

Evading Equity: Principal Autonomy Under the Bloomberg-Klein Market Regime

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Abstract

Using New York City schools as a case study, this study draws on interview data from principals, district consultants and administrators, and principal's union representatives to explore the relationship between market-based reform and colorblindness in educational policy. The study is informed by colorblindness theory, which explores the subtle and unconscious ways equity oriented goals are undermined. I also draw on urban regime theory, which highlights the ability of political, private, and other local actors to use resources and power to build coalitions. Results reveal market-based regimes, supported by business and political partnerships, are likely to relegate issues of equity to the periphery while they focus on privatizing decision-making and shaping schools to reflect market place values.

Keywords: *urban regimes, principal autonomy, educational equity, urban school reform*

Introduction

Access to high quality education is a critical issue for many minority children living in the most impoverished communities in the United States. Research shows minority children often lack access to high quality teachers and schools (Kozol, 2005; Schott Foundation, 2012). To decrease the gap in access between minority and non-minority children, some school districts serving large populations of minority students have granted more autonomy to principals at the school level (Honig & Rainey, 2012). While increased autonomy potentially provides principals with more power to address student needs directly, educational policies can sometimes act in contradiction to a principal's autonomy. Research has shown educational policy makers nationally are moving towards colorblind and race neutral

policies that often ignore equity goals and exacerbate the problems facing high minority high poverty schools (Mead & Green, 2012). As a result, a principal's ability to make necessary changes in schools serving large groups of disadvantaged students may be in direct opposition to colorblind educational policies. While colorblind techniques are gaining popularity (Mead & Green, 2012), especially among the market-based regimes leading districts with large populations of marginalized students, they often ignore the role race and racism plays in inequality.

Market-based regimes are coalitions comprised mainly of business and political leaders who use their collective resources to shape educational policies to reflect marketplace values (Shipps, 2003). Recent research suggests market-based regimes have gained popularity because they provide an alternative reform agenda usually centered on increasing accountability and restructuring the system of authority in educational decision-making (Shipps, 2003; Bulkley, 2007). However, among insular market-based regimes the topic of race can be marginalized or relegated to the periphery (Trujillo, Hernandez, Jarell, & Kissell, 2014). Market-based regimes, then, may be prone to support the type of colorblindness constraining principals' decision-making.

The purpose of this study was to explore how one market-based regime and one standards based reform in the New York City (NYC) school district shaped principals' abilities to influence the educational experiences and outcomes of racially marginalized students. Policy makers in NYC rallied a number of efforts, with particular focus on principals. Yet, principals' capacity to implement reforms was complicated by policy constraints. In order to understand how principals experienced this reform, I explore the relationship between market-based regimes and colorblind policies. The data are drawn from interviews with principals and policy makers as well as document analysis. Data analysis in this study is informed by Yin's (2011) five-phase case study procedure. Given the racial achievement gap has been touted as the civil rights issue of the 21st century (Paige, 2010), study of the reform efforts meant to close the gap are warranted.

Conceptual Framework

Colorblindness and Equity

In his book *Racism Without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2009) discusses the emergence of color-blind racism, an ideology which seeks to preserve white privilege, subtly continue discriminatory practices, and ignore the persistence of racism. Bonilla-Silva's (2009) theory suggests society is more accepting of colorblind policies because overtly racist policies are few since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and, as a result, privileges provided to disenfranchised groups should be limited. For example, affirmative action policies and, in K-12 education, desegregation or integration practices have come under scrutiny because both are designed to specifically benefit historically disadvantaged groups. Colorblindness, then, ignores

the influence of historic discrimination and institutional deficiencies on the current progress of marginalized groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2011).

