

# Global and Local Problematics of Vouchers: An Example of Educational Reform Discourse toward Education for All

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## Introduction

Educational vouchers currently function as a new hope for educators and parents, mobilizing them to imagine changing the field of education for the better. Such a notion of betterment is associated with a hope for a socially inclusive educational system. A common assumption of educational vouchers is that they are scaffolded by a mythical belief that those who have been “excluded” could become “included” as they are now not only empowered but also equipped with the financial ability (government funding or resources) to “choose,” as well as the ability to exercise their “free will” to make a choice.

This essay highlights the Taiwanese preschool voucher system as an example to unpack the taken-for-granted assumptions on how contemporary reform discourses appear to promise to include all children while excluding many. Global and local voucher discourses have been constructed as magical educational reform policies in which achievement of education for all is imagined. However, the concept of voucher is controversial and problematic. Rather than discussing whether vouchers are good or bad as an effective or progressive institutional change, I will problematize how reform discourses and policies produce a new form of subjectivity to echo particular normalizing narratives of the present national imaginary. Focusing on the case of Taiwanese preschool vouchers to understand the problematics of contemporary education reform discourses on issues of freedom and democracy, this paper is organized in three sections.

The first section presents a snapshot of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care in Taiwan. The rules of the Taiwanese preschool voucher system will also be discussed. The second section is a discussion on the analytical approach in which Foucault’s conceptual framework is explored to shed light on the problematic of voucher discourse. The third section is a critical analysis and reconceptualization on the effects of the current preschool vouchers in Taiwan. Embedded in the different sections of this essay is an effort to rethink

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assumptions of vouchers as an effective and liberal tactic of educational reform practice towards attaining education for all and for improving educational quality.

### **Current Structure of Early Childhood Education and Care in Taiwan**

The current Taiwanese compulsory education structure is a nine year system that includes six years of elementary/primary education and three years of junior high school education (grades 1-9). Early childhood education and care programs for children prior to first grade are categorized as preschool education, which is not included in the current nine-year compulsory education system. Thus, early childhood education is an “option” for parents with young children. All parents are responsible for choosing preschool programs that are suitable and appropriate for their children.

Among the preschool programs, *kindergarten* is a term that has been used loosely in Taiwan as an overarching label to describe *all kinds* of institutionalized programs for young children since the 1940s. Different *types* of preschool programs, such as full-day childcare programs, religion based preschool programs, were blurrily categorized and government/ centralized regulations or interventions were limited. However, the appearance of the *Preschool Education Act* in 1981 re-organized the field of early childhood education and care by interjecting and legitimating legal distinctions of *education/care* and *private/public* for the multiple forms of early childhood programs.

Currently, the field of early childhood education and care is divided into two spheres with each sphere regulated by different government administration departments. The sphere of kindergarten focuses on the education of young children 3-6 years old and is supervised by the Ministry of Education. The sphere of childcare emphasizes the well being of young children from birth to six years of age and it is overseen by the Children’s Bureau in the Ministry of Interior. In addition to the different emphases on education and care, another major division in preschool is that of public versus private programs. Typically, public preschool programs are funded by public money, have teachers who are graduates of the multiple Teachers’ Colleges and tuition rates that are relatively cheaper than those of private programs; however, the limited admission quota for public programs is problematic, as it is on a first come first serve basis, which switches to a lottery system, when the numbers of applicants exceed the admission quota. Such, tuition differences and limited public preschool admission have provided fuel for many public debates over initiating a preschool voucher system during the late 1990s.

Although the Taiwanese government has come to recognize the importance of preschool education, and providing more funding for it, the size of public programs remains relatively small compared to that of private programs. Indeed, the size and number of public programs has been insufficient to accommodate more than a small segment of the population (see Table 1). Therefore, issues of accessibility and affordability in early childhood education have been important factors in the shaping of parents' choice in preschool education as well as in the deployment of a preschool voucher system in Taiwan.

