated through ongoing communication and collaboration, whereby the school and the outside agency share jointly in the responsibilities and functions of addressing a specific stated educational problem or goal. One school leader at Marquis Academy compared her experience with the Cobras to the more active contact realized in

an art-based partnership with a local private non-profit organization:

> There's a constant—no, not constant—but regular communication between
> myself and the [non-profit organization] education person. We're continually
> planning together, talking, I'm talking about what I'd like to see. They're talking
> about what they can do. We try things out. There's an assessment piece to it. So
> that feels like a real partnership because there's a two-way conversation about,
> *here's what we'd like to bring*, and I'll say *here's what we need*, versus with the
> Cobras it feels a little bit more random in a way… Like in the fall, we'll get word
> that the Cobras want to do two Stay in School assemblies, and what schools are
> interested? And you can say either, yes we are or no we're not, and then you may
> or may not get chosen to be the school that gets the assembly. So it's, it feels less
> like a partnership and more like corporate largesse that we get from the Cobras,
> versus what happens in our relationship with the [non-profit organization].
> (SA1.S1)

Another school administrator at Marquis Academy described the essence of a mutual

partnership:

> My definition, when I think about partnerships, I think about like I said earlier,
> the teachers and staff, how we are collaborating. I also think about how we
> partner with families. The relations that I describe as partnerships are the ones
> where it's a constant back and forth. It's day to day. There's numerous
> conversations. There's grappling with problems and struggling through it
> together, and figuring it out together. There's bumps along the way. We work
> through those. There's tough conversations. (SA2.S1)

At Roosevelt Academy, leaders explicitly label the relationship with the Cobras

not as a "partnership," but as a *program* that entails a considerably lower level of

responsibility, expectations, or face time in the school. In contrast, school partners, who

are limited to about a dozen organizations, are granted access to develop explicit

partnership agreements. These partners are integrated closely into the school culture and

must directly support the school mission:

> Whether that is the out-of-school time support, the family engagement support,
> health and wellness support, or the academic support, our partners are those
> organizations that support us in more than one of those areas. They usually
> participate as a member of our school site council. Not a voting member, but a
> member of our school site council, meaning that their interest in our school
> extends beyond just their individual "piece" that they do at our school. They

understand who we are and they know the other partners… They know our students and some know the parents… It's very active. (SA1.S3)

At one point, Roosevelt Academy leaders designated every organization as a partner, and did not turn away any interested parties. But over time, through trial and error, sustained reflection, attending conferences, and working with outside consultants and researchers, school leaders grew more nuanced and discriminating in their understanding of partnership and in their development of school policies and strategies for developing partnerships. School partners are now invited to actively participate in partnership contracts that clearly stipulate each party's responsibilities. These are negotiated annually and coordinated through regular partner meetings with school leaders, where organizational players share successes, challenges, and brainstorm resolutions to issues.

Another key feature of Roosevelt Academy's partners is that they devote human capital, not just financial or in-kind contributions, to the work that is done. This regular face time means that, "you need to know the school's language, you need to refer to the students in the ways that we do. We expect that there's a shared language and set of expectations for everyone working here about what it means to be a member of the school community" (SA1.S3). Across schools in this study, participants say that their true partners know students and teachers by name. No one assumes that the Cobras know anyone in the school by name, though participants can usually name multiple Cobras' players, Cobras' owners, and the Cobras' Community Relations Director.

In summary, school participants are able to articulate in clear terms what does and does not constitute a partnership. Although school district officials have publicly described the inter-organizational arrangements with the Cobras as a partnership, and the

school district website labels them so, most individuals in this study say it is not a partnership, but a valued charitable relationship. Many educators believe the term partnership is used too loosely in everyday discourse, also a known problem within the field of public-private partnerships (Googins, 2000; Robertson & Verger, 2012). Calling every inter-organizational relationship a partnership would simply not be useful to school practitioners who need pragmatic means of distinguishing and engaging in a range of cross-sector arrangements becoming increasingly common in public schools. Educators in this study have developed tacit and explicit theories to express those relationships, enabling school leaders to make distinctions between those interactions that call for sustained ongoing communication and contact, and those interactions that demand less professional attention or time. In theory, collaborating through both weak and strong ties across sectors serves as a means to build capital and resources that organizations do not possess, and to address social issues more effectively and efficiently than they could accomplish working alone (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007; Waddock, 1988). However, the varying organizational structures and unequal power dimensions of different sectors pose unique challenges to effective and equitable collaboration (Ball, 2007; Buras, Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Part III: Either/Or Logic in Scholarship vs. Both/And Logic in School Practice

Professional staff perspectives on the NBA's corporate social engagement in River City Public Schools are characterized by nuanced understandings and ideological tensions, rather than stark binary absolutes. This ideological complexity on corporate philanthropy stands in sharp relief to what much of the existing literature on partnerships says about corporate participation in the public sector. This literature tends to view

corporate philanthropy as *either* corporate do-gooding beneficence *or* as something that awards disproportionate benefits to capitalist interests. This dichotomous *either/or* logic is depicted in Figure 4.1 below.[40]

The first, more dominant discourse of corporate altruism "draws on an old and rich heritage, grounded in notions of noblesse oblige," (Godfrey, 2009, p. 701). This tradition aims to redirect privately accumulated wealth back into the public good. As Andrew Carnegie put it, those individuals with "enormous fortunes" bear clear social responsibilities "to promote the permanent good of the communities from which they have been gathered," (Carnegie, cite in Godfrey, p. 701).   Research on corporate philanthropy from this broad stance focuses closely on understanding the conditions that may facilitate positive synergies in civil society through charitable contributions of economic, human and social capital (e.g. Frumkin, 2003; Hess 2005; Mosley-Eckert 2012; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Smith & Wohlsetter, 2006). Scholars in this perspective take an interest in promoting promising practices, continuous improvement, and "what works" in conducting corporate philanthropy in education.

Alternatively, in a second perspective, private sector participation is seen as an invention of capitalism to "greenwash"[41] corporations through public relations (Athanasiou, 1996; Beder, 2002; Laufer, 2003), or as a cunning tool to advance the course of privatization and corporate re-culturing within public education (e.g.; Apple, 2006; Boyles, 2002, 2005; Molnar, 2005; Saltman, 2000, 2005). Business ethics theorist Kallio (2007) has argued:

> The fact that corporations pursue a responsible image has led, among others, to the phenomenon known as 'greenwashing.' Accordingly, it seems that many corporations have chosen the easy, though risky, path and artificially tried to construct their image as green and responsible. (p. 170)

This second cluster of scholarship draws on more counter-hegemonic theories of corporate engagement. Research from this position focuses on the profit-oriented motives of corporate philanthropists, as well as negative synergies produced in often unequal power relations across the public and private sectors. This research illuminates how asymmetries of power are framed in popular culture and public discourse, and how corporate philanthropy operates politically in schools (Ball, 2009; Giroux, 1999; Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2010). However, the existence of greenwashing as an industry practice does not mean that all corporations engage in it. "The presence of economic and political forces prepared to devote considerable resources to shape the 'meaning of greening' to suit their own interests" (Levy, 1997, p.136) does not mean that corporate philanthropy can be simplistically reduced to the mere construction of image or brand.

Figure 4.1: Do-Good vs. Capitalist Benefits? Oppositional Discourses on Corporate Social Engagement in Education

Dominant discourses on corporate social engagement in education ("Do Good")	Non-dominant discourses on corporate engagement (Capital Accumulation)
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as altruism and charity in the public sector -Philanthropy serves altruistic intentions of the very rich who feel compelled to give back, or exercise discretionary responsibilities in society. -Market-based orientation, i.e. corporate philanthropy is tertiary, optional, and subjugated to firms' profit-making functions. -Emphasis on the positive stories of corporate philanthropy	CSR as Greenwashing -Assumes critical orientation attuned to subtle manipulative uses of philanthropy in public relations (PR). -Offers a view into the hidden dark sides of corporate philanthropic behavior. -May over-estimate the exploitative motives and under-estimate the positive effects of corporate philanthropy.
Public-private partnerships (PPPs) as altruistic collaboration on social problems -Focus on ascertaining institutional forms, benefits, & challenges of implementing PPPs.	PPPs as privatizations or creeping corporatizations of public education -Emphasis on power dynamics of PPPs, i.e. *works for whom* and *is it just*?

Though research tends to emphasize the advantages. -Poses technical questions that might illuminate and enhance organizational efficiencies, i.e. *what works*? -Limited accounting for often asymmetrical, socio-political dimensions (power imbalances) that may be reflected in partnerships. -A blind eye to potentials for negative synergy.	-Direct focus on intentional, unintentional, and more hidden costs and consequences arising from partnerships with for-profit and private sector organizations. -Tendency to see everything as political and provide limited insight on pragmatic questions of improving school practices in/with PPPs. -Overly romantic images of schools and perpetually bleak images of corporate engagement, i.e. blind eye to positive synergies in corporate philanthropy.

Going into my interviews, I initially anticipated finding that people's views would fall relatively neatly into either the left or the right side of the figure above. I assumed I would mainly find that people either viewed the Cobras' school relationships as motivated by charitable, altruistic intentions *or* regarded these relationships as motivated by business, profit interests. However, in contrast to the essentialized *Either/Or* logic in the literature, research participants displayed nuanced *Both/And* thinking about the Cobras' engagement. District administrators, school leaders, and teachers are informed and consenting professionals who acknowledge the business-oriented goals of corporate philanthropy, and also make the most of its charitable hand out.

Schools understand that business benefits can influence the shape of corporate giving. But staff frame these non-educational motives positively, provided that the corporate brand meets some minimal ethical benchmarks for K-12 education (which everyone says the Cobras does), and provided that the corporate activity is seen as representing altruism and charity. As a counter-example of these basic conditions, the McDonalds and Coke corporations are considered unfit to partner with River City Public

Schools, primarily because of the junk food industry's role in the obesity epidemic, which disproportionately affects children in these schools. One teacher said, "I would not want McDonalds running programs and putting up their logo in the school, or Coke or Pepsi for that matter…because we need to promote healthy lifestyles with kids. It would send the wrong message" (T3.S1).[42]

In the sections that follow, research participants describe the Cobras as a respected and beloved brand displaying its charitable intentions when engaging schools by helping address the problem of school dropout, motivating student achievement, or enriching school technology resources, for example. At the same time, brand/product placement, fan/consumer development, and public relations are unmistakable business-oriented goals of these school-to-corporate arrangements. No one in the study regarded these business integrations as ultimately objectionable. Staff and students openly consume and support the NBA brand and the Cobras organizational movements both on the playing court and in the schools. However, a handful of participants, who are also fans, find aspects of these for-profit ventures in schools troubling. Two educators raised questions about the broad socio-economic conditions surrounding the team's philanthropic initiatives, saying:

> Whatever they're giving, whatever little it is that they're giving back to the community, they are writing it off in tax dollars. In the meantime, who's really making out? I mean, I think that the people like (Cobras Community Relations Director) who are running it really care. But the high up people on top, even in the district, they're more about the money and the politics, not the education… I see it hurting our kids. I see that really hurting our kids from the inner city. (Coach, C1.S1)

> At some point, somebody should ask, what are we really doing *Stay in School* for? Are we doing it to engage children more in their learning? Or is it more about looking good for the media… like creating an appearance of tackling the dropout problem. (Teacher, T2.S3)

The profitability of professional sports stems partly from strong community ties of commercial consumption, which in the long run may reinforce social dynamics that "keep poor people poor and rich people rich" (C1.S3). Public-private partnerships in sport philanthropy may thus at once replenish scarce schooling resources and generate marketing opportunities for business growth. Therefore, as Lipman (2011) and others have argued, PPPs can be seen as part of a larger "historically-generated state strategy to manage the structural crisis of capitalism and provide new opportunities for capital accumulation" (Lipman, p. 6; see also Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009). In River City, the commercial aspects of corporate philanthropy are often normalized as positive, commonsense displays of local pride in local culture that fluidly cross the boundaries of the otherwise dichotomous discourses of altruism and the market. Part IV next explores the complexities and contradictions that surface in these *both/and* views of corporate engagement in education by examining professional basketball fandom and stardom.

Part IV: Relationships in Sport Fandom and Stardom

Elite professional sport has developed into one of America's most pervasive and influential cultural institutions (McCarty, 2010). Professional sport teams unite and divide spatially proximate and distal communities of fans who passionately support their teams and brands (Sandvoss, 2003). The rituals, routines, and practices of fandom create cultural vibrancy around professional sport and its athletic stars. One of the ingenuities of capitalism has been to draw on the "collective effervescence" that sport can bring into being (Durkheim 1912/2001, cited in Serazio, 2012). Corporate America has harnessed the discursive branding potentialities that lie in catalyzing "moments of intense social unity and reaffirmed group ideals that interrupt the prosaic goings-on of anonymous

everyday life in a big city" (Serazio, 2012, p.2). Professional sporting corporations have flourished in this high-profiting industrial complex, as the consumption of sport has attained immense proportions (Humphries & Howard, 2008; Mean & Halone, 2010).

Sport conjures powerful surges of emotion and the release of adrenaline and other neurotransmitters, producing feelings of exultation in victory and misery in defeat among those individuals and social groups participating in the build up and aftermath of these highly produced sporting spectacles. Hardcore fans paint their faces and bodies. Casual to devoted fans dedicate regular periods of time to following the movements, passes, and rearrangements of their teams, both on and off the court. Bandwagon fans and faithful followers dress often in licensed sport gear, denoting the impact of robust economic relationships in the sport industrial complex (See Chapter 1). The cultural salience of fan experiences with athletic stardom is materially revealed in market-based terms within schools – for instance, in how many children in poverty still find means of acquiring expensive licensed apparel. In the Friends Academy K-8 school in this study, one school administrator explained:

> Many of our students are poor but they can actually look quite expensive. They've got pairs of hundred dollar shoes to match their outfits… the family might actually be struggling to pay the rent or buy groceries, but the kids figure out ways to get the shoes... They look like they have money…but it's an illusion (SA3.S2).[43]

However, one district administrator warned to not confuse the structural conditions of poverty with the social outcomes of being poor, young, and black in America: "Isn't it just veiled racism to say it's 'the sneakers'…Doesn't it just blame poor kids for being poor. I mean, kids in the suburbs spend way more on clothes, right? …But those kids aren't denied access to things like state of the art technology in the classroom" (DA5).

Other educators discussed the resourcefulness that students displayed in getting

their hands on expensive NBA-licensed apparel. At the Roosevelt Academy K-8 school,

a school administrator related the story of a young boy who continually loses his school

supplies. He regularly solicits teachers to replace these supplies, which he says that his

family cannot afford to replace, and which he knows most educators will not deny him if

he asks nicely. At the same time, the boy manages to sport expensive sneakers each day.

The administrator explained:

> There's people who changed the world and they had holes in their shoes. You're
> just going to math class, and you have $200 sneakers on… Which is genius, I
> (student) have figured out a way that I can get what I want because it's a priority,
> and get what I need because it's a school priority... We could argue against the
> justification for a price like that but the sneaker itself, there's nothing wrong with.
> You want to look the best, you want to wear the best. You want to be associated
> with the best… You want to be known as that dude or that girl with the best on. If
> I'm the child and I want the best or what I perceive as the best, but what's in the
> way is what I need (school supply). I'm going to figure out a way that I can get
> both. (SA3.S3).

In River City, teachers, counselors, and principals continually face the fact that,

> Too many of our children, too many families, have to face basic survival
> questions on an everyday basis… like how am I going to pay rent? How to put
> food on the table every week…and food that's **not** on McDonalds' dollar menu
> (SA3.S2).

Simultaneously, those young people living in chronic poverty find ways to participate as

active consumers of the commercialized world of sport, which inadvertently reifies

fractured spaces of capitalism and contributes to the consolidation of wealth and capital

into the hands of fewer individuals who control the means of production in increasingly

synergized globalized markets. One teacher illuminated this paradox:

> Most kids can't buy the basketball shoes outright… I mean, none of our students
> are walking around with $200 dollars in their pocket. But they find ways. They
> nag their parents. Some steal. You name it. They do what it takes… And some
> of our kids dress really fly… I just think there's this sad story about people, kids,
> trying to find happiness in material things, which isn't gonna deliver on
> happiness… I think it does help keep poor people poor and rich people rich…
> I'm not saying they're to blame for being poor…And I'm not saying the Cobras

are to blame for it, but that money would do a lot more good in college savings than sneakers. (T2.S3)

Youth social identities are fashioned in a commercial marketplace that is wrought with social contradictions. A school administrator drew connections between the young people's fixation on licensed commercial apparel and potential future pathways into the "prison industrial complex":

> At the end of the day these kids have got their jackets, their hats—excuse me, I keep saying kids, children—they have the jackets, their hats, their headbands, their wristbands, the Under Armour sleeve, the sneakers. I say it again, *oh lord*, the sneakers! I mean they've got it all… They look like basketball players… That their priority is on the product, be it NBA or for NFL… but (students') priority on that product versus what's in the classroom… without that educational foundation, it makes them prime candidates for the prison industrial complex. It may be a small, may be a large part of the equation, but it is part of the equation. Statistically, we can back up those who don't have the priority for the classroom but will invest in the product, knowingly or unknowingly, actually feed the prison industrial complex[44]… It's big business.

> One of the things I know is that you can't have a prison on the stock market if the commodity is not guaranteed. How do you guarantee a prisoner? Part of it is you've changed the priority from education to something else. It's unfortunate. And I'm not saying that the NBA or anybody else has anything deliberately to do with that. I'm not astute enough to make that assumption. Obviously, I would need empirical data to step out on that, and let me say that, but… I mean, one plus one equals two… I see it every day in the school. The priority is on other things and not in the classroom. How can a child be intelligent to go out in the playground and play without creasing or dirtying a brand new pair of whatever, but can't seem to get their homework done every day? It is not a lack of intelligence. It's priority. It's because they're not inspired. (SA3.S3)

Professional sport occupies a unique place in the public's imagination, although the attendant motivation to consume places some young people at greater risk in society. These consumptive habits point to social givens of the modern world that some educators find deeply concerning.

However, it should come as little surprise that every participant in this study, including the critical voices cited above, expresses feelings of respect, admiration, and

even love towards the River City Cobras. Not every participant is a loyal fan, but virtually no one in the schools publicly roots against them. "You know there's Lakers and New York fans but they just don't wear their gear [in the school]" (T3.S1). One school administrator said, "people would probably look at you strange… if you were like for some reason against the Cobras…rooting against them" (SA1.S2). Displaying one's support for the NBA is common practice in schools. Showing pride in and wearing team colors are especially encouraged during playoff runs. For example, schools with student dress codes will periodically encourage students to wear team apparel in place of the school uniforms on "Fun Fridays" or the day of a big game.[45] The expression of this sporting allegiance presents welcome and entertaining distractions from the everyday mundane aspects of schooling. Fandom provides momentary relief from the typical school day and opportunities for educators and students to socialize in non-academic ways.

