Disaster Capitalism as Neoliberal Instrument for the Construction of Early Childhood Education/Care Policy: Charter Schools in Post-Katrina New Orleans

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Abstract

This article is taken, with publisher permission, from the Rethinking Childhood Series book: Cannella, G. S. & Diaz Soto, L. (Eds.) (2010). Childhoods; A Handbook. NY: Peter Lang. This paper examines the impact of neoliberalism on early childhood education, care, and policy both as a global phenomenon and in the form of disaster capitalism in post-Katrina New Orleans. Neoliberalism is discussed in general terms and then analyzed through a critical, feminist, poststructural, and postcolonial lens in order to reveal the way in which early childhood policy and practices in the United States (such as with NCLB, school choice initiatives, and the charter school movement) have been used as mechanisms to control and privatize services like public education for young children, creating vast inequities and denying access to a free and appropriate education for many. The reader is referred to the complete book for additional critical, feminist, post-structural, reconceptualist analyses on social justice issues within early childhood studies.

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Where neoliberal policies cannot be imposed domestically, they are imposed internationally, through trade treaties incorporating “investor-state dispute settlement”: offshore tribunals in which corporations can press for the removal of social and environmental protections. When parliaments have voted to restrict sales of cigarettes, protect water supplies from mining companies, freeze energy bills or prevent pharmaceutical firms from ripping off the state, corporations have sued, often successfully.

Democracy is reduced to theatre. Neoliberalism was not conceived as a self-serving racket, but Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings: A Compendium of Measures Second Edition. This Early Childhood Measures Profiles Compendium, created for the SEED (Science and the Ecology of Early Development) Consortium of federal agencies, includes information on child outcome measures in the following domains: approaches to learning, general cognitive skills, language, literacy, math, ongoing observations, social-emotional functioning, and Early Head Start. The format and topic headings for measures profiles used in the current compendium were modeled after the SEED compendium of Early Childhood Measures. has been great progress in the development of new assessment tools to assess the quality of early care and education settings. I guess disaster capitalism has its benefits for neoliberal cheerleaders such as Gladwell. Under the reign of neoliberalism, the forced exodus following the tragedy of Katrina is not viewed as a political disaster but as good public policy. This is really an argument that buries the all too acknowledged insight that Katrina was as much a political disaster as a natural disaster. This is crystal clear in Gladwell’s praise for the transformation of the public school system in New Orleans into the first all charter school district run largely by wealthy whites. This is a school system created without public input, one that substituted inexperienced teachers for veteran teachers, and used millions in federal monies to hire teachers from the union busting Teach for America.