

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.

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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In August of 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast of the United States. When the levees failed to control the influx of water coming into New Orleans, the city flooded, and the most vulnerable areas, mainly poor neighborhoods and/or communities that were predominantly of color, were devastated. During the hours and days that immediately followed, using disaster relief and recovery as the legitimating discourse, city, state, and national officials rapidly modified public policy rules, regulations and procedures. Childhood public services such as education and care were dismantled and taken over by the state of Louisiana (rather than local government entities which is the public education structure in the US) or by private agencies that were given corporate contracts to control resources. Further, using the discourse of recovery, new entities were reestablished in what appeared to be an increasingly privatized system. This change was, and is, especially obvious as formerly public schools that served

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young children were opened and operated by a mixture of for profit and nonprofit private organizations. This policy and practice continues today as an illustration, however accelerated and labeled as a “great experiment,” of a creeping neoliberal capitalism that is increasingly embedded within childhood policy conceptualizations and practices around the globe, as well as in the United States.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain neoliberal capitalism as invading childhood public policy. The public school situation in Post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans in the USA is discussed as an example of the neoliberal public policy that has been accelerated as a result of practices of disaster capitalism. The reader is cautioned that these practices are occurring around the globe and are embedded within discourses of emergency, rescue, and liberation, as well as currently accepted capitalist discourses of competition, accountability, and responsibility.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is grounded in the philosophy of classic liberalism that assumes that the individual should function autonomously, based on self interest, and be free from the intervention of the state (Olssen, 1996; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Further, classic liberalism puts forward concepts like free trade and free markets as conditions that perpetuate capitalism (Martinez & Garcia, 2000). Neoliberalism is the belief that the State’s role is to facilitate an economic market-place “by providing the conditions, laws, and institutions necessary for its operation” (Olssen, 1996, p.340) and to produce individuals that become “enterprising and competitive entrepreneur[s]” (Olssen, 1996, p.340). Key aspects of a neoliberal market include (1) privatization, or shifting the control of public services operated by the State to corporate, for-profit groups, and (2) a reliance on the “human nature” (Olssen, 1996, p.340) of individuals to remain socially responsible, self-motivated citizens who actively participate in the market in order to keep the private sector competitive and the economy balanced (Duggan, 2003). From a neoliberal perspective, those individuals who are thought of as lacking self-initiative (for instance, by needing assistance with food, housing, child care or health care from government welfare programs) are

seen as irresponsible and an inevitable component of a capitalistic system (viewed as the “best” economic form) where economic privilege will always be skewed.

Olssen (1996) suggests that neoliberalism is “governing without governing” (p. 340) in that although the State claims to refrain from regulating individuals in order to allow them to remain free, autonomous consumers, since there are some who are viewed as lacking the self-initiative to be actively engaged in the economy, government resorts to tactics such as measurement and surveillance to surreptitiously control those who are viewed as unmotivated. This implicit form of control can be illustrated by US national policy like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which was created to hold teachers and schools who serve children labeled as “at risk” (often children of color) accountable by measuring students’ “achievement” on standardized tests. Children who do not reach assessment “standards” are often mistakenly viewed as lacking the self-initiative or motivation to be successful in school, when in actuality it is the use of culturally biased instruments and narrow constructions of learning and education that create the illusion that particular groups of children do not “achieve” because their teachers and families are not adequate and must be controlled. Therefore, the State intervenes by creating regulations to raise the achievement levels for students “at risk” of failing. Further, without national policy like NCLB to regulate individuals and groups based on neoliberal, modernist assumptions, the testing industry along with the curriculum, tutoring and textbook corporations who support them would no longer be profitable (Meier & Wood, 2004; Saltman, 2007).

Feminist, postcolonial, and poststructural scholars from a range of fields have critiqued neoliberalism as a harmful ideology embedded within modernism, patriarchy, and colonialist assumptions (Bergeron, 2006; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Nelson, 2005; Spivak, 1999). Critical issues raised by these philosophies that are typically disregarded by supporters of a free market-based ideology include: (1) political uses of modernist universalisms to

normalize or completely ignore societal inequities based on racial, socioeconomic, or gender privilege, (2) intensification of economic inequalities between the privileged and the oppressed, and (3) problems with the hegemonic discourse that exists both in the United States and globally asserting that societies and the services they provide (like education and health care) can only function under a capitalist, market-based system.