The Cobras are adorned as champions in a city that widely celebrates its local corporatized sporting cultures. Standing in a school as the morning bell approaches, it is normal to hear adults and youth talk about past and upcoming sporting events, while brandishing team totems. Some teachers are faithful followers through the wins and losses. All teachers and administrators express respect for the team, and even teachers who are not die-hard fans recognize the value of following it since many of their students take great interest:

> I'm a fan… what you might call one of the faithful… It's exciting to watch, and they won some championships, so that doesn't hurt too… But I was a fan in the lean years, and there was a lot of those… (Teacher, T3.S1)

> I tend to wear many hats wherever there's a need but in this particular case with the NBA, I'm a big fan of course. The Cobras' team, they have a lot of veteran players and some of these other teams have a lot of younger players and the

energy level is pretty high…which doesn't mean that they're better teams because when it comes to the final games, you're in the series and you're both three games to three, in the deciding game, the seventh game, the veteran team has an advantage because they have already experienced going through this… It's exciting to watch. (Teacher, T1.S3)

Sure I'm a fan. I mostly watch on TV, but I do go to a game or two almost every year, usually up in the nosebleeds… I was a fan back when they stunk too… Yeah, there's a lot of fans in the school, and so there's energy that builds up in the season, and when the make the playoffs, man, that's fun. (Teacher, T2.S3)

[Since the team's technology donation] I pay a little more attention, and when I talk to people about the computer lab I always say who it came from. It's impressive for a lot of people to hear that we have a classroom dedicated by the Cobras. (School Administrator, SA3.S2)

I'm not really a fan myself…[although] their donation kind of made me one… but, you know, I've always had a tee shirt or hat stuck in my closet" (School Administrator, SA1.S2)

Being a fan evokes expressions of faith, allegiance, and intimacy to a professional sporting organization through community ties that engender diverse social benefits and tensions differently for rich benefactors managing the game and everyday followers of the brand.

The context of fan worship helps create a privileged, protective casing around professional sport that is not afforded to other corporatized markets (Quirk & Fort, 1997; Spavero, 2006; Spavero & Chalip, 2007). The cheering, jeering, and merchandising of basketball are practiced through sporting rituals, routines, and relics, which many schools also take up. Professional sport management benefits from these deep personal connections within imagined communities, which gradually blur the boundaries between the self (fan) and other (team/player) (Sandvoss, 2003). Fans see that they and their identities are part and parcel of an integrated brand. The devoting consumption of teams' commercialized performances and paraphernalia represents both public celebration of corporate brand and private revelation of self. Being a fan creates intense joy and deep

agony, depending mostly on which way the wins go, in the ascent and aftermath of these publicly celebrated sporting spectacles. The imagined space that connects a team and its fans creates seemingly intimate relationships between individuals who will usually never meet in the flesh (although in River City Public Schools, students and staff have unusual ongoing opportunities to meet up close and in person with professional basketball players and owners).

Elite sport is "one of the key contemporary sites where the expression of strong emotions is translated into the generation of substantial capital" (Rowe, 2004, p. 73). Corporations have sought to capitalize on the passionate social interactions that are cultivated through sporting cultures, drawing on fandom, stardom, and the buying, managing, and trading of selectively chosen, mostly Black male athletes who are effectively transformed into commercially branded icons. These "towering athletes [are] mega stars... For a lot of people, for a lot of our students, these guys are like gods" (Teacher, T2.S2). Many RPS youth look up to or even idolize the NBA stars as role models and symbols of "making it" in society, which creates unique opportunities for the Cobras corporation to influence young people to both stay in school and buy their merchandise.

Although municipal public taxpayer funds often go in to supporting professional sport though tax incentives, locally and regionally subsidized loans, or government grants, professional sporting corporations face very few legal stipulations or mechanisms to publicly account for uses of these funds. Team owners "are entering into an unspoken contract not just with the various mayors, governors, or political lackeys eager to lick some sweet salt off the rim, but with the citizens themselves" (Zirin, 2010, p. 5). In

exchange for this corporate welfare and a business-friendly regulation environment, which have helped garner consistent and soaring profits for a few sport owning elites and superstars at the top, the public is granted access primarily to consume the sport. Taxpaying fans consuming the game hold social and economic stake in professional sport, but have no ownership[46] and possess very little recourse for transparency or answerability from professional sporting corporations (Spavero & Chalip, 2006; Zirin, 2010). In the NBA, these celebrated brands surround the arrangement, performance, and sponsorship of gladiatorial sporting spectacles between basketball "gods." The Cobras organization regularly sells out home games and frequently plays deep into the playoffs in a recently refurbished stadium that the NBA owners in fact do not own, but rather pay a hefty lease for the privilege to convene commercial sponsors while waging their basketball showdowns.

The complex interrelated factors of fandom, stardom, and ownership are key to understanding how River City schools experience and perceive the NBA brand and its brand of philanthropy in the community. Without the emotive and visceral forces surrounding public spectacles of corporatized sport, the private sector firm in this study would be just another corporation. But it is not just any corporation. It is an immensely profitable and winning professional ball club that is loved locally and enacted globally. Most River City residents, and all of my research participants, follow the Cobras to varying degrees—as a faithful or bandwagon fan, grouching supporter, or silent objector. The beautiful game, be it basketball, football, baseball, or soccer, deepens the market potential that lies in the public's fascination, and at times obsession, with professional athleticism. NBA stardom and fan worship compose complex institutionalized

conditions whereby a mostly consuming public expresses broad fealty to corporate

brands, which maintain their social legitimacy through *on the field* athletic performance,

but also *off the field* social responsiveness in developing communities of support through

symbolic and material reinvestments within the cities that host them.

This section has illuminated some of the localized textures of public schools'

pledges of allegiance to corporatized sport. This complex fashioning of pop cultural stars

and allied fans reflects the intermingling of discourses on social responsibility and

capitalist benefits. Celebrating sport ritualizes fan practices in and out of schools,

shaping youth identities and patterns of consumption. Sense of self becomes increasingly

one with the image of team/brand. In Part V, we consider three specific relationships

sustained in Cobras' corporate philanthropy: incentivizing relations in corporate

handouts, motivational relationships in meritocratic ideology, and transformational

relationships in corporate-sponsored school technology makeovers. As we do so, the

racial and socio-economic context of elite professional sport persists as a foregrounded

presence in these cultural transactions among basketball fans, stars, and owners.

Part V: Relationships in Corporate Philanthropy

Both altruism and the market at play in corporate social engagements

In this age of fast capitalism, the large and growing field of corporate

philanthropy often works closely or strategically with the commercial and marketing

arms of business (Ball, 2008; Eikenberry, 2009; Sheth & Babiak, 2009). The strong

commercial support for professional sport serves as a foundation from which an

increasingly corporatized sport ownership can market its social responsibility initiatives

(Agyemang, 2011; Bradish & Cronin, 2009). According to Carroll's (1998; 2001)

foundational research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the principle of

economic profitability, encapsulated in the motto, *be profitable,* represents the principal

rule of corporate behavior and decision-making. From this perspective, the dominant

responsibility of a firm is to that of expanding wealth and profits. Corporate

philanthropy, which Carroll labels "discretionary responsibilities," only enters the

equation of operating a responsible business when the financial profitability and

regulatory mandates of the firm are satisfied with due diligence within the confines of the

law. After these economic and legal conditions are met, a corporation then chooses

whether and how to engage in philanthropy. In Carroll's influential theory, these purely

voluntary and discretionary pursuits ought never to undermine or undercut the firm's

economic responsibilities. In other words, the business of philanthropizing must never

get in the way of profit making.

   In contrast to Carroll's *Milton Friedman-esque* perspective that the only true

responsibility of business is economic, and that anything else is merely an add-on, the

more traditional aim of corporate philanthropy has rested on an expanded conception of a

firm's social obligations beyond narrow financial motivations (Visser, 2010). Pioneered

by 19th century industrial tycoons, such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and

Henry Ford, traditional philanthropy sought to empower community groups and civil

society organizations through long-term in-kind resourcing, which could also help

advance personal agendas or avoid government regulation (Himmelstein, 1997). These

captains of capitalism siphoned portions of their wealth surpluses into tax-deductible

contributions to their foundations (The Carnegie Corporation, The Rockefeller

Foundation, and The Ford Foundation) that served the public good. These corporate

foundations typically operated semi-autonomously from the management structure of their parent corporations. Relationships between corporate benefactors and public recipients were often developed over long time periods with donors requiring regular reporting on the use of resources and program results, though not generally taking a direct role in day-to-day decision-making or management of funds. This basically represented the dominant form of corporate philanthropy in education through much of the twentieth century (Lageman, 1992; Saltman, 2010).

Today, an increasing number of corporate philanthropies have abandoned this traditional approach in favor of more "strategic philanthropy," applying evidence-informed management practices to corporate giving that sustains close consultation between those directing in-kind private funds (e.g. foundation and corporate executives and owners) and those receiving these charitable resources (e.g. schools) (Hess, 2005; Frumkin, 2003). Venture philanthropy has explicitly sought to align educational investments with the values and language of the market for social exchanges, fusing principles from venture capitalism and quality management with philanthropic pursuits (Saltman, 2010; Ravitch, 2009). These venture-oriented philanthropists place a small number of big bets, and they expect high returns on their investments, for instance, in measurable quantifiable results on key performance indicators such as academic achievement.

In its decade-plus charitable history working with the River City Public Schools, the Cobras' organization has exhibited features that are both similar to and dissimilar from traditional philanthropy, in which the philanthropic arm of the corporation is "legally attached to the company but operate[s] with considerable independence from

their parent company" (Morsy, 2011, p. 84). Unlike a traditionalist approach to philanthropy, the Cobras' Community Relations, a small department run in the corporate front offices, directly manages the team's school-related programming (Confidential Endnote, C.E. 1). In addition, high-level corporate executives provide pro bono, tax-deductible leadership services to the Cobras' foundation, which co-sponsors most of the Cobras events and donations in schools (C.E. 2). The management structure of charitable giving and public relations is closely intertwined, enhancing the potential for "strategic" alignment of in-kind contributions and "the marketing and branding of the business product" (ibid, p.84).

Recently in 2013, the Community Relations Director expressed clear interest to RPS' Director of Partnerships and Institutional Development that the Cobras' programming should move in a "strategic" direction. For example, the team would like to more systematically track individual student- and school-level data that may be directly or indirectly relate to Cobras sponsored activities (DA4). At the time of this writing, in-depth conversations or decisions on this data sharing work had yet to transpire. The Director of Partnerships said that shifting to be more "strategic" would entail ongoing dialogue between the schools and the Cobras to better understand the intended aims, targets, and strategies, as well as the evidence of what was occurring in and resulting from these exchanges. District leaders would then need to assess how the Cobras' efforts fit into a "comprehensive set of strategies" across the school district. For instance, he explained, school and corporate leaders must openly come to terms with fairly widespread assumptions that *Stay in School* largely fails to reach those students most at risk of dropping out of school:[47]

[*Stay in School*] isn't touching the most at-risk students in and of itself. I think that if we're in a district looking to be more coordinated and strategic about what are our comprehensive strategies…We know that tickets [to a game] or a letter from [star NBA player] isn't going to get somebody who's gang involved, or chronically ill, to come to school… We know that if you just get a letter, and just get a ticket, it's not going to shift some of our highest risk students… I think that that falls back on us… So that we're looking at, how does this [Cobras] partnership fit into our comprehensive strategy? It's on us now, *on us*, to develop the comprehensive set of strategies to really meet the needs… We would have to work with them to define what their role is… Let's be strategic. Let's talk about how we can shift the program to meet the needs. (DA4)

Now that the school district has institutionalized a Partnerships office to provide guidance and support for the schools' development of cross-sector relationships, these sorts of difficult questions may get addressed more systematically. All district leaders in this study expressed interest in sitting down with the Cobras to assess and reform the composition of school contacts with the corporation. However, no one I interviewed had participated in or knew of a time when the school district made a direct request to the Cobras related to these strategic issues or proposed changes to the ways things were run.

This NBA-school relationship also exhibits similarities to a traditional philanthropic approach in its long-term commitment and undemanding corporate investments in the schools. The team has volunteered itself in the school district for nearly three decades. Though the business has changed hands numerous times over its history, each succeeding group of owners has renewed the team's charitable commitment to the public schools year in and out. Some corporate initiatives have been added and dropped over the years, but the core components have remained largely the same. Highlighting the stable and positive nature of the team's involvement in the River City school system, two administrators at the Friends Academy explained:

The staying power of a program or a tradition in the school district or in a school is critical. The team made a commitment, or the team's ownership or the NBA as a whole, I don't know who started it…but whoever made that commitment, kept

it. And I find that remarkable. Because things come and go so much, programmatically, reforms, supports for schools, come and go so much depending on the politics and the way the wind blows. It's powerful to find someone that has made a commitment—particularly to middle schools, because middle schools are often forgotten places… It shows that they care, that they are committed to this year in year out, to support the schools' work. (School Administrator, SA2.S2)

[The Cobras], they've been here forever, basically… It's not like anybody ever forced them to take on this role… They chose the schools and selected attendance as a focus with *Stay in School*… and they've stuck with us, which is not something I can say for a lot of these partnerships that come and go… I don't know, I doubt they [Cobras] see any kind of real economic need for it... I mean, people love them here, and we both know as long as they're winning games they're going to have fans, whether or not they do any community service" (School Administrator, SA1.S2).

In the dominant culture, the notion of philanthropy—a term deriving from Greek, *philanthrópos*, meaning "love of mankind"—is commonly thought of in terms that are compatible with *altruism*, thus connecting "a spirit of public obligation and deeply embedded in a liberal democratic ethos" (Saltman, 2010, p.63). When asked to speculate on the reasons why the Cobras engage in its school-based initiatives, participants' most common first response centers on caring for and expressing obligations to give back to the local community, which happily hosts and supports the team socially and economically:

> The players are larger in life, and show they really care about kids. Everybody gets pumped up when the stars come out, but it's powerful because you can tell they care about making a positive influence in our students' lives. Their commitment to stay involved for so long speaks for itself. (District Administrator, DA1)

> They want to give back to the community. It's about [the Cobras] taking responsibility to recognize that they make a lot of their money from people in the city… And so they have redirected some of that money back into the community… It shows they care about what happens to kids… It shows they have trust in us, in the schools. (School Administrator, SA1.S2)

> Obviously, (athletes) should know that they have a lot of sway, especially for a lot of the kids that do care about their local sports team. They could use that sway

for something extremely positive…or, they could choose to sit back, play with their money, and do nothing. I like to think that every player that is involved intrinsically believes in investing in our youth. (Teacher, T2.S1)

Educators believe that the Cobras CSR is driven up front by the noble intentions of rich owners and athletes, and is defined by a sense of duty to redistribute some of their collective wealth surpluses into educational provisions. Although the team's involvement in the schools is generally seen as being "more on the weaker side of programming, in comparison to some of our deeper partnerships…it is basically the same thing year in year out," (SA3.S2); therefore, schools know what to expect. While "it might be a little on the softer side of programming or partnering, but as far as what happens at the school level, it's really important. Because kids are motivated by the Cobras players…to celebrate their arts, writing, and attendance benchmarks" (DA1).

For schools that choose to participate, *Stay in School* extends organizationally in three kinds of cause-related relationships that reflect the mixing of discourses on philanthropy and the market, discussed below:

- *Incentivizing relationships* through corporate handouts of team trinkets and swag,

- *Motivational relationships* through corporate-sponsored assemblies about meritocracy in education and pursuing one's (basketball) dreams, and

- *Transformational relationships* through sponsored school technology makeovers

Incentivizing Achievement: Corporate handouts for perfect student attendance

Each month, students who achieve perfect school attendance are rewarded with "small prizes, a pencil, a keychain, a water bottle... tiny trinkets…with the Cobras name printed on it" (SA2.S2). Annual attendance benchmarks are recognized in an ascending scale of treats doled out by the team, leading up to framed and autographed pictures of

Cobras players, basketballs, jerseys, or sneakers. People often characterize this

component of *Stay in School* as handouts:

> I mean, they mostly end up in the hallway on the floor—the pictures with the fake signatures printed on them [with personalized messages to students]. I'm just being real with you. They end up on the floor. I end up taking them and stamping them on the wall or something, because…it's just nothing to our kids. (Coach, C1.S3)

> Most of what they give out each month is basically throwaways, little 'chachkies.' Kids keep some of it, other stuff winds up on the floor or in the trash…which then I clean up or throw out… sometimes I've pinned 'em back up on the board or I give it back to them (student) and let him or her know that I found it on the ground. I can give an "atta boy" for coming to school and then I remind them it's all our responsibility to keep our school clean, you know, not throw trash... because I think that's important. But sometimes, they dropped it on the floor by accident and they're like, "Thank you, mister, because I wanted to show that to my mom or my grandma." (Teacher, T2.S2)

> I see what the gifts are that they (team) give out, and I'm like damn, that budget was really low because them little things that they give, the styrofoam hand, they don't cost nothing and you're talking about bulk so you're buying them at a cheaper price. They probably spend more money for us having a meeting [referring to the annual *Stay in School* meeting for school and district reps that coordinate the program]…They don't just give out pizza. They gave us shells and chicken parmesan this last time... They bring us down to the [stadium], which costs a lot in itself… they spend more on all that than they do on a couple months of prizes for kids. (Coach, C1.S1)

Merriam Webster dictionary defines *handout* as "a portion of food, clothing, or money

given to or as if to a beggar." This description is only partially applicable, since my

research participants are not in the habit of begging. One principal responded to a

question about whether she asked for things from the Cobras' team or player foundations,

saying "No, not a regular basis. I'm not that type of person, I usually do not ask for

things…which maybe I should, now you've got me thinking about this, I should have

them on my regular call list for partners" (SA1.S3). The Cobras rewards are seen as

partially filling holes in an area constantly lacking adequate support—student attendance

and engagement. Public school leaders and teacher often find themselves wanting for

financial and other resources to meet the increasing expectations of K-12 education and

tackle the most pernicious problems. While RPS public schools are not actually starving,

they do operate in an environment of perpetually threatened resources and actual or

impending scarcity. The principal of Marquis Academy said, "For a significant portion

of our population, maybe like 15%, attendance always is a huge challenge" (SA1.S1).

