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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Panel Chair Address

Ongoing Work of Scholars of the Critical Childhood Collaborative

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Abstract

This panel focuses on the ongoing work of Scholars of the Critical Childhood Collaborative. Recent “natural” disasters like Hurricanes Katrina and Ike have called attention to societal conditions that place particular groups of people in vulnerable circumstances even before tragic events occur. For those with the least power and resources, disastrous events reenact further conditions of risk and displacement. Children are one of these vulnerable groups as they are physically (e.g. loss of homes, neighborhoods), socially/emotionally (e.g. through hardships on families that loose work, child care, transportation, and social services), and educationally displaced. “Man Made” disasters have a deleterious effect on children in educational environments. Yet, because children are not heard and are denied voice, these effects rarely receive attention. This panel seeks to listen to children and to work toward the creation of a critical public policy infrastructure that addresses equity, social justice, and the avoidance of vulnerabilities for all children.

Critical Childhoods* Academic Collaborative Framework

***Note: Childhood is used in this document in the broadest since that includes younger human beings from birth to approximately 18 years, but also challenges the dichotomy created in dominant uses of child/adult to increase power for those identified as adults and further disempowered those who are younger. Based on the following meeting: Symposium, Prairie View A&M University, December 8, 2008**

Childhoods, Education, and Social Justice:

Critical Studies of Cycles of Disaster

Values Focus:

- Stand for the civil right in childhood to an equitable and socially just education that avoids and counters (when necessary) displacement (e.g. physical, social/emotional, intellectual/cognitive, and/or educational);
- Acknowledge the circular nature of conditions that perpetuate risk and reinscriptions of disaster on particular populations of children (e.g. conditions like

institutional racism or disaster capitalism); and

- Recognize that younger human beings are the community members, participants, and citizens (even democratic co-owners) of their educational environments;
- Acknowledge that critical perspectives are necessary for the attainment, and maintenance, of educational civil rights (avoiding the actual violation or inhibition of liberties, in the name of rights).

Populations of Concern:

- All children, but especially those who are the most vulnerable, and/or have been made invisible, because of the high risk circumstances in which they have been forced to survive by society;
- Families that are placed in weakened positions by societal practices and environmental events; and
- Public schools, and public school educators (e.g. teachers, counselors, administrators) that are available in a democracy to all children and that function in ways that are

socially just, equitable, safe, and supportive of democratic learning;

- Public service providers/professionals whose work impacts the lives of those who are young.

Public Policy Research/Dissemination Focus:

- Recognition of, and support for, government (e.g. Federal, State) responsibilities to citizens in a democratic society that would support the common good;
- Creation of a critical public disposition that would monitor when power is constituted in opposition to the common good and, further make visible groups of younger human beings who are being silenced and ignored;
- Rethink dominant, privileged ways of understanding/interpreting/labeling “others” that have disenfranchised and fostered discrimination and oppression; and
- Continued critical examination and reconceptualization of policies, organizations, and practices that inhibit democratic common good (e.g. nonprofit control over public agendas, industries created “on the backs” of disaster victims, legislated policies that benefit capitalism and inhibit childhood services).

Example Necessary and Facilitative Actions:

Foundational: Creation of a critical infrastructure that supports determination of immediate childhood needs and a long term research/action agenda that avoids constructions and reinscriptions of disaster conditions

Specific Example Facilitative Actions: Watch dog activities; quick response and long term research (projects specific to the collaborative and sponsored projects); action research; strategic plan for systematic communication with the public; political actions that facilitate construction of a critical public policy infrastructure regarding childhood, societal support, and education

Organizational Structure: (similar to the Union of Concerned Scientists)

- (1) Academic immediate response and long term critical and action research,

- (2) Critical “watch dog” and communicator with public regarding childhood conditions following disaster and the misuses of capitalism,
- (3) Creation of a critical public policy infrastructure that addresses equity, social justice, and the avoidance of vulnerabilities for all children

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Example Research

Childhood and the "Corporate" (Colonialist and Capitalist)

Reform of Public Education

Gaile S. Cannella and Michelle S. Perez

National Project: Research Issues

- (1) Ways in which children are represented/constructed in public education reform discourses;
- (2) Curriculum practices and daily experiences in educational environments (impacted by these discourses);
- (3) Social justice and equity as influenced by these reforms (e.g. access, distribution of finances and resources); and
- (4) Impacts on teachers, families, local neighborhoods and communities.

Historical Context: The following is taken from the paper "Critical Qualitative Research and the Unmasking of Disaster Capitalism" by M.S. Perez and G.S. Cannella presented at the AERA conference, San Diego, CA, April, 2009.

Childhood Context and Disaster Capitalism

Social constructivist theories have recently been more accepted in disaster inquiry and have led to the study of natural disasters as socially constructed phenomena. Further, the construction of disaster is highly influenced by policy that determines what is considered to be a disaster. 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. Some researchers have gone further, arguing that even within the social sciences, disasters have been decontextualized from the social, claiming that “disasters are episodic, foreseeable manifestations of the broader forces that shape society” (Tierney, 2007, p.509). Decolonialist perspectives 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.

Disaster capitalism is the notion that catastrophic events (such as 911 that resulted in the “war on terror” in Iraq, and hurricane Katrina) 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 on local communities (Klein, 2007). By producing and exploiting disasters, businesses have created a means to profit with no-bid reconstruction projects, resort development, and in New Orleans, some argue the privatization of public schooling (Saltman, 2007). 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). Naomi Klein’s (2007) investigations correspond citing that “the idea of exploiting crisis and disaster has been the modus operandi of Milton Friedman’s movement from the very beginning- this fundamentalist form of capitalism has always needed disasters to advance” (p.9).

About the Authors

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