As noted in the Taiwan Yearbook 2004 (GIO, 2004, p. 269), the average private preschool tuition can range from NT\$120,000 (USD\$3,468) to NT\$200,000 (USD\$5,811) per school year while the average yearly income in Taiwan is about USD\$15,000. Private preschool education can become a heavy financial burden and educational choice/option for many families. The high costs of private preschool education and the limited admission quota of public programs have come together to give birth to the Taiwanese preschool voucher system as a hopefully effective method to subsidize expenses in early childhood education, as is assumed that a voucher system can solve the problems of accessibility, affordability, and accountability in the field of early childhood education and care in Taiwan.

### **The Preschool Voucher System in Taiwan: Rules of a Fair Game?**

In the late 1990s, groups of parents, educators, and private preschool owners/operators that are pro-preschool vouchers came together to lobby for the birth of preschool vouchers in Taiwan as a progressive, democratic, and "modernized" educational reform practice (Ho, 2006). Among multiple threads of arguments for vouchers, one of the popular arguments is that since *all* parents are taxpayers, it is not fair for parents to pay all preschool costs as unlike public preschools, the government does not subsidize private schools. Therefore, parents with children in private preschools are being double-dipped by the government. Also, public programs are neither adequate for nor accessible to *all* children.

Recognizing the validity of issues of accessibility and affordability in the field of early childhood education and care, Mr. Shui-bian Chen, during his 1994 mayoral campaign, promoted a preschool voucher system. Toward the end of his term (1994-1998) as mayor of Taipei, in August 1997, the Education Bureau of Taipei allocated a budget to subsidize the voucher scheme. The value of the preschool voucher was NT\$ 1,000 (USD\$ 312) per-school year for a five-year-old child attending a *licensed and private* preschool program.

**Table 1 Summary of Public and Private Kindergarten Programs in Taiwan\***

School Year	Number of Kindergartens			Number of Classes			Number of Students		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
1998-1999	1,065	1,089	2,874	2,405	7,050	9,455	64,936	173,851	238,787
1999-2000	1,160	1,845	3,005	2,637	6,877	9,514	68,563	160,047	232,610
2000-2001	1,230	1,920	3,150	2,776	7,258	10,034	73,434	169,656	243,090
2001-2002	1,288	1,946	3,234	2,827	7,317	10,144	75,956	170,347	246,303
2002-2003	1,331	1,944	3,275	2,900	7,333	10,233	76,382	164,798	241,180
2003-2004	1,358	1,948	3,306	2,722	7,645	10,417	74,462	166,464	240,926
2004-2005	1,248	1,904	3,252	2,811	7,418	10,229	73,177	163,978	237,155
2005-2006	1,474	1,877	3,351	3,166	7,547	10,713	69,186	155,033	224,219

Abstracted from the Summary of Kindergartens in Ministry of Education. Source: Data are based on Ministry of Education, "Summary of Kindergartens: by public or private." [http://www.edu.tw/EDU\\_WEB/EDU\\_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU722001/data/serial/k.xls?open](http://www.edu.tw/EDU_WEB/EDU_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU722001/data/serial/k.xls?open) \* Note: This official statistic data only is from the Ministry of Education; thus, this table only includes the numbers of kindergartens. Public and private childcare programs are not included in this table.

Soon after the deployment of the first preschool voucher scheme in Taipei in the school year 1997-1998, parents and educational researchers throughout Taiwan formed an alliance with the Early Childhood Education Association of the Republic of China (ECEAC) to demand a nation-wide distribution of public funds to all in the form of preschool vouchers. They organized a social demonstration in October of 1998, known as *1018- A Walk for Early Childhood Education*. This event further mobilized preschool vouchers as a form of "social justice" (Pan, 2000). By the 2000-2001 school year, an island-wide preschool voucher scheme was institutionalized in Taiwan. Currently, the rules of preschool voucher system apply to *all* five-year-olds attending *licensed private kindergarten programs or childcare institutions*. The debates over preschool vouchers in Taiwan are not one-sided. Opponents of the current preschool voucher system argue that such a scheme does not advocate educational equity and social justice but further marginalizes the disadvantaged groups of families

