

Rethinking the Early Childhood Educational Voucher Policy in Taiwan

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INTRODUCTION

Educational reform discourses on issues of decentralization or the devolution of power from the central educational ministries and bureaucracies to local schools have constituted momentums for the formations of current changes in Taiwan since the 1990s. Much of contemporary educational reform discourses have centered on how the field of education should be restructured, (de)-regulated, and how national curriculum should be reformed to better educate and to prepare today's children for tomorrow's world. It is believed that the role of government in the field of education needs to be rethought and (re)-modified to promote a democratic and modernized educational system in Taiwan. Discussions on and analyses of educational reform policies have commonly perceived the government as a power-holder that can control and (de)-regulate the field of education. Thus, an array of multiple educational reform discourses such as concepts of educational voucher, school choice, integrated national curriculum/pedagogical reform, the productions of commercial textbooks and so on all accept political rhetoric distinctions of public/private or central government/civil society and suggest the necessity of decentralization as a means for progressive educational reform.

Although relatively and comparatively speaking, Taiwan can be categorized as having a "strong State" that produces systems of governing/regulating in the field of education through a form of national curriculum or national standardized testing, such analysis of strong vs. weak State does not provide comprehensive or deeper understandings of the changing relations between the multiple participants or actors in the educational arena and historically and culturally constructed mentalities that underscore the formation of current changes. Thus, rather than focusing on the role of government

and conceptualizing the central government as the power-holder in educational reform discourses, this paper aims to depict the systems of reasoning or mentalities that are embedded within contemporary educational reform and change in Taiwan.

Among the multiple proposals for structural, curriculum, and educational policy changes and reforms in the different sectors of education, in this paper, I will focus on an existing early childhood educational voucher policy in Taiwan. The introduction of an early childhood educational voucher proposal and policy in Taiwan embody rhetoric and notions of devolution in the field of education. “Parental choice,” “school choice,” “equal educational resource distribution,” and the like are all key words and slogans associated with this voucher policy. The idioms and discourses that are embedded within this educational voucher policy often echo and mirror to parts of the greater reform movements that aim to fix the structural inequalities of resource distributions and to change the existing centralized educational structure toward a more de-centralized system.

Thus, in order to rethink what’s being assumed in contemporary educational reform discourses and research studies, the critical analysis of this paper aims to destabilize “our” habitual ways of thinking and reasoning about reforms and changes and (re)-inscribe them in the web of power/knowledge relations. From a social epistemology perspective (Popkewitz, 1991), this paper will illustrate how educational reforms can be thought of differently through notions of power as ruptures and as socio-cultural governing/regulation tools in the field of education and probe at what words/slogans such as “modernization,” “choice,” and “democracy” mean in the context of Taiwanese educational reform discourses.

In addition, weaving in and out of such analysis of an early childhood educational voucher policy is a discussion and problematization of a particular notion of national imaginary in Taiwan which embodies certain mentalities and visions of modernity and social progress. To destabilize and to investigate the naturality of the mentalities that scaffold educational reform discourses and changes, such as an early childhood educational voucher policy as progressive changes will entail the deployment of Foucault's notions of *governance* and *governmentality* (Foucault, 1991). From a Foucaultian interpretation, governance can be understood as *governance of others* and *governance of the self* while a notion of *governmentality* focuses on the productive power that disciplines and constructs the desirable mentalities. This connecting of the mentalities or systems of reasoning about changes and visions of the imagined national outlook with notions of governance and governmentality as governing technologies illuminates educational reforms as cultural regulation and social governance practices that aim to (re)-shape, regulate, administrate, and construct what are reasonable/fashionable/desirable modes of thinking (Popkewitz, 2000b; Bloch and Blessing, 2000; Dahlberg, 2000, Rose, 1999). Thus, notions of governance, governmentality, indigenous foreigner (Popkewitz, 2000a) , and historically/socio-cultural constructed mentalities that guide and shape contemporary Taiwanese educational reform discourses will be incorporated in this paper as analytical tools to bring different understandings of the “desirable” changes in the field of education.