Critiques of Neoliberal Rhetoric

Neoliberalism, Structural Inequities, and Privileging the “Responsible, Efficient, Individual.”

Neoliberal rhetoric attempts to separate economic policy from cultural identity and societal structural inequities (Duggan, 2003) because of the belief that a privatized market (when allowed to function autonomously without interference from the government) will naturally create an efficient, competitive, and balanced economy (Nelson, 2005). This unquestioned “faith” in the market masks the conceptualization of markets as almost always privileging those who control them and oppress, or at least make invisible, those who do not. Further, by ignoring diversity, policymakers are able to assume that it is the *individual’s responsibility to choose* whether or not to be “successful” by adopting the values for which the market was developed and accepting that there will always be an imbalance of economic opportunity.

This focus on individual economic responsibility reflects modernist assumptions that (1) science, reason, and rational thought can reveal what we know about “human nature,” (2) universal truths exist such as the notion of individualism which assumes that we are autonomous, rational, and moral beings, and (3) “progress” is desirable, linear, and predetermined, whether in terms of economic wealth, knowledge accumulation, or the way in which humans develop from childhood to adulthood (Burman, 2008; Dahlburg & Moss, 2005; Seidman, 1998; Cannella, 1997; King, 1997; Gray, 1995; Santos, 1995; Bauman, 1993; Tronto, 1993). Modernist assumptions of human nature, individualism, and progress are used as mechanisms in neoliberal politics to ignore diversity and societal based inequities, and to legitimate the “fairness” of particular groups

benefiting from a market-based economy. This perspective is illustrated in the following example.

Those who *choose* to be in a heterosexual marriage with the male as the “breadwinner” while the female participates in unpaid labor (i.e., taking care of children, the household, etc.) (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003) are interpreted as *choosing* to participate successfully in the market. On the other hand, if a woman *chooses* to be single, take a job in a male-dominated workforce, and/or be a part of a same-sex relationship, then she is interpreted as *choosing* to live with the hardships associated with being a single-parent, discrimination against same-sex couples, sexism in the workforce, or needing financial assistance from the government. Therefore, those who do not fit the assumed, very narrow, neoliberal model of identity are constructed as making “wrong” market choices, and unjustly deemed as unable to benefit from a market-based economy.

Although a market that functions under a neoliberal ideology claims to separate factors of cultural identity from the economy, it clearly relies heavily on modernist assumptions to establish hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality in order to uphold privilege for those in power (most often those who are White, middle class, male, and heterosexual (Duggan, 2003). However, diverse cultural experience, identity, and privilege for particular groups are certainly not separate from the economy.

The construction and privileged practice of efficiency as necessary for profitability in a neoliberal market further intensifies inequities. As Warren (2000), an ecofeminist scholar, explains, “mechanisms of free-market capitalism alone (e.g., without government interference through social regulation) may produce efficient but socially unjust outcomes: Markets may distribute burdens and benefits efficiently but inequitably” (p.180). In other words, even though it may be more efficient for markets to function in a way that allows the private business sector to profit, more often than not, this neoliberal approach widens

the gap of inequality and produces social injustice. For example, waste management corporations may attempt to run more efficiently by dumping hazardous materials in inexpensive, centrally located communities (often of color and/or living in poverty) that have seldom been granted permission to establish laws to prohibit this act from occurring. These communities that are less privileged in a market-based economy are more likely to be compromised and further marginalized.

Capitalism: A Mantra of Privatization, Competition, and Profits

Capitalism relies heavily on modes of efficiency and is a pillar of neoliberal politics. Encarta defines capitalism as “an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods, characterized by a free competitive market and motivation by profit” (Encarta Dictionary, 2007). When profit is upwardly redistributed as a result of diverting funds and support from public services and resources (not limited to money but also resources like the environment), economic disparities are intensified and a social tolerance is developed for inequality to be a “natural” part of our society (Duggan, 2003; Mies & Shiva, 1993). This uneven redistribution of funds and resources occurs globally allowing capitalist systems to transfer wealth and power from the poorest parts of the world to the West, with the United States being one of the primary nations to profit (Duggan, 2003). In fact, by the 1990’s the United States surpassed Europe as the leader in Western privilege and inequality (Phillips, 2002).

