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. In this article the authors critically analyze the alleged "progressive" evolution from child protection (as a coercive practice) towards child welfare (as a preventative and empowering alternative). Using Michel Foucault's frameworks the authors deconstruct the discourse on welfare and its vocabulary on 'prevention,' 'children's rights,' 'active citizenship,' and 'the autonomous individual.' The reader is referred to the complete book for additional critical, feminist, post-structural, reconceptualist analyses on social justice issues within early childhood studies.

Governing Families in the Social Investment State

Michel Vandenbroeck, Rudi Roose and Maria De Bie

Ghent University, Belgium

Introduction

The evolution of the welfare state, and of social work as an element within this welfare state, is often defined as a move forward towards more social justice and a more emancipatory approach of social problems. With regard to the approach of children and families, it is stated that in many European countries the child protection discourse has developed towards a child welfare discourse (Spratt, 2001). Child protection is seen as controlling and repressive, while child welfare refers to a more supportive and participative approach. Child welfare indicates a view of the relationship between social workers and families as partnerships. This child welfare approach is – amongst other – translated into a more preventative and empowering approach (Stepney, 2006) for children and parents. The rights of the child are an important framework in this development (Roose & De Bie, 2007).

The idea of progression marks a dichotomy between child protection as coercive practices and child welfare as its liberating alternative. This dichotomy must be critically analyzed. Payne (2005) states that the development of the welfare state and of social work is one of change and continuity. Margolin (1997) even refers to the changing discourse as an instrument for continuity: social work states to do something else, so that it can keep doing the same! The dichotomy between child protection and child

welfare is predominantly presented as an opposition between oppression and empowerment, control and emancipation and therefore issues of power relations and governmentality are at the core of this analysis, if we consider pedagogy as a specific site which relates political rationalities to the capabilities of the individual (Popkewitz, 1996). As Foucault (1975) showed in his genealogical study of the prison, the disappearance of sovereign power relations did not necessarily create liberty, but rather a new form of governmentality, labeled as disciplining power relations. The French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) devoted much of his professional life to study subtle power relations and how individuals are governed both by the state and by themselves. We will therefore use his frameworks to critically look at this dichotomy and to analyze the discourse on welfare and its vocabulary on 'prevention', 'children's rights', 'active citizenship' or 'the autonomous individual'. It simply cannot be assumed that the transition from protection to welfare may be framed as a liberating practice, bearing in mind this Foucauldian adagio (Foucault, 1983: 1205):

> *Je ne cherche pas à dire que tout est mauvais, mais que tout est dangereux – ce qui n'est pas exactement la même chose que ce qui est mauvais. Si tout est dangereux, alors nous avons toujours quelque chose à faire*[i]

From Coercion to Pastoral Power

In Foucault's view, power is not to be analyzed in its essence, but rather as an operation, a relationship. The central question is not what power is or where it is located, but how it operates (Deleuze, 1985). Power is to be considered as the production of specific forms of truth, in which science (and human and social sciences in particular) plays an important role (Foucault, 1975), as well as the production of specific practices in many fields, including education and social work, determining how problems are constituted, how people are classified and what are considered appropriate ways to shape behavior (Moss, Dillon, & Statham, 2000). The aim of such an analysis is not to produce a new truth, to say what needs to be done, or what is good. Such an ambition would not fundamentally differ from the old prophetic function of scientists or intellectuals (Foucault, 1990). Rather, the aim is to deconstruct what is obvious, taken for granted or presented as 'natural', in order to open up for choice, to reinstall a debate about possibilities, to "bring back politics into the nursery" (Moss, 2007), acknowledging that disagreement is a condition for debate and the

possibility of choice and therefore of conflicting opinions is the essence of democracy (Mouffe, 2005).