Moreover, she added, "There are very few tools we have in our tool kit to try to impact it

(attendance). There are four attendance officers for the entire district. The fact that the

Cobras feel like it's something they want to work on and are willing to put some money

into, that's great" (SA1.S1). Other school-based staff said:

> Attendance is an area that needs to improve all over the city...We have attendance officers and they follow up on truancy cases, but they're overloaded too. For the whole district, there's just a couple of officers (Counselor, SC.S1)

> It's not a lot but, I mean, every bit helps cause schools are always struggling to make ends meet, and when it comes to encouraging attendance, we don't really have a lot to work with. So that handout, even if it's just a cheap trinket, it can go a long way, cause we don't have a lot of perks we can offer kids. (Teacher, T2.S3)

> The main thing they do for is they reward attendance to school because, you know, unless a child is in school, they can't learn. (Coach, C1.S2)

> I think what that does is it keeps the students engaged who come to school regularly. It keeps them engaged and gives them something else to look forward to, just for coming to school. Just for doing what they've gotta do to show up everyday (School Administrator, SA2.S3)

> I do think that the prizes they give out are a nice perk for those students with perfect attendance. And it's a real feat that we *should* recognize, for those kids who have perfect attendance. (School Administrator, SA1.S2)

A teacher at Marquis Academy explained in greater depth:

> The Cobras are involved in appreciating and celebrating the kids that have great attendance. For example, the kids from first quarter who had perfect attendance received autographed posters, from the Cobras, that had personalized messages on them for each kid… It's not the hugest deal. I don't want to act like the kids are completely over-the-moon, jumping around, screaming about getting an autographed poster with a note on it. But they do take pride in it… Maybe, it is

just a poster, but they're very proud to have that poster. I hear some of my students say, "Oh, yes. I went home and my mom says… we're going to get a frame for it, and we're going to hang it in my room. I want to see if I can earn enough of them, over school, to basically wallpaper my room." Maybe that's something small, but anybody, any help these kids can have toward staying in school and making it a priority in their lives is going to be good. Maybe it's a small gesture, but it's still a positive one. I'm grateful for that. (T2.S1)

All participants in this study are grateful to accept these corporate handouts that provide small accolades for student benchmarks and achievements. There are few other options readily available to reward those students who do manage to come to school day in and day out. However, since this positive attention is reserved for perfect attendance, it largely fails to reach students who are most at risk and chronically absent. The handouts offer little to no help for school staff to support youth facing substantial barriers to meeting daily, let alone monthly or annual, attendance benchmarks:

> It's great for the kids already coming to school, but I would say it does little for the kids really struggling to get to school. (Teacher, T1.S1)

> The trinkets they give out for perfect attendance… those don't help us see that the kids with the most problems are able to get to school and be ready to learn once they're here. (Coach, C1.S1)

> Even though I don't feel particularly swayed by the idea that giving a kid a pencil is going to make them want to come to school. But I do think that for kids who have perfect attendance, it's a great recognition. (School Administrator, SA1.S1)

> We've always participated in the program, even though I'm not convinced that giving a child a little trinket is going to necessarily motivate them to want to be in school. And really, that trinket doesn't help students who have real challenges getting here. If we're talking about those kids who struggle all the time to get to school because of family problems or what have you... *Stay in School* doesn't help us help those kids (School Administrator, SA1.S2)

> *Stay in School* helps us incentivize kids that are already meeting attendance benchmarks… It doesn't help us address attendance for the kids…falling behind, falling through the cracks… I'm going to be totally blunt and honest here. Never does it cross my mind, let me contact the Cobras to help me figure out why [student] hasn't been to school for the last two weeks. I'm reaching out to her teachers and counselors. I'm calling her family left and right. I'm demanding answers as to why this kid is not in school. I want attendance cards filed so that

somewhere the courts will put pressure on that family to get this kid into school, which is a whole other interview that that system and how inefficient it is…The [Cobras] program doesn't help me tackle our chronic attendance kids. I wish it did. Maybe there is something I don't know about the program. Maybe somebody can communicate it to me. (School Administrator, SA2.S1)

Educators are thus realistic about the limitations of this aspect of *Stay in School*. Yet they are happy to receive and hand out the paraphernalia. Additionally, "it's funny, the trinkets they give the kids, they're like these cheap reminders of the more expensive stuff they sell" (T3.S3). These branded tokens provide small ostensible benefits to schools that can compensate youth for perfect student attendance. The Cobras' prizes are "nice perks" for a limited subgroup of students. However, for those youth struggling every day or week just to get to school, let alone to be nourished and ready to learn, this handout largely passes them by. The program is low to no hassle for the schools, and has not changed much since it first begun, nor has it been formally evaluated.[48] The prizes are an easy way for schools to reinforce student achievement behavior by publicly administering consumerism and Cobras branding. Schools ritualize student routines through NBA swag that they hope will incentivize performance.

No school staff member interviewed is opposed to these sponsored giveaways, though few educators suggest they can have broad-scale positive consequences in school. The styrofoam finger, the key chain, the bracelet, the printed letter of encouragement from a player, the jersey, the basketball, or the signed sneakers: this merchandising is gifted to high-achievers and dangled as encouragement for lower achievers to simply try harder next month or next year.

Motivational relationships: Corporate-sponsored assemblies to inspire urban youth

with NBA players' stories of struggle and meritocratic success in America

Every year, the Cobras sponsor a handful of their assemblies in middle schools.

Schools sign up at the beginning of each year if they wish to be thrown in the hat for

consideration, and typically schools receive one visit every three to five years. At the end

of each school year, the team also sponsors a citywide *Stay in School* celebration where

they stage motivational speakers, recognize students with perfect attendance, and give out

a variety of other contest prizes and raffles. One school administrator said, "They do an

assembly and it's complete pandemonium. Everybody gets excited, not just the kids, and

so people's attention shifts to that for the day. It's fun and it's distracting" (SA3.S2).

One school counselor added, "We have these assemblies or like performances where

players have come here and [students] get all excited" (GC.S1). The chance to play host

to this local professional basketball team produces highflying emotions, and at times,

"collective effervescence," which offers momentary interruption from "the prosaic

goings-on of anonymous everyday life in a big city" (Serazio, 2012, p. 2). Professional

athletes are popular culture stars that many youth look up to as icons of "makin' it" or as

role models for success. Just as athletes are used to sell commercial brands, they can also

be used to promote inspirational messaging with young people. In highlighting the

racialized components of these commercial realities in professional sport, Rhoden (2006)

states:

> Black faces and black bodies are used to sell everything from clothing to
> deodorant and soft drinks. Their gestures, colorful language, and overall style are
> used by Madison Avenue to project the feel and fashion of inner-city America to
> an eager global marketplace—they're the stealth of ambassadors of hip-hop
> culture and capitalism, bridges between the street and the mainstream (p. 1)

In the commonplace grammar of the marketplace, corporations draw on "blackophilia" (Yousman, 2003) in the dominant culture to generate immense and growing profits. However, they also have a duty to recommit resources, whether economic, social, or human capital, into their local communities of support. In the case of River City, the mostly black male athletes are powerful cultural symbols of success for the mostly black and Latino youth in the public schools.

Under the label of *NBA Cares*, the umbrella NBA corporation puts its cause-related stamp of approval on the Cobras' and other team franchises' local and global social responsibility initiatives. In the NBA, most, though not all, franchises engage in school-related programming through *Stay in School* or other projects. Across American cities that love sports and cherish basketball, social affinity bonds can be cultivated between a team and its fans within the institutional tissues of schools. These school-to-corporate contacts entail complex ideological dynamics, corporate-to-community communications, and popular culture representations of urban culture. A few snapshots of cause-related marketing initiatives around the NBA are depicted below:

Figure 4.2: Images of professional athletes conducting NBA Cares activities with youth (clockwise from top): New York Knicks, Los Angeles Lakers, & Memphis Grizzles. Source: NBA.com

These photo opportunities capture the mostly black NBA players as youth-centric, philanthropic actors in the social arena. In the top left picture from a New York Knicks school event, the image of Amar'e Stoudemire and the lighter skinned female cheerleaders raises questions about the selling of racialized and gendered representations of urban blackness that are at once socially acceptable and sexually alluring to the NBA's mostly-white consumers and corporate sponsors. Examining the background of this photo more closely, one sees, captured in the school bus window's reflection, barbed wire fencing surrounding the schoolhouse building. This stark reflection reveals the disconcerting social and economic realities of inner-city public schooling. These often troubling conditions enhance the public relations value of corporations forging school relationships, while underscoring the need for strategic and sustainable forms of corporate engagement that move beyond "fly by" forms of philanthropy.

To illustrate the social conditions of these relationships in River City, I will now describe a short documercial video on *Stay in School* produced by the Cobras (C.E. 3).[49] Following this presentation, I will examine the images, audience, and purposes of this

multi-modal text. While reading this corporate service announcement on NBA community relations, we must continue to bear in mind the intersection of race, class, and gender in corporate communications about philanthropy.

Stay in School documercial: Coming to you live from the River City Public Schools

The camera frame opens on an attractive Cobras spokesperson reporting courtside in a school gymnasium. Light pours in the gym's large, smudged windowpanes. On the court behind her, thirty or forty young people of color, presumably in grades 6-8, excitedly hurl jump shots, chase rebounds, and cheer each other on. Rising above the youth are several NBA basketball players who coach them on. The reporter says that the Cobras have been offering programs to young people in the River City schools for more than twenty years, hosting student assemblies designed to "motivate students to take pride in their schoolwork" and other activities, such as the basketball clinic shown here.

The camera cuts to a Cobras player, while students practice layups, who says *Stay in School* is "all about teaching the kids here about Cobras P.R.I.D.E: perseverance, respect, integrity, decisions and education… and just coming out to interact with our fans and interact with the community and really support the people who are supporting us." Another player describes how the team is countering the effects of the "drop out" problem in schools:

> There's a high rate of kids dropping out of school. These kids have to understand that they're our future and they have the opportunity to go where they want to be in life as long as they get that education.

A third player explains, "I worked extremely hard in the classroom. It wasn't easy, and that's what I tried to relate to some of the kids here today. Some of the best things in life take a lot of hard work to achieve it." The camera cuts to an eleven- or twelve-year-old smiling girl, possibly Latino or African American, standing on the court who says, "I

have to keep doing my homework and stay focused on my grades, and make sure I

respect somebody, because that respect will come back to me." Cut to NBA players:

> My favorite part is just the excitement on their faces. You know, when I was young, I used look up to people who looked out for me. I had my brothers looking out for me. Having them when I was young, and every time I walked around and they saw me, it made my day, as a little kid, and so I hope I did the same for students today.

> It doesn't matter what player you are, how many baskets you scored or whatever, these kids are excited and they're very, very grateful that we come here and take the time out to speak with them. They're so excited. Just to see that elation on their faces and see them screaming all over the place is more than enough.

The beaming Cobras spokes model is back and signs off, "Here at the Knox School in

River City, I'm [name omitted] for Cobras.com." [Scrolling text says where to find out

more information about the program. Music and camera fade to black.]

After watching this journalistic commercial during an interview, one teacher said,

"If I showed this clip to my students, I bet a number of them would think it was a news

segment, not a commercial" (T2.S3). Though if she did show this clip to students (and

she frequently does bring popular media texts into classroom learning), she would also

talk about the "the power of images and pictures in the media, to like shape they way

people think…and what we're programmed to buy" (T2.S3). This commercial text is

aimed both at drawing positive media attention to the problem of school "drop out" and

also at marketing socially responsible images of the Cobras' and the NBA's cause-related

brands. The teacher reflected:

> It [the commercial] doesn't help you actually understand what's going on in schools. It's more about making a connection or like a good feeling for fans... I say fans because I mean, that's who's likely seeing this sort of commercial for the *NBA Cares* thing…whether that's at a game, or on TV…or somebody going to the website. But like I said, our kids aren't going to games… I go to games, not every year… At the (stadium), you see it's mostly middle-class and professional people that are buying tickets, and it's mostly upper class in the boxes… I assume that's like really the target audience for this (Stay in School) commercial. (T2.S3)

The documercial is a PR device to communicate with Cobras fans about what the team is

doing to support the River City Public Schools in preventing urban youth from dropping

out of school. This participant and others have described the immensity of the dropout

problem that is facing public schools today. In 2011, the school district witnessed ninth

grade cohort dropout rates of less than 25% system-wide, although this figure increases

significantly for students of color when statistics are disaggregated by race and ethnicity

(C.E. 4). The origin of the Cobras' school relations work is clearly understood by district

and school staff as a charitable initiative hatched long ago and led by the business

organization to support the city's public schools as they tackle the problem of school

dropout through programs that provide schools with branded team trinkets, NBA athletes'

motivational speeches, and material in-kind donations. One academic superintendent

explained:

> Students dropping out of school. It's a huge issue. You can look at these different
> leading indicators that are more or less predictive of whether a student will drop
> out in high school. A lot of our kids start struggling early. And middle school is a
> critical time period. So I mean, the Cobras help us with that, they help us address
> this very real problem (DA1).

Although this study found no numerical evidence to reliably estimate *Stay in*

School's direct impact on student attendance data, this is not to suggest a positive

correlation does not exist. Instead, school leadership simply did not have immediate

access to quantitative results for the program.[50] Many administrators believed that the

Cobras have been collecting individual and school attendance figures for some time,

since the team uses the data point to make determinations of rewards for perfect student

attendance each month (e.g. trinkets or printed letters from players), each year (e.g.

jerseys and sneakers), and over multiple years (e.g. signed paraphernalia, such as framed

photographs).[51] Two administrators speculated that the corporation might also be

carrying out its own private impact studies, as a means to enhance the Cobra's social responsibility image.[52] This type of information can then be used to negotiate the financial terms of the franchise's own corporate sponsors, such as Coke, Budweiser, McDonalds, Adidas, or Nike (C.E. 5). However, if the team does conduct either formative or summative business evaluation research on its school-based programs, no participant in this study was privy to its findings.

Most research participants have never actually seen a Cobras' *NBA Cares* commercial, though many have seen those produced and promoted by the umbrella NBA corporation.[53] Some staff have seen short videos created by the school district or posted to one Cobras player's foundation website and blog. With a few participants, like the teacher above, I showed segments of cause-related marketing during follow-up interviews. Displaying nuanced *both/and* logic of altruism and marketing, one school administrator remarked:

> How much can you really get from like a 20-second commercial? …Mostly, it's like it's about them [the team] communicating with fans, right… When a fan sees one of these NBA Cares commercials, they're going to feel good about what their team is doing for urban kids... A lot of people think urban schools, they think of these schools…as like…failed or basically broken… I mean, that's not how I see it, but it is a reality in the news and these movies, like *Waiting for Superman*. And so because of that, I mean, it's a positive message for the NBA… It's good for their image to show they're good citizens in the community… But I wonder too, I don't think they get that much attention in the media for their charity… When was the last time you read in the paper about what the Cobras are doing in the schools? You just don't… which is sad, because I bet if they got more attention for it, they would probably think more about it and do more good. (SA3.S2)

At sponsored events, NBA motivational speeches recast the dominant U.S. culture's ethos of "rugged individualism" (Hsu, 1988) and "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps" through professional athletes' stories of self-determination, perseverance, status, and success in society. One school administrator and a teacher offered:

[Players] are really just trying to give back and create just a belief in the students that they can do anything that they want, and really just work toward their goals. When they come in, the auditorium is silent. You can hear a pin drop. The students are engaged, they are listening to these men speak, and tell their stories. I think it's really powerful what they say. Whether they share stories about how they had that one teacher, who pushed them, or how they had that parent or grandparent that kept them on track, or how they were able to turn away from going the wrong way and just really staying on track to go the right way. The players connect with students on the level that is really relatable and I think that's important. (SA3.S3)

When the kids are excited and they get the guy [player] that they know, and then you can see them sitting there, listening… to life lessons, you know, do the right things, stories about when they were in school. They have their own little acronym, like a motto that stands for… Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, Dedication, Enthusiasm, something like that, so they'll talk about that… I've seen them have really good assemblies where the kids are like "Whoa!" They walk away saying…oh yeah that made sense to me (T1.S1)

Players' stories tie into this acronym and convey life lessons that are foregrounded in the pride of being a Cobra. One school counselor recalled her experience at an assembly when a former Cobras player and hometown hero told his story, and remembered thinking, "the players, they probably get a good sense or feeling that they help the young kids see that they are not alone in the world, that somebody they might look up to, can relate to their situation." The counselor described the implicit personal connections that can be formed in these large group interactions:

He [former player, hometown hero] said that his grandmother raised him, and there's a lot of kids who have family situations that are not good, or that their grandmothers are raising them… He [player] said how he was doing a little better, but not as well as she [grandmother] wanted him to do, and she took him off of the team. Said he couldn't play basketball until he got his grades up… I think that resonates well. One of the guys that came here, I think it's [Point Guard, name omitted], he also said something about how his grandmother really cared for him, and made sure that he attended to his school work and always worked hard to pursue his dream… I think that the stories must get to them (students), if they say that well this athlete may be—they may not say much—but they may be going through similar situations… This happened to me when I was young, but I had encouragement to get motivated. (SC.S1)

I have also observed multiple events where this local hero has moved the crowd.[54] His

stories change slightly at different events, but he always relates tales of how he was

raised by his grandmother, "who was old school, straight old school…whatever it was

she was on it, never missed on my school, and I think I missed three days in eight years."

At one event, after telling three riveting short stories, the former guard stopped and said

squarely into the microphone:

> What I want to say to each and every one of you, is to think about, what do you want to be when you grow up. Not what we tell you that you want to do! Not what your parents or teacher tells you that you want to do. No. What do you want to do! Right now, take 5, 10 seconds to think about that…. [Some murmured voices can be heard in the audience, but mostly there is quiet for about 10 seconds]… Because whatever you think, trust me, it is going to be 100 times harder than what you can imagine it's gonna be. Everyone up here [pointing to NBA players, owners, executives, and local city officials) didn't get here by sitting by or letting things happen to them. Nobody walked up to us on the street and said, "Hey, here, I'm gonna hand you this job." You don't get to be President or CEO of the River City Cobras, you don't get to be director or superintendent of the schools, by not giving 100% all of the time. If you do that, you will be successful. And I feel like I'm a perfect example of someone who was able to achieve my dream mainly through hard work and getting an education. So thank you, and thank you god for giving me this opportunity.

> [Audience cheering and clapping. Music blares. The Cobras mascot bounds off the stage with basketball, hits a springboard, soars to the hoop and dunks.]

> Educational messages of meritocracy have been salient at every Cobras' event

that I observed. These motivational stories are sponsored by a professional organization

that most adults and youth in River City like and support, and are delivered by idolized

cultural icons that come from backgrounds and experiences youth can often relate to.

