



**Getting on the Right Side of Change: How Peer Discourse Sessions See the
Role of Teachers' Unions in Education Reform**

A FrameWorks Research Report

Prepared for the FrameWorks Institute
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November 2010

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INTRODUCTION

In their recent book, Mary Compton and Lois Weiner document policies enacted around the globe that have undercut publicly funded education, undermined teacher professionalization, and sparked assaults on teachers' unions. Increasing calls for privatization of public education have “transformed how we talk about education, teachers and learners, unions, parents groups and professional organizations. It has altered the conditions for knowledge production and the circumstances under which we might demand a socially just education system.”¹ This report, along with the emerging body of research FrameWorks has conducted on teachers' unions, provides empirically-based communications strategies that hold promise for improving public conversations about the role of teachers' unions in education reform, particularly around education inequality. It also offers important observations on obstacles to building public will around policies that support public education and the continuing professionalization of teachers.

This report details findings from a series of Peer Discourse Sessions conducted by the FrameWorks Institute with groups of civically engaged U.S. citizens on the role of teachers' unions in education reform. The research builds directly upon an earlier series of open-ended interviews FrameWorks conducted on this topic in 2010² as well as additional research on education reform.³ In these earlier interviews, FrameWorks identified the cultural models — collections of implicit but shared understandings and patterns of reasoning — that Americans use to think about teachers' unions. Also in past research, FrameWorks conducted a series of in-depth one-on-one interviews with experts in this field. Comparing public and expert understandings revealed the gaps in understanding that currently exist on the role that teachers' unions play. In the research discussed here, FrameWorks confirmed and expanded upon the results of the earlier phases of research and experimented with a set of preliminary reframing strategies that will be further tested and refined in upcoming phases of research. As the bridge between early descriptive research and the later prescriptive phases, Peer Discourse Sessions are a vital component of the iterative Strategic Frame AnalysisTM research process.

The Peer Discourse Sessions provide an opportunity to see how cultural models function in practice by structuring conversations in settings that more closely approximate the social contexts in which discussions about teachers' unions and education reform might naturally occur. These sessions are designed to capture and identify *public discourses* about teachers' unions. This means that, in contrast to one-on-one Cultural Models Interviews, Peer Discourse Sessions do not capture the aggregate of individual understandings of an issue, but rather reflect the social norms and expectations cultural groups share and use with each other in discussing a given issue. Peer Discourse Sessions allow FrameWorks to experiment with primes (prescriptive frame elements) intended to stimulate different patterns of group conversation. In this way, these sessions examine whether intentionally priming conversations with specific frame elements — such as values and metaphors — can create a substantively different conversation from those that characterized the unprimed discussions documented in earlier descriptive parts of the research process.

After a summary of the research and a more detailed description of the Peer Discourse method, we present the research findings in greater detail. Discussion of these findings is organized

around the three fundamental research questions that FrameWorks answers through the analysis of Peer Discourse Session data:

- (1) *confirmation* — do the findings support the cultural models identified in previous research on teachers’ unions?
- (2) *experimentation* — can primes informed by earlier qualitative research facilitate an improved understanding of, and more robust discussion about, the teachers’ unions’ role in education reform? and
- (3) *negotiation* — how do people work with both their default cultural models and the primes they have been provided in making decisions as individuals and in groups about the role of teachers’ unions in education reform?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The confirmatory section of the Peer Discourse Sessions was designed to triangulate the findings from the earlier Cultural Models Interviews.⁴ The findings from these Peer Discourse Sessions proved consonant with earlier research. Participants primarily defined teachers’ unions as advocating for teachers’ pay, benefits and working conditions. As such, teachers’ unions were conceptualized as inherently “self-interested.” At the same time, the profession of teaching was discussed as less of a job than a “calling” in which teachers should be primarily motivated by their passion for educating young people and their devotion to young people’s educational betterment. Concern for financial gain was thought to be at odds with the appropriate motivations for teaching. Reasoning from a combination of these assumptions — that teachers’ unions are about pay and that teachers should be motivated by caring, not money — participants concluded that teachers’ unions were not concerned with students’ needs and were guilty of making teaching “about the wrong thing.” The majority of participants argued, moreover, that teachers’ unions were uninterested and uninvolved in educational reform. In addition, during the unprimed conversations, several participants went so far as to argue that teachers’ unions protect “bad” teachers through their defense of inappropriate tenure policy and that they were no longer necessary to protect teachers’ labor rights.

To begin to shift conversations about teachers’ unions away from these dominant default patterns, FrameWorks adapted and tested two simplifying models (The Orchestra Effect and Remodeling) and two values (Common Good with Future Preparation and Fairness Across Places), and a prime that discussed teachers’ unions as professional associations. These “primes” — or deliberate, researcher-introduced attempts to redirect thinking about teachers’ unions and education reform — were included based on findings from earlier phases of research.⁵ The two values primes showed the most promise — but were effective in different ways. The Common Good with Future Preparation value sparked more robust conversations about the role of teachers’ unions in processes of education reform. The Fairness Across Places prime encouraged participants to talk in concrete ways about systemic inequalities in the education system and the role that unions might play in addressing these inequalities. During conversations that followed exposure to this prime, instead of blaming problems within the education system on individuals (i.e., “bad” teachers, parents or students), participants talked about inequality as embedded in the educational system.

The simplifying models that were tested as primes provided a base understanding of the structure of the education system and directed thinking toward concrete ways to approach reform. However, much of the discussion that followed the introduction of these primes defaulted back to the dominant and unproductive cultural models described above. Furthermore, the prime that addressed issues of teachers' unions as professional associations was effective in helping participants understand the importance of teachers' continued professionalization. Participants struggled to assign a meaningful role for teachers' unions in this process and in education reform more generally. These results suggest that more communications work needs to be done to incorporate unions into these more systemic understandings of education. This is a task that will be taken up in later stages of research where we will develop and test new values and simplifying models for their ability to build understanding and create new perspectives on the role of teachers' unions in the education system.

During the negotiation exercise, in which subgroups of participants were asked to argue for the inclusion of teachers' unions in local reform efforts, participants discussed unions as repositories of teaching experience that were invaluable for reform. Teacher "know-how" was the most common argument made by the participants in favor of the inclusion of teachers' unions in education reform. This indicates that, after exposure to the primes, participants were able to think about unions as more than organizations that advocate for teachers' pay and benefits.

It is important to note that, throughout the sessions, participants consistently argued that they had not witnessed teachers' unions engaging in the kinds of reform activities described in the primes. They based this observation on either their children's experiences in public education or family members or friends who were teachers and union members. In the negotiation exercise, their arguments revealed a desire for teachers' unions to be more involved with local communities. This suggests new communications opportunities in which unions are made more visible to the communities they serve and their reform activities are made more apparent to members of those communities.

RESEARCH METHODS

FrameWorks approaches Peer Discourse Analysis with three specific research objectives:

- 1) *Confirm* the presence and application of the dominant cultural models that emerge from Cultural Models Interviews by triangulating results using a different method; and *explore* variations in the models when they are used in a group setting.
- 2) *Experiment* with speculative reframes that emerge from other FrameWorks research or from area experts to narrow down the number, and refine the execution, of frame elements that are then taken into quantitative experimental research.
- 3) Engage people in a *negotiation* in which they experience efficacy and agency over a complex problem and have to debate and articulate a position as a group, observing what framing elements prove useful and pervasive in participants' interactions with their peers.

Put another way, Peer Discourse Analysis is a way to explore the common patterns of talking — or public discourses — that people use in social settings and how they negotiate among these patterned ways of talking, using both cultural models that they naturally employ in understanding the issue as well as empirically-based “cues” or “primes” introduced by the moderator.

FrameWorks’ more specific goals in these particular Peer Discourse Sessions were: to observe the specific assumptions and norms about teachers’ unions that people employed when in social group settings; to begin to see whether the introduction of specific frame elements allows participants to understand the expert understanding of teachers’ unions; to overcome individualizing habits of thinking and talking; to imagine public policy solutions that address education reform; and to explore how people negotiate among and work with common cultural models and discourses in forming positions and making decisions about these issues.

Subjects and Data Collection

Six Peer Discourse Sessions were conducted with U.S. citizens in July 2010. These sessions were held in three U.S. cities: Memphis, Tenn., Minneapolis, Minn., and Pittsburgh, Penn.

FrameWorks recruited participants through a professional marketing firm using a screening process developed and employed in past research. At each location, 11 to 13 people were screened, selected and provided with an honorarium for their time and participation. For each session, nine of these 11 to 13 people were selected to represent variation in ethnicity, gender, age, educational background and political ideology (as self-reported during the screening process) or to meet more specific goals for group composition. Based on previous FrameWorks research, we suspected that participant responses and views would be particularly sensitive to variations in level of education and racial background. The groups were formed as follows: one white group, one African-American group, one Latino group, one high-education group (some college experience), one low-education group (high school diploma or less), one mixed-education group.

In addition, FrameWorks purposefully sampled individuals who reported a strong interest in current events and an active involvement in their communities because these people are likely to have and be willing to express opinions on socio-political issues.

All participants were given descriptions of the research and signed written consent forms. Peer Discourse Sessions lasted approximately two hours, were audio and video recorded, and were later transcribed. Quotes are provided in the report to illustrate major points and are identified by the composition of the group, but more specific identifying information has been excluded to ensure participant anonymity. For details on the session guide and analysis, see Appendix A.

FINDINGS

Confirmation

During the confirmation section, participants were asked two open-ended questions: what purpose or role teachers' unions serve and what relationship exists between teachers' unions and education reform. These questions allowed FrameWorks to confirm the cultural models we identified in our earlier research on teachers' unions.⁶ The section that follows is organized around these thematic findings: teachers' unions are understood as a way to protect teacher rights and give them voice; advocating for rights and supporting teacher "caring" are incompatible functions; teachers' unions are in opposition to education reform; the education system is poorly understood; and teachers' unions are perceived as anachronisms that protect "bad" teachers.