A CULTURAL/HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

EDUCATION IN TAIWAN

Although it is a cliché to say that our contemporary perceptions of early childhood education are socially, culturally, and historically constructed, a cultural/historical analysis is a study on the history of present that destabilizes our “natural” ways of reasoning and being. Thus, while notions of early childhood education will be looked at across different historical moments in this paper, the notion of history is not treated as a linear timeline but as an understanding of the present, which weaves multiple historical notions of early childhood education together to shape contemporary systems of reasoning about early childhood education (Popkewitz, Pereyra, and Franklin, 2001). Thus, an investigation of the changing meanings of early childhood education through the different historical moments is a “cultural history”, which is defined as a history of present (Popkewitz, Pereyra, and Franklin, 2001). As Popkewitz, Pereyra, and Franklin (2001) assert in their work:

“The history of the present aims to grasp the conditions concerning what is possible to say as ‘true,’ and to consider the present configuration and organization of knowledge through excavating the shifting formations of knowledge over time” (p. 32).

Hence, my attempt to examine the changing meanings of early childhood education from the 1940s to the present aims to highlight how contemporary definition of early childhood education in Taiwan is constructed at this particular historical moment. This different understanding of the construction or fabrication of contemporary notion of early childhood education interjects challenges to the common ways of reasoning as the “regimes of truth.”

In the following sections of this paper, I try to historize the changing notions of early childhood education to elucidate how contemporary common perceptions about contemporary early childhood education are historically fabricated and made.

Changing Meanings of Early Childhood Education across Multiple Historical Moments:

Since the late 1940s, an array of multiple pre-school programs such as community/village childcare facilities during agriculture harvest seasons, church- or temple-based early childhood programs/kindergartens, and various childcare provisions for parents who are occupational soldiers or in the military forces have dominated the field of early childhood education. Among these different *types* of programs for young children, classification and organization of these different care programs, as well as institutionalized educational programs have been unclear and blurry for years. In other words, prior to the enactment of the first educational policy¹ in 1981 in the field of early childhood education, there were no legitimate “official,” “governmental” guidelines, and policies to distinguish the distinctions of the multiple forms of programs. The differences between those programs that were described as educational driven and those programs described as care oriented were left undefined. Thus, kindergartens, preschool education, and childcare programs were all considered as *parts* of early childhood education and co-existed as cultural transition institutions with common goals such as preparing and taking care of the children before their beginning of the compulsory educational system.

¹ The first educational policy concerning the field of early childhood education was enacted in 1981 and titled as *The Early Childhood Educational Policy*. Prior to this first educational policy, the field of early childhood education was not “official” regulated.

The existence of the variety of unregulated early education and care programs in the field over the past few decades has been criticized and perceived by contemporary educational reformers, and evaluation researchers in Taiwan as un-scientific,” not systematic-like, and not “modernized” who compared with other pre-school educational systems in the “advanced” and industrialized” nations. Prior to the first educational policy in the 1981, the blurring boundaries between the co-existing programs for young children were left un-regulated by the ministries of education throughout Taiwan. To emulate what’s considered as “modernized” and “advanced” early childhood education and care system(s) from the West (mostly European countries and the United States), it is understood that the field of early childhood education in Taiwan is in need of reforming. The discourses and mentalities concerning the issues of how the field of early childhood should be regulated and how the different programs with similar goals should be divided constituted the formation for the first educational policy for the field of early childhood education in 1981. The separations between “education” and “care” for the multiple forms of early childhood programs were “official” set through regulations of different governmental ministries. Programs that emphasize on the aspects of education were regulated by the ministries of education and programs that focus on the notions of care were governed by Children’s Bureaus of the ministries of interior.

Moreover, through the enactment of the first educational policy, pre-school education embodies mentalities of modernization that include scientific child-rearing practices, educational functions, systematic curriculum designs, and professional pedagogical instructions. Most importantly, since 1981, current prevalent cultural understandings and rhetoric about pre-school education in Taiwanese educational

research studies, as well as in different forms of media have come to recognize and to construct early childhood education as a *critical starting point*-- a transitional/transformation period of a child's learning and development. A popular motto: "*my child, I will not let you lose the race at the starting point*" (孩子, 我不會讓你輸在起跑點) is a translation that captures an essence of contemporary socio-cultural understanding of the importance of early childhood education in Taiwan. In other words, the functions and meanings of early childhood education have shifted and changed from emphasizing the notions of "custodial care" to "academic education" through different historical moments and socio-cultural conditions.

While this educational policy ruptured the field by introducing new ways of reasoning about what pre-school education should be for young children, and by changing how early childhood education is valued or thought of as kindergartens and childcare programs have been institutionalized and governed through a systematic fashion, the injections of divisions and formations of education- vs. care-oriented programs and public- vs. private-funded early childhood education programs have also constituted the formation of an early childhood educational voucher policy in Taiwan.