Black male athletes offer culturally relevant[55] tales of how to make it in America from

basketball stars and legends of the game. Players' speeches directly emphasize the merits

of getting an education to achieve one's dreams in life, though many NBA players do not

finish college themselves before jumping into the NBA. Each individual story connects

to some aspect or embodiment of P.R.I.D.E. both in getting an education and being a

Cobra. At all times in school-to-NBA interactions, these powerful educational narratives of schooling are couched in these token male emissaries' statistically unlikely odds of achieving their personal hoop dreams.

At Roosevelt Academy, a teacher (also coach) described a pedagogical moment that took place at one whole school event where a Cobras' veteran and star[56] spoke:

> He stepped in front of the stage, and he told his story of growing up and trying to make it. And it was vulnerable. It was vulnerable… The kids were like, "Yo, that's real!" [Rookie player, name omitted], when he came, he started to get that way, but then [Community Relations Director, name omitted] kind of just rushed things along. I understand. That's his job. He's got to keep time and make sure these guys get where they want and need to be… But, with the way the media is set up… like even these new Cobras commercials, they're so idealistic, like, "I'm a Cobra" and then [Cobras Star forward, name omitted] is like [Teacher sits up and puffs up his chest].
>
> Interviewer: They're like gods.
>
> Yeah, and then it takes away the fact that [Cobras Star forward] has a wife. He has kids. He has responsibilities. He's not just… You know what I mean? (C1.S3)

This teacher/coach illustrates the tensions between images and realities of the fleeting face-to-face human contact with, and the marketing of, basketball stars. Students relate easily to players, and many players might like to interact more closely with youth. But, their schedules are always tight and the handlers are there to make sure things move along. The players have to practice, they travel a lot, they need rest, they have other community events to attend, and most have families to get to.

> Something like this *NBA Cares* thing… I always see in the commercials…and it's like… I don't know if it's just hoopla, but when I see players [from other teams] are sitting in the classrooms and reading to kids… I've worked at two schools and I've never seen that happen. I mean no offense by this, but it's usually the white schools that have them reading there. I look at that, I'm like, that's bullshit. Why, if the team is less than a mile away—the stadium, the [name omitted] is less than a mile away—why aren't the Cobras reading at our schools? Why do they just come sometimes, talk and say their acronym [P.R.I.D.E.], and then dip. Why aren't they reading here? I remember seeing Dwight Howard, reading one time in

a commercial, when he was playing for the Magic. I'm like, "What? Why aren't they doing this at our schools? ...Reading in our schools. Why do they just come and talk about sports and finding balance? So, that's another thing I would add, [if I were in charge] — legit reading. (Coach, C1.S3)

This teacher, like others, suggests that the educational possibilities that lie in connecting the substance of students' lives and literacy practices to learning from NBA role models, are thwarted by the one-off nature of schools' and students' interactions with the Cobras. The interests of moving things along restrict deeper forms of learning:

> Don't get me wrong. The assemblies are great. The students are totally engaged. You can hear a pin drop in the auditorium. And the stories players tell, they speak directly to the kids' experiences here… But the problem is, it's a one-time event, where maybe a kid is inspired… But there aren't really any deeper connections that get made… That's partially a problem the team should be accountable to… But I can say, it's also our fault in the school, because, like, we could bring those lessons into the classroom… Right after an assembly, you're having conversations with kids about it informally. They have their own conversations. But then, there's just not room for it in the curriculum (Teacher, T2.S2)

> I think it would be helpful if the program made stronger connections between the students and not just the players and their lives, but like the different layers of the Cobras organization… like maybe through internships or job shadows, or other opportunities to have that interaction. *Stay in School* doesn't really relate directly to the academic and scholarly focus we are pushing for here in the school. So I think that's something that's missing that could really be strengthened. (School Administrator, SA2.S3)

People regularly offer constructive and thoughtful suggestions about how the Cobras could, and why they really should shift from one-off programming to something more intentionally woven into the fabric of school learning. Although the wish for deeper partnership with a team they love and respect is endearing for people, most participants assume that it is not likely to occur. This brings up a key tension between the corporation's interests in public relations and creating "photo ops" with youth and the schools' interests in cultivating ongoing learning experiences with youth. Business experts are clear, though, that cause-related marketing is primarily designed as a device

for marketing and branding, not for philanthropic endeavors:

> Cause related marketing was meant to be marketing, not philanthropy. Otherwise we would know it as "marketing related philanthropy." The practice was aptly named, however, to describe an innovative and socially useful way to augment the power of more traditional marketing, promotion, and public relations efforts" (Walsh, 1999, p.24)

This is a matter of emphasis and degree, which varies depending on the specific approach undertaken by a corporation. Rather than absolute dominance of the market over altruism, sport philanthropy represents blended business-management techniques aimed first, at enhancing the effects of traditional marketing, and second, at investing charitably in the corporation's communities of support. A district administrator with experience in community-based philanthropy offered:

> Corporate philanthropy… almost without exception, it is the least resourced part of the business, because by and large, the people in corporations who distribute the money tend to look at philanthropy as a loss leader. You don't get the same attention for giving away money as you do for making it. In most corporations, no matter what they have, in terms of their…they may be members of business for social responsibility, and they may have CEOs that really spend a lot of time out in community… But by and large, businesses are capitalists and they're in business to make money. And so if you're a part of the business that's giving that money away, there's a dichotomy there… which is really about the resources…the real issue is that…they usually don't have the human resources.

> I love [Cobras' Community Relations Director]. I think he's a really authentic and very genuine person, but if he had three more staff people, that presence… it would be felt. I think there are patterns in corporate philanthropy of it generally being a department that doesn't have significant human resources, not even dollar resources, to accomplish some of the things that really the people who are supporting it, probably wish would happen. (DA3)

School and district participants understand clearly that the Cobras' corporate philanthropy is designed to serve public relations and brand marketing, though most people describe its charitable aims as, first and foremost, what is driving *Stay in School*. Participants also suggest that the charitable value to schools outweighs the downsides of introducing commercialism and consumerism to youth.[57]

The celebration of sports and fan worship in River City creates marketing opportunities for the firm in the expression of allegiance to a local city team with staying power. The capacity of elite sports to affectively mobilize people's base emotions turn the Cobras' moderate donations and occasional appearances into gifts and opportune moments of learning that may appear larger than life. The field of professional sports has benefitted commercially from the forging of intimate associations between the individual (fan) and the team. As public institutions where most youth spend the vast majority of their time, schools can serve as key sites where these social sporting identities are fashioned. Over time, this intermingling of sports brand and public education may lead to both the accumulation of new private wealth, while simultaneously offering a helping hand to resource-strapped schools. By opening the schoolhouse doors to certain brands, such as the Cobras, and not others, such as Coke, schools offer institutional credence to a team that research participants already respect, feel connected to, and desire ever more contact with. As adults' and young people's sense of self and community become intertwined with that of the sporting brand, the corporate management of these community relationships enables slow indirect economic growth through brand placement, marketing, and consumption.

The River City Public Schools benefit modestly as well. First, schools bank on the cultural salience of professional sports and popular culture celebrities to inspirationally deliver positive messages about the meritocratic value of getting an education to young people who can at times be "hard to reach" (C1.S1). School teachers and leaders implicitly assume that the NBA professionals, these "towering athletes…mega stars...gods" (T2.S2), will be able to effectively motivate young people

through personal tales of struggle and success. Having Cobras P.R.I.D.E. means diligently crafting one's basketball game and attending to academics. Players pursuing their token dreams of professional basketball publicly reiterated the themes of always and also minding their books, either because they happened to like learning or because they were held accountable to schoolwork by a strong grandmother, mother, or other coach who cared enough to hold them to the fire. Their stories are powerful and can resonate strongly, at least temporarily, for those in attendance.

Thus, River City Public Schools look to gain a certain measure of cultural authenticity[58] from the NBA and its artfully branded and predominantly Black stars. By hosting a sponsored event in school every two to four years and organizing groups of youth to attend the large annual *Stay in School* celebration every year, schools in this study aim to remind youth of the promise that resides in getting an education and of the hope that is embedded in following one's dreams—be they basketball, building businesses, or becoming an educator oneself. These NBA narratives may serve as inspiration for student achievement. They also represent an amalgam of marketing strategy and youth development. Through intermittent meritocratic injections and upbeat aspirational messages, these assemblies provide ample opportunities for the corporation to place athletes in camera-ready poses with urban adolescents who enhance the team's and the schools' public images. However, the relative infrequency of meaningful contact between youth and the Cobras' organization also creates limitations for student learning.

Transformational Relationships in Sponsored Technology Lab Renovations

Standing in sharp relief to the symbolic (educational) and material (commercial) influences of Cobras' motivational assemblies are substantial school transformations that

are realized in corporate-sponsored technology makeovers. Several years ago, the Cobras decided to take up educational technology as a new philanthropic focus, and began offering chances for schools to receive the large donation of a corporate-sponsored technology lab. A former district liaison to the team said, the Cobras' Community Relations director called up one day:

> He said they were thinking about renovating computer labs in some schools, and what did I think of it… I said, when can we make it happen? …Because we've done assessments of school needs for technology, I've got a running list of places in critical needs, and also principals that I know would put that technology to good use in the classroom. So everything moved very quickly. (DA1)

Currently, seven schools have received these sponsored donations, each totaling approximately $30,000 in cumulative expenses, often conducted in coordination with the Cobras' corporate foundation, individual player foundations, or other corporate partners, such as a bank and a R&D firm (C.E. 6). This "big ticket donation" (T2.S2) usually transforms one room in a school, which "was really in bad shape, it was a mess… really in very poor condition" (SA1.S3), into a brightly redesigned space with thirty or more new medium-home-grade computers, a printer, and sometimes a projector. However, the school district assumes the costs for prepping the room, as well as supporting the technology hardware and software. Even so, a principal said:

> The room was literally falling apart. The walls were crumbling. The paint was peeled off… Having new computers is absolutely fabulous, but you have to understand the simple value of a fresh coat of paint and gleaming new floors in a room that hadn't been touched in over twenty years… The room is beautiful now. It's got these big pictures of players on the walls, which everyone loves. There's Internet and we can offer computer instruction. Teachers can plan class projects, research papers, PowerPoint presentations. It's like night and day. (SA1.S2)

A teacher in the same school said:

> We hadn't had a computer lab in ages. And I can't remember the last time we had a computer teacher. We used to have a lab that people would sign up for, they

would come in and use, and they would go away, but there was no direct instruction piece. (T1.S2)

These rooms are both cherished *team totems* and well-utilized *instructional tools* for individual and class projects, test prep software, computer-based math and literacy programs, and self-directed time. Research participants agree that the technology labs represent some of the most vibrant spaces in school buildings and also deliver desperately needed educational technology:

> It's like, nothing, nowhere else. It's like no other rooms in the school system (District Administrator, DA6)

> Prior to having the computers from the Cobras Foundation, I'm not sure how we had full-class days where teachers could have students all working at computers on any special projects, any research projects, all of these things that are hugely important for kids to learn in the digital age (Teacher, T2.S1).

> The fact is [with the Cobras lab and the school principal's decision to appoint a veteran teacher as a full-time technology teacher to the lab], we can integrate it now, because that's what today's society is looking for" (Teacher, T1.S2).

Monahan (2005) argues that technology, perhaps more than any other area of school reform:

> symbolizes global connectedness and student empowerment. Collectively, school districts invest billions of dollars into computers, telecommunication networks, and media equipment with the goal of correcting social inequalities through technology access. The reasons behind this belief in the corrective powers of technology are complicated, having primarily to do with society's unassailable faith in technological progress but also with political expediency. For instance, in some ways it easier to demonstrate commitment to students through the purchasing of computers than through other measures, such as reducing class sizes or tackling the deeper social problems of poverty. (p. 2)

There is no question that the schools in this study are better resourced as a result of the Cobras' technology donations that create new opportunities for student learning. At the same time, RPS educators say the spirit of this giving simply cannot meet the scale of the challenges facing public schools. These periodic one-time gifts of sorely needed

technology make impermanent and noticeable differences in schools beleaguered by the long-term erosion of public educational provisions. However, they also participate in a subtle denial of the systemic or institutionalized forms of racism that have deepened and widened the social consequences of chronic poverty in the United States. Piecemeal charity, while helpful, will not counter the weight of long-term exclusions from social privilege.

These expressions of corporate charity are valued and, indeed, everyone I spoke to is thankful for the donations. They provide welcome assistance that helps begin to address the technological and pedagogical needs of schools. Thus, although school staff say it is not enough to meet all their challenges, it has led to student work that was simply not possible before the computer lab donation.

> We're missing so many resources. The technology the Cobras gave us, it's our only access right now to computers for these kids. That's it. For the whole middle school, three hundred kids, we have twenty-eight computers… It started out at 30 something but some have broken down… It's a great gift! Unfortunately it's not even like close to enough. In my opinion you should have one of those in every single classroom. Every classroom should have one section of laptops for the kids. It's 2011. If they're not on computer, they're not…what are we preparing them for? (Teacher, T1.S1)

At the same time, the corporation has also decided to outfit the labs with inexpensive, low-to-medium grade home computers that cannot withstand the long-term daily wear and tear of a well-used learning center.

> These are not the greatest computers, I mean, they're going to start dropping off like flies at some point. It's not ideal, but because of [the Cobras donation], students are doing work that just wasn't not possible before last year. (Teacher, T1.S2)

> These are not the top-notch computers… so you are going to have issues, but kids don't even have computers at home. (Teacher, T3.S3)

When the school district purchases new computers, it's standard that we buy commercial grade devices that are built for use in computer labs and last longer than what the Cobras give to schools. (District Administrator, DA5)

In all three schools, people say the infusion of previously missing technology has advanced teaching and learning, yet the quality of the donated technology is somewhat questionable.[59]

Furthermore, what is made of that donation is entirely up to the school. Once the computer lab renovation is completed and publicly unveiled, the involvement of the team ceases. They play no ongoing role in the management, cost sharing, maintenance, upkeep, or uses of the lab in curriculum and instruction. Following the ceremonial passing of the space to the school, the benefactors bear no further responsibility for what happens with their donation. There is a great distance between the corporate donors and the uses of their donated resources:

> They make no demands on us for reporting. And they don't dictate at all how we should be using the computer lab. It's up to us to make the best use of it… I do think it would be great if they wanted to have more of a relationship, though that was never really my expectation… I knew it would be like one and done (School Administrator, SA1.S2).

> There's actually no follow-up in terms of evaluation or assessment. It's basically, here's your donation, now you're on your own. (School Administrator, SA3.S2)

> We're basically on our own with it (technology lab)…but that's fine, it's up to us to make the most of it. (Teacher, T3.S1)

This "no strings attached" charitable relationship provides flexibility, or as one district administrator put it, "more of a freedom to do what you want or need to do" (DA6). However, these weak relational ties raise questions of accountability and answerability on both sides of the PPP.

> I would want to check in with what's happening in the lab… basically I'd want to know it was being put to good use" (Teacher, T3.S3).

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I haven't heard from [Community Relations or the Cobras Foundation], and don't anticipate I will, although it would be nice if they were interested (Teacher, T1.S2).

If it were my money, I'd want to know how it was being used, you know, I'd want to know that whoever was getting my money was using it properly…because hypothetically teachers could be saying, "Kids aren't allowed to use the lab. It's only for adults." We absolutely are not doing this, but how would anybody know that if they didn't ask (Teacher, T3.S1)

If they put me in charge of the money, I'd want to follow it. I'd want to know how that money was being used, and provide assistance to like continually improve how the program was operating… Maybe [the Cobras] just figure that we'll use it wisely. Maybe it doesn't really matter to them how we use it, or they haven't really thought about it… because it's more about charity than having a mutual partnership… This is all just speculation on my part. Whatever their reason, I don't mind though. It means one less report we've got to prepare. One less thing we've got to report on. (School Administrator, SA3.S2)

Nonetheless, people widely acknowledge that the lab is actually being put to good use.

Furthermore, I have witnessed schools using these sponsored spaces to the fullest of their

potential. Yet, teachers say, "it would be nice though if the Cobras said, you know what,

we want to provide more ongoing support" (T2.S2). One coach who also assists in

coordinating *Stay in School* in his middle school described feeling puzzled and frustrated

when, at an annual informational meeting for the program, he asked the Cobras

Community Relations Director if the team was planning to do anything more with the

labs and also asked about the possibility of replacing broken laptops. "He was like, they

probably wouldn't be coming back to the school until they went to the other schools…

You do the math, they're not coming back for fifty years" (C1.S1).

Most people are grateful for the gifts that help their struggling schools stay afloat

amidst the constant specter of insecurity, uncertainties, and structured inequities, which

surround life in and around inner city public schools (Anyon, 1997, 2005; Lipman, 2010).

The existence of these chronic school conditions can thus transform what is a "drop in the

bucket" (SA1.S2) for a profitable corporation, worth well over $400 million, into windfall gains for resource-scarce public schools. Through these corporate-sponsored renovations, the school receives a large one-time contribution that, in the span of mere weeks, radically alters its built environment and pedagogical givens. Students at schools in this study now have opportunities to do work with computers and digital technologies at a level that was inconceivable a few years ago because of the state of their educational technology. Teachers are starting to design instruction differently and regularly access the district-designed online educational platform that allows for tracking attendance data, creating formative and summative class assessments, accessing "just in time" instructional resources, as well as communicating with parents and students.[60]

The Cobras' contribution provides sufficient, though impermanent access to digital technology for a small school, but the corporation currently expresses no interest in questions or responsibilities related to the ongoing pedagogical uses of its newly emblazoned labs. In broader structural terms, these sponsored infrastructure improvements make multiple small investments in the deep and long-term "educational debts" that have accrued generationally to poor communities and youth, disproportionately people and places of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In a country of immense abundance of capital, poor and marginalized youth are "bypassed by flows of wealth and information, and alternately deprived of the basic technological infrastructure that allows us to communicate, innovate, produce, consume, and even live, in today's world" (Castells, 1998, p.74). The Cobras directly aid schools to address these problems of resource shortage, outfitting a few schools each year with new technology devices.

However, the corporate contributions transform the built environment of one classroom space in each building, providing schools with culturally appealing corporate branding and home grade computers that are not designed to withstand the general wear and tear of a public school technology lab. Schools deeply appreciate the donation, which they treat with great care and pride because it came from the Cobras. Nevertheless, the schools have been putting computers out of commission each year at faster rates than if the sponsored labs had come equipped with professional grade education grade devices. Additionally, the donations are often not large enough to match the instructional demands of one school or the district overall. One K-8 school in this study had just one full-size computer lab, which has meant that while middle school students had access to the Cobras' donation but elementary school children did not.