with young children through a market approach to early childhood education (Lin, 1999). The Coalition Against High Tuition and the New Century Youth Group are two groups that have come forward to organize grassroots movements against high tuition and the commercialization of education in order to raise public awareness on the problematic of preschool vouchers and the privatization of education in Taiwan (Chien, 2004). In May 2004, a social demonstration in protest of the current Taiwanese preschool voucher system was organized to promote the idea of universal access to early childhood education and care programs (Tsai, 2004). This campaign towards universal access to preschool programs has constructed preschool vouchers as a dangerous educational reform that advocates commercialization, privatization, and a market approach in education, remaking the field of early childhood education into a market reshaping parents and students as consumers and repackaging preschool programs as commodities. In summary, the Taiwanese preschool voucher system has interjected new reasoning into the planning of early childhood education. While supporters and opponents form different arguments on the current preschool voucher system, it is critical to recognize that commercialization of education is happening and could destroy the objectives of educational reforms for creating an equitable and inclusive education system.

### **An Analytical Approach To Problematize Voucher Discourse**

Since Friedman's (1955) first articulation of a voucher plan in education, the concept of vouchers has become a controversial global educational reform and local political debate. The words, "afford" and "choice" have become part of the global educational reform landscape of language that is taken as natural, no longer questioned, and accepted as "good" (Lee, 2006). Such assumptions about vouchers are embedded within a contemporary global and universal construction of democracy with justice that is able to *extend* choices to those who cannot afford them otherwise (Friedman, 1955; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Moe, 1995, 2001; Witte, 2000). Thus, in most cases of voucher policies around the globe, the targeted groups are often lower income and minority families, although the "good" of vouchers is directed toward everyone—where affordability and choice become desirable, natural, and unquestioned parts of the reform language. With this reasoning, supports have argued that voucher plans promise educational choice and greater individual freedom to achieve a degree of social justice and equity.

Within the geopolitical space of Taiwan, shifting away from a past dictatorship toward a decentralized educational planning era, contemporary educational reform discourses, such as preschool vouchers, symbolized a move towards devolution of power in Taiwan. Despite being controversial, the concept of vouchers has been mobilized as an effective pathway towards attaining "preschool education for all" in Taiwan. Packaged subtly within such preschool

voucher discourse is the notion of *empowerment*. The assumption is that vouchers will empower those who are powerless, disadvantaged, or not able to afford preschool for their children. Nested within the notion of empowerment is a concept of sovereign power that views “power” as something to be owned or held by a particular group(s) of people or institutions. At this point in my discussion, Foucault’s analytic of power becomes a critical analytical tool to understand the many dimensions of contemporary educational issues.

### **Notions of Power**

For Foucault, power is distinguished into two major categories: (I) *a sovereign notion of power*, and (II) *governmentality* (Foucault, 1978,1991). Drawing on Foucault’s analytic of power, I will discuss how educational changes such as voucher discourse can be problematized.

*(I) A Sovereign Notion of Power:* Current educational reform policies within the frame of sovereignty power, such as voucher discourse, perceive the central government, the Ministry of Education, or the schools as loci of power and some of the major sources of educational problems. Therefore, to “fix” educational problems, devolution of power is imperative. Educational reforms through devolution of power are linked to discussions on decentralizing and deregulating education in which the role of government, or the State, is thought to be problematic. Accompanying the focus on the role of government is a construction of educational vouchers as an effective instrument or “technical tool” that is designed to dismantle the role of government in order to deliver the promise of equitable education for all.