Bonilla-Silva (2011) provides three central frames with which to understand colorblind racism. *Abstract liberalism* is a frame best described by its "laissez-faire" attitude towards racial matters (Bonilla-Silva, 2011, p. 193). Rather than acknowledge the role of race in, for example, hiring and other institutional structures, abstract liberalism provides an egalitarian view of civil rights (Bonilla-Silva, 2011; Freeman, 2005). People who subscribe to an abstract liberalism view of race relations believe affirmative action policies would be unnecessary if potential employees were selected simply on merit. In this way, everyone has an equal chance to access opportunities (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). *Cultural racism* takes a "blame the victim" stance in which individuals are wise enough to know biological explanations of inferiority are inaccurate (p. 193). However, the crux of cultural racism is claiming the status of minorities is due to their own laziness or poor values (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). Finally, *minimization of racism* describes the propensity of individuals to blame the status of marginalized groups on any number of social factors like poverty or culture. Yet, the role of racism is minimized, completely disregarded, or referred to as an excuse (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). The common thread between cultural racism and minimization of racism is the propensity to displace responsibility to individuals rather than institutions. The only frame to acknowledge the role of institutions is abstract liberalism but even then the institution is presumed to act in the interest of fairness. Each of these frames is present in post-racial "Obamerica" (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). This study, however, will focus mainly on abstract liberalism.

Urban Regime Theory

Colorblindness is a persistent yet unacknowledged ideology in the United States. It is especially unacknowledged within the pervasive standards based reforms championed by the highly centralized market based regimes leading high minority high poverty school districts across the nation. While these market regimes sometimes claim an allegiance to equity-oriented reforms, they systematically enact policies that are contradictory to equity claims and colorblind at their core. Market regimes are simply one kind of *urban regime* combining the power of political partnerships to advance policy goals. Their popularity, however, necessitates close exploration of their role in the implementation of colorblind equity-oriented reforms.

Stone (1998) defines regimes as "the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together to make and carry out governing decisions" (p. 6). The regime approach can be traced to Charles Lindblom's (1977) work on political economy on a national scale. Deriving from this seminal work, the urban regime model of examining public-private relationships begins with the premise that the urban political process in American cities are largely based upon the division of labor between the state and the market society in which the state operates (Imbroscio, 1998). While local governments have the formal authority to deliver services across cities, the market has the necessary capital for economic

and civic development. Further, while local governments are often too resource poor to implement complex policies, the private market lacks the perceived legitimacy of the government and is often stymied by regulation.

Regime theory also questions whose and what concerns get attention within coalitions and why some concerns do not (Shipps, 2003). In order to answer this question, Shipps (2003) distinguishes between four types of regime cultures. *Performance regimes* are ones characterized by their inclusion of parents, educators, unions, community organizations, elected officials, and, peripherally, researchers, and local academics (Shipps, 2003). Performance regimes seek to alter the culture of schools and pedagogy in order to increase achievement for disadvantaged students (Shipps, 2003). The agenda of *empowerment regimes* is to give newly empowered groups the opportunity to make more suitable and innovative decisions for their constituents. The key stakeholders in empowerment regimes are “new decisions makers” (Shipps, 2003, p. 851). Both performance and empowerment regimes require significant coalition building.

Market-based regimes are distinguished by their interest in shaping schools to reflect the marketplace and may seek to privatize various aspects of the education system (Shipps, 2003). The key stakeholders in a market-based regime are leaders of the business community but they often ally with political leaders who are able to legitimize the cause of the business leaders and lessen restrictive laws and policies that may be obstacles to privatization (Shipps, 2003).

Shipps (2001) also identifies status quo regimes or *employment regimes* as those led by educators, administrators, and school board members. Within an employment regime, coalition members seek to maintain the status quo by promoting the career interests of adults working in the system over the needs of students (Shipps, 2003; Stone, 2001). Shipps argues that market and employment regimes are easiest to maintain because they do not require extensive coalition building. Yet, they are often insular groups with closely shared interests and, thus, do not require the cooperation of other groups (Shipps, 2003).

One salient feature of urban regimes, and especially insular market regimes, is disagreement about issues and, sometimes, exclusion of issues altogether (Orr, 1994). In Detroit, Mayor Coleman Young, the city’s first African American mayor, and other black leaders complained when representatives of the corporate community did not explore issues of race as the city’s formed a new coalition to address the renewal of the city’s downtown. The disagreement between the mayor and important community stakeholders severely weakened the regime’s ability to work with stakeholders in Detroit (Orr, 1994) and meant relegating race, an important topic for many, to the periphery.