The widespread problem of scarce resources in urban public schooling is highlighted when educators and youth come into contact with neighboring resource-rich suburban districts. As a result of persistent socio-economic divisions, poor inner city students in America are continually playing a game of catch up with their more affluent peers. Technology serves a symbol of this wealth and status. As one district administrator put it, "Kids in [Suburb, name omitted] don't need new computer labs…The kids in River City are a lot needier" (DA6). A technology teacher added, "there's money for state of the art technology in suburban communities" (T3.S3). Another teacher explained how these social inequities made people in RPS deeply grateful for the technology provided by the Cobras:

> Technology is one of those things where when students don't have access to it, it's very obvious…Whether or not we all want to spotlight it, we [teachers] all feel a certain burden of heaviness around what the suburban kids have in their schools versus what our kids have here. We can say it all we want to the kids

that, "You're no less than they are." But if you're in a school that has a lot less than what they have, I think everybody feels that strain. I certainly appreciate any corporation, any initiative that tries, somehow, to give to the schools that don't have what those schools have in the suburbs. (T2.S1)

River City Public Schools make the most of their far from ideal circumstances.[61]

For those schools that are granted a Cobras technology makeover, they are instantly given

access to qualitative improvements in 21st century learning tools. In exchange, schools

implicitly agree to care for their rebranded space and host a corporate-sponsored public

unveiling of the lab. That the technology donated by the team will fizzle out is a given.

These are after all plastic and electronically wired gadgets. Since the Cobras chose to

purchase home grade, not "top notch" commercial or industrial grade computers, the

lifespan of the devices is shortened within these actively utilized computer labs.

No one is complaining though. In fact, a few research participants wanted to

make it clear, "You know, I'm not criticizing them, because we're grateful for what they

have given us. It's really a beautiful classroom" (SA1.S2). Numerous district and school

leaders said individual schools and the central district administration should do a better

job of taking ownership to reach out and communicate with the Cobras about what is and

what is not working and how to improve this sponsorship. One school district

administrator explained that this is a problem that runs across other corporate sector

relationships:

> I don't know if it's a signature of corporate partnerships, or if we just haven't had the back-and-forth [communication] as we have with nonprofits or foundations. I think maybe it's just corporate culture and the way it's structured. If you think about corporations, they are built around either a product or a service, and all functions lead to the product or service. When they carve out corporate philanthropy, maybe they want it tied into their product or service for … I'm not saying this in a disingenuous way, but is it for added recognition that points back to their product or service? That's very shaped in the culture and the way they operate, where nonprofits are built around not worrying so much about the bottom line or the brand recognition that a corporation has.

> I don't know that they've meant to be rigid, but just, they have rigid guidelines of how to serve, what kind of service, and how much interaction or what type of interaction they have with the schools… I'd also say that we, as a district, have never been proactive about engaging corporate partners in a way that looks different than feeling more donated to… I think that's on us, too, that we haven't been more interactive. (DA8)

The cultural differences observed between corporate and educational organizations, coupled with the economic insecurity facing urban schools, has encouraged these public school educators to accept the team's offerings with little expectation of having a voice or direct role in designing the structure of this corporate social engagement. The schools are happy to receive donations and visits from a team that is widely respected and even loved. However, school leaders acknowledge playing somewhat passive roles that have helped to maintain the school district's mostly one-way relationship of charity in commercial sponsorship.

School professionals clearly understand that the corporation and the corporate foundation play little part in either the use, misuse, or maintenance of the lab. What the school chooses to make of that donation is completely up to school leaders, teachers, and students. That the technology will be put to good uses is born out by my observational evidence and interviews with educators using the labs. Additionally, adults and youth treat their Cobras-sponsored learning center with care and attention.[62] Teachers and leaders describe feeling pride in the school community when they set foot inside the space, for it is not just room with new computers, but a cherished team totem displaying these technology devices. Undoubtedly, the life-size decals of Cobras stars on the walls and glossy murals will outlast the Best Buy technology, which the school system has begun to refurbish and will need to replace within two to five years. Whether the Cobras organization, the school district, or individual schools will assume responsibility for

refreshing and replacing the technology is not clearly determined. Most of my

participants do not expect the Cobras to take up these ongoing costs. However, leaders

express some optimism that, if the school district were to put together a clear request and

strategic plan around the use and maintenance of the technology, the Cobras network (i.e.

Cobras' franchise, Cobras' foundation, individual players' foundations, Cobras' own

corporate partners and sponsors) would likely respond positively. Whether the

technology transformations can and will play a role in redressing educational inequities

or disrupting social exclusions, which many River City youth experience, are questions

this study cannot answer, yet are worthy of further inquiry.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered empirical insights into the experiences of public school

professionals in the context of one public-private partnership with the Cobras' corporate

NBA organization. Partnerships seem to be everywhere, with many cities like River

City, towns, and school systems bearing the symptoms of "partnershipitis" (Huxham &

Vangen, 2000, p. 303). Theorists on cross-sector arrangements frequently lament that

this term *partner* is often applied too laxly in scholarship and policy initiatives to be of

much pragmatic use to organizational leaders in either sector, as they sort out and enact

the policies and procedures of partnership (Babiak, 2009, 2011; Googins, 2000; Hodge &

Greve, 2010). Furthermore, the majority of academic research and theory on corporate

sector engagement in education takes up the binary logic that primarily regards these

activities as, *either* altruistic corporate participation with the best of intentions, *or* hidden

privatizations and creeping corporatizations. This dichotomous thinking in scholarship

thwarts deeper reading and dialogue across ideological divides on the supposed nature

and role of corporations in society. Restricting conceptualizations of corporate philanthropy to one-dimensional representations, which ignore or discredit other sides' thinking, will repeatedly fail to illuminate what happens in the everyday practices and socio-political realities of public-private partnerships.

In contrast to the simplistic research logic characteristic of the literature, educational practitioners in this study exhibited complex *both/and* thinking about the language games and inter-organizational arrangements of philanthropic partnership. District and school–based research participants commonly hold tacit theories of PPPs that view the Cobras' private sector participation as both altruistic and business-oriented. *Stay in School* effectively extends the reach of the Cobra's organization into the routine practices of the school day and allows schools to capitalize on this corporate contact for educational aims. In other words, wealthy basketball industry tycoons moderately support teaching resources and student achievement, while simultaneously encouraging youth and adult behaviors in commercialism and consumption of NBA branding and merchandising. For schools, the opportunity to connect organizationally with the Cobras brings a mixture of great excitement to meet pop culture celebrities and hopefulness that, through encounters with these millionaires and multi-millionaires, some of their good fortune and wealth will rub off.

Participants' stories and claims about corporate NBA philanthropy point to "more textured understanding of human interaction across power differences, extend[ing] our collective theorizing beyond simplified binaries such as insider/outsider, oppressor/oppressed, to examine the activity of the space between" (Fine & Torre, 2004, p. 19). The dominant discourse on public-private partnerships hinges on vague and

seductive language of community harmony in cross-sector collaboration. News, popular media, and academic scholarship frequently give a pass to corporate philanthropists and express confidence that these new governing tools are generally effective and efficient "at delivering policy outcomes through collaborative networks and diverse allegiances and commitments" (Ball, 2007, p.116). However, the paths of public-private partnership cannot be determined a priori, but are molded from the thick of practice.

Most say the Cobras partnership is not really a partnership, but powerful charity from a beloved brand that has committed itself over several decades and multiple owners to do something about the pernicious problem of school dropout. People dream of a day when the team decides they want to work in mutual partnership to jointly take up the root causes of a problem, rather than just treating the symptoms. Many participants believe that if this rich and well connected NBA organization applied the full extent of its social capital reach to a root educational problem, the potential effects would be huge, though no one is holding their breath, or doing much to change the current course. Some say that if the school district made the right approach, the Cobras might respond in kind, though no one whom I met has ever presented a request or proposal for changes to the way things are run.

In the meantime, everyone seems content with the status quo, especially if this involves continued commitments to renovate sponsored technology labs, and perhaps to refresh the existing digital spaces and devices. What the Cobras do is more than enough for most, and some people feel guilty about accepting donations. At the same time, everyone wishes for more not less sustained contact with the team. Empirical findings in this chapter and earlier in the proposal have sought to illuminate the constant,

impermanent jostling for position and power that is present when the public and private sectors mingle inside the "big politics and big business" of education (Rowan, 2006). Public and private organizations enter into inter-organizational arrangements for various and differing reasons – as do the schools that opt to engage in the Cobras' activities.

First, most adults and youth in River City schools are faithful followers or bandwagon fans of the Cobras brand. It is a "no brainer" (DA1) that schools would wish to take advantage of just about any opportunity to get closer to the team. Meeting NBA stars is an exciting, even effervescent experience for people young and old in a town that loves sports. Listening to professional athletes' stories of struggle and success can create powerful teachable moments for students struggling in their own lives (though this study interviewed no youth or NBA players). Receiving a large technology donation effectively transforms choice schools through the sponsored redesign of a classroom space. There are significant material and social benefits to being in contact with an organization of great wealth, popularity, and cultural influence.

Second, schools realize indirect benefits by meeting calls to action from influential central administrators who are charged with corporate and other sector partnerships. By playing along institutionally, school leaders may curry favor with those who pull the strings on resources and marshal opportunities across the district. Principals have sought to gain an edge over other schools by collaborating and building professional relationships with school district leaders, which sometimes entails engaging in their favored projects, not limited to corporate philanthropy. However, now that all middle schools participate in *Stay in School*, school leaders may need to look elsewhere to gain this partnership advantage.[63]

Third, schools directly garner handouts of branded trinkets and prized paraphernalia that may help incentivize students to meet specific data objectives, collected in district, state, and NCLB mandates, such as improved average daily attendance. For those students with perfect attendance, the awards are a fun recognition that the school otherwise might not be able to offer. For those students, especially fans, regularly attending school but not necessarily every day, the prizes may offer enough incentive to ensure they do not miss the bus or get marked absent in the building. However, for youth who face significant structural barriers to daily attendance, let alone annual benchmarks, and who are most at risk of dropping out or being pushed out of school, or of becoming a victim of the school-to-prison pipeline, "*Stay in School* doesn't reach them. It doesn't even register" (T2.S3). Cobras sponsored rewards thus serve as commercialized positive reinforcements that schools can use to dangle encouragement for lower achievers to try harder next year.

Fourth, about once every three years, a school plays host to this beloved basketball brand in motivational assemblies where, however momentarily, NBA players look to effectively inject youth with powerful messages of perseverance, self-determination, and personal responsibility to achieve success in life and in school. Once a year, schools also pay for a load of middle school students to take the "yellow bus" or ride the subway together[64] to attend the Cobras' end-of-year culminating event in meritocratic achievement, where students are celebrated for having perfect attendance and for entering contests in art and writing about what having P.R.I.D.E. means to them. Educators and youth do it because they care, because they are fans, because they can get their hands on Cobras merchandise, and for the chance to meet and shake a player's hand.

By connecting with this well-respected and popular brand, the River City Public Schools thus seek to enhance its social legitimacy and street credentials in the minds of youth who are visibly drawn to commercialism and who are frequently already members of an imagined Cobras community. In this way, the school district and schools enter into the PPP wishing for a bit of the NBA's swag to rub off on them in relaying optimistic messages about the merits of getting an education and pursuing one's individual dreams.

Last, schools entertain hopes of being transformed through a big-ticket Cobras donation, such as a school technology renovation. When youth and adults set foot in their new sponsored technology lab for the first time, jaws drop. It is powerful to see "kids' faces when they walk in and, and it's like, nothing, nowhere else. It's like no other rooms in the school system" (DA6[65]). In place of dilapidation, schools receive vital tools for 21st Century teaching inside brightly redesigned spaces that come complete with team branding, full-size decals, and painted murals of Cobras stars in action, which leave no question as to where the donation emanated. Inside the labs, the team's branding is "in your face" (SA1.S1), and no one objects. "The bottom line is, our kids need the technology. If [the Cobras] are going to provide something that otherwise we wouldn't have, I can live with a little bit of commercialization" (CT.S2).

For these reasons, River City Public Schools are, at once, grateful recipients of multifaceted charity, target consumers of their benefactors' commercial goods, and cause-related images for the greening of the corporation. It is impossible not to notice the spectacle and performance when the Cobras touch down in schools. The cameras and handlers surrounding the towering multi-million stars create no doubt that these programs are about creating "photo ops,"[66] as much as they are about inspiring youth. For the

Cobras, being pictured and positioned on the side of improving educational opportunities for "at risk" urban youth provides a positive and heart-warming story of corporate benevolence shown to public institutions broadly seen as failing to close persistent "achievement gaps" between the performance of minoritized youth and that of white and Asian-American students. The NBA's school-related programs place basketball stars in camera-ready contacts with smiling and awe inspired young people within inner-city public schools, which is good for cause-related marketing and good for building community relations.

The Cobras' participation in the schools serves as a base for the organization to frame its community-mindedness and corporate citizenship in the media and with its fans. Educators understand that the Cobra's motivations undoubtedly include, but cannot be simply reduced to profit-seeking behavior or to the image politics of professional sports. They also recognize that the marketing angles of a corporation can differ markedly with the educational aims of schools.[67] However, not only are most people not bothered by commercialism and branding in these activities. They genuinely love all contact they have, and wish for more. Additionally, Cobras' marketing is not perceived up front as a commercial activity, but as a normalized and integral feature of a local culture that reveres professional sports. The team deeply cares about schools and youth in River City. Fans love the team and describe feeling their affection being returned both in the organization's recurring construction of a winning basketball team and in its lasting presence in the public schools. The seemingly dichotomous virtues of care for community and care for profits co-exist in the stories people tell about why NBA owners, players, and executives participate in public education, and what happens when they do.

This slow and progressive public-private contact oscillates freely between altruism in building local communities of support and the long-term accumulation of private capital.

These parallel forces converge complexly in self-interested sacrifice, or what Keim (1978) referred to as "enlightened self-interest." In return for in-kind investments in technology, branded merchandise, and motivational services, the Cobras organization benefits from "access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity" (Meenaghan, 1991, p. 36). The business finds economic opportunities in exercising its long-term social commitments to the schools. School leaders implicitly trade access to potential youth consumers for the chance to engage with a basketball franchise that views public schools as commercially exploitable markets and opportunities to exercise corporate responsibility. This public-private partnership thus directly responds to the large and long-term problem of youth dropping out of school, while indirectly attending to the enduring profit motives of professional sports.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation was undertaken to explore the phenomenon of corporate sport philanthropy in urban public education. It has sought a rounded understanding of what happens institutionally and culturally when public schools opt to partner with a highly profitable corporate brand, as part of its social responsibility activities in the local community. The literature from business and education on cross-sector organizational relationships tends to be "both positive and prescriptive, focusing on the benefits of partnership and how these might be increased" (MacDonald & Chris, 2005, p. 307; see also cook, 2005; Hess, 2005; Frumkin, 2003). This scholarship has inquired into and imagined certain "ideal types" of partnerships between the public and private sectors, which in practice, "vary quite widely in what they can be expected to achieve and how they will achieve it" (Waddock, 1991, p. 506). Numerous theorists, reviewed in Chapter 2, have developed typologies of collaboration that may assist leaders to conduct good organizational fit among partners and thus improve the chances of success in these relationships (Austin, 2000; Babied, 2009; Kanter, 1999; Seitandi & Ryan; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Waddock, 1991). However, the routine emphasis on the benefits of partnership does not illuminate the paradoxical effects of these relationships, both positive and negative, which are realized differently across stakeholders and constituents implicated in these arrangements. The positive skew in cross-sector research inadvertently implies that all or most school-to-corporate partnership relationships seek effective and efficient uses of resources and are socially just.

Educational research must attend to the reality that some partnerships may produce hidden costs, for instance, those associated with schoolhouse commercialism,

that do more social harm than good to schools, youth, or the learning process (Apple, 2009; Ball, 2009).[68] Critical theorists such as Boyles (2005) have expressed concerns that corporate engagement in public education poses fundamental social risks to youth and schools. Skeptics have described corporate involvement in education as "greenwashing" (Beder, 2002), as underhanded commercial encroachments in public education (Burch, 2009; Molnar, 2005; Saltman, 2012), or as a means of circumventing traditional public accountability mechanisms in school change and reform (Buras, 2011; Kowalski, 2010; Mickelson, 1999; Ravitch, 2009; Scott, 2009).

Rarely, though, are these public-private policy innovations examined from theoretical perspectives that simultaneously consider a range of positive consequences and negative ramifications for education, whether they are intentional and unintentional. By ethnographically examining school practitioners' views on corporate-community contacts, this study has used the public spectacle of professional sports philanthropy as an evidentiary base from which to pose school culture related questions about educational leadership theory and practice in relationships with corporations. Chapter 4 articulated empirical findings from an in-depth case study of the partnership between the River City Cobras NBA basketball organization and the River City Public School District (RPS). This concluding chapter carefully considers practical and scholarly implications of these findings in responding to the research question that launched the dissertation:

> What is the nature of the relationships that are enacted through an institutionalized partnership between an urban public school district and a corporate sports organization in the National Basketball Association?

The study took a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, approach to investigating the *language games* and *governance arrangements* of this longstanding inter-organizational relationship (Hodge & Greve, 2010). Operating from the vantage point of

schools, this dissertation has delved into the educational complexities and contradictions

of corporate social engagement, "as philanthropy is increasingly conflated with

consumption and media celebration" (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009, p. 975). By listening

closely to educators' stories and viewpoints on the school system's arrangements with the

NBA franchise, this study placed school practitioners' perspectives on these exchanges in

dialogue with corporate-produced media and academic scholarship on corporate

philanthropy. This research responds to the immense task of ethical and effective

leadership in an educational environment of continuously shrinking public resources.

Partnership in Name. Philanthropy in Practice.

In the everyday context of K-12 urban school leadership, engaging corporations in

public-private partnerships is common practice, routinely seen as a positive policy

response to the immense and seemingly intractable social and educational problems

facing schools today (Ball, 2009; Bennett & Thompson, 2011; Robertson, Mundy, Verger

& Menasha, 2012). Cross-sector partnerships have increasingly become a "default

solution to government problems and needs" (Forrer, Kee, Newcomer & Boyer, 2010, p.

475). In academic and policy circles and in the media, the discourse of partnerships

conjures images of "the judicious mixing of market, hierarchy, and networks to achieve

the best possible outcomes" (Jessop, 2002, p.242). In theory, partnerships strive to

construct these ideal positive relationships, which offer opportunities for both the public

and private sectors to address issues more effectively than either sector could achieve on

its own and to share costs and benefits. By innovating and advancing collaborations

across sectors, conventional wisdom assumes that PPPs represent a "win-win" for all

involved organizations and their diverse constituents.

