

Thinking inside the box: Interrogating No Child Left Behind and Race To The Top

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Abstract

This conceptual paper intends to interrogate the fabrication of minority children in the United States from different cultural backgrounds through current educational systems. By focusing on academically-oriented educational reform policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT), it articulates how minority children are 'made up' (Hacking, 1986) through double gestures of inclusion/exclusion which inscribe "the hope of progress and fears of degeneration" (Popkewitz, 2008, p. 12) of minority children and are embodied through their schooling. This paper questions the promise of the NCLB and RTTT that minority children can become liberated from their debilitating circumstances through the salvation of education guided by performance-based accountability policies. Inspired by Foucaultian ideas of power and discourse and Popkewitz's inclusion/exclusion doublet, textual analysis of the NCLB and RTTT documents reveals ways in which social inequity is reproduced through institutionalized discourses embedded in and enacted by schooling for young children.

Keywords: educational reform policy, United States, minority children, Foucault, textual analysis

Introduction

This conceptual paper intends to interrogate the fabrication of minority¹⁾ children in the United States from different cultural backgrounds through current educational systems. By focusing on No Child Left Behind (hereafter NCLB) and Race to the Top (hereafter RTTT) as examples of the academically-oriented educational reform policy of the USA, it articulates how minority children, particularly preschool to early elementary school years, are 'made up' (Hacking, 1986) through double gestures of inclusion/exclusion which inscribe "the hope of progress and fears of degeneration" (Popkewitz, 2008, p. 12) of minority children and are embodied through their schooling. Before I lay out my argument, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of NCLB and RTTT for readers who may not have background knowledge of these policies.

The NCLB Act of 2001 was intended to ensure that all children receive high-quality education and thereby "close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers" (Public Law No. 107-110, § 6301 (3), 2002). For this, the test-based accountability system established single performance goals for minority and non-minority children that they are expected to meet; it also requires that schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state reading and mathematics tests. By expanding the federal control over state and local systems (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005), the federal government requires schools to report the test results in reading and math disaggregated by student subgroups (students with low English proficiency, different cultural backgrounds, disabilities, and from low-income families or in poverty). If any one of the subgroups in a school does not meet the performance standard given by NCLB, the school is labeled a 'failing school' and "punished through withdrawal of federal funds, pressure for privatization, and public school choice" (Fusarelli, 2004, p. 72). Moreover, students in failing schools are either given additional support and resources or the opportunity to transfer to another public school with the provision of transportation. In this regard, NCLB represents the most constraining and intrusive federal educational policy in American history (Wells, 2009), forcing public schools to comply with federal mandates.

Elevated neoconservative and neoliberal ideas on education, which replicate and maintain standards-based and market-driven reforms, have been dominant in political agendas of the United States since the early 1980s. Later, RTTT was launched as a federal grant program by the Obama administration as a continuation of NCLB. Its aim is to advance educational reforms by rewarding high-achieving schools with funds and ultimately helping children get prepared for success and competition in society (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). States voluntarily compete for federal funding; successful states demonstrate improvements in the

following four educational areas: enhancing standards and assessments, building effective use of data systems, retaining and increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution, and transforming low-performing schools. This policy is also designed to decrease achievement gaps between student subgroups, especially between minority and white students, in reading/language arts and mathematics.

These initiatives focus on the academic achievement of minority children in order to emancipate minorities from social injustice and inequity through their 'development' and 'inclusion.' Here, an increase in children's test scores metaphorically serves as a remedy for their incorrigible difference and resultant deprivation and therefore is considered indispensable for promoting their educational and social inclusion. Nonetheless, the hidden practices of 'othering' and excluding minority children in the reform policies contradict their alleged intents. For example, their way of representing minority children through naming/labeling practices differentiates and divides minority children from non-minority and further perpetuates their exclusion from the unnamed.

Although the drawbacks and effectiveness of current educational reform policies and the challenges in their assessment methods have been widely discussed (Lee, 2010; Mathis, 2003; Menken, 2010), there are few studies that reveal the limit of American education in enhancing minority children's agency with a focus on current educational reform policies. Therefore, this article intends to provide an account of how the perpetual motion of fabricating them through "the complex set of relations of inclusion and exclusion" (Popkewitz, 2008, p. 6) plays out in current American educational systems and how the 'making-up-subjects' process underlying citizenship education, in correspondence to the global 'Education for All' (EFA) movement, constructs the agency of the minority children by creating a range of constraints and possibilities.