Both Bonilla-Silva’s colorblindness theory and urban regime theory help to explain how market-based regimes support the enactment of colorblind reform agendas in schools. Taken together these theories explain the complex relationship between social issues and society’s willingness and capacity to address them.

Background- The New York City School District

The New York City school district is the largest school district in the country with more than one million students and 1700 schools and the city's metropolitan area is one of the most segregated metro areas in the country, coming third to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Detroit, Michigan (Logan & Stults, 2011; "NYC Department of Education", 2013). Seventy-eight percent of NYC school students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Forty percent of all NYC public school students are Hispanic, 32% are Black, 14.9% are White, and 13.7% are Asian (Kleinfield, 2012). General enrollment numbers, however, do not reflect that NYC schools are among the most racially segregated schools in the country. In 2012, the *New York Times* ran a series of articles to chronicle the changing racial and ethnic dispersal of students in NYC schools. The article explained 650 schools in NYC had enrollments that were 70% or more of one race and at least half of NYC schools were at least 90% Black and Hispanic (Kleinfield, 2012).

Racial isolation in NYC schools has resounding effects on access to high quality schools and teachers. In a report conducted by the Schott Foundation (2012) for Public Education, researchers found a student's "opportunity to learn," or access to high quality education and schools in the top quartiles of performance, was directly related to neighborhood, race, and ethnicity (Schott Foundation, 2012). Black and Hispanic students in NYC schools are more likely to have less qualified teachers and are more likely to have teachers who leave their position within 2-3 years (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Schott Foundation, 2012). Highly qualified teachers are defined as teachers who have a Masters degree and 30 hours or more of further education (Schott Foundation, 2012). In NYC schools with highly qualified teachers, 6% of Black and Hispanic students perform at Level 4, the highest level of mastery, on state and national exams (Schott Foundation, 2012). In schools where there is high teacher turnover and few highly qualified teachers, only 1% of Black and Hispanic students perform at Level 4 on state and national exams (Schott Foundation, 2012).

These findings represent disturbing trends related to race, ethnicity, and neighborhood in NYC schools. In particular, these findings suggest neighborhood, race, and ethnicity can predetermine the kind of access Black, Hispanic, White, and Asian students have to high quality schools and high quality teachers. The disparities present serious problems for teachers and principals working in such a system. As such, principal autonomy was placed at the center of the Children First reform agenda of the Bloomberg-Klein regime as a way to help address the significant achievement gap in schools. In a pamphlet disseminated to recruit principals to join the Empowerment Schools Program, designed to give principals more autonomy, the NYC DOE stated

We believe that it is important to put the decisions about how to educate students as close as possible to those who work with them – the principals in collaboration with the school community. Such key decisions include broader authority over educational programming and curriculum, greater discretion over budgets, a significant role in

selecting and evaluating the dedicated administrative team that supports you in your work and the chance to decide what customized professional development you want for yourselves and your staff (NYC Department of Education, 2005).

Although the NYC Department of Education (DOE) articulated the idea that autonomy was an important step in addressing educating children, the DOE's exclusion of principals' voices from decision making and the increased participation of the private sector diminished principals' capacity to enact their autonomy. Part of the exclusion is related to the Bloomberg-Klein market-based regime. Rather than increase participation of the public in the reform process, Bloomberg and Klein steadily increased the participation of leaders in the corporate world, like John Welch, the well-known chairman of General Electric throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Welch, like Klein, had no background in leading public educational institutions. Bloomberg and Klein continuously built and worked through the regime to the detriment of educational equity issues in the NYC school district leaving a legacy of private market sector-like decisions for a very public matter.

Methods and Data Sources

Data from this study were part of a larger study of principal autonomy in NYC schools. The aim of this study was to understand the relationship between market-based regimes and colorblindness in standards based reform. I use a qualitative case study design with NYC as my unit of analysis. My study draws heavily on interviews from 16 participants, 14 of which were recorded and transcribed. Additionally my study relies on analysis of newspaper articles and official NYC and DOE press releases.