Literature also observes that PPPs frequently aim to develop the internal professional capacity of each organization to meet the differing facets and functions of their shared problem (Robertson et al, 2012; Seitandi & Ryan, 2009; Smith & Wohlsetter, 2006). Proponents argue that successful partnerships can produce a range of advantages to the public sector, such as improved access to vital resources, enhanced educational services, or institutional advancement rising from public education "adopting the principles of organizational effectiveness from other sectors" (Hoffman & Schwartz, 2007, p. 115). Unsuccessful partnerships can produce diverse negative consequences, such as cynicism and disappointment from squandered or misused resources, damaged public reputations, disgruntled employees, dissatisfied supporters, or angry community constituents (Babiak, 2009).

Waddock (1988) defined a cross-sector 'social partnership' as:

A commitment by a corporation or a group of corporations to work with an organization from a different economic sector (public or non-profit). It involves a commitment of resources—time and effort—by individuals from all partner organizations. These individuals work cooperatively to solve problems that affect them all. The problem can be defined at least in part as a social issue; its solution will benefit all partners. Social partnership addresses issues that extend beyond organizational boundaries and traditional goals and lie within the traditional realm of public policy—that is, in the social arena. It requires active rather than passive involvement from all parties. Participants must make a resource commitment that is more than merely monetary.

From this view, a partnership works to tackle a societal problem more efficiently and effectively than either sector or organization could accomplish working alone. Each organization contributes substantially and not simply financially. Multiple layers of staff members from all organizations actively participate in developing and implementing joint interventions in the social arena. The realization of this type of cross-sector partnership, explained Waddock (1991), "contrasts with the more passive forms of involvement

possible, for instance…by donors in philanthropic endeavors" (p.483).

Although the collaboration between the Cobras and RPS was often labeled and talked about as a partnership by representatives from both organizations in public documents and public appearances, in practice, the "partnership" represented a long-term friendly relationship in corporate philanthropy, consisting of charitable donations and cause-related marketing. Most participants perceived these arrangements not as a social partnership, but as a charity exercised by a distant and caring benefactor to schools of NBA followers. RPS and the Cobras have used the rhetoric of partnerships to positively frame their institutional arrangements in both corporate and school communications.

Among school and district staff, the origin and driving purpose of the Cobras' school-related programming is widely understood as a charitable philanthropic initiative hatched, led, and managed by the team to support the school system in addressing the chronic problem of school dropout. Every research participant expressed positive views vis-à-vis the Cobras' stated and ambitious goal to support the school system in stemming the tide of students dropping out and engaging youth to want to stay in school. However, school leaders, teachers, counselors, and coaches acknowledged a lack of understanding and not feeling part of the process of establishing and negotiating the purpose, goals, or shape of these school-corporate contacts. The overall aim of *Stay in School* was well established and respected, yet school stakeholders did not feel included or empowered to have a say in developing the program's strategies and activities.

K-12 leaders were not intentionally integrated in the process of determining the measures of success or accountability, nor have they requested or insisted that this occur. Since the inception of this inter-organizational relationship, the corporation has directly

handled the details of designing responses to these management questions.[69] Several

district administrators and some principals suggested that a mutually beneficial

relationship existed between the NBA organization and the school district, though not at

the school-level.[70] A few district officials reported having periodic communication with

Cobras' representatives, though these conversations were described more often as

information sharing by the Cobras than consultation of school district leaders'

professional opinions.[71] Leadership expertise flowed primarily in one direction from the

corporation to the schools. Corporate owners and executives have set the goals,

priorities, and strategies for action, with limited engagement of school or district

leadership.

This philanthropic connection to the Cobras provided certain benefits to the

schools in terms of branded rewards for perfect student attendance, motivational

assemblies delivered by rookie and veteran NBA athletes, and occasional one-time

technology donations. By connecting with this revered professional basketball club,

school and district leaders looked to draw socially on the popularity and economic

vitality of the NBA brand. One city official explained publicly how fortunate the River

City schools are for "this partnership with the Cobras, not just giving us tickets, because

they have given us tickets…but they celebrate attendance, they celebrate staying in

school" (Research fieldnotes, May 2012). As of the fall 2013, seven K-8 schools had

received Cobras technology donations including a new computer lab and brightly

branded walls and computer skins of high gloss NBA images and icons. The three

schools in this study have participated in the Cobras' programs for more than ten years.[72]

These three schools were each awarded a sponsored technology renovation in the year

prior to the start of interviews. As a result of these makeovers, students have been presented with instructional opportunities—for example, using the Internet and desktop publishing—which were not possible a few years ago.

However, the theory of change in action rested almost exclusively in the hands of corporate leadership, which belies the essence of cross-sector partnerships for social change. "Partnerships imply mutuality and collaboration. For example, schools in partnership with universities cannot just be the passive recipients of the latter's high-minded scholastic expertise" (Leonard, 2013, p. 130). Likewise, schools in partnership with a corporation should not sit back while the latter decides and designs what is best for young people or the learning community. "Instead, K-12 schools have their own expertise gained through daily, on the ground experience" (ibid, p.130). In a partnership, responsibilities are shared and planned in collaboration. Knowledge, expertise, and contributions must come from leaders and staff in both organizations who assume joint, though not necessarily equal, ownership of key partnership components. Smith & Wohlstetter (2006) argue that reciprocity in partnerships "does not mean identical (or even symmetric) benefits or resources are expended; what one partner receives may differ significantly from the benefit enjoyed by another" (p.250).

In River City, this inter-organizational relationship was characterized by mutual liking and respect demonstrated over a long period time, but it failed to establish mutually agreed upon purpose, goals, or actions. The relationship was friendly but unequal. Both organizations have shown a long-term interest in the other. School practitioners and students regularly donned team apparel and cheered on their local basketball brand. Schools proudly displayed and spread the word about the team's

donations. Every year, the Cobras charitably supported the schools with monthly

trinkets, sponsored a handful of events to motivate students via athletes' stories of

determined success on the basketball court and in school, and donated one or more

technology renovations. School staff usually relished the chance to interact with the

Cobras. At the same time, the corporation assumed most financial and opportunity costs

associated with programming, and it set the agenda and priorities. School leaders chose

whether or not to participate in Cobras initiatives, but they did not decide what shape or

direction those initiatives took. Further, no formalized stipulation agreement or

partnership contract was ever negotiated or developed to document shared roles and

responsibilities across organizations.

The Power of Weak Ties

The partnership literature often assumes that greater communication and

collaboration lead to greater mutuality and increases benefits for both parties (Austin,

2000; Kanter, 1994). Conventional wisdom suggests that, in multi-organizational

arrangements, strong ties are more valuable than weak ties. However, research must not

overlook the potential power of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Little, 1990). This

study indicated that the weak organizational ties with the Cobras produced positive

outcomes and almost no direct costs for the schools. Participating in *Stay in School*

required only approximately one day per month of one staff person's time to verify

perfect attendance and hand out students' branded prizes. School leaders devoted little

attention to thinking about the NBA program because the corporation handled most all of

the details, and always did so in a professional and well-produced manner.[73] These weak

ties allowed principals to reap benefits of corporate sponsorship, without expending much or any energy as a school leader.

Associating with the Cobras franchise allowed schools to experience recurring "fly-by" contact with an adored NBA brand, such that "every once in a while, these gods float down, and in an instant they change what's happening in the school" (SA3.S2). When the team descended upon a school for a visit, it was a fun and exhilarating, though short-lived, experience. By communicating with the media and families about the Cobras' charitable commitments, school and district administrators sought to enhance the schools' public image and influence parents' school choice decisions.[74] In addition, the technology donations provided schools with basic access to digital learning tools, as well as beautifully rebranded spaces. Participating schools earned the right to market themselves using the Cobras much-loved image. In turn, the corporation traded tax-deductible donations, at costs significantly less than traditional advertising, for the right to place its brand in schools and conduct cause-related marketing using the schools' image. These weak ties to the Cobras offered resources to the public sector while requiring schools to spend very little time or energy in sustaining the relationship, administering program activities, or completing paperwork.

In contrast to this philanthropic arrangement, school leaders in this study identified a small number of partnerships, often with non-profit and community-based organizations, characterized by strong ties. In these other relationships, school administrators and teachers said they engaged in regular email, phone, and face-to-face contact with the outside agency as they collaboratively crafted responses to ongoing problems of practice.[75] Partners knew adults and students by name. Both parties sat

down on a regular basis to think about issues together, to imagine strategies and tactics, and to periodically assess how things were working out. This kind of more active relationship demanded abundant time and a high social-cognitive load on professionals at various levels, not just among upper leaders, in both organizations.

If K-12 leaders aim to strengthen relationships with corporations, they need to comprehensively understand the purposes, roles, and intended outcomes of all stakeholders involved in these arrangements (Cook, 2005). In River City, the difficulty of this challenge becomes evident in the fact that the school district had as many as 3,000 different relationships with outside organizations and anywhere from two to four dozen of these took place in individual schools each year. However, "no one is certain exactly how many different partnerships there are across the whole district" (DA5). "When you're looking at how it plays out at the school-level, it can be partners layered on top of partners layered on top of partners" (DA2). Reflecting a recent trend in urban education, RPS established an Office of Partnerships to more systematically approach the formation, evaluation, and support of school relationships with other sectors. Effective communication and collaboration with sporting corporations requires understanding the motivations of corporate owners and players to become and stay involved with schools. The dissertation was grossly limited in this area. Having examined only one side of this cross-sector relationship, looking into school-based perspectives but not the viewpoints of the Cobras, it was not possible to precisely say what motivated these corporate sports partners, or how to equitably and effectively harness their corporate resources in schools. Most research participants, though, strongly believed that the Cobras organization was

primarily inspired by a sense of duty and desire to give back to the community that loyally supported them.

Some leaders and teachers acknowledged that the corporation likely sought business advantages from these activities, such as, public recognition from the firm's name and logo displayed on donation, tax benefits from in-kind donations, and opportunities build its fan base inside schools. In spite of perceiving these direct and indirect benefits to the corporation, educators tended to view this corporate relationship as one-way with most resources and investments flowing from powerful NBA stake owners to charitable recipients and followers. School leaders did not fully appreciate indirect costs shouldered by the schools, which added value to the Cobras organization, for instance, PR-related value in enhancing the brand's image and building public goodwill or marketing value in conducting branding among youth. This is problematic because the schools simply accepted their place in the passenger seat. The Cobras decided the direction of the relationship, and the schools never questioned aloud whether it was the right direction. This donor-recipient dynamic reflected some similarities to the notion of *noblesse oblige, a* French aristocratic term, in which:

> Aristocracies were supposed to take upon themselves certain social obligations in recognition of the privileged position they occupied in the society. But they decided for themselves what constituted their obligations and accepted no wider scrutiny or debate around these, let alone democratic influence (Utting & Marques, 2009, p. 39).

The lack of scrutiny or transparency in corporate leaders' decision-making and action raises questions about the social accountability of this cross-sector arrangement, as well as the effective and equitable use of corporate and school resources. Prior research estimated that between 10 percent and 40 percent of cross-sector collaborations had no clear accountability mechanisms built into them (Cook, 2005; Cramer & Landsmann,

1992). In River City, district and school administrators and teachers reasonably assumed that the Cobras were tracking and monitoring long-term student attendance data, since the team used this data point in making determinations of monthly and annual student rewards.[76] Press releases and NBA documercials also confidently asserted that the Cobras' *Stay in School* efforts utilize all of the organization's resources in the goal of making a direct impact on youth through effective community outreach, interaction, and support.[77] However, no one I interviewed had knowledge of studies, or could cite figures, of the initiative's impact on student attendance or engagement. Although school leaders anecdotally believe the program helped some students come to school every day, no participant in this study had ever seen or assessed actual evidence to support this claim. The Cobras publicly provide no reports or data on their website. To school officials' knowledge, no formal or informal program evaluation has ever been conducted.

There was no way to reliably know if the Cobras' philanthropy was effective at reducing student dropout or efficient in its use of resources, since neither the schools nor the corporation demonstrated the achievement of results. Without periodic evaluation of the processes and products of collaborating, the apparent success or failure of these efforts rested on anecdotal accounts. If the collaboration was about "looking good for the media…creating…an appearance of tackling the dropout problem," (T2.S3) there were many examples of heartwarming cause-related marketing documents produced by the team, but very few instances in which the news or popular press ran stories about this work. However, as most research participants assumed, if the corporation's and the school district's primary goal was to encourage attendance and improve youth engagement in learning, no information was publicly available to assess whether they

were meeting these goals. Internal research is needed to make determinations of impact, which could be used to make informed decisions about program implementation.[78]

The tenuous claims of success made by the Cobras regarding *Stay in School,* though, obscure certain downsides of teaming up with a commercial powerhouse, such as increased marketing and consumer activities inside schools (Boyles, 2005; Brent & Lunden, 2009; Burch, 2010). A few research participants expressed concerns that, by inviting the NBA organization into schools, school leaders were effectively, however unintentionally, encouraging youth consumption that existed in tension with healthy youth development.[79] School leaders should attend to the possibility of indirect and inadvertent harm emanating from the endorsement of commercialism during the school day, while being careful not to overstate these implications.[80] This study uncovered no direct harm to youth or adults as a result of the Cobras' arrangements, although a number of participants noted contradictions between the explicit messages for youth to stay in school and the implicit messages to consume NBA products or pursue improbable dreams of playing professional sports.[81] Notwithstanding these concerns, no one in this study was troubled by the Cobras' presence in the schools. Everyone wished for more, not less interaction with an NBA organization that was cherished and widely consumed. Paradoxically, some educators did not view the NBA's branding activities as commercially oriented, but instead as basic displays of pride in local sporting culture. A few participants acknowledged they had not realized or had never considered that the team held marketing stake in its charitable donations and public appearances in schools.[82]

Research from the advocacy and critical literature on partnerships has observed that public schools choosing to collaborate with corporations must face the possibility

that the primary interests of business may conflict with those of public education. Public

sector organizations are typically motivated to work with other sector to respond to social

and political "demands for improved efficiency and accountability and…to provide more

benefits and services while being both less intrusive and more transparent" (Selsky, 2005,

p.850-851). Corporate engagement often aims to meet growing consumer expectations

that wealthy elites participate philanthropically, as well as to pursue business self-

interests, such as, enhancing the brand's image, marketing merchandise, or attracting and

retaining employees (Burlingame & Young, 1996; Iyer, 2003; Molnar, 2005; Selsky,

2005). If public educators fail to consider both the explicit and hidden costs of cross-

sector relationships, they may participate unwittingly in compromising the educational

welfare of youth in schools. For instance, the Cobras' motivational assemblies reflected

on a rhetorical combination of:

> The rags to riches story, a familiar motif in the narratives society tells itself about sport…(and) the myth of the noble athlete, persevering against diversity, playing for the love of the game and bonhomie of fellow competitors (Boyle & Haynes, 2009, p. 87).

In U.S. popular culture, the "image of the African American NBA player as rising from

the 'ghetto' to international fame and fortune misleads academics and publics alike"

(Dubrow & Adams, 2010, p.43). Young people's dreams of making it out of poverty

through professional sports reinforce an inspiring though uncommon pathway of

ascendance from poor neighborhood playground to multimillion-dollar celebrity status.

For far many young people of color, Boyd (2000) argues:

> Life in America…has been about playing a concerted game of chance, with the odds definitively stacked against them. (They) have attempted to turn a game of chance into a game of skill, and because of this, life itself becomes an ongoing game. This influence pervades Black culture, and because sports has been one of the arenas where there has been a consistent Black presence, even dominance, the notion of the game is that much more a part of everyday life. (p. ix)

At Cobras' sponsored events, basketball and athletics were never promoted as the only or best means to life success, yet athletes undeniably embodied this outcome. NBA players presented education as a clear and worthwhile path out of poverty and hardship, while simultaneously sharing lessons learned in pursuit of their own hoop dreams. Players' speeches directly emphasized the meritocratic value of obtaining an education and demonstrating good work ethic. As one player explained, "I feel like I'm a perfect example of someone who was able to achieve [the dream of playing basketball] just mainly through hard work and through education." As symbols of stardom and status, NBA athletes' celebrity was implicitly used as a motivator for student success. However, players' stories did not acknowledge the role of institutionalized racism and wealth inequality in shaping young people's life opportunities, whether in sports or other professional avenues. One study of racial, socio-economic, and family background influences on the statistically unlikely odds of playing professional basketball found that 66 percent of African Americans and 93 percent of whites that entered the NBA from 1994 to 2004 were from upper and middle class backgrounds (Dubrow & adams, 2010). Therefore, while the Cobras organization sought to inspire youth through noble tales of rising above adversity, they relied on stereotypical renderings of the American dream that suggested a level playing field for students' taking.

The reverence that local educators felt towards this NBA brand encouraged public leaders not to ask, to what extent, if at all, does this public-private relationship threaten the interests of the schools? District and school administrators felt little need to worry about or pose difficult questions of the Cobras because corporate leaders had always ensured their school productions functioned smoothly and professionally. It was easy for

school leadership to unquestioningly accept the NBA philanthropy when the details were handled for them and hand delivered by a respected organization. Moreover, public school administrators were continually forced to respond to more outwardly pressing matters, such as, ongoing funding cuts to aspects of education not directly assessed on standardized tests or coordinated efforts to shut down schools that chronically underperform on those tests (Berliner & Nichols, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Saltman, 2007). The high stakes environment and perpetually threatened resources facing schools, coupled with a history of one-sided exchanges from corporation to schools, set up dynamics in which offering constructive criticism to the Cobras seemed counter-intuitive. One administrator said, "We don't have a lot of groups clamoring to donate to us, so I guess you could say we don't have the luxury to look a gift horse in the mouth" (SA1.S2). The fear of jeopardizing the NBA team's annual donations helped to quiet any dissenting voices that might have openly critiqued the emphasis or shape of giving.

Policy Implications

Since River City school leadership was not fully engaged in organizational decision-making processes, the collective knowledge and experience of public educators, gained on the ground, was customarily overlooked. This expertise could theoretically be applied to the construction of evidence-informed strategies to more soundly combat the school drop out problem. Without a seat at the leadership table, the public schools let the corporation decide what was best for them and tacitly accepted the role of more passive recipient. District and school administrators accepted the team's contributions with little expectation of shaping the Cobras' policies and practices. Leaving decisions up to the

corporation "suffers from a legitimacy deficit, because what is good for the social good is often not what is good for business" (Alves, 2009, p.15). This is not to suggest that the Cobras organization was not well intentioned or goodhearted, but rather, that business executives should not be expected to design school programming without educators' meaningful input.