Peer Discourse Sessions do not provide the same access to the depth of understanding of these issues as do Cultural Models Interviews. What Peer Discourse Sessions do reveal is the relative strength of the models. Overall, there was a narrowing effect in the Peer Discourse Sessions. Many of models identified in the Cultural Models Interviews dominated group discussions while others faded into the background. Unlike the one-on-one Cultural Models Interviews that elicit deeply held models that people use to reason about an issue, Peer Discourse Sessions capture how participants together express public discourses about teachers' unions. That is, in Peer Discourse Session participants do not express their personal ideas about a topic in isolation from their fellow citizens, but instead they enact social expectations that define norms around teachers' unions and education reform. In this way group conversations, more so than individual interviews, tend to focus narrowly on the *most dominant* cultural understandings. They express what participants feel empowered, permitted or expected to say in the public square. These groups therefore invigorate a specific dimension of the cognitive landscape around an issue — a terrain that is essential to understand in creating more strategic and effective communications around an issue.

Teachers' Unions Function to Protect Rights and Give Voice

At the beginning of the confirmation section, the participants almost universally stated that teachers' unions were critical to protecting teachers' rights as employees, including securing fair wages and benefits, setting guidelines for working hours and standards for classroom sizes, ensuring uniform processes for employment decisions, and advocating for workplace safety issues.

I would say collective bargaining in order to improve their wages or the benefits, or anything that they need for the classrooms and if they need help, that's really important.
Memphis White Group

I see unions as an entity that advocates for a particular group. So with respect to "teachers," I think unions are paramount because teachers are a very important field of very low pay relative to other industries, so I think it's necessary for teachers' unions, on

some levels, to exist to advocate for teachers, to make sure they receive a decent wage because of how important the education system is.

Pittsburgh African American

To give them the pay benefits that they're entitled to because it is a program that teaches our children, educates our children, works with our children, but we tend to forget to reimburse them for all the wonderful things they do for our children. So, by having unions, they support and talk — I think teachers are more concerned about taking care of the kids and less about themselves, and they need someone to take care of them.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Fairness for all the teachers, as far as the Teacher A does something, Teacher B does the same thing, they're both treated the same way. Unions have rules, guidelines so they keep the standardization of their profession.

Pittsburgh Low Education

[Teachers] are working in hazardous environments where the schools are 40, 50, 60 years old, and there's asbestos falling. I mean, New York just did a study where a good chunk of schools are exposing children to asbestos daily because they don't have the money to refinish walls, and they don't the money to update ductwork and things like that.

Minneapolis High Education

When the participants did not have any direct experience with unions or concrete information about how teachers' unions operate, they drew on knowledge of other unions and mapped these understandings onto unions in an educational context. It should be noted that several participants talked about family members, friends or close associates who were teachers and members of a union.

The unions are there to fight for everybody. I was also in a machinist union years ago, and I've seen the bad part of unions, too, because many, many years ago unions, you had to have unions because people were being abused ... there's a point where the corruption gets so bad that, you know, unions aren't worth having. I've seen union stewards bring pistols into the meeting. I'd go in, I'd write my check, I'd hand it to them, and I'd walk back out. I didn't play that game. So I mean, you know, teachers' unions, I've never been in that part of it, but I can only assume what they're lobbying for, and it's usually themselves, so.

Memphis White Group

The teachers have a union for the same reason everybody else has a union. I think the reasons are all the same, they just tailor the wording to a specific industry. ... It's protection, it's fair employment acts, it's fair labor practices, it's trying to deal with the company's asking unreasonable things of them, or the school in this case.

Minneapolis High Education

When I hear the terminology of someone with being within a union, I always go back and think of the ironworker or steelworkers union, and there are teachers out there who, at some point in time, might have done something to protect another child, and might have lost their job, or something like that, and they would need proper representation, which would come from a union, but I also agree with you that, you know, salary, health care, vacation, time off, maternity leave, so on and so forth is really what I think of when I hear about a “teachers’ union.”

Pittsburgh African American

As the above excerpts demonstrate, drawing on knowledge of other unions resulted in critical and positive ideas about what unions do and how they work. However, the most dominant understanding was that unions advocate for workers’ rights, pay and benefits. Following this, another common understanding was that teachers’ unions provide teachers with a voice in the political arena. For some participants, unions provide teachers with “power” to impact legislation and influence political decision-makers.

I think unions came about because teachers felt they had no voice in politics, and it was a better way to get that voice to get some power. You know, it’s lobbying things to it.

Memphis White Group

Leverage against politicians, and political bodies like school boards.

Pittsburgh Low Education

Although less frequently than giving teachers a voice in the political process, at least two groups noted that unions provide teachers with the power to create and/or voice their concerns about curriculum decisions:

I’m gonna agree with what he said so far, but it’s not always just finance. I think you have unions, especially for the teachers, so they could have a voice in the learning process. The teachers are the ones who have the classrooms. The administrators, they may set the agenda, the curriculum, all the rules and regulations, but ultimately, it’s the teacher that is in with the students, and it’s only through the unions that they have a unified voice so that they can be a part of the learning process for those students.

Pittsburgh African American

And what I hear is, you know, if you have like one teacher just trying to get something done, or getting more books for the classroom, or more money for art supplies or something, one teacher is not gonna make a difference. That they have no voice. You get enough of them together, you’re gonna get it — like he said, number is better.

Memphis White Group

The idea that teachers’ unions advocate for teachers’ interests, whether financial or political, was the most top-of-mind response when participants were asked to think about the purpose of these groups. Early in the conversations, these roles were largely discussed in positive ways. Most participants agreed that teachers were underpaid, performed very difficult work, needed a voice, and that unions fulfilled these functions. However, these more positive views of teachers’ unions

quickly gave way to more critical ideas. Once the topic of education reform was brought into the conversations, participants drew on less productive models to reason about the role of teachers' unions.

Advocating for Rights and Supporting Teacher “Caring” are Incompatible Functions

Similar to the findings from the Cultural Models Interviews, participants had distinct and at times opposing views of teachers' motivations for becoming teachers as well as the role of unions in addressing those motivations.⁷ On the one hand, several participants discussed at length the difficulty of the work of educating children and the dedication and caring required to fulfill professional commitments. For example, the following participants talked at length about the work and personality necessary to a good teacher.

And unfortunately these teachers are in a very difficult position of trying to educate the child, and you also have parents who aren't involved, who are there, who have nothing to do. I think, I wouldn't want to be a teacher right now. It's a tough job.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

I never thought teachers made a great income, and to me, I think that's the hardest job in the world, cause I don't like children. I have some, but ... [LAUGHTER] ... hey, I wouldn't do it. [LAUGHTER] There's not enough money in the world to pay me to be a teacher.

Memphis White Group

However, the caring and dedication of teachers was seen as being in direct opposition to what the participants perceived to be the primary role of teachers' unions — namely, securing pay and benefits for teachers. Because teachers' unions were perceived to be advocating only for teachers' interests, this was often defined as oppositional to students' interests, which were clearly believed to be served by caring, rather than financially concerned, teachers.

I think that there needs to be incentives for the teachers to focus on the children, and I think there has to be a better mechanism instead of the old traditional way that teachers' unions were established and the purpose of them. If we're going to move forward in educating our kids, they need to use this union to actually look at, what should we do for our children, and you know, add that to their base.

Pittsburgh Latino

Participant 1: *Well, that's to support the teachers. So if it's “classroom size” because the teachers agree that a classroom should only be 20 students or whatever — I could see why they would fight for that or use that as a bargaining chip. If you got 30 students compared to 15 students, big difference in your day.*

Participant 2: *They're teaching them, too. It not only affects the teacher, it affects the kids' lives when you have that many kids in a classroom.*

Participant 1: *Yeah, but do you think the unions are considering the kids?*

Participant 2: No.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Their [unions] major concern is one thing and that's money. Okay, they want more money.

Pittsburgh Low Education

Advocating for pay and benefits and being a dedicated teacher was an either/or proposition for most participants. Several spoke about teachers needing a passion to educate and that this dedication needed to supersede any desire for financial gain. Because participants primarily defined teachers' unions as advocacy groups for the material needs of teachers, and saw teacher caring as being damaged by financial self-interest, unions were seen to interfere with the process of quality teaching. These ideas became even more pronounced as conversations turned to education reform.

Fighting Each Other: Teachers' Unions are in Opposition to Education Reform

Participants were asked directly about the relationship between teachers' unions and education reform. A few of the groups were able to discuss in concrete terms how teachers' unions might be involved in improving the U.S. education system. The African-American group was more adept at understanding the role of teachers' unions in reform and generally held a more positive view of teachers' unions than the other groups.

I've never really paid much attention to the education reform, and teachers' unions, and all that, and I don't have any experience with unions, so I might have kind of an idealized view, and I appreciate the problems you all have been talking about, and I can see how those are probably very real issues, but just in my eyes, I just kind of see a union as a power tool to take these problems, and the teacher says these are our problems, and I think they should be able to say, "Okay, how are we going to address this?" They say, "Here's what we think" and then take it to the educators, and say, you know, "This is what we need to do," or take it to the government, or lobby from the money that the teachers need, and I guess I just see that as their role.

Memphis White Group

And the teachers are saying, "I'm in the class, it's not working." "You were asking me just to teach to this — so they can pass a standardized test." Because I know it's been said "No Child Left Behind," and of course it's gonna affect their pay, if they don't produce, but they said, "That learning method is not working," and that's where the union comes in to have a collective voice to go to the administration saying, "We need to look at this, and will you back me?"

Pittsburgh African American

The other point, though, is the union keeps the teachers happy. The union gets the pays for the teachers. The union takes care of keeping the class sizes down. When you have that, and you have a happy teacher, they're gonna teach your children, they're gonna do a better job. If you have a teacher that's not being paid properly, and they're grumbling and miserable because they ain't getting the right pay, and that they don't have the right

class size ... your kid's learning nothing, and your kid is suffering. So, the union is not looking out for the child, per se, but in the overall picture, it is taking care of the child in the long run because it makes a happy teacher, and creates a happy educator.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Unfortunately, the positive sense of how teachers' unions impact education reform was limited in these sessions. Most groups expressed the notion that teachers' unions impede reform and "progress" in the educational system. In the last quote listed above, the participant referenced teachers' pay as an incentive for better educational practices. However, in most instances, participants considered concern with teachers' salaries and benefits as antithetical to education reform. The idea that teachers' unions were only concerned with promoting teachers' interests — especially on salary issues — at the expense of the students was even more pronounced when participants were asked to consider the role of teachers' unions in educational reform. That is, the caring teacher versus self-interested employee model was further highlighted in the context of discussions about educational reform.