We agree with those who have suggested that capitalism has evolved to a state of hypercapitalism which can be characterized by “(1) interpretations of the world that are based on capital, resources, and markets, (2) a fear of losing material commodities, [and] (3) a belief that capital (rather than Enlightenment/modernist science) is now the solution to human problems” (Cannella and Viruru, 2004, p.117). A feminist analysis of hypercapitalism reveals an intensified neoliberal shift becoming further embedded in local, national, and global politics. This strengthened hegemony has had a major impact on many (if not all) facets of policy both in the United States and globally.

Neoliberalism and Disaster Capitalism

Social constructivist theories have recently been accepted in disaster inquiry and have led to the study of natural disasters as socially constructed phenomena (Dynes, 2000; Spector & Kitsuse, 1977) and to an openness to notions like “disaster capitalism” (Klein, 2007). Scholars have proposed that the construction of disasters is highly influenced by policy that determines what is even considered to be a disaster (Klinenberg, 2002; Platt, 1999; Stallings, 1995). These policy decisions impact the amount of relief given to particular regions after a catastrophic event, or in some cases, gives financial opportunity to large corporations for whom it is essential that an area be considered a non-disaster site in order to build and gain investment interest for development projects (Davis, 1998; Green, 2005).

Some have also argued that even within the social sciences, disasters have been decontextualized from the social (Blaikie et al. 1994; Hewitt, 1983), claiming that “disasters are episodic, foreseeable manifestations of the broader forces that shape society” (Tierney, 2007, p.509). Kousky and Zeckhauser (2005), and Mileti (1999), suggest that human actions have caused the rise in the construction of disasters through practices that destroy the ecosystem and lead to a less sustainable world. Others have analyzed racism and classism in the construction of disaster including human actions that take place during and following a catastrophic event (Allen, 1996; Barry, 1997; Bolin & Stanford, 1993; Bolton, 1997; Brinkley, 2006; Cooper & Block, 2006; Fradkin, 2005; Henderson, 2005; Hewitt, 1998; Horlick-Jones, 1995; Phillips, 1998; Ryang, 2003; Tierney et al. 2006; Weiner, 1989).

Disaster capitalism is the notion that catastrophic events (such as 9/11 that resulted in the increase of the military industrial complex through the “war on terror” in Iraq) are foreseeable and strategically devised to allow for corporate profiteering at the time of disaster and during the recovery efforts that follow.

Naomi Klein (2007), the author of *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, describes this calculated practice as “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities” (p.6).

During instances where disaster capitalism is operating, rather than rebuilding what existed previously, those hoping to advance corporate goals use “moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering” (Klein, 2007, p.8) allowing industries to redevelop devastated areas rapidly with little to no awareness of the impact of their actions by local communities (Klein, 2007). By producing and exploiting disasters, businesses have created a means to profit with no-bid reconstruction projects, resort development, and even public services for children.

As a growing global phenomenon, Saltman (2007) suggests “this movement also needs to be understood in relation to the broader political, ideological, and cultural formations most prevalent at the moment- namely, neoliberalism and neoconservatism” (p.3) (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 2004). The “fundamentalist form of capitalism has always needed disasters to advance” (Klein, 2007, p.9).

Neoliberal Hegemony and Public Policy

There has been a shift “from an understanding of the economy as something that can be transformed, or at least managed [by the people or the State]...to something that governs society” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.53). This “culture of thinking” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.3) has made it difficult for policy makers, scholars, and the general public to imagine a world or society that can function outside of a capitalist economy (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Spivak, 1999).