This study does not recommend that the Cobras organization abdicate its leadership responsibilities to the school department, but that decision-making takes place through greater exchange and equity. Corporations "need to be 'incorporated' socially as well as legally" (Lee, 2007, p. 70). The onus rests on educational leaders, as much as corporate leaders, to ensure that public-private partnerships actually function as partnerships. By definition, partnership implies a two-way relationship. By calling this mainly one-way philanthropic relationship a partnership, the school district and the corporation took a politically expedient road that let both organizations off the hook from actually developing mutuality in collaboration. How could the Cobras' contributions ever be expected to address the seemingly intractable school dropout problem, as long as initiatives remained largely one-time donations and events led from the top-down without the close collaboration of K-12 leaders, teacher and staff members?[83]

Numerous participants said that they hoped for a day when the Cobras' owners and players might come to the schools and say they want to sit down together in mutual partnership, to understand deeply where each other is coming from, and then take up an issue together from its root causes.[84] One participant in this study, after reading the findings and conclusions, provided detailed feedback on policy suggestions to educationally develop this relationship through more sustained practice. This teacher's

recommendations are included in Appendix VI. Several district administrators expressed optimism that, if the school district took a direct approach and organized a clear and rational proposal for corporate leaders, the Cobras might respond in kind.[85] Considering the team's longevity working with RPS, district leaders believed this commitment could be elevated, especially if a proposal were framed in business-friendly discourse. Yet, no one in this study ever planned or presented a coherent request for changes to the way things were run. One fact of the matter is, for a great many public educators today, it can feel "like we're constantly being asked to do more with less…it's totally exhausting," said one school administrator (SA3.S2). School professionals often did not have extra time in the workday to eat lunch or use the bathroom, let alone contemplate the nuances of partnership.   The increasing expectations and shrinking resources of urban schools created barriers for K-12 leaders to take careful stock of cross-sector arrangements. Given these constraints on schools' resources and time, there are significant challenges to their developing a proposal for change or initiating a plan of action. This responsibility should rest with the school district and include structured opportunities for school stakeholders to set the priorities, debate, and take ownership of the proposal.

Although the city had, according to several district leaders, "never been proactive about engaging corporate partners in a way that looks different than feeling more donated to" (DA8),[86] in establishing an Office of Partnerships, the school district created an opportunity to alter its approach to connecting with corporations. It would be impractical to assume that every inter-organizational relationship can or should be developed into a social partnership. However, the potential risks of pitching a proposal to enhance the collaboration would be relatively minimal, for instance (e.g. losing face if the plan were

rejected). The potential advantages would be enormous if a prosperous and widely

networked corporation, such as the Cobras, applied the full extent of its resources to a

root educational problem. One district administrator described the importance of making

pragmatic choices about what relationships should receive the time and attention required

for genuine collaboration and shared responsibility:

> As a district, we'd have to do a lot more in order to move this relationship to a
> strategic partnership. Nobody is care and feeding the Cobras. There is no
> account executive in the school district assigned to the team. From a partnerships
> perspective, we have to think about how much time and resources we have to
> dedicate. Then, we need to pick and choose which relationships we want to
> dedicate that work to. Could it? Yes. But, shame on us for not exploring the
> possibility of growing this into a partnership. (DA5)

The school district and the schools made professional compromises in anticipation of

one-way charitable exchanges from a corporate donor and professional sporting

organization that many people in River City held up as heroes. Public schools

associating with another corporation such as Coke or McDonalds might feel equally

powerless to negotiate the terms of engagement of that relationship. However, layered on

top of this relationship is the reality that most of us experience awe in the presence of

sports fame. Sports fandom creates feelings of faith and allegiance and "moments of

intense social unity" (Serazio, 2012, p. 2) that kept schools eagerly participating for the

chance to interact with a beloved team. This study witnessed the coming together of

corporate and K-12 educational interests in what was an uneven playing field. The NBA

organization's social and political clout was significant, "fed by the local celebrity status

of business leaders as well as the more obvious influence of capital—and can often

supersede the professional weight of experience accumulated by educators" (Abowitz,

2000, p. 336). River City educators implemented aspects of *Stay in School* but played no

direct role in its governance. Corporate players assumed the burdens of funding and

managing the program, however, they were neither embedded in schools, nor did they closely consult school leaders in making decisions.

There are measurable costs to establishing and maintaining a social partnership, costs that the River City Public Schools never assumed in its more one-way philanthropic relationship with the Cobras. The school system enjoyed some recurring benefits, while avoiding almost any explicit expenses. The Cobras placed no reporting requirements on their technology donations, which gave each school the freedom to plan and use the technology labs as it saw fit. Yet, these donations were one-time offerings that provided no ongoing support of the labs. Central to a school district proposal to the corporation should be a reconsideration of this one-off giving. At the same time, the school district must recognize "not only the benefits of a partnership approach, but also of the inherent costs involved in taking such an approach" (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007, p. 254). School leaders need to consider what, if any, costs they are willing to incur in establishing a more mutual partnership. Growing the relationship into a partnership would take considerable commitment from both parties to agree on a shared purpose and set of values, clearly stipulate each partner's roles and responsibilities in a shared memorandum of understanding, and periodically evaluate partnership accomplishments and challenges.

As public-private partnerships in education have grown in number and stature, professional demands on principals, district administrators, and other school leaders have also increased. Concomitantly, institutional roles that once were seen as the exclusive responsibility of public officials are now viewed more and more as broad-based problems that should be resolved not only by public institutions, but also by other societal actors, including corporations. These changes create both opportunities to enhance the capacity

of public schools to provide high-quality education, and immense obstacles to achieve effective and equitable outcomes for all. As public schools navigate the complexities of corporate social engagement in education, educational leaders must stand ready to actively engage, listen, and learn from a range of school constituents, as well as corporate leaders. Schools must find ways to continually identify social inequities, educate corporations from schools' experiences, and create opportunities for corporate players to become integrated into and changed by schools. They must also demonstrate their leadership and expertise in building cross-sector relationships that continually work in the interests of the young people they serve. Likewise, corporations that invest in K-12 education should rethink the terms of public engagement in order to tackle the underlying causes of our collective social problems through long-term sustainable solutions that draw on the knowledge and expertise contained in schools while sharing their entrepreneurial experience. In this manner, the private sector can become a partner with the public educational sector to socially innovate and contribute in ways that either sector could not achieve on its own.

Research Implications

Inter-organizational relationships between public schools and other sectors are widespread and growing. For-profit firms, non-profits, educational agencies, and local communities increasingly find value in collaborating with organizations from other sectors as a vehicle to build capital and resources they do not possess, and to take up social issues in more dynamic ways than they could realize in isolation (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007; Waddock, 1988). K-12 educational leaders are increasingly expected to work cross-sector in order to address such wide ranging issues

as bracing from repeated budget shortfalls, enhancing school resources, externalizing or

sharing some of the costs of public education, as well as contracting out core and

peripheral services (Ball, 2009; Burch, 2010). Given the political and economic

conditions of austerity in public education, it is unlikely that we will witness any

significant backtracking from these public-private collaborations in the near future.

Making certain these inter-organizational relationships work in the interests of public

schools means carefully attending to issues of efficiency, effectiveness, and equity, each

of which require vastly different questions and means of inquiry. One school district

leader in this study described the potential strategic applications of educational research

in making informed decisions and maximizing school time, resources, and value:

> We should leverage research to make relationships with other organizations
> stronger, so that we're both maximizing our time and resources, and ensuring that
> partnerships bring productive value to schools…We should be using research to
> help frame our expectations of partners, develop clear partnership contracts or
> agreements, and inform how we measure the impact of partnerships (DA5).

Cross-sector research can stimulate professional dialogue and debate on the practical

challenges, as well as the intended and unintended ramifications, of school contacts and

cultural exchanges with sectors that reflect different organizational logics.

In depth research is needed to simultaneously explore practitioners' perspectives

from both public and private sector organizations working together. However, because

this dissertation examined the public schools' viewpoints, but did not include interviews

with the corporate sports partners, the study was hampered in what it could reliably say

about the motivations, purposes, costs, and benefits of the corporation in this cross-sector

relationship. One logical post-doctorate direction of inquiry would be to approach the

Cobras NBA franchise or the umbrella NBA association to solicit feedback on and

reinterpretation of the findings and conclusions of the thesis and/or participating in future

research alongside district and school leadership. Another limitation of this study stemmed from the dearth of existing empirical research in education that examines corporate sports philanthropy. This posed significant challenges to the case study by limiting equivalent scholarship to compare and contrast evidence and interpretations of case findings.

Qualitative research could be used to identify viable examples of social partnerships between public schools and elite sports (professional, amateur, or collegiate) that are aimed at tackling the structural root causes of educational problems. Further case studies could be used to illustrate the key components of cross-sector partnerships in education and pose questions, such as: what specific policy innovations support partnerships? How do partners divide and share professional responsibilities to achieve mutually agreed upon goals and targets? What strategies and tactics enhance the active engagement of a broad array of stakeholders? What opportunities and challenges exist to meaningful democratic engagement of stakeholders? What role can formative evaluations, social auditing, and public reporting play in developing effective and equitable partnerships? Action-oriented research could be undertaken to engage with organizational leaders from different sectors to innovate and systematically inquire into collaborative practices. To meet the large challenges that beset urban public education, scholars and practitioners from a variety of fields need to come together to build knowledge and tools to consciously collaborate and communicate across organizations and sectors of different underlying logics and power dynamics.

Conclusion

This dissertation addressed the implications of the rise of corporate philanthropy within the context of long-term economic austerity in public education. The result was a critical examination of the confluence of altruism, elite professional sports, and the marketplace in urban public education. The study examined the nature of the longstanding cross-sector collaboration between an urban public school district and a NBA team franchise. It found that, although this collaboration was often talked about as a partnership, in practice, it advanced a charitable and promotional relationship that was characterized by mutual affinities but not mutually agreed upon goals. This philanthropic connection to a powerful local-global sporting institution generated benefits to local public schools through rewards for perfect student attendance, motivational assemblies with professional athletes, and periodic, one-time donations in sorely needed technology. However, this relationship also raised profound questions related to the mechanisms for social accountability in leadership decision-making, the effective and equitable use of school and corporate resources, and the indirect consequences when schools rely on commercialism and re-racialized images of stardom to sell the meritocratic value of getting an education to a generation of students.

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Appendix I: Initial IRB Approval Notice

BOSTON COLLEGE
Institutional Review Board
Office for Research Protections
Waul House, 3rd Floor
Phone: (617) 552-4778, fax: (617) 552-0498

IRB Protocol Number: 11.156.01

DATE: March 8, 2011

TO: Alexander Gurn

CC: Andrew Hargreaves

FROM: Institutional Review Board – Office for Research Protections

RE: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Professional Sports: A Case Study of a U.S.
Public School System's Partnership with the National Basketball Association (NBA).

Notice of IRB Review and Approval
Expedited Review as per Title 45 CFR Part 46.110, FR 60366, FR, # 6 & 7

The project identified above has been reviewed by the Boston College Institutional Review
Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research using an expedited review
procedure. This is a minimal risk study. This approval is based on the assumption that the
materials, including changes/clarifications that you submitted to the IRB contain a complete and
accurate description of all the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research.

This approval is given with the following standard conditions:

1. You are approved to conduct this research only during the period of approval cited
   below;
2. You will conduct the research according to the plans and protocol submitted
   (approved copy enclosed);
3. You will immediately inform the Office for Research Protections (ORP) of any injuries
   or adverse research events involving subjects;
4. You will immediately request approval from the IRB of any proposed changes in your
   research, and you will not initiate any changes until they have been reviewed and
   approved by the IRB;
5. You will only use the informed consent documents that have the IRB approval dates
   stamped on them (approved copies enclosed).
6. You will give each research subject a copy of the informed consent document;

7. You may enroll up to 60 participants.

8. If your research is anticipated to continue beyond the IRB approval dates, you must submit a Continuing Review Request to the IRB approximately 60 days prior to the IRB approval expiration date. Without continuing approval the Protocol will automatically expire on March 7, 2012.

Additional Conditions: Any *research personnel that have not completed an acceptable education/training program should be removed from the project until they have completed the training. When they have completed the training, you must submit a Protocol Revision and Amendment Form to add their names to the protocol, along with a copy of their education/ training certificate.*

Approval Period: **March 8, 2011-March 7, 2012.**

Boston College and the Office for Research Protections appreciate your efforts to conduct research in compliance with Boston College Policy and the federal regulations that have been established to ensure the protection of human subjects in research. Thank you for your cooperation and patience with the IRB process.

Sincerely,
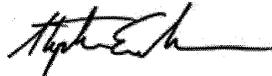
Stephen Erickson
Director
Office for Research Protections

PF

2

Appendix II: Sample outreach letter

Re: Request to participate in a study of corporate philanthropy in public schools

Dear Educator,

As part of my PhD thesis, you are invited to participate in a research study that examines the National Basketball Association's (NBA) philanthropy in public schools. The study aims to understand school professionals' perceptions of and experiences with NBA school programs, such as the *Stay in School* program and the recent technology lab donation.**

Although the NBA has engaged in community relations in the school district for well over a decade, no independent study has ever been conducted to examine these programs. If you have attended a team-sponsored event, if you make use of the technology lab, or have any direct or indirect knowledge of this topic, please consider participating.

If you choose to participate, your primary role would involve a 1-on-1 interview. Interviews usually last 45-60 minutes, depending on one's responses and availability. During the interview, you will be asked to discuss your thoughts on various aspects of the NBA programs in your school or the school district. Participation is voluntary and would be scheduled at time that is convenient for you.

If you are interested or want to learn more, please contact me at the information below. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Gurn, PhD student
School of Education, Boston College
gurn@bc.edu
alexgurn@gmail.com
(c) 617-XXX-XXXX

**Institutional review boards in your district and at Boston College have approved this study.

Appendix III: Interview Protocol

Note to participant: If you have time before we meet, please read over the following questions. You may be more drawn to certain questions, and might have nothing to say about others. Do certain ideas or questions come up as you reflect? In all likelihood, we will not cover all of these questions during the interview. This is intended as a starting point for a conversation about the different sorts relationships that take place as a result of the institutional collaboration between the schools and the National Basketball Association (NBA).

1. Briefly, can you talk about your role and primary responsibilities in the school system? How long have you worked in the school district overall? How long in your most recent position? How has your role changed over time?

2. For the majority of this interview, I'd like discuss any direct or indirect experience that you have with the local National Basketball Association (NBA) team's *NBA Cares* program in your school or the school district, for example, technology lab donations, *Read to Achieve*, or *Stay in School*. Please talk about the nature of your involvement with any/all of these programs.

3.a. In your understanding, what are the main activities associated with this NBA program in your school or the school district?

3.b. What role does the team play? What does the team do or provide?

3.c. What role does the school play? What does the school provide?

3.d. What role does the school district play? What does the district provide?

3.e. What role do students play in these programs? How do students participate?

3.f. What role(s) do teachers play?

3.g. What role(s) do administrators play?

4. Can you tell a short story that you think characterizes the program and might help to understand what it is like for those involved?

5.a. What do you think are the team's main aims for running this program with the schools?

5.b. What do you think are the school district's main aims for partnering with the NBA?

5.c. What do you think are the schools' main aims for participating?

6.a What economic or other material resources does the team invest in the school district, such as grants, donations, gymnasiums, computer equipment, or school supplies?

6.b. What other kinds of contributions does the team make?

7.a. What, if any, benefits do the think the school derives from this partnership?

7.b. What, if any, benefits do the think the school district derives from this partnership?

7.c. What, if any, benefits do the think the team derives from its partnership with the schools?

7.d. Can you tell a story that you think exemplifies how the schools and/or the team benefit?

8. What does it cost the schools (or the district) to participate in this partnership?

9. Do you think the NBA school program (or the partnership between the NBA and the schools) could be improved? In what way(s)?

10. What would be different if this partnership didn't exist? For both the school and the team?

11. Who else do you think it would be important to interview to understand how this NBA program works in the school district?

12. Are there any documents that you think would be helpful to look at, that would enrich our understanding of this partnership between the NBA and the school district?

| Appendix IV: Six Sources of Case Study Evidence ||||
| (Adapted from Yin, 2009, pp. 101-114, 102, 120) ||||
Source of Evidence	**Examples**	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Documentation	o Letters; memoranda; e-mail correspondence, and other personal documents, such as diaries, calendars, and notes; o Agendas; announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports of events; o Administrative documents, such as proposals, progress reports, and other internal records; o Formal studies or evaluation of the same "case" that you are studying; and o News clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media or in community newspapers	o Stable—can be reviewed regularly o Unobtrusive-not created as a result of the case study o Exact—contains names and details of an event o Broad coverage—long time spans, many events, many settings	o Retrievability—can be difficult to find o Biased selectivity, if collection is incomplete o Reporting bias—reflects (unknown) bias of author o Access—may be deliberately withheld
Archival records	o "Public use files" such as U.S. Census and other statistical data made available by federal state, and local governments; o Service records, such as those showing the number of clients served over a given period of time; o Organizational records, such as budget or personnel records; o Maps and charts of the	o [Same as those for documentation] o Precise and usually quantiative	o [Same as those for documentation] o Accessibility due to privacy reasons

	geographical characteristics of a place; and o Survey data, such as data previously collected about a site's employees, residents, or participants		
Interviews	o In-depth interview with key participant, in one sitting or over an extended period of time, to probe specific and open-ended questions related to the case; o Focused interview, in which a person is interviewed for a short period of time (i.e. hour or less), likely to follow closely to specific set of interview questions derived from the case; o Formal survey interview, to generate quantitative data as part of the case study evidence	o Targeted— focuses directly on case study topics o Insightful— provides perceived inferences and explanations	o Bias due to poorly articulated questions o Response bias o Inaccuracies due to poor recall o Reflexivity— interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear
Direct observation	o Excluding purely historical inquiries, a case study takes place in the natural settings of the "case", meaning that some relevant behaviors, events, or environmental conditions will be available for observation. Observation activities can range from casual to formal, and include the use of observational tools developed as part of case study protocol	o *Reality*—covers events in real time o Contextual— covers context of "case"	o Time consuming o Selectivity— broad coverage difficult without a team of observers o Reflexivity— event may proceed differently because it is being observed o Cost—hours needed by observers

Participant-observation	o Special mode of observation in which the researcher may assume a variety of active roles within the case being studied and may in fact participate in events being studied	o [Same as those for direct observations] o Insightful into interpersonal behavior and motives	o [Same as those for direct observations] o Bias due to participant-observer's manipulation of events
Physical or cultural artifacts	o A technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence, to be examined as part of a case study and applied extensively in anthropology	o Insightful into cultural features o Insightful into technical operations	o Selectivity o Availability

Appendix V: Molnar and colleagues' typology of commercial activities in schools

Adapted from Molnar, 2005, pp. 21-26

(1) *Sponsorship of school programming*, such as through the running, support, and/or marketing of school assemblies, events, and contests; the provision of school sporting equipment; and the renovation of schools' athletic or educational facilities;

(2) *Exclusive contracts* with businesses, including with food and beverage companies (e.g. cafeteria food products/services, vending machine distributors, soft drink companies), manufacturers of sports equipment, and publishers of curriculum and other educational materials;

(3) *Incentive programs* that reward behaviors such as collecting grocery store labels or achieving certain scholastic benchmarks like perfect attendance;

(4) *Appropriation of space*, such as traditional advertising on book covers and school billboards;

(5) *Sponsored supplemental educational materials* donated by corporations;

(6) *Marketing*, such as corporate advertising to students, and *marketing research* in schools, at school events, and online;

(7) *Fundraising* activities to raise money for school and after-school budgets; and

(8) *Privatization* of public schools through the private management and administration of schools.