They're going to fight each other. The teachers' unions are what unions are. They will fight for the status quo every time. They will fight to protect their members. That's what they're meant to do. That's what unions do. However, "education reform" is completely against the status quo. Any reform is against the status quo. Just by definition alone they counteract each other.

Minneapolis High Education

I mean, the main issue is to have kids in school, learning. And the teachers' union focus is not that, and I think that the policies that the teachers' unions have, should have more emphasis on the student as opposed to the employment of the teacher.

Pittsburgh Latino

I think that unions are constantly looking at, as all politicians are, looking at the "money" aspect. They're not looking at, necessarily, completely, what is best for the child. So, as a result, they have a lot of, as you all said, "political pull," "political power," so they look at what's gonna benefit "moneywise" for their union and their teachers, and they push for that whether the teachers want it or not because they're looking at the "money" aspect.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Participants also argued that teachers' unions were "too political" and that this interfered with their ability to impact change in the educational system. While earlier in the sessions, participants thought that teachers' unions existed in order to give teachers a legitimate political voice, when the conversations were directed to teachers' unions in the context of education reform, political power again impeded teachers' unions' ability to impact reform — but this time, it was because they wielded too much power and in a way that led to corruption or distortion of their original purpose.

Participant 1: Well, just I think, general, but as we're talking with teachers' unions, yeah, I think sometimes they lose sight, and maybe their little power gets too much, and they push.

Participant 2: I think any group, you get too many people involved, and then you get people elected to be the voice of that group, then you have a chance of losing your focus. You forget what it's really about. Is it about the teachers? Is it about the students? Is it about the people who were just on a power trip? I mean, it could be like with any group of people.

Memphis White Group

It's too political now. The school boards, you know, the unions ... you know? They look at it as like, Republicans and Democrats, Conservatives, and Left and Right Wing. They don't look at it as, okay, let's do what's best for the people, do what's best for the kids, do what's best for the school; they look at it as, which side of the fence am I on, and that's what they worry about.

Pittsburgh Latino

But the unions are very political, too. I mean, if you belong to a union, they come in and they tell you who you have to vote for ... If they're a Democratic union they're probably gonna be for, if it's a Republican they're not gonna be for it.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Concern for money and power and the corruption that these things were seen to inevitably precipitate were perceived to impede unions' abilities to contribute to reforming the U.S. educational system. Underlying these statements is the idea that education reform is limited to better teaching practices and that such teaching occurs only when teachers are dedicated and more concerned about the students than their status as workers. Similar to FrameWorks' research on education,⁸ participants lacked an understanding of systemic reform, and focused exclusively on changing individual teachers' behaviors.

Lack of Understanding of the Educational System

Related to the above point and similar to FrameWorks' earlier research on Americans' perceptions of the education system and education reform, the conversations that occurred in the confirmation section revealed a lack or misunderstanding of the ways in which America's educational system is structured.

But the union still has to go back and negotiate with the school board. Is that — am I correct on that? I mean, they have to go back even though the school board controls the funding, how it goes, the curriculum of the schools, but the union still has to — I mean, the teachers inform the union, but they still have to go through the collective bargaining with them, so how powerful, or how much weight does — does the union pull with trying to get factors changed?

Memphis White Group

Participant 1: *Well, the school boards they have to deal with micromanage what they do, and they in turn need somebody to protect them against the school board member from just saying, you know what, we're gonna fire you, and that's that.*

Participant 2: *Some of the schools have two or three different unions running through them. Like ... some represent the aides, some represent the teachers, some represent the administrations. You may have a numerous amount of different types of unions running through the school.*

Participant 3: *But why do the teachers need the unions to protect them if the administrators at a higher level have it?*

Participant 1: *'Cause like he just said, the school board is made of parents.*

Pittsburgh Low Education

You know, I just think of the word "reform," right? "Re" — "form." We got to form it in the first place. We're not gonna reform any stuff that isn't even formed in the first place. I think, to reform something that is this amorphous blob out there called ... the "education system." [SIGH]

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

The lack of understanding was even more unproductive when participants talked about the relationship between individual teachers and teachers' unions. Rather than an organization of teachers, several participants spoke about the inherent conflicts *between* teachers and their unions. This conflict was primarily based on the sense that teachers are supposed to be (and often are) selfless and dedicated, while unions are primarily self-interested. These conversations were often replete with references to Jimmy Hoffa and union corruption from other sectors of the labor force.

The teachers' unions, they're not there really to protect the teachers. Too often they're too worried about, okay, they have to get an extra 15-minute break, or they don't have this day or that day off. Why doesn't the teachers' union help the teachers to get more money for their classrooms, get more money for their books? Why don't they fight against the athletic departments, you know? Why does the school have to get a new football field every other year? How many of those kids are actually gonna make a living out of going and playing football or baseball, but how many of them could maybe learn something more with the arts, and with music, or you know, something like that, something they can actually do in life rather than just sports? The teachers' union needs to help support the teachers so they can get what they need to actually teach.

Pittsburgh Latino

I think if you look at that, you have the "union hierarchy" and you have the "union members." I think the "members" are there for the kids, the "hierarchy" is there to protect the members.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

The fact that the educational system is “an amorphous blob” in the minds of many Americans explains why participants are so unclear as to where teachers’ unions fit in and are able to change this blob. Instead of changing the blob, most participants described a surface, peripheral function for unions in protecting the blob and keep it and fighting to keep it as it is.

Teachers’ Unions are Anachronisms and Protect the Bad

Two other negative themes from the earlier research also proved dominant in the confirmation discussions. The first was the idea that unions protect “bad” teachers, irrespective of student performance.

I see my opinion’s kind of colored because I would see also a lot of how the unions at times protected teachers that didn’t know what they were doing ...

Minneapolis High Education

I have a friend who works in the South ... they’re not allowed to be represented by teachers’ unions, and they do have low pays, but they also have a standard that if your students don’t meet certain requirements, you’re gonna lose your job. That would never fly up here. All your students could fail, and you have your union to protect you. So you know, the standard of being a good teacher, and not being a good teacher, is kind of shielded by a union.

Pittsburgh African American

I believe that a lot of these unions are supporting teachers that should be out of the whole school system, and they have allowed for these teachers to get away with a lot of things.

Pittsburgh Latino

Participants also regularly expressed the idea that unions were necessary at one point in history, but that most struggles over labor rights have already been addressed. Therefore, according to these participants, unions are largely anachronistic and no longer necessary. Again, because participants defined teachers’ unions primarily by their ability to protect teachers’ rights as employees, they were unable to see how the other roles teachers’ unions play in the education system might continue to be important. These statements also reveal the underlying assumption that teachers’ rights as workers are largely protected and no longer subject to abuses.

They’re not my favorite thing, though. I think maybe there was a time and place for them. I’m not sure. I’d like to think that they could help.

Memphis White Group

A lot of my family are teachers back in Michigan where I’m from. 30-year, 40-year teachers, generations, and I think there used to be a good reason, like maybe for the same sort of reasons that like steelworkers and autoworkers, and those types of um ... unions, but I don’t — I can’t see why they need one today, given how things are.

Minneapolis High Education

I believe they had a very good purpose at one time. I do think they’re outdated because they don’t look at “now,” and I do believe they have gone just money-oriented rather

than looking at the whole situation. Uh ... they are way back in the day. They just — they don't look at "current." They don't look at the big picture.

Pittsburgh Low Education

In sum, the confirmation discussions began rather positively with discussions of the important role unions play in protecting teachers as employees. However, participants' understanding of the appropriate role that unions should or could play in the education system stopped there. Save a few participants, it was very difficult for people to see how unions fit into the education system more generally and how unions might play a constructive role in education reform. Securing employees' rights, including protecting salaries and benefits, was seen as fundamentally at odds with educating students. Participants conceptualized the process of teaching and learning as a selfless act that required dedication, rather than continued professionalization, higher salaries or institutional support. Because unions were understood to interfere with this dedication by advocating for teachers' monetary concerns, unions were largely perceived to damage and distract from attempts to improve education and reform the system — tasks that participants tied clearly to improving teacher caring.

Experimentation

During these sessions, the Future Preparation with Common Good and Fairness Across Places values facilitated more productive discussions about teachers' unions and their role in education reform relative to both unprimed discussions and conversations following the other, less-promising primes. However, even these relatively successful primes were not wholly effective, and in some groups, on some occasions, even these primes were unable to shift discussion off or away from the dominant, sticky and viral cultural models described above. In the following section, we discuss the effectiveness of each prime in turn.

Teachers' Unions as Professional Associations that Improve Practice

This prime was designed specifically to address one of the major gaps between public and expert understandings of teachers' unions that FrameWorks identified in earlier research.⁹ While the public primarily understands teachers' unions as organizations that protect the labor rights of teachers, the experts we interviewed described a much more expansive role for unions as professional organizations that aid teachers in improving educational practice. As this was clearly a goal for the public as well, we decided to test whether we could bring teachers' unions in alignment with public goals by explicitly revealing this shared interest.

Students Pay a Price When Teaching Profession Ignored

Beginning in 2000, an enormous proportion of veteran teachers began to retire. For the first time in history, public schools had to compete with professions like nursing, where there were more opportunities for advancement and for professional development, and where greater responsibility brought better pay and more input into the organization. Surveys of new teachers show that their career decisions are based on the amount of freedom they have to innovate in the classroom, their ability to develop new skills to improve their teaching, and opportunities to affect the system in which they teach.