Echoing most development discourses and modernization theories such as World Bank funded research studies in the "Third World" regions, current discourses and educational research studies in Taiwan about this early childhood educational voucher often embody a concept of the need to become "modernized." Conceptions of what are considered as modernization and desirable development in Taiwan certainly reflect a

history of knowledge/power relations that are associated with the production of an imaginative geopolitical space (Escobar, 1995).

Contemporary perceptions of the need to become modernized in Taiwan accept the notion of Western standards of progress, development and modernity as the “truth” to re-perpetuate, and to legitimate a particular notion/experience of civilization. As Escobar critiques the singularity of the “Western” notion of development:

“...I propose to speak of development as a historically singular experience, the creation of a domain of thought and action, by analyzing the characteristics and interrelations of the three axes that define it: the forms of knowledge that refer to it and through which it comes into being and is elaborated into objects, concepts, theories, and the like; the system of power that regulates its practice; and the forms of subjectivity fostered by this discourse, those through which people come to recognize themselves as developed or underdeveloped” (1995. p.10).

The forms of subjectivity, to borrow Escobar’s (1995) analytical term, of the “modern” self and of the “advanced” nation in the context of Taiwan are related to perceptions of what are being practiced in “developed” European nations and the United States.

The perceived “modern” practices in the field of education in the “West” are commonly identified as the discourses of “parental choice,” “high quality programs,” “scientific curriculum,” “equality for all,” and so on (Bloch, in press). While each discursive notion embodies different political ideologies and pedagogical theoretical ideas, these discursive notions and ideas function as educational reform slogans and travel together into the field of early childhood education as desirable “modern” practices in Taiwan to produce multiple competing educational reform discourses. As an effect of

modernization theories and development discourses, this desire and mentality of wanting to become a “modernized” and “developed” region in the global community legitimates certain discursive spaces for the formation of a different and new historical/cultural understanding of the notion of what is an “ideal” and “good” early childhood educational system in Taiwan.

Contemporary educational reform policies as effects of power are becoming socio-cultural governing practices to produce new norms and changes in the field of early childhood education, as well as to transform the identities of the individuals (parents and children) as responsible and self-governed enterprising individuals (Dahlberg, 2000; Rose, 1998). In this construction of new norms or “regimes of truth,” the discourses that govern the desires of individuals to become active, accountable, and well-informed, for example, as parents are transformed into *consumers* who know how to choose the right and appropriate early childhood education and care programs for their children (Rose, 1998). Such mentalities or subjectivities are connected with certain types of knowledge and are interlaced with the changing governing practices that are embedded within contemporary educational reform discourses.

THE FORMATIONS AND EFFECTS OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL VOUCHER POLICY

The concept of educational voucher policy in Taiwan entered into the field of education as a “modernized” global reform discourse that circulates within the newly created discursive spaces, which were generated by the first early childhood educational policy since 1981 for it had legitimated the differences and the divisions between public

vs. private, and educational- vs. care-oriented pre-school programs. When the first early childhood educational policy entered into the field, it appeared in the form of a political campaign “promise.” In 1994, when Mr. Shui-Bian Chen (陳水扁) represented the Democratic Progressive Party to run for the Mayor of Taipei City, he promoted the concept of *Early Childhood Educational Voucher* (幼兒教育券) as a means to increase the accessibilities for early educational programs for young children, to support parental rights in choosing their children’s educational programs, to facilitate positive competitions in the field of early childhood education for higher quality, and to encourage non-licensed programs to become licensed (Taipei City Government, 1997). Toward the end of Mr. Shui-Bian Chen’s term (1994-1998) in the office as the Mayor of Taipei city, in August of 1998, the Education Bureau of Taipei City allocated a first educational budget and legitimized the first early childhood educational voucher policy for families/children who are eligible and qualified to apply a total amount of NT. \$10,000 dollars in the school year of 1998-1999². This was the first appearance and distribution of an early childhood educational voucher in Taiwan. Since then, many cities and counties gradually follow such a reform policy³ and in the 2000 school year, currently, a voucher reform/policy has been institutionalized island-wide with equal amount of money⁴.

² NT. \$ 10,000 dollars is about \$ 286 U.S. dollars. The average income in 2001 of Taiwanese people is about \$14,000 U.S. dollars.

³ After the first voucher policy in Taipei, many different cities and counties followed such policy but distributed different amount of money to parents. For example, in the school year of 1998-1999, in Kaohsiung city, the voucher is NT. \$5,000 dollars per school year (this amount of money equals to \$143 U.S. dollars).