This article also focuses particularly on early childhood in order to highlight the complicated processes in which educational reform has an effect on constituting minority children of pre-school and early elementary years. Although NCLB and RTTT have no direct accountability requirements for the education of young children in 2nd grade and below, attention has been drawn to how statewide concern for an accountable educational system has generated the push for accountability in early learning programs, including child care, family child care, preschool, pre-kindergarten, and Head Start (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). As a result of educational reform policies' focus on accountability, early learning standards have been regarded as measures to ensure quality education for young children. Under the standards-based climate, young minority children are constructed by normative discourses inscribed in child-centered and academically-oriented education programs, which appear to be mutually exclusive.

Through focusing on US educational reform policies, this paper challenges the guarantee of the NCLB and RTTT that minority children can be emancipated from

the repressions and constraints of existing social structures through education guided by performance-based accountability policies. This gesture of hope for the progress and reclamation of minority children incarnates fear of the dangerous 'Other' which is deviant from normalcy and thereby threatens the future. This "salvation narrative of the [policies'] care for [minority children] is to eliminate (at least theoretically) the exclusion of targeted social groups through [educational] policy" (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004, p. 87). School thus plays the redemptive role of rescuing them from degeneration. In this article, the policies' shared motto 'educational excellence for all children' is questioned and rethought as a mode of representation and reproduction of the salvation thesis, in relation to power relations.

NCLB and RTTT are two leading policies that not only constitute current educational systems in the United States but also articulate cultural theses. Therefore, the problematization of normative assumptions that shape the educational policies can disillusion uninterrupted optimistic and utopian thought that education in the United States brings about the emancipation of minority children from socially deprived, disadvantageous situations. In addition, though I intended the term 'minority children' to mean children from different cultural backgrounds, the analysis of the policy documents shows how its meaning expands and is yet valorized through the processes of differentiation and categorization.

Inspired by Foucaultian ideas of power and discourse and Popkewitz's inclusion/exclusion doublet, textual analysis of the NCLB and RTTT documents reveals ways in which social inequity is reproduced through institutionalized discourses embedded in and enacted by schooling for young children. This article aims to provide international readers with significant insights that allow for an understanding of how a school can serve as a space where young minority children are systematically fabricated through systems of reasoning inscribed in regulating, differentiating, and dividing practices guided by educational policies.

This article is divided into four sections. The first section highlights how early childhood education, from preschool to early elementary school, in the USA prescribes norms for young minority children's behavior and learning regardless of different educational programs (e.g. child-centered or academically-oriented). The second section draws attention to the inclusion/exclusion doublet embedded in educational reform policies in which minority children become abject. In the third section, the discussion develops towards the governing of the parents and families of the children through the policies. Finally, I bring to light ways in which education, as a governing mechanism, makes up minority children as reasonable citizens. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of a Foucaultian critique that allows for rethinking the salvation thesis inscribed in American education.

Continued normalization within ambiguous terrains in children's learning

Despite the mission of the educational policies to improve education and thereby include all children, the educational reform that intends to equally serve all children is limited by the normative discourses that continue to place certain groups of children, such as minority children, on the margin of the society. Ironically, the reform entails the double gestures of inclusion/exclusion, which will be explained in more detail later in this paper, without engaging in 'thinking outside the box.'

Developmentalism and the child-centered curriculum

Before discussing the effects of NCLB and RTTT on minority children in detail, this section begins with an explanation of how early childhood education in general has been configured, in order to see complex sets of different political and social conditions under which education for young American children has been constructed. The fact that there have existed enduring tensions and debates emerging from the co-existence of child-centered and teacher-directed programs (Florez, 2008; Goldstein, 2007; O'Brien, 1996, October) tempers the impact of any single philosophical and theoretical ground in education. Multivocality in education for young children has thus rendered the educational terrains indefinably ambiguous and fluctuating. Nevertheless, the normalization of young children is sustained across different educational practices and thought since both Developmentally Appropriate Practices (hereafter DAP) and high stakes curricula, respectively representing child-centered and teacher-directed programs, have been steadily employed as a set of normalizing technologies (Cannella, 2002; Gunzenhauser, 2007; Jaye, Egan, & Parker, 2006; O'Brien, 1996, October).

Generally, early childhood education in the United States has been configured within a complex web of modernist discourses that design such normalizing pedagogical technologies approved by scientific rigor (Bloch, 2000; Bloch, 2006; Cannella, 2002; Cannella & Bailey, 1999). Bequeathed by the child study movement and progressive education, child development knowledge has dominated the field of early childhood education along with a deficit model in regard to minority children (Bloch, 2000; Burman, 1994). It also grounds the DAP guidelines that formulate regulatory norms in the early childhood curriculum. Thus, the child development knowledge affects ways in which children, parents, teachers, and those engaged in early education think and behave in regard to children's education (Cannella, 2002).