Education reformers say these are also precisely what students need if they are to master the subjects they need to qualify for careers. But high turnover rates in urban and rural schools suggest that many teachers have not found what they hoped for, and high dropout rates suggest students haven't either. Some education reformers say that teachers' unions have the best chance of improving the practice and professionalization of teaching, because they are able to represent the changes that teachers know need to be made. Continuous training, opportunities for advancement and the ability to identify ways to improve education — these are what professional teachers' associations are uniquely qualified to do.

The prime encouraged participants to think about some of the difficulties teachers face regarding the pedagogy. As was noted in the previous section, in the unprimed discussions, participants largely equated teachers' difficulties to "bad" students and uncooperative parents. When discussing the prime, they were also able to articulate how issues of professional development and autonomy might impact teachers' retention rates and the effects of high rates of turnover on students' educational outcomes.

So, it's good to know that at least in your district, teachers have a lot of influence on that, 'cause I hear that goes to motivation. If I'm handed a textbook and told, teach this, it's like oh boy, am I motivated, huh? I'm gonna get up there and read the thing or paraphrase it — gee, human nature. The more say I have over my job ... the more engaged I'm going to be, and maybe I'll go that extra step.

Pittsburgh Low Education

That's what it sounds like is happening with these teachers, and they're leaving the profession, and ultimately students are having to pay the price because you got teachers who don't want to be there because they don't like what they're doing, and ... the teachers aren't getting the support to give the kids what they need..

Memphis White Group

You get these innovative teachers, and then they say, well you can't do that. There are written rules in the school, whatever that you can't do it, and the teachers get frustrated because then they cannot do certain things. And I'm not talking about anything, any abuse or anything horrible for the child. I mean, I'm talking about positive things ...

Pittsburgh Latino

After exposure to this prime, all of the groups spent part of the ensuing discussion addressing issues related to teachers' continued professionalization and the ways in which teachers should (or should not) be kept up-to-date with the latest and most effective pedagogical practices.

And then her teacher said, you know, this is something — she [the teacher] goes to a seminar every summer when they're out, she calls it "her" school. So every new school year, she comes and brings something new, and then when you go into the classroom, she has words all around the room, and there's different colors.

Pittsburgh African American

I think they're very overlooked. I don't think they're paid nearly as much as they should be because just think about like a basketball player, how much he makes, and I'm not saying that he is not like a humanitarian, and he doesn't give his time somewhere else and help people, but he's not really doing anything that's like profound. He's not changing the world. Teachers are changing children, and they're changing the world, and they need to be held to a higher standard. Yeah, they need to be held to some type of standard at the same time.

Pittsburgh Latino

I just don't think teachers are as educated as they used to be. I think this is saying, I really do think that teachers should be tested every once in a while, every five to 10 years, to see where they are. I do.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

While the last excerpt was critical of teachers' continued education standards, the prime was nonetheless able to give participants another measure by which to evaluate effective teaching. During the earlier confirmation section, participants defined "good" teaching by the dedication and selflessness of the teacher and argued that "good" teaching was compromised by "self-interested" unions. After exposure to the professionalization prime, participants were able to discuss other factors that shape teacher quality and specific ways that teachers strive to improve their practice through continued professionalization and training. However, it is important to note that participants were unable to see how teachers' unions would be able to aid in this process or address some of the teachers' problems and difficulties relating to training and career development. That is, participants were unable to conceptualize teachers' unions as contributing to professionalization and teacher improvement. This was evidence of a still-missing but critical link connecting teachers' unions to educational quality and, in turn, meaningful education reform.

Yeah, too often it appears to me sometimes it's more like they're worried about their jobs and preserving the status quo than it is to really reform the system, to improve the system, and require a greater capabilities and expertise in a field ... on the teachers.

Memphis White Group

I still have to go back and say that this isn't how I look at unions. This isn't what unions do. I need the administration, I need the school board, I need my elected officials ... I don't elect the union, I don't pay the union. I know what my child needs. I don't have kids, but I know what these children need, and the parents know best, the parents who care, and truly are involved in their child's education know best, and these union officials, I just don't know if unions are truly taken seriously, and can really get the job done.

Pittsburgh African American

The union in my observation, is totally out of the picture. I've never seen it, and I've attended many school board meetings, and followed it very closely, and my children are high school age now, so.

Pittsburgh Low Education

The argument that the participant never “sees” the union involved in education reform was persistent throughout these sessions. Even when participants were able see a role for the union in ensuring teachers’ role in education reform through continuous professionalization, that role was constrained to securing financial resources.

Participant 1: *This final paragraph says that continuous training opportunities for advancement in the ability to identify ways to improve education, these are what professional teachers’ associations are uniquely qualified to do, and I agree with that 100 percent. Not only are they qualified, they should be required to do that. If they’re requiring these teachers to perform at a higher level, they have to provide them with the resources in order to be able to perform at a higher level.*

Participant 2: *That’s where the unions come into play.*

Pittsburgh African American

As the above quote demonstrates, the African American group was better able to link teachers’ unions to education reform than were other groups. Apart from this group, however, the inability to connect unions with reform stemmed in part from participants’ lack of clarity about how teachers’ unions fit into the overall educational system and the inability, therefore, to imagine a role for these groups in reform. Several even argued that teachers’ unions were distinct from teachers as they had in earlier, unprimed discussions.

Participant 1: *And it is. It’s the freedom. Do the unions have any say in that? I have no idea.*

Participant 2: *That’s what I’m saying, I don’t know if they have that ability or if it’s the school board that’s saying ...*

Pittsburgh Low Education

I mean, I actually ... [CHUCKLE] ... that actually says what the unions — that the unions are listening to the teachers. I mean, that’s what the article says. That the unions are listening to the teachers.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Finally, as the prime encouraged discussions of some of the problems facing the education system, several group discussions veered off of teachers and their unions and instead focused on parental and student responsibility for educational outcomes. These types of discussions are problematic in that they pin education reform on the behavior of individual parents and teachers, rather than on more systemic changes.

True education reform starts at home. I mean, that’s the — that’s the simple truth. I mean, you can talk about all the problems and everything, but unless the unions are focused on changing the mindset and the culture of the parents ... so it’s just a bunch of rhetoric.

Memphis White Group

The base is the parents, hopefully gets you past. We brought this kid into the world, we need to see it through along with the teaching and everybody else in our community, and we make a better kid. That's my view. I brought two children into this world, and I did great.

Pittsburgh Latino

If you just plain have a rotten kid, anywhere you send them they're gonna gravitate to rot.

Minnesota High Education

The biggest variable in this is the student itself. In grade school, I went to a Catholic school, had good teachers, they were well underpaid, didn't know that at the time, of course, but in high school, I went to a city school, and there was a lot of teachers that did care, but I mean, there was just some unruly kids, who just ruined it.

Pittsburgh Low Education

The major drawback with this prime is that it highlights many of the problems that teachers face, especially those who are new to the profession. Once discussing these problems, participants became so embroiled with the size and scope of problems facing the teaching profession that they were unable to think about potential solutions. And more significantly, they were unable to think about how unions might address these issues. In fact, most group discussions veered away from any discussions of unions, whether positive or negative, in response to this prime. Thus, while the prime was effective at setting up a different conversation about teachers, participants lacked any direct experience or an operational narrative to connect teachers' unions to that conversation.

Future Preparation with Common Good

Future Preparation and Common Good are values that establish a societal goal for education, beyond individual achievement, and connect that goal to the common good of all citizens.¹⁰ This combined value performed very well in FrameWorks' prior research on education and education reform, where it was found to help people think about policy solutions to education issues, rather than attributing responsibility for reform to parents, teachers and students. Because of this success, we adapted the value to address teachers' unions' role in education reform and the benefits that accrue to all members of society when all students have access to quality education.

Shared Benefits of Educated Population Guide Teachers' Unions and U.S. Education Reform

When reforming education, we need to look at preparing today's children as an important goal that benefits everyone in the future. The most important goal in education reform is to prepare our nation's children to contribute productively to our society and our communities. Teachers' unions say they could be doing more to prepare our children for the challenges our society will face in the future if they

had more say in how the system works — for teachers, for students and for communities. They say we need to update the entire educational system to promote the skills our children will need in the future and this means addressing problems in the profession of teaching — in the way children are taught and learning is measured and in the way communities fund education. According to this view, if we fail to adequately update the educational system, our nation will not be prepared for the future and all of us will suffer the consequences. With the right goal in mind to guide the actions of teachers’ unions and educational reformers as they work together, our country will be able to draw upon everyone’s skills and capabilities to confront the challenges we will face in the future.

Compared to other primes, this value combination led to more robust conversations about the role of teachers’ unions in education reform. Several participants picked up on the idea of collaboration among members of the education system and used this to talk about how teachers’ unions might impact change.

I still see a need for national collaboration, and if you’re talking about U.S. education reform ... there needs to be a standard; a nationwide standard for that reform. And yes it starts with the individual unions, it goes on to the state level, and the state level needs to go national, and they need to be on one page if there’s going to be uniform reform.

Pittsburgh African American

I agree with the article. It has to start at the basis, and the teacher is — I mean, they’re right there with the child, they’re the ones that are the main point from where everything will step. I mean, they know the kids’ needs, they know the schools, or the district, or the communities, you know, in structure and environment, so they should be involved in making those decisions.

Pittsburgh Latino

Whoever it is, sitting in a room saying, okay, we think everybody needs to take these tests and they need to pass these tests, and making all these decisions without a teachers’ union or teachers themselves there, and nobody knows more about the kids and what the kids need than the teachers. And that’s exactly what it is, is there’s No Child Left Behind was that they were forcing these teachers ... nothing but test, test, test ...

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

In fact, several groups mentioned the issue of standardized testing and the resulting lack of autonomy among teachers to develop curriculum:

What stuck out to me in this article is that it says that “the need to address problems in the profession of teaching in the way children are taught and learning is measured, and in the way communities fund education,” and I guess the learning is measured, kind of struck me because I’ve just heard so much about these standardized tests, and how the teachers tailor their classrooms just to get the kids to pass the test, you know, and that’s their focus.