In order to identify participants, I looked for district employees who participated in the Empowerment School program, a program designed with the intention to give autonomy to principals at the school level. The program was initiated during the 2005-2006 school year and only 331 schools were designated "Empowerment Schools." In order for a school to become an Empowerment School, they had to submit an application and principals in Empowerment Schools would have to sign a four-year "performance agreement" to pledge their commitment to meeting "specific achievement and progress targets" (NYC DOE, 2006b). According to one policy maker interviewed in this study, schools were chosen based on their potential to meet progress targets. He said, "Schools that were scheduled to be closed, or those whose principals were being disciplined or removed, were ineligible. We didn't want principals to be able to avoid accountability by joining" (Senior Policy Maker A, 2013). Each Empowerment School received \$150,000 of discretionary funds and an additional \$100,000 in unrestricted funds for the development of various programs (Gootman, 2006b, NYC DOE, 2006c). Principals in Empowerment schools also received unprecedented discretion over their budget, staffing, and curriculum. One year after the announcement of the Empowerment Schools program, during the 2007-2008 school year, it was announced that all schools in NYC would receive the operational autonomy that Empowerment Schools received (NYC DOE, 2007a).

Interviews were conducted with eight Empowerment school principals to understand how, if at all, they enacted their autonomy. Two non-Empowerment school principals, with similar demographics and school locations, were interviewed for comparison purposes (see Table 1 and Table 2). I also interviewed four NYC DOE officials involved directly with the creation and implementation of the autonomy policy of the Children First reforms. I also interviewed one senior official from the principal’s union to understand the role of principals in the reform agenda development; and one network leader, an instructional support staff member external to the school who helped principals with implementation of policies and practices. All identities of participants were protected by pseudonyms. Other important stakeholders not interviewed include members of the business community, the teachers union, and the mayor’s office. As a way to assess the involvement of these groups, I rely on newspaper articles and official press releases from the DOE and mayor’s office.

Table 1: Empowerment Principals

Principal	Grade Level	Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	% White	% Black or African American	% Hispanic or Latino	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	* Student Stability	Total Enrollment
Principal Carmone	PK-5	94%	4%	0%	5%	91%	87%	1700
Principal Clarke	PK-5	94%	1%	69%	29%	1%	82%	720
Principal Bogle	PK-5	59%	0%	68%	30%	1%	83%	430
Principal Evers	K-5	83%	0%	81%	17%	0%	91%	400
Principal Bernard	PK-8	61%	6%	67%	24%	2%	87%	950
Principal Rossi	PK-5	N/A	51%	19%	23%	5%	93%	170
Principal Kagan	PK-5	84%	2%	89%	8%	2%	82%	500
Principal Adelman	4-5	90%	2%	1%	35%	62%	82%	440
District %		78%	13.9%	32%	40%	13.7%	--	1,100,000

Table 2: Non-Empowerment Principals

Principal	Grade Level	Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	% White	% Black or African American	% Hispanic or Latino	% Asian or Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	* Student Stability	Total Enrollment
Principal Cole	6-8	66%	30%	1%	3%	66%	100%	1000
Principal Rhodium	PK-5	94%	3%	76%	12%	8%	79%	240
District %		78%	13.9%	32%	40%	13.7%	--	1,100,000

Analysis for this study consisted of five phases (Yin, 2011). During the first phase of compiling the data, I used simple schemas to organize and keep track of interview protocols, field notes, and documents. During the second phase of data collection, I engaged in a process of disassembling the simplified schemas and placing data into more specific and smaller groups based on my research questions. I also began to develop initial codes as a way to take a more in-depth look at the emerging patterns. Some of the initial codes were titled “principal speaks about autonomy” or “policy maker discusses Children First”, which were superficial and not initially descriptive.

As the patterns became more evident, during the third phase, I reassembled the data into meaningful groupings of analytic themes. During this phase, I borrowed from the grounded theory approach to developing core categories, which helped me to develop central themes (Birks & Mills, 2011). I used both deductive and inductive approaches to decide which codes would move forward to more analytic themes, how to combine codes developed in phase two, and which codes would be left out of the final analysis.