Appendix VI: Teacher's Reflections and Recommendations

Post-Study Interview Reflections of NBA CARES
Author: Teacher (T1.S3). February 2014

Hi Alex,

Thank you for sending the study and dialogue from your interview of me concerning the NBA Cares Program. I read through the abstract of your thesis, including the Contents Page with Sub-titles, first. I had not thought of this program in the light that you had presented it, with concern for the corporate structure of the NBA making appearances, only to increase their profit margins, and to improve the image of professional athletes and the sports they play. Your statistics concerning who really controls the wealth, corporate America owning 10% of the wealth in our country, also caused me to re-think the images of corporations in general. However, there should be a different perspective when considering professional sports teams.

The most hopeful question you asked of me, was how do I think this interaction between schools and the NBA Cares Program could improve. I still believe that having one or two NBA athletes commit to working more closely/mentoring a group of students at a designated school on a monthly basis, or over a period of several weeks, would provide a better timeframe for the Athlete/Star Player, to provide a more meaningful experience for both them and their students. That NBA athlete should showcase their strongest skills that have been developed throughout their school and college careers, in a way that creates an analogy between school and sports.

I recently videotaped a Cobras rooky player reading aloud to a class of students, during which time the athlete was expected to also discuss parts of the story with the students. Even though there was an Assistant with the athlete, who really asked the guiding questions, it was clear to me that reading aloud a story was not that Athlete's best skill to display. Whichever skills are displayed, the athlete should feel really strong and confident about doing it, and be able to talk about strategies he or she used to develop that skill to such a high degree. That can be shown using basketball skills, verbal skills, social skills, artistic skills, etc.

Videos and photographs of the students interacting with the athletes would become a lifetime souvenir. RPS sponsors Technology at Home, which provides a way for parents and students to take computer classes together within the school they attend, and earn a computer to keep at home, including the software, printer, and accessories needed. NBA Cares could become sponsors, in part or whole, of this program within the schools that they adopt. Larry Gilbert's Computer Lab provided the place of instruction at [School 3], and other teachers received stipends to help the parents and students learn the computer skills, over an 8-week period. Perhaps the NBA CARES Program could pay the stipends to the Teachers in this program. NBA Athletes could be assistants during this class, if their computer skills are strong, and media projects can be developed together with the Athletes.

As far as changing or at least impacting the demographics of who really attends NBA games in River City, holding Cobras basketball camps throughout the summer months, and during school vacations, with scholarships for those with talent who can't afford the fees, would be a great place to start. Coaches from Middle and High Schools around the city could recommend students who not only show skills in basketball, but also are committed to academic excellence.

A section of the seating in the [stadium], could be reserved at certain games for these students, who successfully completed the Basketball Camps, to attend a Cobras game with a family member. The number of nights that are set aside for special categories of fans, such as Military, Teachers, etc., could also include a few game nights during the week for students from the schools being supported, as is presently done as an incentive for improving attendance, behavior, and academic excellence, as it is presently done with some Middle School students.

The real changes that need to be made, concerning corporations and their profit margins and wealth, will have to be left to our politicians and community leaders proposing changes in the tax structures of cities and towns across the U.S.A. The imbalance of wealth vs. poverty in our country will be changed at a slower rate, but one that will hopefully happen and be motivated by the very students and families that NBA CARES Program are reaching out to.

Endnotes

[1] e.g. Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA); National Basketball Association (NBA); National Football League (NFL); Major League Baseball Association (MLB); NASCAR; Cricket Australia; England and Wales Cricket Board; rugby's European Super League

[2] Katz's (2004) study traverses youth spaces in the seemingly dissimilar geographic locations of *Howa, a* village in central eastern Arabic-speaking Sudan, and *Harlem*, New York City. The author illustrates how global capitalism renders parallax connections in these "first" and "third" world places for young people living in socially marginalized communities.

[3] In *Wasted Lives*, Bauman (2003) distinguishes between *global tourists*, who move around the world freely and easily with vast social and cultural capital, and global vagabonds, such as undocumented immigrants and refuges, who experience significant institutional restrictions on their movements.

[4] Additionally, this picture of spending in sport philanthropy is made more ambiguous when one considering that marketing costs of philanthropy, such as advertising and promotion of the corporation's cause-related activities, can be aggregated into philanthropic spending and tax deductions.

[5] I distinctly remember getting my first pair of Nike Air Jordan's and Chicago Bulls Starter jacket, and the emotional rush I got from wearing them.

[6] The broadcast footage of the Nov. 19 brawl can be seen in a 15-minute segment on ESPN's flagship program SportsCenter commenting on the the day after the fight available, see ESPN (2004). The account of the incident in this chapter has been assembled from video footage, news accounts, editorials, and other literature on the controversy.

[7] One can experience the shape of this corporate presence by perusing the Internet, and sifting through the vast array of materials produced or sponsored by professional sporting organizations that are used to present their organization's philanthropic pursuits in the media (e.g. corporate websites, commercials, promotional videos, blog activity, press releases, news stories). These materials point to how each team attempts to frame its brand of corporate giving.

[8] All names that pertain directly to this localized case study have been changed so as to protect the confidentiality of the research site and participants, i.e. Pseudonyms are given for the city, the schools, the NBA team, all individuals, and other organizations, such as foundations, non-profits, community-based organizations, and government agencies, whose likeness, voices, and stories may be given space in the case study narrative. Certain personal traits or descriptors may be altered slightly to protect individual confidentiality. In efforts to maintain strict ethical protocols, certain demographic and/or geographic details about the schools and city (e.g. population statistics; composition of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups across city; linguistic communities; organizational terrain of city) may also be altered, wherein these changes do not overtly constrain or corrupt understanding of this particular case study.

[9] Questions of access, as well as my outsider position to the business management field as a grad student in education, were driving reasons behind my initial decision not to pursue

the corporation as a research site. Given my recent experiences working on Hargreaves & Harris (2010)'s international study that included corporations, I understood the unique obstacles and fascinating opportunities presented to studying organizations in the business sector. Furthermore, I chose to protect the confidentiality of schools in the study over the benefits of learning from corporate insiders' perceptions of this partnership because I genuinely had no idea at first what sort of opinions and viewpoints I would encounter about the corporation. Since philanthropy operates voluntarily at the discretion of corporate decision-makers, I was concerned about hypothetical putative ramifications to schools if corporate leaders were fully cognizant of the research sites in the event I uncovered unsavory perspectives about the Cobras.

[10] Iterative searches have been conducted in these major academic databases: Academic OneFile, ASSIA, Business Source Complete, Dissertations and Theses (ProQuest), ERIC, Education Research Complete, JSTOR, and Social Sciences Citation Index).

[11] Further, many of those stories about corporate philanthropy that make it on the radio, on TV, on the Internet, are actually constructed by corporate public relations (see e.g. Maloney, K. (2006). Rethinking public relations. New York: Routledge.)

[12] In other words, I am asking people working in schools to interpret the motives, purposes, structures, and arrangements of people working in corporations. For this reason, I might also consider soliciting feedback, consultation, or theoretical sampling from corporate insiders to the NBA.

[13] I pursued multiple perspectives on this subject by consulting with people of varying roles in schools (e.g. central administrators, principles, classroom teachers, coaches, counselors, school specialists, and paraprofessionals) and by examining a range of documents about this cross-sector collaboration created both by the schools and by the corporate organization. This study was empirically limited by interviewing no corporate sports executives. At the same time, it benefitted and learned from the *epistemic privilege* of public educators, drawing on "a special advantage with respect to processing or acquiring knowledge about how fundamental aspects our society operate to sustain matrices of power" (Moya, cited in Campano, 2007, p. 16).

[14] I understand that I am also shaped by these historically situated ideological conditions. I assume that it is a responsibility of researchers and public intellectuals to systematically unpack the explicit and implicit power relations underlying discourse in seeking constructive responses to problems of practice.

[15] I base this claim on a review of Cobras' team website and press releases describing school relationships, footage of sponsored school events, as well as personal interviews conducted with D. Cesniuk (2010); G. Johnson (2011); and E. Wolff (2010).

[16] The concept of corporate responsibility in professional basketball intersects with such diverse areas of corporate behavior, such as, contract labor negotiations between the players' union and the NBA to determine minimum expectations for athlete participation in community relations and charitable events, race- and gender-based hiring decisions on the team and in corporate front offices, reducing waste and pollution at sporting events.

[17] Only a subsection of research on CSR directly relates to the topic of philanthropy. A small subset of that work addresses the intersection of sports philanthropy and public education, explored further in Chapter 4.

[18] Though, I have much unfinished business in this respect. I have had exceeding difficulties closing the page on this review of literature, because with each twist I log more and different questions and create enquiries into other areas I had not considered the day before. For instance, I speak of ideology but yet I leave untouched any understanding of the political and economic developments that brought about the national welfare state in US and elsewhere, and systemic efforts to replace those systems by the workfare state or "competition state" (Ball, 2007; Jessop 2002) that is principally concerned "within innovation, competitiveness and entrepreneurship tied to long waves of growth and more recent pressures on perpetual innovation" (Jessop, p. 132).

[19] Code's research is concerned with rupturing the dominant model of knowledge in Anglo-American philosophy and science based on the principles of Enlightenment.

[20] ibid

[21] See endnote #9.

[22] A list of confidential endnotes exists for review by the thesis committee and all research participants.

[23] DA5; Observational data

[24] DA5; DA3

[25] All names changed. See endnote #9. Contextual information about The Cobras comes from publicly available documents on the team website and in the press, as well as interviews.

[26] Economic performance indicators in position #8, River City Cobras, represent hypothetical, not actual figures.

[27] DA1

[28] This study drew in theoretically and methodologically from the distinctly different epistemological orientations of Dyson & Genishi (2005) and Yin (2009).

[29] Many of these quotations have been condensed to exclude extraneous talk, tangents, stutters, and false starts. See Chapter 3 for more information on the process of interpretation, analysis, and writing of the research.

[30] The diverse professional networks in River City offer relatively abundant resources for most local schools. See Chapter Three on context of the research site.

[31] e.g. Using Balanced Scorecard and district-designed program evaluation tools.

[32] I interviewed one of these consultants, based at a school that is not in this study.

[33] This player has since been traded from the Cobras, and no longer participates philanthropically in River City.

[34] In the Cobras' *documercial* for this event, this school official's quote on partnership is presented in snippet form.

[35] Only two research participants have explicit knowledge of these financial conditions.

[36] Hence, the need to ethnographically explore corporate partnerships.

[37] District administrator 1, who until recently served as the school district's liaison to the Cobras, initially identified those schools that were invited to submit proposals for successive computer lab donations sponsored by the team (on average three donations per year since the initiative started). This administrator explained that decisions were usually made quickly, because "with the Cobras, things move fast, and they always run smoothly." He would compose a short list of schools with pressing technology needs, as well as a principal and staff he thought were "ready" to make good and effective uses of

the donation. A handful of schools would be asked to present concise 1-2 page proposals on how they would make use the lab. Within approximately 5-10 days, school site visits and meetings with school leaders would be scheduled and completed, and one school would be selected. Two to three weeks later, one lucky school was presented with a brand new technology lab or mobile technology cart.

[38] This parental choice in educational quasi-markets translates into dollars for schools (see Lipman, 2010)

[39] See also SA1.S1, SA2.S2, SA1.S3, C1.S3, for "cookie cutter" references

[40] Each clustering of discourses, reviewed in Chapter Two, is capable of seeing aspects of corporate engagement that its counter part overlooks, though, research inside one academic encampment usually does not acknowledge or review oppositional theory. When it does, authors often use the opportunity to dispute the other side's assumptions, or even to discredit scholars as irrational.

[41] Greenwashing is defined as "disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012).

[42] No one I interviewed raised specific objections to either the ethics of McDonald's labor practices or its environmental record, but the company's health-related concerns are seen as fundamentally in conflict with the development and well being of school-age youth. See Saltman (2007) for a discussion of socio-economic and ideological tensions of the junk food industry in public education.

[43] See work by Tressie McMillan-Cottom, on systematic dispossession and 'status' goods, e.g.
http://tressiemc.com/2013/10/29/the-logic-of-stupid-poor-people/
This would also be a spot to pay attention to racialization processes.

[44] Participant said further, of the global supply chain of NBA products, "it feeds the line of products or parts of the products that are manufactured. You say a couple of dollars a day involving women and small children in Southeast Asia. No, we're talking pennies a day."

[45] In one school in this study, the assistant principal, who is an avid sports fan, gets to decide how frequently and announce when the students are encouraged to wear local team apparel in place of the school uniform.

[46] Except in the lone U.S. case of the Green Bay Packers

[47] This problem will be addressed further in the sub-section below, *Incentivizing Achievement.*

[48] Please note, this dissertation is not a formal evaluation but an exploratory case study.

[49] My interpretation of this one documercial describes frame-by frame images and dialogue. Identifying characteristics were changed to protect confidentiality.

[50] More than one research participant suggested that I should instead be exploring this causal question of impact in my dissertation.

[51] DA1; DA3; DA4; DA5

[52] SA3.S3; DA1

[53] E.g., see http://www.nba.com/cares/

[54] I listened to this former player speak at several school rallies in 2011 and 2012.

[55] Though perhaps not *culturally responsive*

[56] This player later met with smaller groups of students selected by school staff based on recommendations, attendance, behavior, and grades, as part of his private foundation's sponsored computer lab renovation at the Roosevelt. This and other technology makeovers are discussed in sub-section, *Transformational Relationships*.

[57] E.g. C1.S1; C1.S3; SC.S1; SA2.S2; SA1.S3; T1.S1; T2.S1; T1.S2; T3.S3; T2.S3

[58] i.e. "corporatized street cred"

[59] The more recent sponsored labs tend to have higher end technology (e.g. Mac minis) than the home desktop computers installed in the schools in this study. The shift has been based on feedback from schools and the district technology office, as well as the Cobras' experience working in other school districts.

[60] T1.S1; T2.S1; T1.S2; T3.S3

[61] School leaders and teachers talk about "opportunity gaps" that mainly poor students and families of color are faced with in their long-term educational pathways. The problems of access and use of resources expand beyond technology as well. One coach and teacher lamented, "Kids need to see. But they can't see if we don't provide the opportunities. We can talk about the suburban things, and at every suburban high school, there's a track in the back. There's a track team practicing back there. There's a track team running around back there. There's a soccer team there. There's the football team there. There's a baseball team there. There's a lacrosse team. There's softball. They can touch it. They can see it. In River City, the softball team has to go across town to find a field. The baseball team has to go someplace else because there's no baseball diamond. Football team is right there, but … then it becomes grazed. Track team … nobody has a track. Our track meets are held in the middle of nowhere." (C1.S2)

[62] At one school not in this study, students or staff have mistreated and destroyed the technology donations.

[63] District leaders frequently shift with changing superintendent's administrations. This attrition, which is commonly witnessed in urban central school administration, creates uncertainty in professional relationships. For instance, since the former long-time official liaison to the Cobras has left the school district, it is now unclear to schools what administrator is championing the process of Cobras-sponsored technology transformations.

[64] Most of the available buses are owned privately, and cost prohibitive for schools to hire, therefore, many schools travel by public transportation with students to the end-of-year event. Teachers say this is a positive experience in itself, as they have chances to informally socialize with youth in ways not possible in the typical school day.

[65] Also DA2; DA3; DA4; DA5; DA8; SA1.S1; SA1.S2; SA2.S2; SA1.S3

[66] E.g. C1.S1; C1.S2; C1.S3; DA1; DA5; DA6; SA1.S1; SA1.S2; SA2.S2; SA3.S2; T1.S1; T2.S1; T1.S2

[67] E.g. See troubling connections between the intense consumerism of sports apparel (e.g. sneakers) and the "school-to-prison pipeline" (SA2.S3)

[68] See also short case study in Chapter 2 of partnership between Shell Inc. and Scholastic Inc. within public education

[69] DA1; DA3; DA5; DA8

[70] DA1; DA2; DA4; DA8; SA1.S1; SA2.S2; SA1.S3

[71] DA1; DA3; DA8

[72] One school and three school administrators had experience with the NBA program since it was first initiated

[73] DA1; DA2; DA3; DA5; DA6; SA2.S1; SA1.S2; SA2.S2; SA1.S3. Several research participants acknowledged thinking very little about the Cobra's school-related programs before being asked to do an interview, and some were genuinely surprised at how much they had to say during our taped conversations.

[74] Parent/school choice has implications for educational funding as annual budgets allotments are influenced by a school's student roster.

[76] DA1; DA2; DA3; DA4; SA1.S1; SA1.S2; SA2.S2; SA1.S3

[77] C.E. #

[78] In fact, a few research participants suggested to me during interviews that perhaps I should change my dissertation's focus to explore a question of effectiveness in improving student attendance or youth engagement in school.

[79] e.g. "At the end of the day, these kids have got their jackets…the sneakers. I say it again, *oh lord*, the sneakers! …When the priority is on the product, be it NBA or for NFL…but if their priority on that product versus what's in the classroom…without that educational foundation, it makes them prime candidates for the prison industrial complex" (SA3.S3). See also SA1.S2; SA3.S2; T2.S3

[80] DA5; DA3; SA1.S2; SA3.S3; C1.S3

[81] "The trinkets they (Cobras) give the kids, they're like these cheap reminders of the more expensive stuff they sell" (T3.S3); C1.S1; C1.S2; C1.S3; T1.S1;

[82] DA2; DA6; P1.S2; T3.S1; T2.S2

[83] DA3; DA4; DA5; DA6; DA7; DA8; SA1.S1; SA1.S2; T2.S1; C1.S1; C1.S3

[84] DA3; DA4; DA7; DA8; SA1.S2; SA3.S2; T1.S1; T2.S1; T2.S3; T3.S3; C1.S1; C1.S3

[85] DA2; DA3; DEL; DP; DA5

[86] DA2; DA3; DA4; DA5; DA7; DA8; DA9