⁴ The current island-wide early childhood educational voucher is worth NT. \$10,000 dollars, which is about \$286 U.S. dollars.

Understanding the “Rules” of the Early Childhood Educational Policy in Taiwan:

While such an educational voucher policy appears to be for *all* children of five years old, this notion of “*all*” and who is eligible to apply for an educational voucher need to be interrogated. As written in the first education voucher policy of by the Education Bureau of Taipei City in 1997 and by the Ministry of Education in 2000: an early childhood educational voucher is good for 5-year-old children who are registered and enrolled in licensed private kindergartens or childcare programs (The Ministry of Education, 2000). For children who are currently in public kindergartens or public childcare programs, they are neither eligible nor qualified for an educational voucher. Moreover, children who are receiving different forms of pre-school education and care, such as in-home care or being taking care of by family support systems are not entitled or eligible for such educational voucher. Thus, as this educational voucher policy seems to embody a notion of “*all*” to practice a form of social inclusion, a different form of social exclusion is simultaneously being produced.

Similar to notions of choice and educational voucher policies that are packaged to advocate particular visions of social equality and the social freedom to “choose” in several different educational systems (Moe, 2001), this current early childhood educational voucher policy in Taiwan also embodies a particular notion of fixing the “un-leveled field” as “a social justice that comes late (教育券是遲來的正義)” (Pen, 2000) for particular groups of children. Under this frame of reasoning, an educational voucher policy is often perceived as an “alternative solution” that aims to eliminate social exclusion. However, given the “fact” that the average tuitions for private kindergartens are 2.8 times higher than the public ones (Taipei City Government, 1997), it’s not hard to

realize that such an early childhood educational voucher policy is accessible to certain types of families. Thus, this early childhood educational voucher policy can be perceived as a “sorting” or “classifying” governing technology rather than a “solution” for improving the tilted field of education. Instead, this early childhood educational voucher policy certainly favor particular “kinds” of families since the tuition differences between “public- “ and “private-“ funded pre-schools are dramatic.

Thus, from a different perspective, rather than perceiving such an educational reform policy as a “solution” that seeks to fix the unequal distribution of educational recourses/funding, conceptualizing it as a rupture directs attentions to the different and new ways of reasoning about early childhood education through notions of choice, quality discourse, and standard movements. These different ways of thinking about early childhood education have created and shaped the mentalities concerning what is *reasonable* and *desirable* as high quality pre-school education. While each of these notions of educational reform discourses is directed to different theoretical understandings of educational issues, together they interject and introduce different ways of thinking about what is a “good” early childhood education and care program and what is a “good” parent who knows how to choose the appropriate pre-school programs in Taiwan.

In the following sections, I will discuss how educational policies and reforms can be thought of differently as cultural governing practices and cultural changes, as well as ruptures to interject different understandings of contemporary notions of what “good” and “appropriate” early childhood education should be.

Educational Policies and Reforms as Cultural Governing Practices and Cultural Changes:

From a different analytical point of view, the guidelines and rules that underpin this voucher policy, as well as other educational reform policies function as modes of regulations to guide and to shape a new cultural understanding of what early childhood education means. Thus, we can think of educational reform and policy as embodying broader cultural struggles that shift and transform our ways of thinking and being through a construction of a different notion of the “self.” For example, as discussed earlier in this paper, through the governing practices that are embedded within this educational voucher policy, parents are simultaneously being governed and self-governed as they are transformed into *entrepreneurial selves* who are *active and responsible consumers* of early childhood education and care programs and who know how to choose the “right” programs that are licensed and thought of as high quality (Rose, 1998; Dahlberg, 2000).

By conceptualizing educational reforms and policies as a cultural tool that governs, normalizes, and administers the parents as well as the field of early childhood education, it leads to a re-conceptualization of the concept of inclusion/exclusion (Popkewtiz, 2000b). As a cultural tool, the educational voucher policy (re)-defines the norms of “good” kindergartens and childcare programs through licensing and voucher granting processes. Kindergartens and childcare programs without licenses then become “abnormal.” Thus, parents who enroll their children in unlicensed programs are not only excluded to apply for an educational voucher for their children, they are also being included and/or perceived as “abnormal” parents. As much as the rhetoric of this voucher policy aims to practice greater social inclusion by framing it as for *all* children,

the existence of social exclusion occurs simultaneously. Hence, inclusion and exclusion should be understood as one concept of relations as it creates a mapping system for it organizes the field by producing both systems of inclusion and exclusion (Popkewitz, 2000b). Such a different analysis of educational reforms and policies as social and cultural governing and/or regulating practices also opens up a discursive theoretical space for understanding and mapping the different theoretical assumptions and educational research methodologies in the field of early childhood education in Taiwan.

