THE CONTEMPORARY POLICY CONTEXT OF CHILD AND YOUTH CARE: GLOBALIZATION, NEO-LIBERALISM, AND THE ATTACK ON THE WELFARE STATE

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ABSTRACT: The author argues for the importance of policy studies in Child and Youth Care (CYC), and conducts a comparison of two positions on macro-level policy relating to globalization. This article suggests that, although policy studies get little attention in CYC literature or education, policy is actually central in our work. Caring occupations like CYC arose in a specific historical social policy context, the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS). The KWS is now under attack by proponents of neo-liberal styles of globalization, and the social policy context for CYC as an occupation may be disappearing.

Key words: Child and Youth Care, policy, neo-liberalism, globalization, anti-imperialism, Keynesian Welfare State (KWS)

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines two opposing theoretical positions on globalization and social policy. The debate described here has important social policy implications for Child and Youth Care (CYC). In fact, the continued existence of caring occupations such as CYC may ultimately depend upon our response to claims about globalization (Bradford, 2000; Graham, Swift, & Delaney, 2003; Mishra, 1999). In this paper I do not argue for either of the positions that I describe, although my sympathies are certainly with the defenders of socialized care. Rather, I simply hope to illustrate that we have important choices to make regarding what we believe about globalization, social policy, and the fate of the welfare state. I also hope to incite more interest in policy research and analysis in the CYC world because I believe that, much to our detriment, we have neglected policy studies in CYC.

Policy Matters
    In the discussion that follows, policy is considered to be, "a decision chosen to direct future actions of groups of people" (Reitsma-Street & Burnett, 2002, p. 1). As Graham, Swift, and Delaney (2003, p. 3) put it, policy-making involves, "the dilemmas of choice created when one objective must be selected over others". Policy is not removed from the concerns of practitioners and academics in CYC. Rather, we all constantly make and

enact policies. For instance, as anyone who has engaged in the process
knows, making decisions about how things will work on an on-going
basis in a residential program is not a simple matter of "making the rules".
Like all policy processes, it involves making complex decisions about
creating, administering, and evaluating policies. It means addressing
multiple stakeholder interests, conflict over means and outcomes, difficult
value choices, decisions about resource allocation, and so on. Likewise, to
give an example from a different location, when boards and administrators
of non-governmental organizations develop programs, submit requests
for funding, and administer their agencies, they are not doing so in a neutral
environment but in a social policy context. They have to make policies
about how to respond based on their interpretations of that context. A
third example, common in the experience of CYC practitioners, occurs
when different systems that serve people interact, and we need to have
policies or agreements about how case work will be coordinated and
planned. If we wanted to stretch the point just a bit, we could even think
about the resulting case plan as a form of policy, since it is a set of
decisions about how things will happen in the future.

A further parallel between case planning, or practice in general, and
policy is that they work better when systematic analysis and critical
reflection are integral in their creation, application, and evaluation. The
more we know about how these processes work, the better we are able to
do them consistently well. This paper addresses macro-level policy relat-
ing to globalization, but policy at this level contributes to the context in
which educators and practitioners make policy choices at more local levels.
The more we know about macro-level policy issues, the more informed
we will be about policy choices at local levels. If you think in ecological
terms, social policy set by the provincial and federal governments has
quite a direct impact on the people we work with. An obvious example of
this is in policy that influences funding allocations for social services and
the ideological directions those systems take. In short, policy isn't an
abstract concern or something that only happens far away, but rather is
always close at hand. If we examine the situation, we can see that every-
thing we do in practice in CYC happens in the context of policy-making.

Sometimes, in fact, the context of practice is so saturated with policy
and so close--or so far away--that we may not notice how influential it is
on the ways we practice. We may not see its imprint on, or traces in, the
programs we construct, or on the things that we advocate, or on behalf of
those we work with. The particular policy-contextual factor I address in
this paper, globalization, seems as far removed from the immediate
context of practice as possible. And yet, as I hope to show here, claims
about globalization in a social policy context have a direct influence on
the important caring work that we, as CYC practitioners, researchers, and
educators, carry out.

Globalization and the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS)

Globalization is usually discussed in relation to the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of our contemporary socio-historical condition (Mishra, 1999; Rajaee, 2000). Many theorists suggest that our global social relations have undergone a qualitative change over the past few decades and that we now live in a fundamentally globalized world (Mishra, 1999; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001; Rajaee, 2000). The main reasons usually given for this are enhanced global transportation, communication, and production technologies, which have enabled the unprecedented global flow of culture, people, capital, and products (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001; Schaeffer, 2003; Teeple, 2000).

What does any of this have to do with social policy that bears on CYC? This can be explained by looking at how the role of the nation state in industrialized and information-driven societies is changing. Specifically, it helps to understand the concept of the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS). Simply put, the KWS is a set of social policy approaches characterized by the belief that governments ought to fund things like social services, education, and health care. The KWS is the social policy context in which caring occupations like child and youth care have flourished in the past several decades. However, KWS forms of governance and social policy are currently facing some historic setbacks, and this not only influences the policy context of CYC-- it ultimately threatens the continued viability of socialized care, including occupations such as CYC.

A brief history of the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS) will help us understand why there is currently a political attack on state-enabled caring work like CYC, and why this attack is often presented as the only possible choice that governments have (Bradford, 2000; Burke, Mooers, & Shields, 2000). Following this is a brief comparison of some key claims in two streams of discourse on globalization, which helps to unpack some of the ideological issues behind the assault on the KWS. This comparison illustrates that there are, in fact, choices to be made about how to view and respond to the reality and meaning of globalization.