It is obvious that the coercive practices of child protection have gradually lost their appeal in social work and that the disciplining power relations between the expert who knows what is good for the child and the lay parent have rightly been criticized. However, the idea that friendly social work is better than repressive social work is not new. Typical for early child protection interventions is the idea of friendly visits: a kind word works better than an obvious use of power to convince the parents that they have to change. This idea was also translated in the development of social casework, in the beginning of the nineteenth century. An idea central to child protection is that social work interventions must be organized as much as possible outside of the judicial system, as this system is clearly linked with the idea of power. Hence, care and control must be separated from each other. Prevention is the key word, not only prevention of social problems, but also of judicial interventions. This idea is reinforced with the development of the welfare state and the rise of all kinds of social institutions, which must make it possible to prevent child protection interventions as a whole. While the idea is that judicial interventions must be avoided, the judge becomes central, by stressing the fact that his interference must be avoided whenever possible (Franssen, Cartuyvels & De Coninck, 2003).

We notice in the development of child protection that this notion of prevention of power leads to the idea that there really can exist such a thing as powerless social work: the further away we are from judicial power, the more empowering we would be. This idea disregards the notion of pastoral power, as coined by Foucault. Although the idea of friendliness existed, there was still a clear cut divide between the expert social worker and the client. The expert in child welfare today resembles more a caring and loving companion, a *pastor*, in the early Christian metaphoric sense of the kind shepherd. As Foucault (1990) explained in the "Tanner Lectures on Human Values" in 1979, if the state is the political form of centralizing power, let us call pastorship the individualizing power. Shepherdly kindness is close to 'devotedness'. Everything the shepherd does is geared to the good of his flock. That is his constant concern. When they sleep, he keeps watch (Foucault, 1990). Pastoral power is based on the individual attention for each member of the flock. She exercises this power not through coercion,

but through individual and unlimited kindness. The pastor (i.e. the social worker) is accountable for each sheep, as is obvious in the increasing number of cases where social workers are brought to justice in cases that they have for instance failed to detect child maltreatment. The 'sins' of the sheep are considered to be also the pastors' sins. This concept of pastoral power requires a specific knowledge by the shepherd of the soul of each member of the flock. To produce this knowledge, specific technologies are developed, based on the "self examination and the guidance of conscience", a combination of obedience, knowledge of the self and confession, to ensure redemption and salvation (Foucault, 1993). Today, parents need to scrutinize themselves, to explain themselves, to reveal what one is, in parent support groups, exchange programs and other social support groups in which the "expert" refuses to say what is "good" but facilitates the self-examination and the (public) confession. There are multiple examples of this to be found both in Europe and the U.S. such as the flourishing parent sessions, based on the approach of Gordon's "Listening to children", or parent advice books that are not written any more by the expert who knows (such as Benjamin Spock) but by the caring parent (such as Bill Cosby). The disciplining power relation, moreover, relies on the fact that the "punishment" for the sin (e.g. a too authoritarian approach of children, rather than "positive parenting") does not follow upon the sin, but will become obvious only in later life (e.g. in adolescence). The literature on what constitutes "good parenting" (e.g. the categorization of parents in laissez-faire; authoritarian and authoritative) connects parenting styles with developmental outcomes many years later, such as academic achievement or delinquency (e.g. Dwairy & Menshar, 2006; Mandara, 2006; Villar, Luengo, Gomez-Fraguela, & Romero, 2006). This has two major disciplining effects, the first being that one is deprived from his senses in judging what is good, since the effects of parenting are only to be measured many years later. The second, related to this is a specific and mutual dependency on the expert pastor to advice us on what is good and to assist us in scrutinizing ourselves and in reflecting on our parenting. Foucault labels this as the hermeneutics of the self, the construction of an autonomous self, that is able to rationally analyze what is good, to make the right "choices" for herself and her children, to invest in later life (Foucault, 2001).

This development, that became obvious since the 1980's, is reinforced by important developments in the conception of the welfare state, influenced both by the economic crisis of the 1980's and the collapse of the Soviet empire, with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 as emblematic figure,