Discourses on child development are carried out by the implementation of standards that are used to measure the appropriateness of pedagogical practices and the normality of children's behaviors. Pedagogical practices that follow the standards of the child-centered, developmentally appropriate guidelines are rewarded, supported, and regarded as high-quality, whereas those executed outside the boundary of the standards are often thought of as inappropriate for young children

and labeled as low-quality (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Likewise, children who show types/levels of behaviors, attitudes, and skills predicted by the performance standards of the child-centered curriculum are considered to be normal. On the other hand, those whose behaviors fall below the performance standards are deemed to be immature. For this group of children, extended observation and examination are encouraged and even required for the purpose of identifying the reason for their behaviors regarded as in need of intervention and improvement (Cannella, 2002; Mac Naughton, 2005).

Children internalize norms inscribed in standards through ritual classroom practices that regulate and discipline their bodies and minds. As Butler (1993) notes, the construction of children is “neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both “subjects” and “acts” come to appear at all” (p. 9). The childhood of minorities is also constructed and granted its instability in the course of reiterated practices embodying the standards. Certain acts repetitively occur so as to prove the normality of their subjects as far as prekindergarten performance standards and indicators provided, for example, by the New York City Department of Education present developmental milestones for each developmental domain.

The performance standards and the performance indicators focused on all learning domains. The clear expectation is that, by the end of the year, every child will demonstrate growth toward achieving the prekindergarten performance standards. The performance indicators describe specific four-year-old competencies that serve as a guideline for planning instruction (New York City Department of Education, 2003, p. 13).

The performance standards pose expectations for young children’s demonstrations of specific levels of behavior. For instance, as performance indicators for social and emotional development, the following is included, stating that a child:

- develops imagery for significant others when they are out of sight.
- identifies him/herself by gender, first and last name and as a family member.
- shows personal interest through choice of materials and activities.

(New York City Department of Education, 2003, p. 15)

The above-mentioned capacities involve cultural theses that define and support an autonomous and independent child and that differ and reject other capacities which are unspecified here yet made culturally available to minority children (Popkewitz, 2008). This normalizes, in particular, minority children in that the standards-based learning recognizes behaviors adherent to the inscribed norms, while discouraging other ways of thinking and behaving (Mac Naughton, 2005). Namely, minority children undergo an assimilation process through the erasure of differences sought by education (Delpit, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Given the norms that all children should follow, teachers guide children to regulate their bodies, thoughts, and habits. With reference to the given performance indicators, teachers compare individual children's performances to the norms stated in the guidelines. This sort of assessment provides a rationale for interpreting, rating, and intervening in their behavior. The course of children's iterated practices for possessing so-called normal bodies and minds eventually gives rise to their self-regulation. This is how normalization takes place under the imposition of standards in their schooling.

Academically-oriented education

While the child-centered curriculum based on child development knowledge (e.g., Creative Curriculum of the Universal Pre-K program) involves surveillance, examination, and continuous observation of children for its portfolio-based assessment, some private early childhood education programs provide children with academically-oriented work (e.g., sit-and-still drills and dittos) and employ numerical measures to assess children's knowledge and school readiness (Goldstein, 2007). Along with the emphasized importance and ongoing impact of child development knowledge and the child-centered curriculum, early childhood education has been equally influenced by recent federal educational reform policies such as the NCLB and RTTT.

A close look at the basic principles of the NCLB policy allows for understanding the dominance of normative discourses across different philosophical terrains in children's education. The principles include accountability for States, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students; more flexibility for States and local educational agencies in the use of federal education funds; and a strong emphasis on reading for young children (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

NCLB requires states "to adopt content and achievement standards, to measure student progress toward those standards, and to implement a series of interventions and sanctions in schools and districts that fail to meet their targets" (Hamilton et al., 2007, p. 1). For this reason, academic assessment is used to measure the accountability of schools and teachers as well as children's academic achievement through testing in reading or language arts, mathematics, and science. The testing in these subjects is implemented in order to:

[determine] the yearly performance of the State and of each local educational agency and school in the State in enabling all children to meet the State's challenging student academic achievement standards (Public Law No. 107-110, 2002, p. 1449).

Although a reliance on testing and standards has long been present in the American public school system, test-based accountability, which integrates standards, testing, curriculum, rewards, and sanctions, was newly introduced in the era of

the NCLB (Linn, 2005). As it holds schools and teachers accountable, the test-based accountability movement designates student test results as a means of measuring school accountability and requires standards (cut scores) to ensure high quality education for children and particularly to improve the education of minority children.