In Milton Friedman’s work, the proposal of educational vouchers is conceptualized as an effective strategy to dismantle the monopolizing role that government plays in education. Utilizing and mobilizing economic reasoning through the idea of a free-market economy, Friedman (1980) argued that opening up the field of education through vouchers not only challenges the role of government but also empowers parents/families to exercise their freedom to choose what is and is not appropriate for their child’s education. He states that “one simple and effective way to assure parents greater freedom to choose, while at the same time retaining present sources of finance, is a voucher plan”(p.160).

Embedded within a sovereign notion of power is a production of dichotomies in which are binary distinctions of the powerful versus the powerless, the dominating vs. the dominated, the oppressor versus the oppressed, the colonizer versus the colonized. This analytical understanding of power and the binary logic of classification further mobilize the notion of choice. In other words, without conceptualizing power as something to be held or re-distributed, the

hypothesis of empowering the oppressed to exercise choice would not stand “true.” This binary construction is dangerous for it limits in-depth critical recognitions of cultural multiplicities and social dispositions; in addition, it embeds hierarchies and limits ways of understanding relationalities between such ideas as centralized and decentralized governance.

Voucher discourse, which has strongly cultivated deregulation/decentralization as well as the devolution of power ideas, risks overlooking the notion of “governing from afar,” surveillance, and regulations embedded in and through self and other governance. As Popkewitz (1991) argues, a “dichotomous world produces homogeneous ‘others’ that can deny intellectual work one of its major reasons for being—skepticism” (p. 222). Conceptualizing educational changes through a sovereign notion of power not only creates the homogenous “Other” but also limits our understanding of how educational reforms and policies subtly produce social and cultural normalization and governance.

*(II) Governmentality:* Moving away from the logic of binary reasoning, Foucault’s analytic of governmentality (1991) shifts our attention to the productive power of educational reform discourses to understand how reform policies and practices produce new mentalities within the field of education. In this sense, governing is not through brute force but through steering from afar with policies. Working to recognize the multiplicity and omnipresence of power and steering away from a sovereign, prohibitive conception of power, Foucault (1978) explained power is NOT a thing to be owned or redistributed in the name of empowerment. Rather, power circulates discursively to produce new norms or regimes of truths governing our conduct while we internalize a code of conduct. Through Foucault’s concept of governmentality (governmental rationality), educational reform discourses and policies—such as preschool vouchers—can be (re)conceptualized as technologies of governing practices with particular objectives that shape, regulate, normalize, and discipline the “subjects or the governed” (parents, children, the families, or the educational field). As “subjects” are governed or regulated through educational reform policies, they simultaneously embrace certain new ways of reasoning and being.

This notion of power-as-governmentality enables us to understand how new and desirable norms are produced while we gradually become self-disciplined to fit in descriptions of the new norms. In addition, as Popkewitz (1991) clarifies, this form of power is “intricately bound to the rules, standards, and styles of reasoning by which individuals speak, think, and act, in producing their everyday world” (p. 223). This notion of governmentality allows me to critique how a preschool voucher system inscribes new norms and codes of conduct to discipline both the parents and the field of early childhood education in Taiwan.

### Effects of Taiwanese Preschool Vouchers

The language and idioms circulating with the preschool voucher discourse in Taiwan have coupled freedom and choice as signs of progress towards achieving the promise of education for all. “Freedom” is understood as a universal desire or ultimate emancipation. Simultaneously, “choice” is thought of as a form of empowerment tagging along with “freedom.” Coexistent, freedom and choice become joined elevator concepts which have “no known origin and serve as a magic concept as they seem to cover the solution for all problems” (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004, p. xviii). Who does not desire or want to have the “freedom to choose?” Lindblad and Popkewitz (2004) argue that the danger in elevator words or concepts is that they have been “accepted as singular and universal terms that refer to some fact or reality and do not need to be explained” (p. xviii). As elevator words, “freedom” and “choice” have repackaged educational vouchers as an effective means towards educational equity. Having the individual freedom to make a choice in itself appears to embody a degree of liberation.