resulting in the hegemony of neoliberal market economies. The welfare system after the second world war evolved into a social investment state (Giddens, 1998), a welfare state that does not compensate for failure, but invests in future success, since the traditional welfare state could no longer efficiently tackle the new social questions such as re-emerging poverty and unemployment. Rosanvallon (1995) argued that the end of the 20th century was marked by a triple crisis. The first crisis is a financial crisis: states were faced with increasing spending in social security issues such as unemployment benefits, while facing reduced income. The second is a bureaucratic crisis: states were increasingly perceived as being ineffective and inefficient by the general population as well as by policy makers and as a consequence, a neoliberal discourse on smaller states emerged. Finally, a philosophical crisis coincided, raising questions about the very concept of social welfare and social security. As a means of dealing with these new social fractures, Rosanvallon pleaded for more individual attention by the state, one that valued social inclusion. However, especially in English language countries, social inclusion has increasingly been defined in terms of employability and markets. This dominant construction of the welfare state in capitalist hegemony entails a growing focus on risk-management, individual responsibility and a discourse of "no rights without duties" in which allowances are no longer taken for granted entitlements. These manifestations have been described as "the enabling state" (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1989); the "employment first welfare state" (Finn, 2003) or the "contractual state" (Crawford, 2003). They have affected the relationships between parents and the state since the focus shifts again towards an radicalization of parental responsibility, where parents are seen as responsible for the future success of their children (Featherstone, 2006; Parton, 2006). This legitimated the renewal of coercive practices. It concerns new coercive practices – such as parental orders – which may relate to a "pastoral" nature, yet at the same time, we also witness the re-emergence of "older" forms of disciplining power technologies, such as the (threat of) prison. Wacquant (2002) has argued how in the case of the US and France, a transition occurred from investing in the welfare system to investing in the penal system, showing for instance how budget cuts in parent allowance systems have been contingent with investments in the penal system. In continental Europe this development has a less brutal face than in the US, as we see a form of social panopticism: social service bureaucracies are called on to take an active part in the pacification of social problems, "since they possess the informational and human means to

exercise a close surveillance of 'problem populations'" (Wacquant, 2001: 407). Bradt and Bouverne-De Bie (2007) have documented how the two domains of welfare and justice are not separate, but that a penalisation occurs *inside* the welfare system in the case of the UK and Belgium, and especially, how these changes are also enacted by social workers and educators and in particular by their silence in the debates on these issues. This silence is, according to their study, not a result of being silenced, but rather a self chosen isolation, in order not to be involved in the penal system.

The transition to the welfare system of the "Third Way", calls for active individuals, taking the responsibility of their own life, acting as the entrepreneurs of their life history and investing in the future success of their children. The increasing use of a language of "choice" implies equality of access to the market and denies actual structural positions of disadvantage (Burman, 1994).

Technologies

Let us now look at some specific examples of changing practices that may be considered as technologies of these forms of governing families and children in the social investment states.

In the case of France, the riots in the suburbs in the autumn of 2005 have, in dominant discourse, been framed as "juvenile delinquency" rather than as protests against social inequalities. Consequently, they are considered to be an individual and educational (or cultural) issue, rather than a political and social problem of racism and inequity (Schneider, 2007), that seemed almost inevitable, considering the living conditions in these suburbs that Bourdieu and colleagues (1993) recorded more than a decade earlier. The riots drew new attention to a report by the Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (2005), that analysed the causes of juvenile delinquency through a developmental lens, and adopted a stepping stone approach, which identified the risk factors for juvenile delinquency in early childhood. This report formed the core of a political discussion in the French Senate that led to a report proposing several legislative initiatives to prevent the risk of juvenile delinquency (Bénisti, 2005). Notwithstanding broad public protests (i.e. a petition with 200.000 signatures of professionals in early childhood), several of these proposals have been legislated, including changes in the legal protection of the professional secrecy of

social workers, the possibility of forcing parents of young children “at risk” to accept the custody of an educator and the forced placement of children in internship, in cases where their parents refuse the aid offered to them in parent support programmes (Collectif, 2006; Neyrand, 2006).