Memphis White Group

The one line that stood out to me is the part about “addressing the problems in the profession of teaching in the way that children are taught in learning is measured”; I think with the reform, and the way things are, I mean there’s such a focus that kids have to take these “tests,” and the teachers are forced to focus — your kids have to pass these tests, and if they don’t, you obviously are not a good teacher, and I think that takes away from the education itself, ’cause all you do is focus on these tests. Bottom line, some kids don’t test well.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

However, the positive conversations about the role of teachers’ unions in education reform were quickly overtaken by the more dominant notion that teachers’ unions are simply not in the right position to advocate for reform. Again, this stemmed from the idea that teachers’ unions are predominantly concerned with teachers’ pay, which is antithetical to meaningful reform.

I’m just trying to think of any case I have ever heard where a union was out there saying, yes we need to make these changes. Every time I’ve heard it, it’s been, no, no, you don’t want to make these changes. I mean, this seems to like completely contradict everything I’ve ever seen in the news.

Pittsburgh Low Education

Well, what caught my eye the most was, it says “if they had more say” ... that being the teachers’ union right there. You do have more say, just bring it to the bargaining table, you know? Don’t just say, well it’s all about our pay scale and this and that, it’s about classroom size, and it’s about levels that these children should be at, and we have to attain that, and so on.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

They need to be less selfish, and they need to try to focus on the children, the communities, and then themselves third, instead of focusing on themselves, which is the whole problem that I feel with unions, and teachers’ unions, in general, or other unions, is that they’re focused upon themselves instead of what they’re actually there to do. I mean, as a parent, my focus is on my child first, and then I’m way down the list.

Memphis White Group

After exposure to the Future Preparation prime, participants continued to make clear distinctions between teachers and their unions, again supporting the idea that teachers, rather than teachers’ unions, should be consulted on issues of education reform.

Well, this is the second article that used “with the right goal.” Who decides what the right goal is, and you know, is that something that the student should have input in, as well? Shouldn’t teachers be taking it to their union leaders? Should the students be able to go to the union leaders? Who decides what is the right goal?

Pittsburgh Low Education

Teachers alone should be able to come to the table, whether they're with union representation, along with union representation, to be able to speak on behalf of the teachers. You know what I mean?

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Participants also voiced frustration at what they perceived as the insurmountable problems facing the education system and wanted concrete solutions that would effect real change.

It says, "if we fail." We have failed. Sorry, we have. And they still don't tell me what they're gonna do. How are you gonna improve? What's your ideas? It's just saying "if we fail," well, we have failed for, say, 20 or 30 years doing this, but you're still not letting me know what areas you're gonna improve, how are you gonna do it, and what steps to take.

Memphis White Group

Yeah, that's a great point of view, but what's the resolution?

Minneapolis High Education

I just want to know "how" exactly they're gonna do it? I mean, what are they really talking about? I mean, it's easy to say, yeah we know that; we know that we need a certain goal because our children being educated the proper way will definitely make a better future for everyone, but how are they gonna address that issue and actually do it?

Pittsburgh Latino

Finally, similar to the conversations that followed other primes, several group conversations defaulted to discussions of parents as solely responsible for educational outcomes.

You were there when you go to school, and you know, and after the school, you do whatever your parents allow you. Then all your children under 18, you're the guardian, and it's your responsibility, not the federal government, or anybody else. It's our parents' responsibility.

Pittsburgh Latino

But then, it goes back to the parents, too. If you don't give a shit about your kids, you know, I mean, sometimes them going to school, that's the only place they feel where somebody cares about what they're doing, you know?

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

The Future Preparation with Common Good prime showed some promise as it did lead to more promising conversations about the role of unions in education reform. These discussions, however, were quickly shut down by more unproductive understandings of teachers' unions, which were at odds with the positive goals set out by the prime. The perceived "selfishness" of unions in advocating for teacher pay and benefits did not square with the societal goals and benefits enunciated by the Common Good value.

Fairness Across Places

FrameWorks found in previous research on education and education reform that the idea of a maldistribution of resources can help people overcome zero-sum thinking (us vs. them) in favor of a reconsideration of system disfunctionality and the consequences for everyone.¹¹ The Fairness Across Places value frames inequalities in the educational system in such a way that the public is able to grasp systemic sources of inequality, rather than seeing inequalities as stemming from “deficiencies” of individuals. Furthermore, this prime was designed to show how place-based inequalities can impact the system at large. The iteration of the prime tested in these sessions demonstrated how unions are well positioned to address inequalities in education. This was a strong recommendation that emerged from our expert interviews.

Education Reformers Say Fairer Distribution of Resources Across Communities is Key to Improving U.S. Education

There has been a lot of talk lately about the need to make changes in the ways that educational resources are allocated across communities to support K-12 education. Teachers’ unions say that improving education requires us to make sure that all communities have access to the resources that are required to have quality education. Based on their ability to sound out teachers and to compare education practices across communities, they conclude that we should be doing much more to make sure that all communities have the ability to educate and prepare our nation’s children. According to this view, the fact that some communities have a small tax base means that children who pass through those schools tend to get teachers who are less prepared and to experience a lot of teacher turnover. This undermines and disrupts learning and disadvantages these communities, whether they are rural or urban. If we fail to adequately update the entire educational system, some areas will have good educational systems and others will not. This has a ripple effect throughout our society. Great differences in educational quality from place to place hurt our country by limiting our general pool of talented people who can contribute to our nation’s well-being. Teachers’ unions believe that, with the right goals to guide our reforms, every area would receive a fair share of educational resources so that we have the ability to draw from well-prepared students, no matter where they live.

The Fairness Across Places value did encourage conversations in which unions played a central role in addressing educational inequalities. The prime concentrates on a specific problem in the educational system and speaks directly to how unions can ensure fairer distribution of educational resources. As the first quote below demonstrates, some participants felt optimism about addressing educational inequalities and abandoned the more hopeless attitudes about the scope and possibility of education reform that we documented above.

Big numbers do make a difference ... unions make a difference, you know? We do make a difference, and I believe it definitely can happen, and it was designed that way, initially, for this very purpose to do what it’s done. You know ... [CHUCKLE] ... to keep some people more educated, and keep others ... less educated, you know? It can happen.

Pittsburgh African American

I feel like this is the first article that we've had that actually kind of said, here's what — "here's something we can do to change something." It laid out a specific problem, which is variations in funding, and it's, you know, it laid out a consequence, you get better teachers in some places, and poorer teachers in some places, which in turn leads to better prepared kids, and more poorly prepared kids, and it's — I mean, it's saying, we can, if we try to kind of equalize our funding throughout the school systems, then we have a chance of making all children more, in general, better prepared.

Memphis White Group

... and reforming the way it is "paid for," maybe the way it is paid for because if property taxes are not — or income taxes, or whatever function, maybe it could be fairer.

Minneapolis High Education

More subtly, rather than blaming poor educational outcomes on “bad” teachers, parents or students, in certain places participants spoke at length about place-based inequality. While the quotes below do not directly discuss the role of teachers’ unions, by moving away from discussions of “bad” teachers, participants were able to discuss educational inequalities as systemic and in need of systemic solutions, which can be seen as a promising shift to set the stage for a discussion of the systemic functions of teachers’ unions.

Their school environment, if each school were given a certain amount of money, and what they do with it is what they do with it, instead of, you know, having it from the property taxes, or you know, based on "place."

Minneapolis High Education

It seems to me that it has to — money is supposed to be coming from somewhere else in order to spread it evenly because if it's just based in poor communities where there's less of a tax base, then it's gonna always stay that way, you know, poor teachers, and just you know, so I guess the money has to come from somewhere else, it's not gonna come from some of the communities, so.

Pittsburgh Latino

I mean, I tend to think that I kind of see their point. I mean, I live in a district that, fortunately, has very high standards in the school district, and very high everything across the board, so is it fair because and I don't know how to say this without, you know, is it fair because they have a higher tax base and they can afford the teachers that are up here that — it just seems like those children do get that education, and other school districts that have a small tax base, they just get kind of put by the wayside. It just doesn't seem fair to me. So it almost would seem better to just kind of pull the money and then spread it out equally, in a way.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Despite these promising threads of conversation, the more dominant and negative notions of teachers’ unions eventually found their way into the conversation. Similar to the other primes, participants argued that unions really do not “want” reform. Another theme that emerged after this prime was that participants, particularly those who were parents of school-aged children, had

not witnessed teachers' unions advocating for educational reform, but were only aware of teachers' unions actions during strikes or wage disagreements.

Participant 1: Okay. Like I'm hearing all of you, and I'm sitting here like, what are you talking about, I've never heard a teachers' union say anything about anything else other than what they want for their teachers.

Participant 2: Maybe that's the problem because I — I've not heard — I'm like you, I — I agree with you, I've not heard, but maybe the teachers' unions need to get involved ... in education.

Pittsburgh Low Education

I don't care if the teachers' unions ... getting involved in education reform or anything other than we want more money for the teachers, and we want health insurance, and we don't want our teachers to pay any health insurance. Am I the only one that's like missing the buck here?

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

I think if you took all the money that was spent in Pennsylvania on educating K-12, divided it by the total number of students in K-12 in Pennsylvania, and then said, every district is gonna get the exact same per pupil, which means some will get more and some will get less, you would have mass rejection by the teachers' unions. That's not what they want. They want to take what we have now, and go up. It's not about redistribution of resources to create equity, it's about more resources.

Pittsburgh Low Education

The assumption that teacher's unions advocate exclusively for their own benefits precipitated conversations about the need for greater transparency and accountability among the teachers' unions.

And then they say "less prepared teachers," well, if you're the teachers' union, why are they less prepared? I mean, you're responsible for preparing teachers, too. I mean, looks like that'd be part of the unions' piece too, to make sure your teachers are accredited, what you know, to push that piece of it.

Memphis White Group

But I do feel that there has to be an accountable measure, like this transparency issue that's not as transparent as we had hoped because the information is not shared with everybody, and so, you have to go to ten different meetings to find out that nobody knows anything.

Pittsburgh Latino Group

Finally, similar to the other primes, several group conversations defaulted into discussions of parental responsibility. However, perhaps because the prime explained limits on parental influence in the form of resources, the parental responsibility theme was not as dominant after

exposure to this prime as with the others. One group advocated for teachers' unions playing a bigger role motivating parents to get involved with their children's education.