To summarize at this point, viewing educational policies and reforms as ruptures that interject different systems of reasoning, patterns of governing, and as cultural regulation practices elucidate how cultural understandings of what a “good” early childhood education and care program is have shifted through different historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions. Cultural/historical understandings of pre-school programs in Taiwan have shifted from being perceived as institutionalized childcare programs that emphasized custodial purposes to being viewed as critical head-start, and early scientific developmental programs with modern educational functions. The changing understanding of what early childhood education is or should be is scaffolded through effects of modernization and development discourses that are related to the field of education. These different reform discourses embody various notions of social regulations, philosophies of liberalism, neo-liberalism, and political discourses from European nations and the U.S. to amalgamate new ways of reasoning and thinking about the existing inequalities in the field of education. While some educational reform discourses are being translated into the field of education and appeared to be part of widely circulated or discussed “globalization educational discourses,” critical re-

examinations of how these multiple concepts, such as educational voucher, are being re-worked in the context of Taiwan. Interrogations of how concepts of change are re-interpreted to become legitimate educational policies that challenge and rupture current ways of thinking about education, parenting, childhood, as well as what are concerned as public and private responsibilities of individuals/teachers/schools are needed to understand how perceived “common senses” are constructed.

Educational Policies and Reforms as Ruptures in the Field of Early Childhood Education:

Conceptualizing educational policies and reforms as ruptures in the field of early childhood education allows us to understand the shifting and changing cultural/historical meanings of early education and care programs in the field. Multiple global educational reform discourses such as choice discourse, deregulation, and standard/quality movements in the field of education do not form in a vacuum. There are particular socio-cultural, historical, and political conditions that scaffold the formation of certain educational reform discourses, which appear to circulate “globally.” Therefore, when studying how notions of educational reform or “globalization” discourses are re-appropriated and re-articulated as “local” reform discourses, it is necessary to contextualize the formation of reform proposals and policies within the particular historical moments and socio-cultural conditions.

At this point, it is useful and crucial to turn to a discussion in which contemporary educational reform discourses in Taiwan can be perceived as hybrids of globalization/localization discourses that weave global and local systems of knowledge

and mentalities through the deployment of the notions of *hybridization* and *indigenous foreigner* (Popkewitz, 2000a). As Popkewitz (2000a) explains the notion of hybridity and how it enables us to re-conceptualize the formations of educational reform discourses, he asserts:

“The concept of hybridization makes it possible to think of educational practices as having plural assumptions, orientations, and procedures. ... National reform practices, as well, can be understood as practices that have multiple assumptions and divisions from which the political imaginary is being re-visioned. The globalization of educational reforms embodies a complex scaffolding of techniques and knowledge that are not imposed through fixed strategies and hierarchical applications of power that move uncontested from the center nations of the world system to the peripheral and ‘less powerful’ countries” (p.272)

Contemporary educational reforms in Taiwan weave in notions of decentralization and the devolution of power, emulations and adaptations of regulating/governing technologies in the field of early childhood education, and Chinese/Taiwanese cultural reasoning of the role of the child to form a distinctive set of governing practices but yet include some globally circulated practices of socio-cultural regulations.

Being global and local simultaneously, contemporary educational reforms in Taiwan produce social and cultural governing practices that can be understood through Popkewitz’s (2000a) concept of the *indigenous foreigner*. As he defines this:

“It is common in national policy and research for the heroes of progress to be foreigners who are immortalized in the reform efforts. The names of the foreign authors, for example, appear as signs of social, political and educational progress

in the national debates. ...While the heroes and heroines circulate as part of global discourses of reform, such heroes and heroines are promoted in national debates as indigenous in what appears to be a seamless movement between the global and the local. The foreign names or concepts no longer exist as outsiders but as indigenous without alien qualities. The invocation of the indigenous foreigner functions to bless the social reform with the harbinger of progress” (Popkewitz, 2000a, p. 277-278).