Thus, when educational voucher discourse is linked with the notions of “freedom” and “choice,” it is difficult to argue against vouchers. To further problematize how Taiwanese preschool voucher discourse has dangerously transformed the system of reasoning that constructs our current understandings of freedom and choice, allow me to go back to Mr. Chen Shui-bien’s 1994 mayoral campaign rhetoric on preschool vouchers. Chen’s rationales in instituting preschool vouchers were to (1) increase young children’s access to early educational programs, (2) support parental rights to choose their children’s educational programs, (3) facilitate positive competition in the field of early childhood education for higher quality, and (4) encourage non-licensed programs to become licensed. To unpack the assumptions embedded within such arguments for vouchers, we can start by deconstructing the following assumptions.

(1) *Preschool vouchers can make preschool more affordable and thus will increase young children’s access to early childhood educational and care programs.*

This assumption helps to construct vouchers as one of the magic cures to solve economic differences by providing an “equal footing” or an even starting point for all families. However, the current structure of preschool vouchers functions as a *partial* tuition addition/reimbursement to children in private licensed preschool programs rather than as a *full/complete* tuition compensation or subsidy for all preschool-aged children. Paradoxically, the intention of deploying preschool vouchers to produce progressive institutional change for the inclusion of disadvantaged groups of families as an ethical educational reform

practice has ironically constructed particular groups of families as the ultimate “other” to be excluded. Therefore, the very concept of social inclusion is closely tied with a concept of social exclusion through the deployment of voucher policies in Taiwan.

Supporters of preschool vouchers assume that vouchers do provide some degree of social justice or equity for families with children in private programs. At the same time, a “silent” social exclusion is occurring, in that the “already marginalized” families have never been able to afford private early childhood educational or care programs. Preschool vouchers in Taiwan not only perpetuate existing social distinctions and cultural differences but also reconfigure or rationalize a particular mode of reasoning as the new “truth.”

*(2) Preschool vouchers mobilize the concept of “freedom to choose” for parents to activate “parental choice” in choosing preschool programs for children.*

The mobilization of “freedom to choose” for preschool programs in Taiwan is never “neutral” or “natural,” but is instead politically, economically, and culturally constituted. The limited quota of public preschool programs has distinguished families and parents into multiple social spaces to reflect and constitute differences. Preschool education is not part of the national compulsory educational system in Taiwan, parents who want to *and* who can afford to enroll their children in early educational programs or who need childcare services can exercise their “parental choice” to choose and select “appropriate” programs for their children. That is, the “choice” and decision of enrolling a child into any early childhood educational or care program in Taiwan is a private choice left to individual families, with very little government regulation or involvement; the history of this has to do with a historical set of political, cultural, and economic issues and rationalities.

Without the rigid/centralized confinements of national curriculum guidelines, early childhood education and care curricula in Taiwan are not predetermined by the central government but are relatively “free” to explore all kinds of pedagogical practices or curriculum theories. In addition, without regulation under a national compulsory educational system, public early childhood education and care programs are limited and have not been organized through school districts. From this perspective, “parental choice” or “school choice” already existed in Taiwan for parents who were able to “afford” such a choice. On the other hand, one could argue that “freedom to choose” in Taiwanese preschool choice has never existed. That is, the notion of “choice” in Taiwanese preschool education is not “free” but is socially constructed as a myth for those who can afford to practice it. Choice, from such a critical perspective, is closely interrelated with each family’s particular cultural and social disposition(s).

(3) *Preschool vouchers promote quality in preschool education by encouraging positive competition within the ECEC “industry.”*

Embedded within this mode of reasoning is a market approach to preschool education in which parents are reconstructed as consumers while the preschool programs become commodified. The commodification of preschool programs generates “healthy” and “positive” competition in which low quality preschool programs would be disciplined to become registered and “legal” to meet the standards of “high quality.” This rationality is nested within Milton Friedman’s conception of dismantling the central government’s monopoly power through mobilizing a neoliberal economic reasoning that emphasizes the development of the “free market” as an embodiment of democracy and freedom. The danger of this way of thinking is its tendency to take selected groups of parents’ perspectives on education and (re)make them as *the narrative for all, which appears inclusive, while excluding many.*