We have a union representative to say, we have to focus on the parent who's not — who you're saying, may not be involved in the child's learning process. The union can take on that function, too. If they got to go to Harrisburg, they can go to them all, or they can go to the parent. That's another function. That's what the union can play in dealing with the parents.

Pittsburgh African American

In sum, the conversation that followed this prime was less focused on issues of individual responsibility for educational inequalities and more focused on a critical systemic issue that shapes the quality of education for all Americans. While there were still criticisms of teachers' unions, participants did not argue that ensuring fairness in the educational system is outside of the purview of teachers' unions. Rather, they explained that they had simply not yet seen the teachers' unions engage in these kinds of activities, suggesting an important space for communications to highlight the reform initiatives around educational inequality currently pursued by teachers' unions.

The Orchestra Effect: Education as a System of Many Players

The Orchestra Effect, or the idea that the education system is composed of many parts that need to be in good order and working together, is a simplifying model that has proven very effective in other areas of FrameWorks research in explaining the education system.¹² As was documented in the earlier confirmatory section of the report and in prior FrameWorks research,¹³ Americans have a limited understanding of how the education system works and often narrow the important players in the system to parents, teachers and students. This prime was designed for these sessions to illuminate that system, and to explain explicitly how teachers' unions fit into this orchestra.

Teachers' Unions Key Section of Education's Orchestra

Our nation's educational system is like an orchestra where everyone has a particular part to play. Like an orchestra, it has many groups of players with specialized jobs, such as school boards, taxpayers, families, teachers, principals and administrators. One important but misunderstood section of the orchestra is teachers' unions. By representing the views of teachers on education and keeping professional improvement center stage, they contribute to the orchestra's ability to play beautiful music and function effectively. Without their participation, the orchestra just can't play at its best or meet the challenges of playing the most difficult pieces of music. Teachers' unions bring to the orchestra a deep knowledge of how education happens in the classroom, what could be done to improve it, and how all the other players influence learning. The orchestra sounds best when each musician is skilled, the instruments are well-tuned, and the sections work together in harmony toward the common goal of playing the best music they can. Communities need the insights of many teachers who come

together to offer ways to improve education. No orchestra becomes great overnight, and the beauty of the music depends on lots of small steps, dedicated practice by all of the musicians who have all the resources they need, and an orchestra conductor who can create harmony among all the parts. We can use this orchestra theory to guide how we approach education reform and how we engage all the players in improving our performance.

In contrast to its robust effects in elevating discussion about education reform more generally, this prime sparked limited conversations about the role teachers' unions might play in reform. A few groups argued that, ideally, all parts of the education system would work together, but noted that this is far from reality and has not been their experience.

I think the unions themselves have to be a strong voice for what education is, and then begin to help set policy and procedure through the state and federal government, and how money should be distributed.

Pittsburgh African American

But the union has a key role in it because the unions are the ones that are making sure that teachers stay certified, keep up-to-date with new processes in our schools. As this article points out is, it is a continuing experiment. Each day is a new experiment on what works, what doesn't, and yeah, things don't work, and when they don't work, you discard it, and failure is sometimes good.

Pittsburgh Low Education

I think it's basically saying that everybody needs to do their part and play nice in order to get what needs to be done accomplished, and it makes sense. It probably doesn't happen, but it makes sense.

Memphis White Group

However, the discussions that followed this prime overwhelmingly focused on how unions do not play and should not play a role in education reform. In fact, some groups argued that teachers' unions were not concerned with education at all. According to participants, teachers' unions work for the benefit of their members, which must come automatically at the expense of students' educational experience.

I circled "common goal of playing the music the best they can," but then early on it says by representing the views of the teachers of education, which misunderstood — the most misunderstood section in the orchestra is the teachers' union. What does the teachers' union have to do with this? They're not playing the instruments, they're not tuning the instruments ... And they're not helping them learn how to play the instruments.

Memphis White Group

It says that teachers — "representing the views of teachers on education, and keeping professional improvements center stage," and it says, "what can be done to improve it," and the "deep knowledge of how education happens in the classroom" — might be true, but that's not what the union does. I mean, you said, the union doesn't do that.

Minneapolis High Education

They do it because they get — when your child is not there, they do not get paid, so it's all about money. It's not whether my son is getting A's or B's, it's about whether his body is in there, and where they can mark an X in his spot.

Pittsburgh Latino

Similar to discussion following the Fairness Across Places prime, here participants argued that teachers' unions do not play a role in education reform because those participants had not witnessed their local union members engaging in such activities. This recognition was a pervasive response to questions throughout the sessions that probed participants to connect teachers' unions with education reform. Several groups talked about the need for unions to interact more directly with the community and especially with parents.

I don't think there is ... because teachers' unions bring to the orchestra a deep knowledge. Well, are they using it? Like I've got friends who are teachers, you never hear about, I had a union meeting where I worked on my professional development. I've never heard any of my teacher friends say that. It's usually, oh "dues" this, or I got to talk to the union rep, they changed my hours ...

Pittsburgh Low Education

When I was a teacher, I didn't hear from the union until it came to within one year of contract time. Then they started to send me off notices. I have relatives who are in the trades, and especially I know the carpenters and the welders. I mean, those people — you start off and they train you for work from get one, and they advance you through the levels, and you have to pass their test and all that before you can even get out there in the field, but once you're out there in the field, you have to get to a certain level before you're allowed to work on your own. I never saw anything like that in teaching.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

Participant 1: *Has the union reached out to parents?*

Participant 2: *No.*

Participant 3: *Never.*

Participant 1: *Unless it's a donation. I mean, how many times does somebody in the NEA call and say, what can we do to fix education, or what's your opinion, what are we doing right and what are we doing wrong, what's — what's the middle ground? Never.*

Memphis White Group

And finally, similar to the effects observed of other primes, several discussions following the Orchestra prime defaulted to narrow senses of parental responsibility for educational outcomes.

If I play the devil's advocate with the teachers' union, they can say, parents don't care anymore, and kids are always right, they're never wrong, and ... when I was in school,

and they had a PTA meeting, they filled the auditorium or gymnasium with the parents. Now, you get a dozen people in a room like this, and that's a big crowd. Honestly, truly, you're just getting no response because they just don't have the participation.

Minneapolis High Education

I think it all starts at home ... I mean, cause like I said, my wife's in the PTA, and then like I've met with my daughter's teacher multiple times, and we were the only family that both the mother and father come. And just like my daughter has like a big little agenda, every day it's stamped for the homework. The teacher was saying most of the kids don't turn it in.

Pittsburgh African American

The Orchestra model explains how education in the U.S. works as a system. That is, it is not only made up of teachers, students and parents but includes multiple stakeholders who need to work together to make the system run. Where participants had difficulty with the prime was in connecting teachers' unions to educational practices. This difficulty appeared to stem not only from their belief that teachers' unions only advocate for the benefits of teachers, but also their lack of experience with teachers' unions involved in education reform. With little to go on, they simply could not see and did not agree with the idea of teachers' unions as an existing or desirable part of the orchestra.

Remodeling

Remodeling — or the idea that reforming the education system is like remodeling and updating a house to improve its functionality — is another simplifying model that emerged from FrameWorks' previous research.¹⁴ We found in one-on-one Cultural Models Interviews that education reform is such a broad and abstract concept that it can be meaningless for people. In addition, because most public discourse, especially media frames, stresses the seemingly intractable problems facing the education system,¹⁵ people are often pessimistic about viable solutions and alternatives. For these sessions, we used the Remodeling model to explain in highly concrete and pragmatic terms the process of reform and the specific roles for teachers' unions in that process.

Teachers' Unions to Help in Remodeling Education

Education reformers could learn a few things from Home Depot. When you remodel a house, you do more than just repaint it: You make substantial changes, keeping the previous shape of the house, but updating old parts, and making the house more modern and efficient. Like a team of contractors, we have to remodel our educational system so that it enables our society to thrive in today's world. In doing this, we can't leave out the electricians or the plumbers. Teachers' unions are key members of this contractor team — they have important and strategic knowledge about what needs to be remodeled, what the best remodeling strategies are and, most importantly, they have expert knowledge about how to actually implement and carry out the remodeling plans. Right now our educational system is an old house that doesn't do a good job of educating our children or providing society with the skills that America needs. The bad news is that remodeling

creates temporary dust, noise and inconvenience. The good news is that when you remodel you don't have to start from scratch — you strengthen what's working and fix what's not. If we approach educational reform as remodeling, not demolishing, we will be more successful in giving our children what they need. Teachers' unions are a critical and practical part of our design team.

The Remodeling prime was successful in helping people think about education reform in concrete ways. Instead of discussions of education as an “amorphous” blob that is only failing students, participants talked about specific ways that the system can be improved. Furthermore, these changes were not discussed as outside the realm of possibility or mere utopian dreams, but doable solutions for a system facing large-scale problems. The specifics or details of their proposals are not as important here as their ability to think about change in concrete and positive terms.

It can do the job where the smaller schools are unable to do because of lack of tax dollars, lack of enrollment, so you build a bigger facility so it can accommodate the kids, now you have to allocate money based on the need of the students, and what the teachers can use, and you bring the teachers in and they can facilitate the students. That remodeling, I like that, cause it's a good concept. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, let's start here where we are, and start tearing down this, and building it up here. Put in quarter inch drywall where we didn't have no drywall at all.

Pittsburgh African American

Despite more productive conversations about the process of reform itself, participants were again largely unable to link reform to the activities of teachers' unions. Several groups argued that unions were fundamentally uninterested in reform and, instead, teachers' unions worked to blame other groups for the failures in the education system, rather than taking up the charge of reform.

Yeah, I've got a little of an opinion on that, and it is true, the teachers' union does have a major role to play in the whole all the issues, but too often my impression with the teachers' union is they're busy pointing the finger at government, taxpayers. It's always them, it's their fault, it's not our fault. We're not part of the problem. If it's suggested that there should be some criteria to measure their performance, they don't even want to go there. Do not talk about “measurement.” It seems more they're concerned about tenure and job security.