Indigenous foreign concepts in educational reform discourses, to name a few, have been about decentralization, marketization, freedom to choose, quality and standard movements, and de/re-regulation in the field of early childhood education in Taiwan. Debates on deploying an early childhood educational voucher system indicate hybridization of local conceptualization or (re)-appropriation of global and foreign concepts in the context of Taiwan. Intertwined with the notion of *indigenous foreigner* is a complex web of power/knowledge relations in which certain actors (such as educational researchers) are perceived to have the *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1984) or authority to mobilize and to indigenize certain global discourses.

Thus, the concepts of *indigenous foreigner* and *hybridity* not only recognize how global and local reform discourses overlap with each other but also refuse to accept educational reform discourses as universal sets of ideas/rhetoric. In addition, the importance of the concept of the *indigenous foreigner* is not about the foreign concepts or names that are immortalized but in the hybridity of discourses that legitimate the forms of knowledge and experiences of modernity and social progress as regimes of truth across spaces and places, but in historically contingent ways (Popkewitz, 2000a).

RETHINKING AND RESEARCHING EDUCATIONAL CHANGES

The commonsense discourses that surround and scaffold current educational reforms in Taiwan are often conceptualized and framed as “progressive changes” for “fixing” the existing education structural problems as well as issues of social inequality and social inclusion/exclusion. As President Chen asserts in his weekly Saturday morning speech:

“We don’t want our children to repeat the same old educational path taken by us. We don’t want our children to suffer the same old pain we had experienced through schooling. We need to support educational reform and it is essential to recognize that the journey of educational reform can not be backward” (2/22/2003, my translation).

Embedded in President Chen’s speech about educational reform is a particular notion of social and cultural progress as he believes that educational reforms are continuous efforts toward a better educational system. Comparable and somewhat identical with President Chen’s vision of educational reform, a Chemistry Nobel Prize Laureate, Yuan-Tseh Lee⁵ shares a similar perception in a series of his public announcements:

“...educational reform should look forward. Let’s think about this: what will Taiwan look like in the 21st century? What kind of life do we want for our next generation?” (Lee, 1996; my translation)

⁵ Yuan-Tseh Lee is a Chemistry Nobel Prize Laureate who resided in the United States since his graduate studies. He returned to Taiwan in the early 1990s to head the Academia Sinica. The Academia Sinica is the highest academic institution in Taiwan which has two basic missions: conducting scientific research in its own institutes, as well as providing guidance, channels of communication, and encouragement to raising academic standards in the country.

Thus, contemporary articulation of educational reforms and policies often imply notions of linear progress and modernization to fix the current educational problems as proposals and reform policies circulate both inside and outside the field of education in Taiwan.

As I recognize educational reforms and policies as ruptures in the field, which are not necessarily associated with notions of linear social and cultural progress, I subscribe to a political stance that Popkewitz (1991) calls a method of social epistemology. Like Popkewitz defines:

“Social epistemology relates to how knowledge is intertwined with institutional worlds to produce power relations. The goal of research is to understand how choice, speech, feeling, and thinking are regulated through a range of anonymous practice in which goals and motivations are inherent” (1991, p.221-222).

In this sense, deploying a method of social epistemology enables me to investigate what mentalities are being constructed, as well as embedded in educational reform discourses to produce certain forms of knowledge or systems of reasoning as *the norms*. Moreover, how knowledge about educational reform and policy is formed needs to be understood through notions and webs of power/knowledge relations. Thus, when applying this analytical point of view into the field of education to study how educational researchers are conceptualizing reforms and changes in Taiwan, it is crucial to recognize how notions of power outline particular theoretical stances that shape ways of researching and studying educational change and reform.

Notions of Power, Educational Knowledge, and Educational Research:

Educational discourses are never outside of power relations, thus notions of power are embedded within educational reform discourses and educational research. How one comes to understand notions of power shapes one's theoretical stance(s) and understandings toward educational reform and research. Drawing from Foucault's (1991) notions of power and referencing Popkewitz's (1991, 2000a, 2000b) interpretation of power relations within the field of educational research, there are two different notions of power that scaffold different theoretical and methodological orientations in conceptualizing educational reforms and policies. The two notions of power are 1). *sovereign notion of power*, and 2). *governmentality*. As discussed earlier, there has been a common perception of educational reform and policy as a "solution" in Taiwan. When one subscribes to such a perception, one is immersed within a *sovereign notion of power*. A different understanding of power relates to the *effects* of power that focus on the productive nature of the power. When one subscribes to the effects of power, one comes to pay attention to how educational reform and policy governs our conduct in relation to how we become self-governed to embody certain ways of reasoning and being. Such different understanding of power is referred to as *governmentality* by Foucault (1991) to pay attention to the production of ways/systems of reasoning in a particular historical and socio-cultural condition.