In addition, conceptualizing preschool vouchers as an effective means to promote quality of early childhood education could create a misconception about educational quality by equating “quality” with the government/State licensure process. While the preschool licensure process provides some “quantifiable” characteristics and produces a “checklist” for the intangible concept of “quality,” the deployment of preschool vouchers does not “assure” or promote improvement of quality in early childhood education. Embedded within the discourse of educational quality is the assumption of the “low” quality in public programs as they do not need to compete in the preschool market to “attract” students for survival but are protected by government funding to monopolize the field. These arguments pay little attention to the relations between teacher qualification and educational quality. Finally, some research studies have argued that vouchers do very little to improve educational quality (Chen, 1999; Lin, 1999) and have suggested that better/alternative ways to raise the educational quality in ECEC include offering more in-service teacher training programs or direct subsidies/grants to the schools themselves for professional development rather than a partial tuition refund/credit to parents.

### **Governing through Reform Discourses: (Re)Classification and (Re)Organization through Preschool Vouchers**

Taiwanese preschool vouchers function as the new normative discourses producing new systems of reasoning in which new rationales of governance are constructed. As Ho (2006) states: “by providing public funds for vouchers, Taiwan’s government reversed its previous handsoff approach to private preschool education” (p. 66). I would add that the Taiwanese preschool vouchers have not only infused disciplinary power to normalize parents’ educational choice behavior, but has also regulated and re-planned the field of

ECEC in Taiwan. While this reform targets the private preschool “industry” directly through the granting of public funds to children in licensed private programs in the form of educational vouchers, more recently, mutations of this policy have also allowed vouchers/tuition subsidies for public programs.

Constructed as “democratic governance” to shape new “subjectivities” as well as to discipline and regulate the field of ECEC, vouchers should be thought of as social and cultural administration in which new “norms” and “truths” are produced to (re)define normative ways of thinking, acting, and being. That is, the systems of reasoning underpinning the intelligibility of Taiwanese preschool voucher policies produce socio-cultural disciplinary guidelines. The effect is to shape a particular normative understanding of what a *good, appropriate, and quality* early childhood educational program means for children and parents while “good” parents are re-classified to include those who know how to choose or “shop” within the preschool education “market.” Promoting “freedom to choose,” Taiwanese preschool vouchers produce new rules and standards on how to choose and interject a new definition of the “modern entrepreneurial-self/parenthood.”

In unpacking the notion of “good” parents, it is imperative to problematize the construction of the “modern entrepreneurial” subjectivity through which individual autonomy and freedom are underscored within a “Western” notion of advanced liberalism’s political rhetoric (Rose, 1999). For example, as Taiwanese vouchers are for five-year-old children in licensed private kindergarten and childcare programs, when parents exercise their “freedom to choose,” they are expected to be savvy enough in finding out whether the programs have (or do not have) government licenses that indicate the degree of quality. Through a preschool voucher system, not only are the parents being disciplined by the rules of vouchers but also the field of early childhood education and care is regulated through the licensing-granting process. Parents are simultaneously governed and self-governed as their choices are shaped by the rules of voucher policies to think of licensed programs as *appropriate* high quality or *normal* early educational and childcare institutions.

Governance through educational policies is not through brute force in which the parents, children, teachers and preschool programs are oppressively controlled, organized, and ranked. Rather, governance through reform policies focuses on the productive effects of power in which new mentalities, systems of reasoning, and rationalities are made intelligible and logical. Governance through such constructions of mentalities becomes implicit and indirect and requires the formation of new subjectivities to produce a new classification logic. Echoing my earlier discussion of the analytical approach to the problems of global and local voucher discourse, a Foucaultian analysis on the case of Taiwanese preschool vouchers sheds light on how we are governed while we

simultaneously become self-disciplined as we internalize the rationalities of the new systems of reasoning as desirable “norms” and “truths.”