Memphis White Group

There's a key difference, you know, they — they talk about “Home Depot,” and “contractors” in this article, and the — the true key difference is that Home Depot and contractors have a profit in order to make it work. Teachers' unions care about the “status quo.”

Minneapolis High Education

My thoughts are, okay, teachers' unions have been around for so long, okay, so what have they been doing before? If they're experts? I mean, exactly, what's happening? Now

all of a sudden they have a new ideology of what education should be, and where are the funds gonna come from? Are they gonna reduce their fees to the teachers so that they could help with money for doing what they're supposed to be doing, or allocated to something else?

Pittsburgh Latino Group

Similar to other primes tested, part of the inability to link teachers' unions with education reform stemmed from lack of understanding of the education system and exactly how teachers' unions fit into this system in relation to teachers.

It makes it sound like it's more than teachers, but it says here "teachers' union, key members of the contractor team, they have important and strategic knowledge." And I'm not sure that a teachers' union would have the best strategies for how to help teach. I think maybe the teachers would be the better place to start ...

Minneapolis High Education

I think, if you took the word "unions" out of here, and put "teachers," I think teachers have tremendous ideas. I think a lot of teachers would love to be able to influence education reform, but if there's a glass ceiling, and it's not necessarily in January, and it's teachers' unions. Because you don't move up into the hierarchy unless you are on the right team, and once you get there, it's like the shops, you know, it's like the business agent in the industrial model, once you get that business agent, once you get off the shop floor and you become a business agent, you don't want to go back there.

Pittsburgh Low Education

One unintended consequence of the prime was that the reference to Home Depot sparked discussions of business models and privatization as more efficient means of running schools. The underlying assumption in many of these comments was that for-profit organizations are inherently more efficient and therefore better at enacting reform.

No matter where you go, these problems are sustained. I mean, you look at Home Depot, that's a private sector. They have to run things for a profit, and with a teachers' union it's not. You throw money, you throw money. They never have to show a profit, they never have to show sustainable improvements,

Memphis White Group

I heard this one, and I don't know for sure, you can — you can correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't it true if you — let's say I — I'm a principal and I manage the school, and if I have \$100 million dollars to do it, and I can do it and produce results with \$80 million, that they take the \$20 million away. That if you do not spend your budget, then your next year's budget is smaller. So it's not expected to be ... more productive to — to have good results with less money because it's, you know, it's cutting my neck.

Minneapolis High Education

Participant 1: *When I read this one, I feel more comfortable with it, and I'm gonna tell you why. If I'm looking at a teachers' union, and I'm looking at it in comparison to*

remodeling a house, I know I have to come up with a plan. If I'm going to fix this kitchen in my house, I'm gonna try to get three bids. So I want three different ideas so that I can analyze why ...

Participant 2: Competition.

Pittsburgh Latino Group

The Remodeling idea provided important information about what education reform is and how it might take place. This is an important first step in communicating the role of teachers' unions in education reform. However, as with all of the primes, additional communications work needs to be done in order to directly connect unions to the reform process. Finally, even subtle references to private businesses encouraged participants to map business models onto what is a public good, which did not result in robust conversations about how public education can be improved.

Negotiation

During the negotiation section of the Peer Discourse Sessions, we experimented with two kinds of exercises in which participants were asked to make presentations to the state Board of Education as to why teachers' unions should be included in reform plans. In the first exercise, performed in two of the six sessions, we divided participants into two groups. One group represented a local teachers' union and the other an anti-union group. In the second exercise, performed by the remaining four groups, participants were divided into three groups and all subgroups were asked to make a presentation in favor of union involvement. At the end of all the exercises, each participant was asked to vote for the presentation they found most convincing and to explain the reason for their decision. Below, we discuss the primary focus of participants' presentations and discussion during this exercise. Analysis of the data from this part of the Peer Discourse Sessions revealed two dominant themes: Teachers' unions are repositories of experience, and accountability and transparency are needed in teachers' unions.

Teachers' Unions are Repositories of Experience

All of the groups charged with advocating for the inclusion of teachers' unions in the reform process argued that teachers' unions, as an organization of teachers, had the necessary knowledge and experience to be included in reform conversations. In fact, some argued that reform would not be possible without teacher "know-how." Interestingly, the subgroups did not draw on any specific prime used in the experimentation section of these sessions. However, teachers' unions' knowledge of the most effective pedagogical practices was a theme brought up in almost all of the tested primes that seemed to "stick" with these participants.

They have the interest of the students at heart. They know what has not worked, but they've still tried to work with whatever the administrators handed down to them, and they have continued to educate themselves, to train themselves, they've fought for that union to get improvements in the classroom, all of those things will benefit the students. They can easily recognize the issues.

Pittsburgh African American

We are the voice of the front line, we're the voice of the students, we're the voice of the parents in these cases, and we have the real-world experience in the classroom to help lend to your process so that we can give you constructive input as far as what we think the standards ought to be. Anything else? And we also have innovative ideas that we'd like to contribute to the process.

Minneapolis High Education

Teachers are in the daily classroom. They see the kids, they see what works, they see what doesn't work. They're going to buy into a plan if they feel a part of it. If I came to you and said, I want this, I want this, you're gonna give it to me and that's that, how would you feel?

Pittsburgh Low Education

In addition to arguments about teacher “know-how,” several groups argued that teachers’ unions were repositories for individual teacher experience. These groups argued that teachers’ unions could act as data collectors, gathering information from members about best pedagogical practices. These arguments were significant in a number of ways. First, during this exercise the pro-union groups did not distinguish between teachers and unions. They talked about unions as aggregates of teachers that could coordinate the vast experiences of teachers for the purpose of reform. In these discussions, teachers’ unions were no longer discussed as a self-interested group working at the expense of students and even the teachers themselves, but as important collaborators in the process of reform.

On the union, you're gonna have the most qualified, the most experiences, the people that are gonna know the most. The people in the union, they work on a national level. They know what works and what doesn't. They know what other cities things that don't work for them up North, wherever, among your different states.

Memphis White Group

They should be included because they have direct access to the teachers. By having direct access to the teachers, you're able to do surveys, have feedback, have following because you have a captured audience. The roles that they would play would be to analyze and assess our areas of concern. There are many that we have, so um ... this is actually an ongoing process that they have.

Pittsburgh Latino

Unions should have a position at the table because the union provides an effective middleman, effective almost daily clearinghouse, so to speak, you have so many different teachers, they all have so many different experiences, you can't just have this mob of people screaming out their ideas. We need to be able to collect the data, we need to be able to present the data, we need to be able to evaluate what works, to monitor feedback from them. They're the ones that are on the front lines.

Pittsburgh Low Education

In fact, one person argued that teachers should have professional associations, but that this needed to be differentiated from unions.

I don't necessarily think that unions are the best thing. I kind of think that in the "real world" if I had to align myself, I think I would prefer to see some sort of professional organization that is a lobbying party, that can act on behalf of teachers and education, but not necessarily be a union.

Memphis White Group

During all of the previous sections of the Peer Discourse Sessions, participants struggled to understand how teachers' unions are involved in education reform. However, when asked to advocate for unions, they were able to make very compelling arguments for the inclusion of these groups and expressed nuanced ideas about how unions fit into the education system. Instead of arguing for the presence of unions simply because they protect teachers' right as employees, when the discussion was contextualized as being about education reform, participants were able to see other roles that unions play in the education system.

Accountability and Transparency are Needed in Teachers' Unions

Interestingly, arguments about the accountability and transparency of teachers' unions were used by groups who were both pro- and anti-union. The anti-union groups argued that teachers' unions are primarily concerned about their own gains and are not accountable for the performance of their members or for educational outcomes. This lack of accountability was the primary reason for teachers' unions' exclusion from educational reform efforts.

We spend money, spend money, the same results. As we talk about starting over and blowing up, maybe that's the piece that needs to blow up. Do we really need a third party to speak for us, and we pay, we pay our dues, we pay this, but we still have the same results year in, and year out, and nobody is held accountable or responsible, and your quote was about the insanity?

Memphis White Group

Also, they're gonna come to the table, and they really are just gonna skate around the issues. They're not gonna address the issues, cause again, it goes about protecting their lot. Secondly, they're not administrators. They don't have the overall picture as to how the system works, 'cause that's not their background, they're teachers. They um ... don't know where the funding is coming from, how the resources need to be allocated. That's not their problem. That's not their expertise, so they don't need to be at the table. And lastly, look at the track record.

Pittsburgh African American Group

However, ensuring accountability and transparency was also a very common and powerful argument that groups made for the inclusion of unions in education reform. These proposals entailed greater communication and coordination between unions and members of the larger community. They advocated for measures by which unions would be made more accountable and responsive to community concerns. This argument was not necessarily made explicit in the tested primes, but instead seemed to emerge organically from participants' desire to "see" unions be more involved in the reform process beyond strikes for teacher pay. In their presentations, several groups made the case for greater community involvement by the teachers' unions.

We feel that our membership needs to be on board because, when the rubber hits the road, you know, we want to be involved. We want to be involved with the parents, we want to be involved as a partner to make a positive change in the situation we find ourselves in, in the state of Minnesota. The second thing is, that I think we can communicate to our members that we really need to focus on the students, and focus on constructive feedback. We're open to any and all feedback, we understand that, politically, unions can be a kind of a heavy topic, but we really want to really focus on constructive feedback to the unions, and we're willing to accept that.

Minneapolis High Education

A community is not just a few people in the community; it would involve everyone, including the students because students do have a big voice, and we, most of the time, are the ones making the decisions, and I think by having different groups, and I think that's why we would ... the role we would want to play, really, would be as a liaison between the community and the teachers, that they — um ... our community leaders, our students, and have everyone that is involved in the school system and education to be involved, and try to come up with new programs and new ways of improving the system, and have ... so that everybody has a voice, and we want to hear what everybody has to say.

Pittsburgh Latino

Because we have input from the communities, from the teachers, from the union reps, from the administration, we have that — we have an ear to them, and we can be the conduit to bring it back to you.