As the standards-based accountability movement is geared towards academic success generally verified by a recognizable increase in test scores, early education has been, to a great extent, bound to something that is academically-oriented and teacher-directed (Goldstein, 2008). For example, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2006) reports that the NCLB has “change[d] what teachers do, how they do it, and why they do it ...[and] create[d] forces and pressures to teach ‘pre-academics’ for students who are too young” (p. 3). Testing pressures for children, parents, and teachers become intensified with heightened expectations for excellence in assessment since its outcome determines the amount of funding allocated to educational institutions. This may contribute to promoting and securing rote learning and drills in early childhood classrooms.

For the sake of the focus on academic achievement in the NCLB and RTTT, the notion of children’s school readiness has increasingly incorporated the aspect of mastery of subject knowledge. In the wake of the NCLB and RTTT, academic standards and assessments have their primary concerns in reading, language arts, and math subjects. Although its target population of students only covers from grades 3 to 12, excluding kindergarteners and grades 1 to 2, children in early grades (Pre-K, K, 1st and 2nd) are undoubtedly affected by the policy (Graue, 2008; McDaniel, Isaac, Brooks, & Hatch, 2005). This is well illustrated in a report in the *Wall Street Journal* which states that:

President Bush’s No Child Left Behind program pushed districts to require more from younger pupils. As a result, in many districts, skills once thought appropriate for first or second graders are being taught in kindergarten, while kindergarten skills have been bumped down to preschool (Kronholz, 2005, p. B1, Cited in Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006).

In this educational system, standardized tests administered in academically-oriented education are major instruments by which children’s learning outcomes are evaluated (Hunter & Bartee, 2003). Here, the higher the scores they get on tests the more knowledge it means that they have gained from their learning at school. All different children are assessed and judged by the same measurement system that contains the same questions asking about the same content knowledge regardless of the individual children’s different talents and abilities. In this manner, children are readily categorized and grouped in accordance with their demonstrated academic levels; the multiplicity and variety in their capabilities are made invisible and oversimplified by such a content knowledge-based assessment.

Thus, any different knowledge that a minority might bring from their home culture is seldom acknowledged and appraised as core knowledge that should be taught and tested at school, considering that American schools for young children are dominated by a white, middle-class culture (Cooney, 1995). Minority children are thus normalized as their fund of knowledge gained from their home culture, which does not “belong to a particular (hegemonic) culture” (de Carvalho, 2001, p. 63) represented as whiteness, is othered and disregarded. Deprived of whiteness, they are blamed for their “deficit” in the school culture.

Education as a modernist mechanism of normalization and discipline

Although the child centered curriculum guided by DAP appears to differ from the academically-focused education driven by the federal educational policies, I have discussed their shared outcome, which is the normalization of young children. The normalization process occurs in both child-centered and academic-oriented programs as norms and standards underlie their curriculum decisions, instructional techniques, assessments, etc. Furthermore, according to a report by the *New York Times*, kindergartens today, either public or ‘child-centered’ private programs, intensely prepare children for standardized tests in reading and math, as NCLB has gained its ascendancy over US educational systems (Orenstein, April 29, 2009).

As a result, early childhood education in the United States has served as a normalizing and disciplinary mechanism and its conduit, regardless of different types of curriculum it operates, since capitalist modernity replaced the functions of the penal system with “socio-pedagogic institutions” (Kessl, 2008, p. 94). Considering that socio-pedagogic interventions aim at transforming minority children according to certain norms (Foucault, 1999/2003), I argue that educationalized disciplines, as part of governmental acts to control the population, are designed and planned to normalize them. This government, rationalized by the humanitarian and egalitarian quality of education for all children, subtly entails the normative assumption that minority children need assistance in order to become normal. Thus, educational boundaries generally created along the axes of child-centeredness and teacher-directedness are obscured as education, per se, is designed to effectively calculate the minds of individual minority children in accordance with normative ideals (Popkewitz, 2008).

Minority children identified and abjected through inclusion/exclusion

Having said that minority children are normalized by virtue of the erasure of their differences and through the discipline of themselves after being placed under continual surveillance through schooling, it is necessary to elaborate on how they are ‘made up’ in the concurrent process of identification and abjection. For example, the nature of immigrant children is enunciated through the process of distinct

categorization, as education for immigrant children is explained under the same category in which programs for limited English proficient children are included. In Section 3102 of the NCLB policy legislation²⁾, it is stated that immigrant children are included in limited English proficient children, as if they belong to the same group and as if all immigrant children lack English proficiency (or the former is a sub-group of the latter), as follows:

The purposes of [English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act] are (1) to help ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet; (2) to assist all limited English proficient children, including immigrant children and youth, to achieve at high levels in the core academic subjects so that those children can meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet (Public law No. 107-110, 2002, p. 1690).