Conceptualizing preschool vouchers as a socio-cultural governing technology that regulates, normalizes, and administers the parents, as well as the field of early childhood education, also leads to a re-conceptualization of the concept of social inclusion/exclusion. As a social and cultural governing technology, educational voucher policies (re)-define the norms of *good* or *voucher-worthy* kindergarten and childcare programs through government licensure and voucher granting processes. Kindergarten and childcare programs without licenses are constructed as underground, “abnormal” or “inappropriate” cultural institutions for young children. Parents who enroll their children in non-licensed programs are not only excluded from being rewarded with educational vouchers as partial tuition refund/credits for their children, but they are also included in the category of “abnormal/bad” parents. As much as the political rhetoric of vouchers initially publicizes notions of liberal democracy to promote greater social inclusion by framing vouchers as beneficial for *all* five-year-old children, ironically, social exclusion occurs simultaneously.

### **Some Concluding Thoughts**

Contemporary educational reform discourses, such as vouchers, instill individuals with hopes of progress and visions of a better future through the promise of education for all. But as global voucher discourses are translated, reassembled, and made intelligible in Taiwanese local cultures, they shape different discursive practices. In addition, educational choice has been dangerously mobilized as a modern and democratic educational practice. The Taiwanese version of truth about “educational choice” is made intelligible, in part, by the U.S. Chicago School’s neoliberalism through which a particular economic analytical perspective and analysis are expended to become the universal reasoning system. Within this particular frame of neoliberalism, through which the concept of the voucher is mobilized, all spheres or fields are redefined as extensions of the economic domain (Lemke, 2001). Therefore, in attempting to solve the problems of affordability and accessibility in early childhood education and care, the deployment of Taiwanese preschool voucher discourses has transformed educational problems into economic rationalities. In addition, it becomes “normal” to transform the field of early childhood education and care into a preschool *market* in which the parents are constructed as consumers while the children are thought of as *human capital*.

Although a popular reasoning has emphasized that vouchers can make preschool more affordable for all, it is important to point out that a significant percentage of children 3-6 years old are not enrolled in any public or private kindergartens or childcare programs (see Ministry of the Interior [www.moi.vog.tw/stat](http://www.moi.vog.tw/stat)

[/gender/s01-01.xls](#) Ministry of Education [http://www.edu.tw/EDU\\_WEB/EDU\\_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU72201/data/serial/k.htm](http://www.edu.tw/EDU_WEB/EDU_MGT/STATISTICS/EDU72201/data/serial/k.htm) Children's Bureau <http://www.gov.tw/year/y04-06.xls>). Take the 2004 school year as an example, fifty-three percent of the 3-6 year-old population was not enrolled in any public or private preschool program. This group of children can be easily forgotten by the public under the current preschool voucher scheme in Taiwan. While it is inappropriate to homogenize different parents' reasons for not "choosing" institutionalized preschool education or care provisions as options for their children, it is reasonable to link it with the problem of affordability.

In conclusion, educational choice is not a pure economic decision but it is linked with parents'/families' social and cultural depositions. Educational choice can be thought of as cultural practice. Through a preschool voucher system, a normative socio-cultural administration is at work to (re)-shape, regulate, and construct what are thought to be reasonable/desirable modes of thinking and acting. These new norms are productive in the sense that parents and children are transformed to become responsible, autonomous, and enterprising individuals. This construction of normality is dangerous as it silently shapes the reasonable subject by reconfiguring a particular desirable subjectivity. Constructing a particular notion of hope, Taiwanese preschool vouchers have inscribed an economic logic as the normative narrative to depict how the field of early childhood education and care should be organized and how parents should embody and exercise "choice" as children are redefined into "human capital." This narrative has not only disciplined the field of early childhood education but also governed the parents. Therefore, it is imperative to be wary of the effects of educational reform discourses in which local translations are in play in the work of promising an education for all.

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