Neoliberal capitalism reproduces inequalities between the services available for the privileged and those who do not fit the mainstream. An example of this occurs when public funding and support is minimized for “sites of non-market politics- [such as] the arts, education, and social services” (Duggan, 2003, p.21). Those who are economically privileged by neoliberal politics are often able to privately seek and pay for services like education by using supplemental income

if the State lessens or discontinues financial support. Others, however, find it necessary for the government to maintain its role in providing these services because of vast inequalities that exist, and that are purposely maintained through hierarchies of gender, class, race, and sexuality. Decreasing national funding for public non-market programs or moving them into the private business sector will only intensify inequalities and strengthen patriarchal, colonialist structures of power that marginalize women, people of color, and others (Collins, 2000) who rarely benefit from a system that functions under neoliberal politics.

While it is important to refrain from limiting our conceptions of the world and the multiple economies that exist within it, since Bergeron (2006) reminds us that “the local penetrates the global and vice versa” (p.161), it is important to acknowledge that capitalism and neoliberalism impacts all societies globally and continues to dramatically skew economic and social privilege around the world. Capitalist hegemony has penetrated the boundaries of publicly funded and regulated social services like education and will continue to gain momentum unless the consequences of privatizing public programs is revealed and a “political imaginary” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.xxvi) open to diverse economic ways of being is reconceptualized.

An Illustrative Case of Neoliberal Policy: Early Childhood Education and Disaster Capitalism in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Prior to hurricane Katrina, public education was a service used by children and families who could not afford to attend one of the many private, religious schools, or to live in an area available only to the elite that allowed access to the few public schools with resources. Therefore, many of the most economically and socially privileged in New Orleans were not participating in the public school system before the storm (Flaherty, 2008). This is an important factor when considering the way in which public education is being reestablished post Katrina, since the elite have once again been able to avoid placing their children in struggling public schools by either enrolling them in private institutions or by

having the means to reside in a high-cost area that allows attendance to one of the few privileged new schools that are supported by such organizations as the Business Roundtable (Carr, 2008; Saltman, 2007).

Neoliberalism and Public Education

The past two decades of educational reform in the United States have been spearheaded by neoliberal agendas (Giroux, 2004). Apple (2001) suggests that “rather than democracy being a *political* concept, it is transformed into a wholly *economic* concept” (p.39), allowing an “economic rationality” (p.38) to be used as a lens to analyze and transform public education policy. Consequently, a neoliberal approach to educating young children attempts to commodify schools by placing them in a “self-regulating” (Apple, 2001, p.39) market and identifies students as “human capital” (Apple, 2001, p.38) and parents as consumers. Moreover, this market-based ideology has given momentum to school choice initiatives nationwide and after hurricane Katrina, has provided a platform for corporate-based schools in the reestablishment of the public school system in New Orleans.

School Choice as Public Policy

The movement to privatize public education in the United States now uses the discourse of ‘choice’. The discourse began with the voucher concept and has more recently used charter schools as the vehicle for decentralization, deregulation, and privatization.

Economist Milton Friedman proposed a neoliberal, market-based model of education in the mid 1950’s that would not be controlled directly by the government but rather allow families a ‘choice’ to attend any state approved school with the use of a state certificate or voucher. Under Friedman’s plan, schools receiving vouchers would be required to meet standards set by the government. Quality would be controlled by competition forcing failing institutions to shut down and average performing schools to raise achievement if they wished to remain in the market (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000). Although vouchers have been implemented sparingly in a limited number of

locations and resisted by public education proponents, Friedman's market-based model of education has paved the way for the emergence of varying forms of school choice (Bracey, 2003; Engel, 2000) on a much grander scale than individual vouchers would ever have facilitated.

There are a range of models that have been generated (all centering on Friedman's neoliberal philosophy) as ways in which to create a market-based education system in the United States. These models advocate less government control and the creation of a competitive market where the individuals (i.e. the parents) become active, self-motivated consumers. Many claim that school choice does not equate to privatization since public funds are used to support the system. However, when choice initiatives (like vouchers) allow parents to use nationally generated tax payer funds to place children in private schools, the funds become a source for corporate profits. This form of 'choice' will inevitably take money from public schools, feed the business sector, and create a larger inequitable circumstance for children who are already marginalized by the current system (Apple, 2001; Bracey, 2003; Giroux, 2002).