As seen in the last sentence of the above excerpt from the policy legislation, immigrant children are expected to deal with the same level of challenges and to meet the same academic achievement standards that all children are expected to meet. Here is an irony. On the surface, the same levels of challenge in their content learning and of achievement standards may sound like an equal treatment and even an inclusionary act. Such an equal chance given in regard to what they learn, however, could lead to inequity in terms of the ways they are assessed, unless their learning is understood within its complex contexts. The immigrant children are also *simultaneously* differentiated from unnamed/unlabeled children and are othered as they are described as incapable of achieving at high levels without assistance. Given this separate name such as immigrant under the category of minority, their differed status becomes legitimate and even natural. In other words, the attempt to include immigrant and minority children “distinguishes and compares two human kinds—[the child who meet the challenging academic content and academic achievement standards] and the child recognized for inclusion and yet different—the child left behind” (Popkewitz, 2008, p. 149). In this way, the practices of including immigrant and minority children simultaneously cast them into the spaces of the nonmember: not possessing qualities of competent learners, excluded from the hopeful future of society. An inclusion/exclusion double gesture (Popkewitz, 2008) is thereby performed through the legitimating of the categorizing and grouping at the policy level, while being hidden under the alleged hope for equality, not equity, and heightened expectations towards their achievement, regarded as a product of the generously permitted equality in education.

How minority children are positioned within a policy text insinuates how they are identified as seen in the segment of the NCLB policy statements, which reads:

Developing and implementing initiatives to promote retention of highly qualified teachers and principals, particularly within elementary schools and secondary schools with a high percentage of low-achieving students, including programs that provide ... incentives, including financial incentives, to principals who have a record of improving the academic achievement of all students, but particularly students from economically disadvantaged families, students from racial and ethnic minority groups, and students with disabilities (Public Law No. 107-110, 2002, p. 1632).

Here, minority children are characterized by being textually placed in juxtaposition with immigrants, English language learners, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and children with special needs. This typology indirectly attaches to minority children certain qualities by means of “the compartmentali[z]ation of [them] into spatiali[z]ed domains” (Graham, 2005, November, p. 9) that are occupied by low-achieving children, economically disadvantaged children, racial and ethnic minority, and children with disabilities. Consequently, this way of categorizing and identifying minority children as well as their parents perpetuates their falsely captured nature and “(re)secure [their] position” (Graham, 2005, November, p. 13) in the low level of the imagined, simultaneously realized, hierarchy of our society.

Also, the general use of race and ethnicity only as salient features describing minority children is limiting in that it makes invisible other possible ways of thinking of and perceiving them (Graham, 2005, November). I argue that this is an exercise of subjecting power on ‘different’ races and ethnicities. In the same manner, educational research, policy, and classroom practices employ such defining, decisive categories as race and ethnicity in order to place a certain group of children under the lumping category named ‘minority’ (Akkari & Loomis, 2009) that is regarded as disadvantaged and in need of additional intervention and surveillance.

Namely, minority children are depicted as if they need special attention and assistance for their academic achievement. In this way, the policy carries the assumption that minority children may not be capable of attaining academic success unless extra supports are provided. Also, as Butler (1993) asserts, “the naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” (p. 8). While children are named ‘minority,’ the boundary to which they belong is imagined and reified, and children’s construal of the norms inscribed in the set boundary becomes recurrent and habitual. This explains how they internalize normative knowledge about themselves and the world by virtue of ‘naming/othering’ that is a discursive practice embodying a normative discourse circulating in society and institutions (Graham, 2005).

The inclusion/exclusion double gesture inscribed in the policies also generates the abjection of minority children, as seen in the following description of 'minority' population in the RTTT policy. This is well enunciated in its definition of high-need students, as follows:

High-need students means students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, who attend high-minority schools ..., who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities, or who are English language learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b, p. 19499).

Despite this policy's well-intended invitation of minority students into the mainstream society, the enumerated descriptions of high-need students, at the same time, convey the message that they are not qualified members of the society. That is, minority children are excluded from the unnamed group of students constitutive of the center/majority and thereby positioned at the margins. Without 'special' assistance and support, their inclusion will not likely occur. Therefore, the idea of the full inclusion of minority children can be illusory in that it is, in nature, inseparable from its underlying premise that they are 'different' from the unnamed. Their 'difference' is thus made visible and serves as the condition of their exclusion and alienation (Stiker, 1999).