In the fourth phase, I interpreted the data by engaging in a process of rereading the data, the codes, and the analytic themes to develop a new story about principals’ perspectives of autonomy in NYC schools. The data explain how the autonomy policy was interpreted and implemented by principals and how the surrounding contexts and obstacles influenced principals’ implementation. Finally, during the fifth phase of analysis, I began to draw conclusions based on my interpretations of the narrative developed during phase four.

Key Findings

Privatizing Reform- Role of the Market Regime

In 2002, Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire businessman, was elected mayor and gained legislative permission to control the NYC school district. Early in his tenure

Bloomberg selected Joel Klein, a former assistant attorney general in charge of the Department of Justice's antitrust division to become chancellor of NYC schools. Klein successfully defeated Microsoft in an antitrust case but had absolutely no experience in educational administration (Brinkley, 2000).

On October 3, 2002, the New York City Department of Education announced Children First. A DOE press release reported

The goal of Children First is to improve achievement across all schools and to address persistently low performing schools by moving innovation and effective school change throughout the system. The Chancellor's team will examine best practices in instruction, management and budget analysis, supporting the core purpose of instruction. Concrete action items will address the challenge of spreading the effective practices of successful schools.

One of the Department's first orders of business was to assemble a team of people to assist in a 100-day study of the entire NYC school system (Goodnough, 2002a; Goodnough, 2002b). Klein stated the investigation would be "... an open and inclusive process" (NYC DOE, 2002). He added, "Input from the community is absolutely critical. We look forward to speaking with parents and community members – to everyone with a stake in our City's schools – and to listening to their ideas. Together, we will ensure that our school system is focused on student learning and achievement," (NYC DOE, 2002). However, the composition of Klein and Bloomberg's coalition, in part, remained secret and often face accusations of insularity (Senior DOE official A, personal communication, 2012).

One former senior official from the Department said current parents and educators were purposefully excluded from the working groups because the Department wanted to avoid going back to a system of patronage that existed before mayoral control (Senior DOE official B, 2012). He stated

The elected parent leaders, which is really an entry level political position, was told go out and support the schools but you are not going to be at the policy table. We will listen to you, we'll also give parents choice, more good choices than they have ever had before and we will be receptive and responsive to the complaints of individual parents and try to resolve them as quickly as we can. But, you are not going to be invited into the governance process (Senior DOE official B, personal communication, 2012).

The official believed parent leaders participated at the district level only to serve their own future goals to hold political office. As a result, parents were not welcome in policy development at the district level and were asked to trust the Department would improve the system without parent and educator input.

The actual Children First agenda placed significant focus on system coherence and standards (O'Day, Bitter, & Gomez, 2011). As a result, Mayor Bloomberg eliminated the 32 community school districts, replaced the districts with a city-level educational panel he handpicked, and implemented a standard curriculum in math and reading for the entire district. Bloomberg and Klein also placed principal development and autonomy at the "centerpiece of the Children First reform agenda" (*NYC Government*, 2003). Principal autonomy meant principals would be able to select their own staff, manage their own budgets, and choose the curriculum best suited for their particular school's needs.

These shifts were also accompanied by increased private involvement in decisions for the NYC school district. Key private decision makers included John F. Welch (widely known as Jack Welch), former chief executive officer of General Electric (*NYC DOE*, 2002), Robert E. Knowling, a leader in the field of telecommunications (*NYC DOE*, 2003a), and Richard Parsons, former CEO of Time Warner (*NYC DOE*, 2003a). Welch, Knowling, and Parsons each helped to lead and/or teach for the NYC Leadership Academy, a principal preparation program for NYC schools. The Partnership for NYC, which brings together more than 200 CEO's from the NYC's leading corporate, investment, and entrepreneurial firms, also committed to raising \$30 million for the Leadership Academy (*NYC DOE*, 2003b). More than half of the funds raised by the Partnership came from private corporations and a number of wealthy individual donors (*NYC DOE*, 2003b).