The English Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBO) and Parental Orders likewise frame “deviant” behaviour that is not strictly “illegal” (such as nuisance) and argue for a coercive use of parent support programmes. In Belgium, the new youth protection law inscribed the possibility to force parents - by the threat of a fine or prison – who are seen as indifferent towards the delinquent behaviour of their children to attend a parental support program. The experience was that these parents could not be found, unless we interpreted indifference in an extremely broad way (for instance not being able to find help on your own). In the case of Flanders (Belgium), poor PISA results (providing comparative data on schooling outcomes) show that there is a substantial educational gap at age 14-16 and that school results are significantly linked with the socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds of the pupils. This problem of inequality is, again, framed as an educational problem and – at least in part – a matter of parental responsibility, since the Minister of Education invests in home visits to families from ethnic minorities to convince them to send their children to kindergarten earlier (Vandenbroucke, 2006). In addition, discussions to lower compulsory school age have begun, even when – in the case of Flanders – over 98% of three year olds attend kindergarten (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006).

Some common threads can be observed in these manifestations. As in the beginning of the twentieth century and the child protection approach, there is again an ongoing focus on parental responsibilities and the “pedagogicalization” of parents (Popkewitz, 2003). This development is also strengthened trough a specific interpretation of the rights of the child as a frame of reference for pedagogical action (Roose & De Bie, 2007; 2008), where the child is viewed as competent and vulnerable, and the parent as to be educated (Moqvist, 2003). Social problems are – in the name of realising the rights of the child – translated into problems of parental behaviour and parents are seen as responsible for the problems of their children. We notice for instance that in the strategies for tackling poverty, parents can be seen as responsible for the poverty of their children (as we notice in the UK, e.g. Hamilton & Roberts, 2000) or they are not held responsible, but – as is the

case in Flanders – the main strategy for tackling poverty is seen in the increase of parents support programs.

There is a significant change in the management of what is constructed as "illegal". Legislation is, according to Foucault (1975) and Deleuze (1985), a matter of managing illegalisms: some are permitted, made possible or invented as a privilege of the dominating classes, some others are tolerated as a compensation for the dominated classes and some are prohibited, isolated and taken as an object of intervention as well as of domination. Finally, there is a focus on the provision of parent support as risk management, to prevent later costs to society, in the context of the social investment state. As we indicated earlier, the concept of prevention has always been, and continues to be, a core aspect of the governing of families. Prevention can be approached in different ways (Stepney, 2006). One approach stresses the need for targeted intervention with high risk clients; another approach is concerned with establishing wider support in the community to tackle problems of poverty and disadvantage.

Currently, prevention is again mainly understood as the prevention of risks provoked by the individual (the self), rather than as societal prevention of exclusion. Today, this discourse of prevention is backed by a scientific regime of truth about risk factors, based on population studies (e.g. Sanders, Markie-Dadds, & Turner, 2003). Yet, much of this empirical research is criticized for its lack of rigour, while its academic appearance and its use of quantitative measurements turn its discourse into supposedly objective and unquestionable truths. As critical scholars argue, cross-sectional research cannot allow interpretations of correlations as causal relations, such as between maternal depression and later adolescent misbehaviour. Fendler (2006) explains that correlational statistics are probability studies with limited generalizability. Notwithstanding the caution to consider when analysing population data, these are often interpreted as if each member of the identified group (e.g. black children) represents the characteristics of the group (e.g. underachieving in education). This ecological fallacy (Connolly, 2006) would mean a false generalization, as if for instance each child of an ethnic minority would accumulate risk factors, or each child accumulating risk factors would develop some form of delinquency. In the French case, correlations between problematic language development and externalizing behaviour in young children, reported in academic literature, are interpreted in the INSERM-report for the government as if speaking a minority language may be a risk factor for juvenile delinquency (INSERM, 2005).

The statistical basis of the prevention programs may show that an accumulation of four or more risk factors does correlate with significant higher prevalence of contacts with justice, or child abuse services, but does not explain how these links occur and more importantly, does not account for the agency of the majority of children and families that, while accumulating risk factors, do not end up in trouble. Research may show for instance that the accumulation of four or more risk factors is associated with a significant increase of child maltreatment (e.g. Brown, Cohen, Johnson, Salzinger, 1998). Yet, even when accumulating four or more risk factors, more than 65% of the children do not encounter any maltreatment. As Burman (1995) states, we simply lack information about normal interaction patterns in unconventional families and problems in normal families, to have a good basis for assessing the relative advantages and disadvantages of different family conditions.