In juxtaposition with words such as homeless, incarcerated, disabilities, and English language learners, children attending high-minority schools are considered to be 'high-need' students. Here, these characteristics express that which is abject. According to the Oxford dictionary, abject is defined as unpleasant, degrading, self-abasing, and completely without pride or dignity. The policy regulations on who minority children are and how they should be educated enclose the act of abjection. Abjection is an expression of horror (Kristeva, 1982). Identifying minority children as repulsive and abject is a strategy that those who are not minority employ for protecting themselves (Kristeva, 1982). However, as Kristeva (1982) argues, the abjection takes place where meaning collapses and the imaginary border between minority and non-minority is eventually obscured as minority children are abjected in the statements of the policy. Further, "the physical, psychological and symbolic integrity of the racist subject" (Hook, 2006, p. 216), its identity, is threatened. The children as the abject "should be understood as the apparent source of such reactions and affects, that abhorrent, uncontained and indefinable 'thing' which elicits avoidance, repulsion, sickness, disgust" (Hook, 2006, p. 217). That is, this form of degrading, in Butler's (1990) terms, refers to 'Othering.' By the same token, as minority children are 'abjected' through the practices of social inclusion/exclusion embodying the reasoning of educational reforms, they are othered.

Governing children, parents, and families

To this point I have highlighted how current educational policies in the United States foreclose, normalize, and other minority children through the practices of inclusion/exclusion and abjection. This section, extending its discussion to the effect of the governing school on children in their broader niche, elaborates on how it also governs their parents and families, through reading the texts of the NCLB and RTTT policies. The following excerpts from the NCLB legislation seem to just declare law plausibly well intended for enhancing the literacy level of children and their families. However, a close look at the between-the-lines of the texts reveals how they become the very object of governance in the service of the family literacy improvement program offered by the NCLB. The democratic ideal of the EFA is firmly grounded in this process of designing the minority population by the management of educational institutions. The literacy program targeting children and their families is an effective apparatus to stretch the government into the very immediate milieu in which children's experiences are discursively constructed.

As the NCLB offers a family literacy service and literacy improvement program, its goal of improving children's reading skills has extended its coverage of power to serving their parents and families as a unit of government. This subjectification process, in which students and parents who have low levels of literacy are given 'special' attention, is subtly expressed in the legislation of this policy which reads:

...the State educational agency will encourage local educational agencies and individual schools participating in a program assisted under this part to offer family literacy services (using funds under this part), if the agency or school determines that a substantial number of students served under this part by the agency or school have parents who do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent or who have low levels of literacy (Public Law No. 107-110, 2002, p.1456).

Here educational credentials and verbal facility (e.g. diploma and literacy) are cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural awareness is also included in cultural capital. Bourdieu conceptualizes capital as power and culture as a source of power (Bourdieu, 1986). Parents with little cultural capital, of the kind valued by schools, thus become the object of governance, which is expanded from children, in the name of family literacy education. The reason for the education of parents and families, the care of their capacities, is further enunciated by the exigency of parent involvement, as follows:

The policy shall be incorporated into the local educational agency's expectations for parent involvement, and describe how the agency will conduct, with the involvement of parents, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy

in improving the academic quality of the schools served under this part, including identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in activities authorized by this section (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background), and use the findings of such evaluation to design strategies for more effective parental involvement (Public Law No. 107-110, 2002, p. 1502).

Just as minority children are described in the policy document, minority parents are juxtaposed with parents with limited economic, cultural capital, and/or disability. This implies that minority parents likely have low levels of literacy, are different from educated parents with more economic/cultural capital, and are incapable of effective parental involvement. This associates race/ethnicity with different forms of capital. The connection thus created identifies minority children and families as necessarily lacking capital. Paradoxically, the proposal for inclusion by means of parental involvement insidiously excludes parents of racial and ethnic minority background by positioning this group of parents as problematic and in need of extra intervention and care.

It seems that NCLB has thus promised the salvation of minority children and their families by putting them under more systematic surveillance and control (Popkewitz, 2008) under the guise of humanitarian support and in the name of academic achievement and success as its so-called egalitarian end goals. However, the concept of salvation insinuates that these helpless children who do not benefit from the redemptive programs likely fail at school and in society. The binary positioning of teachers as saviors versus minority children as the objects to be rescued expresses the dual gesture of hope for the future and fear of the children as a dangerous population. As seen in the description and definition of minority children in the NCLB statements, certain groups of population are lumped into the category 'minority,' which homogenizes them regardless of their different characteristics, desires, appetites, and knowledge.

While the term 'minority children' homogenizes different groups of children, the policy text multiplies its meaning by including in it multiple subgroups such as English language learners, racial and ethnic minorities, children from low-income families, and children with disabilities. Even the insertion of parents and families lacking economic, cultural and linguistic capital into target groups of population in the policy texts indicates that the meaning of minority children is determined in tight connection with that of their parents and families. This way of enclosing different groups of children and families into the same category of minority eventually enlarges the space of action that marginalizes and subjects the mass of a minority population in opposition to the center/norm/majority/unnamed.