Sovereign Notion of Power in Educational Reform Research and Discourses:

The concept of sovereign power depicts "power" as something to be owned or held by a particular group(s) of people or institutions (such as city governments, ministries of education). When educational researchers subscribe to such an

understanding of power, the field of education can be perceived as an unlevelled field or an unjust structure. Within this frame of reasoning, there are always some advantaged groups with more power while other groups are disadvantaged or being marginalized with very limited or with no power. In other words, there are social actors who are oppressors while there are social members who are oppressed. This notion of power as a *thing* to be owned or to be distributed is embedded within contemporary educational reform discourses in Taiwan and can be found through notions of deregulations or devolution of power.

Through a notion of sovereign power, educational reforms and policies often are re-conceptualized as liberating practices to empower the groups of powerless, disadvantaged, and marginalized. Moreover, educational reforms and policies within critical structural mode of inquiries are often associated with slogans such as “resistance,” “empowerment,” and “progressive.” Notions of “common goods” and greater social inclusions within critical structural analyses outline a particular vision of a better future and produce a new regime of truth that is the opposite side of the existing hegemony.

A different form of dangers and limitations of such theoretical perspectives is the productions of the binaries. In the context of Taiwan, power-as-sovereignty within critical structural analyses frequently creates the homogenous “other” and limits understanding of educational reforms and policies as social intervention practices including cultural and radical interventions, which will change and transform the field and reduce inequalities based on hegemonic ideologies and practices based on structures of race, class, and gender. Using the existing early childhood educational voucher policy

as an example reveals that a particular notion of social democracy and inclusion becomes the “truth” as “our” common good is constructed simultaneously when the “ultimate” other is being constructed.

To summarize at this point, through a sovereign notion of power, it becomes possible for educational researchers to accept the distinctions of the oppressor and oppressed, advantaged and disadvantaged, and powerful and powerless. While I recognized the relative notion of “power” and the metaphor of the “un-leveled playing field, this binary mode of analysis does not allow me to recognize cultural multiplicities and social dispositions nor does it permit me to interrogate the complex relationships of different “actors” such as parents and children in the webs of power/knowledge relations. Moreover, such distinctions between the powerful and the powerless also embody the theories of social reproduction, which do not recognize the different meanings of schooling, parenting, and choices for different groups of parents and children.

Educational researchers who subscribe to a sovereign notion of power often identify themselves (or are identified) as having “critical” eyes and theoretical orientations. Within this tradition of critical theories, issues of class, gender, and race/ethnic inequalities are studied through theories of Marxism, neo-Marxism, Gramsci’s and Freire’s writings that center on issues of empowerment, and education as a means of liberation, as well as many other theorists/theories within such narratives of critical pedagogies. Notions of social inequality and social exclusion are criticized and issues of “common goods” often take center stage for educational researchers who position themselves within this frame of reference. Through such frame of reasoning,

educational reform and policy is highly politicized, as well as being thought of as a way out of current social inequalities or leveling the titled field.

While various groups of educational researchers have different political, ideological, and cultural understanding toward educational reform discourses, a notion of sovereign power runs as a central idea that scaffolds the different theoretical approaches to educational research. Moreover, the concept of sovereign power also embodies notions of linear social and cultural progress. Despite different interpretations of social equalities, common goods, and democracy, a “universal” perception of educational reform discourses and educational policies as “progressive” changes or solutions that lead to a “better” outlook of the future is assumed in the notion of sovereign power.

Governmentality: Educational Reform Discourses as Ruptures

While a notion of sovereignty power produces modes of binaries (powerful/powerless, oppressor/oppressed, or advantaged/disadvantaged), a notion of governmentality breaks down constructions of dichotomies to understand the multiple ways of reasoning and being through educational reform discourses (Bloch, 2000; Popkewitz, 1991, 2000b). As educational researchers embody the concept of governmentality, educational reforms and policies are perceived as technologies of governing practices that shape, regulate, normalize, and discipline the “subjects” (such as parents, children, the families, or the educational field) as some educational reform policies are proposed to “regulate” the field. Simultaneously, while the “subjects” are being governed or regulated through educational reform policies, they also embrace certain new ways of reasoning and being as they become self-governed. Thus,

educational reforms and policies are not being thought of as “solutions” but as ruptures that interject and introduce different ways of reasoning and thinking about changes in the field of education.