In the decades following World War II, the role of the state in the northern industrialized nations changed significantly. Social welfare functions, in which the role of the state had formerly been marginal or non-existent, became a priority for governments, and the KWS came into being (Bradford, 2000; Burke, et al., 2000; Graham, et al., 2003; Russell, 2000). In the newly formed KWS, governments assumed a major role in providing socialized protection for unemployed workers, the poor, the elderly, children, vulnerable families, and so on. Many Canadian social programs and systems originated, or were greatly expanded, in the years from 1945 to the mid-1970's (Graham, et al., 2003; Russell, 2002). There was an accompanying growth of caring occupations. The website for the 2003 "Promise Into Practice Conference", for instance, states that "following the Second World War, a new professional approach emerged focused on the care and development of children and youth" (ICYCC Web Site, 2003).

The origin of the KWS coincides with the growth of CYC as a modern occupation, and their fates are inextricably linked.

The KWS was constructed during decades of economic growth and prosperity (Burke, et al., 2000). This state form was created in part because this prosperity and the social peace required to sustain it could be maintained through the provision of some social policy buffers to the vicissitudes of the market (Graham, et al., 2003). During the economic depression of the 1930s and onward into the later decades of the 20th century, organized labor and other social movements fought hard to pressure governments to create social programs in Canada. In some respects, the social programs of the post-war KWS can be viewed as providing state-mediated peace in the historically contentious relationship between labor and social movements on the one hand, and capital on the other (Burke, et al., 2000; Graham, et al., 2003).

By the middle of the 1970s the post-war economic boom declined, and the KWS came under sustained attack from right-wing ideologues and corporate interests. They claimed, and continue to claim that in the new economic reality, the social benefits extended to workers and citizens are barriers to adequate profit (George, 2001; Inwood, 2000; Starr, 2000). In the 1980s, claims about the advance of globalization began to be used by neo-liberals to bolster arguments against the KWS (Bradford, 2000; George, 2001).

The unprecedented global mobility of capital created by new information and transportation technologies now enables corporations to shift manufacturing to locales where they do not face the costs of KWS benefits (Roth, 2002). Corporations and investors can now demand that governments roll back the KWS benefits that supposedly make business unprofitable through high taxes and labor costs, or they will move capital and industry to nations where they do not have to carry the burden of such checks on their profits (Starr, 2000). In response, governments in countries such as Canada have dramatically reduced or eliminated many state-provided benefits that have been taken for granted for several decades (Graham, et al., 2003). Beyond this, the neo-liberal program of privatization, tax cuts, eliminating social programs, obsessing about economic efficiency, and lowering labor standards has become the apparent common sense social policy.

Competing Interpretations of Globalization:
Neo-Liberalism and Anti-Imperialism

Is this common sense and widespread view the only option? In fact, there are various streams of theoretical discourse that make claims about what the reality behind globalization is. Here, for simplicity of comparison, I consider two contrasting theses: the neo-liberal globalizers versus those who see globalization as imperialism.

The proponents of neo-liberal globalization say that it is an inevitable historical force (Starr, 2000). The loss of social programs, they suggest, is

simply the reality of the weakened state in a world with globalized communication, trade, transportation, and manufacturing. We need, they argue, to face the fact that in a globalized world we can no longer afford to provide a social safety net of social programs. These programs, according to the globalizers, result in higher taxes and a less flexible labor force, and are therefore a disincentive to investment. For the neo-liberal globalizers, anything worth being provided can be taken care of by the free market, hence, for instance, the constant calls that we now hear in Canada for a privatized health care system. Moreover, in this view, the KWS isn't worth mourning, since it was a negative policy development in the first place, leading to dependence on social programs and an unsustainable sense of entitlement on the part of citizens.

In stark opposition to the neo-liberal globalizers, there is a stream of discourse that views the term *globalization* as being a misleading disguise for imperialism. Imperialism can be defined as "the process whereby the dominant politico-economic interests of one nation expropriate for their own enrichment the land, labor, raw materials, and markets of another people" (Parenti, 1995, p.1). In this view, what neo-liberals and others call globalization is really just another name for the exploitive economic and military policies of the more historically powerful northern nations, particularly the US. Free trade agreements, for example, are presented by neo-liberals as being of general benefit. But anti-imperialists argue that these agreements actually enable the wealthiest members of the imperial nations to become wealthier while the rest of us grow poorer (Fredrichs & Fredrichs, 2002; George, 2001; Lewis, 2002; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001; Polet, 2001). Moreover, those of us who live in the imperial states also lose our KWS benefits at a rapid pace as a consequence of the policies enforced through free trade pacts.

Anti-imperialists argue, in essence, that neo-liberal globalization is not a set of policy responses to an inevitable historical reality but, rather, is a historical reality constructed through social policy choices. While the policy discourse of the neo-liberals claims that political policy choices are being made in response to the more primary economic realities, the globalization-as-imperialism thesis holds that intentional policy choices have, in fact, created the economic reality to serve certain interests. The dismantling of welfare state services and programs may not be inevitable but, rather, may be just another way to facilitate the transfer of wealth from the poor and less powerful to the rich and more powerful. In this view, then, the widespread belief in the inevitability of globalization and the appearance of neo-liberal policy as common sense is a serious mistake, not least of all because it makes considering alternatives seem futile (Bradford, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Currently in Canada, KWS programs are disappearing and being threatened daily. For CYC practitioners and educators, it is important to recognize that the neo-liberal view on social policy, while it is usually

presented as the only option, is actually but one way to view the social reality of the contemporary situation. In order to be able to form effective policy responses to the neo-liberal assault on socialized care, we need to actively seek out and understand alternative views. Given the close connection between KWS programs and CYC, the very future of this type of caring work may depend on us doing so.

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