Governmentality: Making up minority children

In this manner, minority children “are made up” (Hacking, 1986) as controllable, manipulatable, and correctible, and produced as self-governing individuals. This fabrication of the subjects further leads to governing them as a targeted population, one homogeneous mass, which is rationalized in the name of the security of society. When it comes to the education of minority children, including English language learners, immigrant children, and racial and ethnic minorities, the NCLB legislation specifies that the objective of its proposed education is to “enable the students to become more productive and informed citizens” (Public Law No. 107-110, 2002, p. 1848) and to close “the achievement gap between minority and nonminority students” (Public Law No. 107-110, 2002, p. 1440). It implies that minority students are left behind and are not productive and competent enough citizens until they are fully educated under the given educational agenda.

Educational reform policies as apparatuses inscribe and embody a certain form of rationality that underlies citizenship education. Despite the claim that NCLB undermines citizenship education due to its exclusive focus on math and reading and less attention to other subjects, this policy officially addresses that it “helps schools to establish safe, disciplined and drug-free educational environments that foster the development of good character and good citizenship” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c). This indicates that teaching is not so much delivering subject knowledge as cultivating qualities of good citizens in children (Popkewitz, 2008). Namely, education serves as a governing mechanism, fashioning children as modern liberal subjects that possess and exercise free agency that predates any social conditions and enables them to act as they wish, by inculcating children with rational ways of thinking and behaving (Kessl, 2008; Passavant, 2002; Popkewitz, 2008).

Here, both the sovereign power of the government and institutionalized disciplinary micro-practices co-function as governmentality over minority children as Foucault (1991) explains the term governmentality as:

[t]he ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security (p. 102).

Although children are expected to exercise agency that qualifies them to become good citizens, their way of reasoning is extensively shaped through schooling. While they are constrained through the processes of differentiation, normalization, and division in the current educational systems, governmentality enables them to freely choose any behavior within a given regime of truth which refers to a set of statements that is considered to be true, thinkable, and acceptable and formulated

as the effects of power within a particular discourse (Foucault, 1980). As Popkewitz (2005) asserts, "schooling serves to fabricate the child who participates and acts as a reasonable citizen" (p. 5). Agency, reason, and rationality are thus seen as taken-for-granted capabilities of a modern liberal subject. Early education attempts to cultivate these prerequisites for becoming a reasonable citizen.

Despite its intention to develop the agency of children, analysis of the policy documents has revealed that the policies give expression to what is rational or irrational through defining and envisioning education. Importantly, children's decision making regarding their behavior and thought rests upon the knowledge of rationality thus inscribed at the policy level. In this regard, people are not born with agency but, to some degree, their agency hinges on given contexts (Popkewitz, 2005). In other words, "agency is possible, but it is always situated in a particular context" (Bevir, 2010, p. 432). This is how the making-up process underlying American education constructs minority children by rendering a range of constraints and possibilities in regard to how they should behave, think, and feel.

The governing process of the school as a disciplinary institution thus leads to the creation of self-governing individuals who possess American "cultural values such as civility" (Passavant, 2002, p. 166), an asset which is intelligible at a particular time-space. Particularly, the policy statements depict minority children as in need of educational intervention in order to become American citizens through the inculcation of civility. In other words, they are to be civilized. As Passavant (2002) claims, the American cultural value of civility also becomes significant within "the discourse of Western civilization versus the savage or barbarian" (p. xii). Consequently, non-Western traits of minority children's traditional, home cultures are apt to be ignored, dismissed, and eliminated in their school culture where children are instilled with civility. Civility is not only an important quality of an American citizen but also serves as a social norm (Passavant, 2002) which minority children should live up to.

As Foucault (2000) asserts, "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free'" (p. 342) and it is productive and positive. As for minority children under the government of schooling, this notion of power in relation to freedom of subjects envisages the exercise of their agency and the act of resistance. More importantly, resistance is present at multiple local levels (e.g. home, school, community, etc.) and by different subjects (e.g. children, parents, families, teachers, etc.). Webb, Briscoe, and Mussman (2009) claim that teachers' pedagogical fabrications are an act of resistance against neoliberal surveillance reified by the enforced performance standards derived from NCLB. Likewise, critiques from minority children and parents in response to the imposed educational rules and principles signify that power is exercised in "strategic relations of governance and resistance by free subjects" (Deacon, 2003, p. 232). According to Gunzenhauser (2007), resistance, in a Foucaultian sense, is framed by the care of the self which involves "critical reflection and intersubjective social engagement" (p. 28). Therefore, any non-

conforming behaviors, counteractions, and critiques of minority children and families are ways in which they resist subjugation by the governing practice of education.