Pittsburgh Mixed Education

In sum, the negotiation exercise revealed that participants were able to discuss concrete ways in which teachers' unions should be directly involved in education reform or provide a uniform voice for teachers in terms of reform issues. This exercise set a specific context in which participants were asked to discuss unions. Teachers' unions were directly linked to issues of education reform and most groups were asked to think of ways in which unions could contribute to this process. In this context, the organizational power of the union was understood as an important source of experience, knowledge and data regarding best pedagogical practices. While issues of accountability and transparency were employed to argue against the role of teachers' unions, they were also used to express a desire among participants as members of specific communities to have more contact with teachers' unions.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Analysis of the Peer Discourse Sessions offers clear communications implications. The first lesson is that the dominant cultural models that structure public thinking about teachers' unions are extremely powerful. The assumption that teachers' unions exist primarily to secure more financial resources for teachers and that concern over pay comes at the expense of dedication to teaching students is highly available and readily employed by Americans to make sense of all aspects of teachers' unions. In addition, these Peer Discourse Sessions underscored how

powerful these patterns of thinking are in derailing an appreciation for unions as important stakeholders in the education system, especially around issues of education reform. Unless experts and advocates are aware of the existence of these patterns and deploy specific reframing strategies to both counter their potency and avoid their activation, messages about teachers' unions are destined to be "eaten" by this combination of cultural models that currently dominates the swamp of public thinking.¹⁶

The most promising primes were the values of Future Preparation with Common Good and Fairness Across Places. This suggests the importance of values in communicating about teachers' unions. While each of these values had drawbacks, both were able to temporarily shift conversations away from individualized notions of teaching and education. Future Preparation with Common Good offered participants a more collective view of the purpose of education and helped participants articulate why improving the education system matters to all Americans. Fairness Across Places encouraged discussions about problems in education as systemic. By shifting focus away from "bad" teachers, parents or students, these primes provided space for more productive conversations about the role teachers' unions might play in education reform. However, in both cases, participants struggled to match the ideal with their direct experiences of teachers' unions in the communities they knew. That is, while they were open to the idea, the reality of teachers' unions did not appear to offer them any examples from which to draw to further invigorate their thinking or to contest the dominant models.

The Orchestra and Remodeling simplifying models were successful in building out the actors involved in the education system and explaining how the education system can be reformed, respectively. However, they were only marginally successful in helping participants understand the role of teachers' unions in these processes. This suggests that these two models provide a basic understanding of the education system and its potential reform, as FrameWorks found in previous research, but that other models are necessary to establish the role of teachers' unions in these processes and systems. This task will be taken up in later stages of FrameWorks' simplifying models development and testing.

While simplifying models can open the door to better thinking about teachers' unions, as the entailments of the metaphors are designed to place them on the right side of change, the ultimate success of this reframing will rely upon people's first-hand experience in judging these reframes authentic. This report has demonstrated repeatedly that people are able to toggle in the right direction in response to the primes, but that they default back to unproductive ways of thinking when they are unable to call to mind any evidence of teachers' unions engaged in community dialogue, in advocating for students or in supporting parents. This finding strongly suggests that it will be a combination of the reframe and highly visible evidence of teachers' unions engaged in the common good that will ultimately defeat the corrosive narrative of selfishness and anachronism.

APPENDIX A: SESSION GUIDE AND ANALYSIS

Peer Discourse Sessions are directed conversations and, as such, follow a fixed guide and are facilitated by a trained moderator. These sessions begin with open-ended discussion followed by moderator-introduced framed passages or “primes” designed to influence the ensuing discussion in specific ways. The sessions end with a group negotiation exercise in which participants break out into smaller groups tasked with designing a plan to address some part of the larger issue.

Based on three objectives described above, the Peer Discourse Analysis guide was divided into three sections: *confirmation*, *experimentation* and *negotiation*. Despite this organization, data from all sections were used to address all three research goals. For example, data from the *negotiation* portion of the session were also used to *confirm* and triangulate the results of previous research, and data from the *experimentation* section were analyzed for patterns of *negotiation*.

Section 1: Confirmation

The first exercise used a word-association task and open-ended discussion about teachers’ unions and education reform to confirm the dominant cultural models and public discourses attached to these issues.

Similar to the methods used to analyze data from the Cultural Models Interviews, *social discourses*, or common, patterned, standardized ways of talking, were first identified across the eight groups. These patterns of talk were then analyzed to reveal tacit organizational assumptions, relationships, logical steps and connections that were commonly employed but taken for granted. In short, analysis looked at patterns both in what *was* said (how things were related, explained and understood) and in what was *not* said (assumptions and taken-for-granted understandings). Anthropologists refer to these patterns of tacit understandings and assumptions that underlie and structure patterns in talk as *cultural models*.

Section 2: Experimentation

In the second exercise, the moderator introduced primes that were written as news articles. These primes were designed to address perceptual issues identified in early work related to teachers’ unions and education reform. The content of the primes included two simplifying models (the Orchestra Effect and Remodeling) and three values (Common Good with Future Prosperity and Fairness Across Places). The models and values included were successful in earlier quantitative experiments on education and education reform. Finally, we developed and tested a new prime that discussed teachers’ unions as organizations that promote continued professionalization for teachers. The order in which the primes were presented to participants was rotated from one session to the next.

Group discussions following each prime were analyzed for patterns across groups to examine how each prime shaped and affected talking and thinking. In addition, as the primes represented different frame elements, we expected that they would accomplish different communications goals. The Orchestra Effect and Remodeling idea communicate the structure of the education system and the process of educational reform, respectively. We expected, by structuring more-

concrete understandings of the education system and the process of its reform, these elements to redirect conversations away from the individual level, where discussions about “bad teachers” were likely to predominate, toward more systemic appreciations of the roles that teachers’ unions might play in education and reform. Values were designed to provide different ways for participants to orient to the issue — generating different ideas of the goal of education as a common good, the social ramifications that result when educational quality is not evenly distributed, and the improvements to the educational system that could result from a clear role for teachers’ unions in the reform process. We expected that these values would prompt more productive policy thinking about societal responsibilities to improve education.

The primes were also measured by their ability to meet some or all of the following criteria:

User friendliness: Researchers evaluated whether primes were “user friendly” — if participants were able to use the language of the primes in subsequent discussions. User-friendly primes are also more likely to appear in other areas of the Peer Discourse Sessions, such as in the discussions of subsequent primes and during the final negotiation exercise.

Shifting away from the dominant models: In general, successful primes are also relatively effective in “loosening the grip” or inoculating against the dominant cultural models and conversational patterns. We therefore looked at whether, after being exposed to a prime, group discussions were measurably different than both unprimed conversations and discussions following exposure to some of the less successful primes.

Float time: Related to the ability to shift off of the dominant default patterns of thinking and talking, FrameWorks looks at the “float time” of the primes. Float time refers to the time from the introduction of the prime (when the moderator finished reading the prompt), to the point at which the group conversation makes its way back to one of the dominant default discourses.

Filling gaps in understanding: Effective primes are also relatively successful in filling what FrameWorks calls “gaps in understanding” or gaps between the ways that the public understands a concept and the way that experts do. We measured this by referencing previous phases of the research that identified these gaps and analyzing whether discussions that follow the primes engage with expert understandings of teachers’ unions.

Section 3: Negotiation

In the third section, we used two different exercises. For four of the sessions, each nine-person session was broken into three groups of three participants. Each group was tasked with arguing to their State Board of Education why teachers’ unions should be included in education reform efforts. For two of the sessions, participants were divided into two groups of four to five people. One group was asked to argue for the inclusion of teachers’ unions while the other was asked to argue against including teachers’ unions in education reform. FrameWorks used small handheld digital recorders to capture the discussions and negotiations within the small groups. In subsequent analysis, we examined the arguments that people used to rationalize choices and convince others in the group of specific positions and documented the multiple perspectives used to negotiate decision making. In this exercise, we were interested in participants’ patterns of talk and process of negotiation, but also in whether their active engagement in the exercise could

diffuse the dominant models that structured unprimed conversation about teachers' unions. We were, therefore, not as interested in the specific policies that each group proposed as in how they arrived at their solutions, the rationales they employed in constructing arguments, and shifts in the tone and general attitude toward the issue that emerged as a result of inter- and intra-group discussions.

About FrameWorks Institute:

The FrameWorks Institute is an independent nonprofit organization founded in 1999 to advance science-based communications research and practice. The Institute conducts original, multi-method research to identify the communications strategies that will advance public understanding of social problems and improve public support for remedial policies. The Institute's work also includes teaching the nonprofit sector how to apply these science-based communications strategies in their work for social change. The Institute publishes its research and recommendations, as well as toolkits and other products for the nonprofit sector, at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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Please follow standard APA rules for citation, with FrameWorks Institute as publisher. O'Neil, M. (2010). *Getting on the right side of change: How Peer Discourse Sessions see the role of teachers' unions in education reform*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

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² Kendall-Taylor, N. (2010). *Stuck in the middle of multiple meanings: Mapping the gaps between the expert and the public understandings of teachers' unions as part of Strategic Frame Analysis™*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

³ Chart, H. & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2008). *Reform what? Individualist thinking in education: American cultural models on schooling*. Washington DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁴ Kendall-Taylor, N. (2010). *Stuck in the middle of multiple meanings: Mapping the gaps between the expert and the public understandings of teachers' unions as part of Strategic Frame Analysis™*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁵ Kendall-Taylor, N. (2009). *Orchestrating systems and remodeling reform: Reframing education reform with Simplifying Models*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁶ Kendall-Taylor, N. (2010). *Stuck in the middle of multiple meanings: Mapping the gaps between the expert and the public understandings of teachers' unions as part of Strategic Frame Analysis™*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

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⁸ Chart, H. & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2008). *Reform what? Individualist thinking in education: American cultural models on schooling*. Washington DC: FrameWorks Institute.

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¹⁵ Center for Media and Public Affairs (2009). *Put down your pencils please: Media coverage of education reform 2007 to 2008*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

¹⁶ For a visual representation of the swamp, see <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/educationreform/>