Through educational reform and policy, we come to form certain ways of thinking. The concept of “parental choice” as a “right” in the field of education for example, is a current prevalent belief in multiple regions. However, another way to analyze the formation of our “perceptions” is through the notion of governmentality to understand what are the scaffolding concepts and educational discourses that work together to contour our common languages and ways of thinking about choice and about rights. What seem to be our “natural” perceptions are not necessarily natural but socially, historically, and culturally constructed as effects of power. As we come to identify ourselves as “educated” and “rational” persons through the acts of self-governance, we shape our desires and ways of conduct while our mentalities are being governed through educational reform discourses. In light of such a notion, “power functions through an individualization that disciplines and produces actions, rather than merely as a repressive force” (Popkewitz, 2000a, p.287)

Thus, the notion of governmentality enables educational researchers to (re)-conceptualize educational reform discourses within the complex of power/knowledge relations. Through the notion of governmentality, it becomes possible to think beyond binary modes such as choice/no choice and to further interrogate the constructions of norms that are produced through multiple educational reform discourses. Most importantly, it is also through this notion of governmentality that we are able to think of educational reforms and policies as “*social/cultural regulations or agents*” (Shore and

Wright, 1997) that produce new “norms,” identities, ways of thinking, and systems of classifications.

Breaking away from the binary mode of reasoning, *post-structural perspectives* create possibilities to rethink educational reforms and policies as cultural and social regulation practices that produce different “norms” and facilitate different ways of thinking about changes through the notion of governmentality.

SOME ENDING THOUGHTS

Over the last few years, contemporary discourses about educational reforms and policies are no longer being confined to the academic “ivory tower” in Taiwan. Educational reforms and policies are frequently discussed throughout the multiple forms of media as several reform policies are being implemented and re-appropriated to change the existing ways of reasoning, being, and acting in Taiwan. From a different angle, educational reforms and policies are intertwined with social, cultural, and political changes as educational reform discourses are interconnected with notions of social justice and equalities, as well as national imaginaries in Taiwan. As Lee states:

“If the President continues to support and to perceive educational reform as a means for saving the souls and as a national governing practice, then the goals of modernization and improvement of high quality education will be achieved more easily” (1996, p.ii; my translation).

Embedded within this statement of Lee’s (1996) is a connection that conceptualizes educational reforms as social/cultural reform, which implies a notion of the need to transform “our” contemporary mentalities or ways of thinking about education.

Moreover, through this frame of reference, educational reforms and policies can be perceived as *political technologies* (Shore and Wright, 1997) to introduce particular rationalities of governance and mentalities.

Thus, educational research plays a major role in the formation of educational policies as it is being perceived as a practical tool in (re)-conceptualizing the effects of educational reform policies and as a useful “scientific” resource in guiding/outlining change in a perceivable future. As discussed in the previous sections of this paper, educational research is immersed within power relations. How notions of power are being conceptualized in educational research illuminate how notions of educational reforms, changes, and policies are conceptualized.

Much contemporary educational reforms and policies in the field of early childhood education in Taiwan are constructed through development discourses and particular notions/theories of modernity at this particular historical and socio-cultural condition. Notions of linear social and culture progress are embedded within educational reform policies as new desires, and ways of thinking about what are “good” pedagogical practices and educational programs for children. The two notions of power: *power-as-sovereignty*, and *governmentality* are analytical tools that work to deconstruct Western experiences of development discourses and modernity as a singular experience or “regime of truth” (Escobar, 1995).

In the context of Taiwan, at this particular socio-cultural and historical moment, multiple educational reform policies are widely implemented and deployed in the field of early childhood education and care. Rather than accepting a sovereignty notion of power, which often suggests the devolution of power in the field of education as a means to

promote a better and democratic educational system, a notion of governmentality will (re)-directs attention to an investigation of how we come to think what we think. At a different level of analysis, governmentality as an analytical tool directs attentions to the socio-culturally and historically constructed mentalities that become the common ground of forms of political thoughts and actions.

Throughout this paper, I have weaved notions of mentalities into the contemporary educational reform discourses. I argue that we need to destabilize and problematize the notions of modernity, visions of linear social and cultural progress that are embedded in contemporary educational reform discourses in Taiwan. Moreover, reconceptualizing educational reform through the notion of *governmentality* and *indigenous foreigner* entails re-historicizing the constructed mentalities. Educational reform discourses simultaneously construct and govern our habitual ways of reasoning and acting. As technologies of governing, educational reform discourses also normalize and discipline our system of reasoning and conducts.

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