I have briefly discussed that minority children are fashioned at the intersection of domination and resistance. While it is important to look more closely at how they resist normative knowledge and practices provided under the current educational systems, this is beyond the scope of my article. Therefore, I leave it to future studies to show more detailed and sophisticated analysis of minority children's resistance under the present educational reforms.

Conclusion

This article has challenged the salvation narrative that declares academic-oriented and standards-based education guided by NCLB and RTTT can liberate minority children from the constraints of social structures. Educational intervention and surveillance at the policy level is regarded as a proactive means to invite minority children to membership in mainstream society. However, the policies actually order early school reform to configure segregated education where education for minority children is envisioned in separate terrains. In other words, intolerance of difference sets up boundaries in early education.

Throughout the paper, how current education reforms in the US mold minority children into normalized subjects with limited agency has been explored. For this, I pointed out its normalizing process as well as the abjection of minority children and families through the system of inclusion/exclusion. As governing practices operate on "the immediate social *entourage*, the families, parents, doctors etc." (Foucault, 1980, p. 101) of the children, the art of government works itself into the bodies of individual children in a capillary fashion. It is therefore dangerous to believe that a standards and performance-based accountability system in education successfully enables minority children to become actors with uninterrupted autonomy and agency. With a particular focus on US educational reform, this paper has brought to the surface power relations that produce constraints for minority children in education. Thus, it has pointed out the importance of re-looking at what is called truth regarding education for minority children, which is sanctioned at the policy level, from different perspectives.

Furthermore, the paradoxical nature of the educational policies in focus here should also be given attention. According to the salvation theme inserted in the policies, schooling, as far as it is administered and organized in correspondence to their expectations and demands on reducing achievement gaps between student subgroups, is considered a pathway to accomplish democratic ideals that ensure the participation of all children and the preservation of an inclusive society. Although the least government control and maximized individual freedom are the elixir of democracy (Cruikshank, 1999), the rationale of current educational systems in the US is

contradictory to this democratic principle. Its educational reforms require the presence of intrusive government for the participation and inclusion of those who are excluded.

Finally, I acknowledge that the use of the linguistic category 'minority,' including some other terms (e.g., race) that differentiate and divide human beings, in this article may inevitably contribute to reinforcing and (re)distributing the discourse governing minority children. Namely, loaded with complex interplay between power/knowledge, the "language ... morphs into [certain] images and narratives of" (Popkewitz, 2008, p. 128) minority children. Yet, it is requisite to utilize such contestable terminology in order to actively engage debate about how minority children are constructed through their schooling directed by educational policies. As Lather (1994) wrote, "[t]o be heard in the halls of High Theory, one must speak in the language of those who live there" (p. 184). Simply deleting the language may elide ways in which minority children are enclosed and confined under the realm of marginalization (Popkewitz, 2008). So, the writing process of this article required me to engage in ongoing recalcitrant practices of working "within and against" (Lather, 2007, p. 135) governing language, discourse, and systems of reasoning constitutive of the mode of representation. My point, more importantly, is not about the language itself, but about the systems of reasoning inscribed in the discourses that the language circulates regarding who minority children are and should be. Supposedly empowering educational reform policies inscribe systems of reasoning underlying the "assemblies, connections, and disconnections" (Popkewitz & Rizvi, 2009, p. 18) of social and pedagogical discourses that constitute the policies. Governing principles that are thus generated order, normalize, discipline, and fabricate minority children. It is also vital to keep in mind the importance of the critical and strategic use of language that otherwise gives expression to the social and psychological qualities of minority children which disqualify their participation and action in a democratic society (Popkewitz, 2008).

To conclude, my attempt in this article is neither to completely deny the presence of the children's freedom and agency nor to condemn educational policies and practices as a whole. Rather, it is to expose how governmentality operates through the implementation of educational policies and how education as a governing mechanism fabricates minority children in the United States. This follows Foucault's (1997) statement that:

[m]y point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism (p. 256).

That everything is dangerous and political means more possibilities and potential for resistance as Foucault (1990) asserts "where there is power, there is resistance" (p. 95). In this respect, my effort to problematize what appears to be necessary and legitimate is a practice of resistance that requires sensitivity and

sensibility towards truth claims. Although this article has interrogated educational policies only within the US context, its implication could reach policy makers, educators, practitioners, and educational researchers in other countries by provoking them to rethink their educational policies and practices for minority children within discursive and sociopolitical contexts.

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- 1) I use the term 'minority' as an inclusive concept that distinguishes individuals by their race, ethnicity, gender, or disability. I therefore do not mean that minority children are merely the racial or ethnic minority of generic use.
 2) NCLB policy legislation is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg40.html>

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