Principal preparation was one area that became increasingly privatized by the Bloomberg-Klein regime. One senior department official said

We started NYC leadership academy because we no longer trusted universities to prepare principals for the school system of the future. They prepared principals for the schools in the past, for over a 60-year period, meanwhile student achievement hadn't moved an iota. Graduation rates in NYC public schools was 50% for 60 years and so those institutions essentially trained generation after generation of principals who ran their schools as business as usual. (Senior DOE official B, personal communication, 2012).

This senior DOE official's statement is evidence the Bloomberg-Klein regime wasn't interested in a public process of reform. Rather, they sought to limit the voice and involvement of the public and privatize the decisions made for NYC public schools. Especially as it related to principal leadership.

Regime Policy- Laissez Faire Notion of Equity

The Bloomberg-Klein regime regularly touted their goal was to create a "system of great schools" rather than a great school system. The idea was to lift all schools and to reform the entire system as a way to improve achievement across all demographic groups. One senior policy maker said

The theory of change of Children First was that we needed to create a system of good schools, with that locution. Rather than a good school system. That meant that every school had to be a good school or an excellent school and that there are elements to a good school. A primary one, and a primary lever and intervention point, was that every good school had a strong and capable principal (Senior DOE official C, personal communication, 2012).

The DOE official was closely involved with writing early Children First designs as well as the grant for the principal preparation program. To her, the notion that *all* schools are great schools was critical yet it lacked any attention to the persistent achievement gap plaguing some NYC schools and students.

It should be noted that closing the achievement gap was highlighted in policy documents as a primary goal for the Children First reform (NYC DOE, 2005). Even the Children First Core Narrative referenced the achievement gap three separate times (Children First Core Narrative, 2008). Schools were to be rewarded for closing the achievement gap and the district suggested one primary way to do so- instructional support and “good teachers” (Children First Core Narrative, 2008, p. 8). The document read

We know how important good teachers are. They have the ability to help students master new skills, overcome challenges, and make academic progress. Studies have proven that good teachers literally have the power to eliminate the persistent achievement gap that separates African-American and Latino students from their white and Asian peers (Children First Core Narrative, 2008, p. 8).

To the regime, closing the achievement gap was the responsibility of individual schools and their teachers’ abilities to instruct and guide the gap closed. It can be inferred from these documents that the regime believed one major obstacle to closing the achievement gap was good teaching rather than institutional/district level failure to meet the needs of marginalized students.

Official Children First documents never connected the reform to equitable experiences or outcomes for the many thousands of marginalized students struggling through the NYCs school system. Rather, the Bloomberg-Klein regime focused broadly on several areas of emphasis- increasing performance on standardized tests for all groups (Ravitch, 2010), which they tied to quality of instruction (O’Day & Bitter, 2011), creating small learning environments (i.e. small schools movement; Anyon, 2014), and increasing choice options (charter school reform; Corcoran & Levin, 2011). Each of these reform goals were to be achieved in a centrally run-mayor controlled school system. Because neither the mayor, nor his regime provided explicit statements or details about how these areas of emphasis supported equity goals, principals leading high minority high poverty schools were left to

struggle through the process with no unified or explicit district level plan for closing the achievement gap.

Reform Agenda in Practice- Principal Autonomy Under Constraint

Eight out of ten principals in this study led schools where more than half of their students represented one racial or ethnic group. Through interviews, principals shared leading schools with high minority high poverty populations required additional resources due to the multiple identities held by many of the students. One principal, Principal Rhodium, said

We have a high rate of homelessness in our school and foster care. We have a lot of students whose parents are in prison. We share space with the Bedford-Stuyvesant Multi-Service Center, which was once empty space in our building. We're not a DOE building. And we were able to create job training, housing programs. So while our school is running, most of our parents and members of the community are in school at the same time or receiving some type of service. (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012).