“Charter Schools” as New Forms of Privatization

Although still used in small numbers, vouchers failed to gain the momentum anticipated by Milton Friedman and his supporters. Charter schools as a concept have been reconceptualized and used as a way to re-establish support for school choice by convincing those who initially opposed vouchers to support the charter school movement. The concept of a charter in education was first developed in the 1970's by Dr. Ray Budde, a former teacher, junior high school principal, and professor at the University of Massachusetts (Kolderie, 2005). Budde based his initial ideas for a charter on Henry Hudson's 1609 charter with the Directors of the East India Company. In the charter, Hudson describes “the purpose and vision of his trip, the risks entailed, what he must do to satisfy accountability requirements, how he will be compensated, and what rewards there might be for high productivity” (Bracey, 2003, p.77). Budde based his

concept of a charter in education on the principles outlined by Hudson while incorporating instructional autonomy suggesting that “teachers could be ‘chartered’ directly by a school board...[and] no one—not the superintendent or the principal or any central office supervisors—would stand between the school board and the teachers when it came to matters of instruction” (Budde, 1996, p.72). When there was no response in the 1970’s by Budde’s colleagues to his initial proposition, he discontinued any efforts to further develop his ideas.

About ten years later, after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* which prompted policy makers, and the general public to become more interested in reforming education in the United States (Kolderie, 2005), Budde revisited his charter concept and wrote a book that was published in 1988 by the Northeast Regional Laboratory entitled *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts*. In his book, Budde focused primarily on the idea of “chartering” departments or programs within a school (rather than chartering entire schools, which is the current interpretation of a charter). Budde immediately distributed his book nationally to anyone he thought may be interested in reforming public education at the local level and even sent a copy to then President George H.W. Bush (Budde, 1996; Kolderie, 2005).

In July of 1988, Budde’s wife discovered a New York Times article where Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, suggested that “local school boards and unions jointly develop a procedure that would enable teams of teachers and others to submit and implement proposals to set up their own autonomous public schools within their school buildings” (Shanker, 1988, p.7). Albert Shanker spoke of a system that allowed schools “to be created by groups of teachers, or parents with teachers, who wanted to develop a new curriculum or teaching strategies to improve both instruction and student learning” (American Federation of Teachers, 2008, p.1). Budde admits that he initially had mixed feelings about Shanker changing his original idea of chartering programs to chartering entire schools but eventually embraced new models that emerged from his initial interpretation (even the ones that were later developed in the early 1990’s) (Budde, 1996). Members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) on the other hand believe Shanker’s vision of charter schools has been compromised over the years, stating that his original

intent to “free teachers and administrators from bureaucratic red tape and encourage innovation...has been transformed into a rhetoric of reform by choice and competition” (AFT, 2008, p.1). Therefore, the AFT no longer supports charter schools and what they claim to provide as a means for educational reform.

Charters schools have become the most popular and widely accepted form of school choice in the USA for many reasons (Lubienski, 2001). Some argue that unlike vouchers, charter schools allow for a market based model to be established in public education (by functioning autonomously and providing more options and competition for standard public schools) without privatizing the system. Therefore, positioning charters as a non-privatized model for school choice has allowed for the charter school movement to gain the support of those who may have originally been skeptical of school choice under the voucher initiative. Some insist that redefining education by supporting charter schools will keep voucher programs from threatening to privatize and dismantle the public school system (Lubienski, 2001). However, this argument manipulates and falsely represents the neoliberal agenda of charter schools and the school choice movement. One point is certain, these schools are being constructed by those without backgrounds in education, are literally taking over public education buildings, and operated to a major extent by corporations like Edison and Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) (Saltman, 2005; Saltman, 2007; Sizer & Wood, 2008)

Childhood Education Policy: Post-Katrina New Orleans and Disaster Capitalism

Following Hurricane Katrina, the Bush administration created national recovery funding for New Orleans schools that privileged the establishment of charter schools, resulting in the most concentrated number of charter schools in a public school system in the United States. There is a mixed response from communities in New Orleans about the reestablishment of public education with charter

schools. Those with neoliberal agendas believe that charter schools will ultimately save public education, while critics have spoken out about the harms of creating a market-based system. Many local communities in New Orleans, however, whether advocates or adversaries, do not appear to be aware of the issues that other public school systems in the United States have had when discourses of competition and privatization emerge.

