

# Neoliberalism in the early childhood education classroom: From deficit to empowerment <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

Access online [PDF] <sup>[3]</sup>

Excerpted from introduction

Introduction: Education and Reform in the Neoliberal Era

Across the United States and increasingly across the world, local, state, and federal governments are implementing education reforms through policy initiatives intended to improve “quality” in education by standardizing teaching and learning practices (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Pérez and Cahill, 2016; Sleeter, 2005; Swadener, 1995). This standardization paradigm endangers education by cloaking “ideological selections of knowledge” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 54) that in fact, once uncloaked, expose a larger neoliberal education agenda, an agenda that is based on capitalizing the market value of human life and of the people’s potential for economic production. As Kincheloe (2010) posits, “market imperatives, not ethical or humane considerations drive social, political, economic, and educational policy in neoliberalism” (p.24). Early childhood education is no exception. As Harvey (2005) explains:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. (p. 3).

While neoliberal education policies are centered on the successful preparation of the future workforce and future consumers (Brown, Lan, and Jeong, 2015), and enforced through systems of accountability and standardization such as Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) (Pérez and Cahill, 2016), we may also find *Nepantlas* (Anzaldúa, 2000; 2012) for transformative spaces where education can flourish and thrive. In such *Nepantlas* (Anzaldúa, 2000), which are the liminal spaces where creativity and the construction of the self among and with the others reside, we may engage with and enact a Womanist (Maparyan, 2012) conception of “good knowledge...knowledge that helps people and other living beings, promoting both balance and well-being within Creation” (p. 37).

In a neoliberal education paradigm, we teach and learn in the throes of imperialism born from the legacy of European conquests, and we bask in the aftermath of its colonizing and minoritizing ideologies as carried through neoliberal policies in our classrooms. As I gather strength to summon the voices of those who have and continue to pave the way to resist the exploitation of the human spirit of the neoliberal education agenda, I invoke Maparyan’s words and ask the reader to align with me the concept of a “ladder of learning” (Maparyan, 2012, p. 38), the symbolic representation of the transformation which starts with the acquisition of information, then expands and ascends until one reaches wisdom and enlightenment. As Maparyan posits, “education is literally, the process of drawing forth that which already exists internally and immanently, and it is ideally a process of bringing external and internal dimensions of knowledge into full and complete alignment” (2012, p. 38). Thus, in enacting a Womanist education agenda, we resist the disempowerment engendered by the “affective atmosphere of surveillance” (Burman, 2016, p. 18) in which we practice and learn within accountability and standardization praxes.

**Region:** United States <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** neoliberalism <sup>[5]</sup>

capitalism <sup>[6]</sup>

classroom-deficit

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/21/10/neoliberalism-early-childhood-education-classroom-deficit> [2] <https://journals.sfu.ca/iccps/index.php/childhoods/article/view/109> [3] <https://journals.sfu.ca/iccps/index.php/childhoods/article/view/109/pdf> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9131> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/capitalism>