Ninety-four percent of Rhodium's students qualified for free or reduced lunch and 88% of her students were Black and Latino. She described the importance of understanding her students' identities in order to effectively educate them and serve their families. Her sentiment was shared by Principal Bogle whose school was located directly adjacent to the Polk Houses, a large housing project also in Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn.

...My school does house children from five shelters. So our population is transient. Even though the parents, once their children are enrolled, and a [permanent] home is found for them, they still want to bring them back. Sometimes it's a long way [to travel]. We really have to encourage them not to. Just in the child's best interest. But we do house children from five shelters and the [Polk] projects (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012).

Like Rhodium and Bogle, principals in this study demonstrated a sharp attentiveness to the social issues, related to race and class, shaping their school's context. They were passionate leaders dedicated to their jobs but expressed a helplessness that manifested as anger toward the policy. This anger was clearly evident as it related to hiring highly effective teachers for their schools. By far, principals expressed the most concern over staffing autonomy, which they believed was critical to providing marginalized students a high quality education. Principal Clarke, Principal Rhodium, Principal Bernard, Principal Carmone, and Principal Adelman each expressed disappointment and anger when they realized lost the power to hire the teachers they believed could juggle the demands of their schools. Rhodium was especially vocal because her school received a D on the district's progress report, a tool used by the Bloomberg-Klein regime to evaluate

schools based on performance, school environment, and ability to close the achievement gap. In response to her school's letter grade, Rhodium said

Anytime you tell us that XY and Z is going to be the framework and we're going to have this standard and teachers have to be kept to that standard, know that we have the low graduation rate that we have, and we have the achievement gap that we have, because we haven't had the cream of the crop [teaching] in the classrooms (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012).

Rhodium fearlessly associated the achievement gap with staffing. She knew the Black and Latino students in her school needed highly effective teachers and yet she felt the Bloomberg-Klein regime's laissez-faire attitude about the relationship between teaching and achievement gap made closing the gap impossible.

Principal Clarke shared Rhodium's sentiment and added that her efforts as the instructional leader to shape the school's trajectory were thwarted by her inability to gain teachers support around new efforts. For example, Clarke wanted to create two single sex classrooms with an emphasis on supporting and increasing achievement for Black boys in her school. However, a teacher filed a grievance against Clarke stating such a requirement was against the union contract, effectively squashing Clarke's new idea. Clarke believed the "fine line" she walked with teachers made closing the gap difficult. Clarke was frustrated and somewhat angry when she yelled "Forget the firing" when asked if she could simply fire the teachers who were obstacles to her goals (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012).

The principals' anger was also in part due to the entrenched history with poverty experienced by many of the families they served, but it was also due to the disconnect between what they saw as half-hearted policies enacted by the Bloomberg-Klein regime. Mr. Walsh, a senior official in the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators, the union NYC principals belong to, believed the autonomy policy was not sufficient enough to address the obstacles caused by social issues including concentrated poverty. He believed the DOE should have institutionalized some practices, so principals would not have to make decisions about how to address low-income students' more serious needs. He stated

I don't think autonomy was the thing to get us there. I think there were some things that the system should have done. Mayoral control in my mind allowed the Mayor to put all the city's resources into the schools as is needed. Health, transportation resources – I'll start the biggest one, health. [But] there should never be a kid who has to go anywhere to be immunized. Because if the city controls the money to immunize the kid, [principals] never miss him in school (Mr. Walsh, personal communication, 2012).

Walsh believed the autonomy policy fell short because it neglected to directly address the areas of need critical for students' success in school. Walsh saw the autonomy policy as a burden on principals who were left to make difficult decisions about how to tailor their practice and develop innovative programming to support low-income children with high needs. Principals, in effect, were not autonomous. Rather, the burden for improvement was shifted away from the district offices to schools. Walsh expressed principals' small successes were attributed to first hand experience. Not the regime's laissez-faire "improve education for *all* students" agenda. To Walsh, the district failed to understand the local context, especially as it related to social issues.