Examples of the situations produced by policy changes after Katrina include (1) the ability to quickly and exuberantly refurbish particular schools serving the wealthy like Lusher charter school in Uptown New Orleans, (2) access interpretations that inhibit free, and continued right of entry to a public school because of “hidden” admissions requirements (e.g. parent participation standards that influence the child’s continued acceptance as a student in the school), (3) a decentralized system that results in some children and their parents searching for a school (e.g. 20+ different entities operating 30 schools at one point in time), and (4) the creation of a business model for education that encourages cuts in school expenditures, adversely impacting teachers, students, and communities (for example by eliminating enrichment programs and services for children with special needs and failing to provide adequate facilities/instructional materials for students and teachers). The number of charter schools is expected to rise as enterprising, for-profit and non-profit organizations seek investment opportunities, including FirstLine Schools, Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), New Beginnings School Foundation- Capital One- University of New Orleans Charter Network, and the Einstein Group, Inc.

The specialized circumstances found in a city that has experienced disaster as catastrophically as New Orleans has allowed for charter schools, and various forms of privatization, to emerge in an unprecedented manner. When a dire situation literally results in no schools for young children to attend, everyone becomes desperate for any kind of possibility, producing an environment that influences equity and access to public education. In order to address these concerns and understand the differing perspectives of the seemingly privatized shift in public education in New Orleans post-Katrina, much consideration must be given to the development of research questions and practices along with further, extensive immersion in the culture of the city.

Naomi Klein (2007) describes disaster capitalism as “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities” (p.6). This entrepreneurial trend has played a key role in targeting and exploiting all children, people of color, women, the poor, and the colonized in larger society and more recently in New Orleans post Katrina. Because modernist assumptions have constructed children and the traditionally marginalized as intellectually and physically less advanced (Burman, 2001; Rose, 1990; Cannella, 1997; Lichtman, 1987; Voneche, 1987), dominant ideologies, fueled by disaster capitalism, have allowed leaders at the local, state, and national levels to rebuild public education in New Orleans in a way that appears to create profit for corporations and may leave younger human beings who rely heavily upon open-access to a free and appropriate education with the burden of suffering from the consequences of the inequalities that capitalism produces.

The original concept of a charter developed by Ray Budde in the 1970’s was an initiative created to give teachers instructional autonomy within already established public schools and had no agenda for allowing non-profit and/or for-profit management companies to charter and operate entire schools (Kolderie, 2005; Budde, 1996). Now part of the larger, neoliberal school choice movement that initially focused on vouchers as a way to reform and eventually privatize the public school system by using a market-based approach to education, charter schools are another way in which school choice is attempting to corporatize public education (Apple, 2001). Although similar in agenda to voucher initiatives, the charter school movement has been able to mask its privatization efforts, and therefore has gained more support politically and from local communities who are not aware of the dangers that charter schools present for a public school system that attempts to educate children justly and equitably.

Global Cautions Regarding Neoliberal Childhood Public Policy

Neoliberalism is embedded in childhood policies around the world, with capitalism and discourses of competition increasingly penetrating childcare services, educational curriculum, and public school systems. Policy makers must discontinue the crafting of legislation that positions children and families as commodities, and a critical disposition must be generated to uncover the injustices produced by a neoliberal, capitalist ideology in order to serve *all* children equitably.

Some have proposed that capitalism does not function as “a single and coherent “system”” (Duggan, 2003, p.x) and that diverse forms of economic functioning exist, including those that are non-capitalist (Bergeron, 2006). By “repoliticizing”(Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.xxviii) economic politics and examining spaces where others have resisted capitalism, boundaries established by neoliberal, patriarchal discourse may be broken and allow for alternative ways of functioning (outside of capitalism) to become more prevalent (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.xxiii). Living at a time in which neoliberal capitalism is literally causing economic crashes and increased poverty around the globe, we must be especially attentive to the embeddedness of neoliberal agendas within our conceptualizations and practices of early childhood public policy. Otherwise, we may soon be asking why our supports for an equitable common good have become competition for services, further labeling of individuals (children and teachers), the practice of literally rejecting young children from public education, and increased inequities between young children who are privileged and those who are not. Our policy conceptualizations and practices must not become themselves the creators of lived disaster for young children.

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