The principals' and Mr. Walsh's accounts beg the question, what did the Bloomberg-Klein regime mean when they provided principals with autonomy? How, if at all, did the regime envision autonomy playing a role to eliminate the achievement gap? What specific mechanisms were in place to help principals address what they believed were delicate yet salient social concerns? The policy designed by Bloomberg and Klein claimed principals were the centerpiece of the reform however, principals felt their power was weakened and ultimately restricted by the regime's half-hearted attempt to close the achievement gap.

Discussion

The findings in this study inform the knowledge base on market-based regimes and colorblindness, as well as principal autonomy. First, the findings contribute to the theoretical base on market-based regimes. Despite Chancellor Klein's stated commitment to an open and inclusive process, the market-regime's insularity undermined what should have been a public process to address the persistent social issues shaping the educational experiences of students. Parents were excluded from the process because policy makers believed they were too political and educators were excluded because policy makers believed they represented remnants of a bureaucratic system overrun by patronage. Rather than engage the very people implicated in the reforms, the Bloomberg-Klein regime increased the participation of private actors who showed little public interest in the achievement gap or educational equity.

Research has shown regime composition is extremely important because the interest of the coalition members may naturally propel some policy agendas to the forefront while others are relegated to the periphery. In the case of the Bloomberg-Klein regime, closing the achievement gap was a goal. However, competing priorities, like increasing private participation in policy making, helped to diminish the importance of equity and the achievement gap. These findings suggest market-based regimes may be less likely to take on intentional equity-oriented reform to remove obstacles caused by racial and socio economic disenfranchisement. One reason market-based regime's may be inattentive to race and socioeconomic status is because, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2009; 2011) points out, it is more palatable to espouse an "everyone rises" mentality in society today and the primary goal of any

regime is to advance policy agendas. Policies that seek to provide redress for racial wrongs are too controversial and, perhaps, even more so among market-based regimes. This idea will need further exploration in future research.

The findings in this study are not meant to suggest the elimination of all market-based regimes. The Bloomberg-Klein regime did successfully infuse private money into the NYC school system. However, the NYC case emphasizes the need to open up the policymaking process to allow for public participation. While this study does not explore how principals' participation in the policy process would have helped achieve equity goals, principals' attention to the intersectionality of race and class may have, at least, provided an opportunity to discuss how central race and class are to student performance.

Even though principals were empowered with the discretion to make critical decisions for their schools, they felt confined by their inability to choose their own staff. This study suggests staffing autonomy was, perhaps, the most critical for principals of these schools. Yet, it was one of the first autonomy tools principal lost after the first phase of Empowerment. Principals admitted they were inexperienced human resource managers at the initiation of Empowerment. Perhaps because, like all new tasks, principals needed to learn how to hire the right staff. However, they quickly learned they needed the "cream of the crop" in their classrooms and when they couldn't hire effective teachers or fire ineffective teachers, principals used words and phrases like "frustrated", "autonomy is limited", and "stress" to express their experience with staffing their schools. The autonomy policy fell short and was an ineffective tool to help schools address complex racial issues in NYC schools.

There is also a lesson to be learned about principals and their scope of influence. NYC policy makers brought principals to the centerpiece of reform, yet principals did not make reform decisions at the district level. This study suggests policy makers excluded principals because they believed, like parents and teachers; principals' participation was a first step into political office, a self-serving endeavor. However, the exclusion of principals from the policy process also begs the question, what group of educational stakeholders truly have the ability to effect change in NYC schools? Though principals are central to many reform decisions, it is possible they lack the social capital necessary to influence serious district level decisions. NYC principals are union members of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators. Compared to the teacher's union, however, the principal's union is a small organization mostly comprised of *assistant* principals. As such, with such small numbers, it is possible the union is not as effective as the teacher's union in shaping the trajectory of important school decisions. Future research should inquire about principals' level of influence in the NYC school district.

Conclusion

Research on school reform shows educators and communities are essential parts to the process of improving schools (Stone, Doherty, Jones, Ross, 1999). Schools are positioned in economic, political, and social contexts of communities. By relying, primarily, on market-based solutions, as did Klein

and Bloomberg in New York City schools, the extent to which principals could address serious social issues related to race, class, and equity was severely weakened.

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