Another concern is that prevention programmes intervene *before* a problem occurs. Therefore they legitimize coercive intrusions in populations that do not (yet) present any problems, and they may confirm existing stereotypes about specific families (e.g. living in poverty, having particular ethnic or cultural roots, single-parent families).

Finally, the regimes of truth in which these programmes are embedded, exclude parents from defining the problems that need to be tackled, the debate about these definitions being reserved to experts. It is far from being obvious that the societal targets of prevention always coincide with the enhancement of the well-being or dignity, as perceived by the families. For instance, framing externalising behaviour of young children as possible future delinquency is considered by parents as quite intrusive and may be a reason for parents for not seeing their demands met (De Mey, Coussée, Vandenbroeck, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2009). This is also Biesta's (2007) concern about the tension between scientific and democratic control, or, as he puts it, the democratic deficit of evidence based education. Prevention programs, such as the Positive Parenting Programs or Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, are based on the assumptions that parents should be "taught" what positive parenting is; that parents do not know how to perform positive parenting, while the expert does; and that parents can "progress" when looking critically at themselves and confessing to the professional. In many cases, however, parents may be very aware that things are not going well, but are caught in difficult circumstances that do not

allow them to act as they would wish, such as poverty or bad housing conditions. This may in part explain why the populations in Triple P studies are predominantly middle or higher Socio-Economic Status (SES) and why, as Thomas and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) conclude, it is not certain that findings can be generalized to low income groups. In short, the focus on prevention entails the risk of individualizing social problems in the social investment state. This may mean that the family is instrumentalized as the place where early socialisation needs to be shaped, without acknowledging children's and parents' voices on these socialization processes.

Discussion

In this final part of the chapter we come back to some common threats in the different examples such as decontextualisation and inclusion/exclusion (or silencing specific families). Decontextualisation means that moral standards are put forward, disregarding the specific contexts in which education takes place. At the end of the 19th century, one of the major concerns regarding education was child mortality. In many European cities up to 20% of the children did not live up to their first birthday. This *social problem* may be analyzed in the context of dramatic living conditions of the working poor: extremely low wages, abominable housing conditions without sanitation and the complete absence of any social legislation (maternity leave, paid sickness leave, etc). However, in official discourse, the child mortality was not analyzed in these terms, but rather as the result of incompetent and negligent mothers. The interventions, set up by the bourgeoisie, framed labor class mothers that needed to be educated and civilized in order to raise their awareness of their maternal duties (Vandenbroeck, 2003). In turn, these individualizing interventions reinforced the dominant idea that these mothers were indeed responsible for the health of their children. Similarly, many of the present-day parent support programs analyze "positive parenting" as a matter of individual competencies, disregarding the contexts in which families live. School failure for instance is dominantly framed as a deficiency of families (not adapting to the school culture), rather than of schools (not adapting to the family cultures and contexts). Parent support programs are designed to tackle this problem with friendly visits that in turn reinforce the dominant construction of the parental responsibility. As a result, many parents, living on the margins of society (e.g. immigrant parents) are convinced that the future of their child (or the lack of future) is in their hands, a very salient and actual form of what Paulo Freire (1970) labeled as *internalized* oppression. The idea that parent support programs –

and educational programs in general – are a modern way to tackle problems of poverty denies the fact that these approaches rather refer to a continuity in history and in social work, where the blatant (and growing) social inequality is disregarded, which makes it even virtually impossible to think of poverty in a different vocabulary than the vocabulary of individual choice. In this sense, education may be viewed as a powerful technique to individualize social problems by decontextualizing them.

Today, this individualization of social problems is embedded in emerging discourses on freedom of choice. The discourse of choice assumes two things that may be critically discussed: that choice exists and that choice is desirable. Many scholars, both in Europe and in the U.S. have documented that in early childhood education for instance, there is no such thing as choice. Children from poor families and from immigrant families are predominantly to be found in early childhood education from poor quality and this cannot be understood as a result of parental choice (e.g. Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004; M Vandenbroeck, De Visscher, Van Nuffel, & Ferla, 2008; Wall & Jose, 2004). As a matter of fact, the language of choice masks effects of social inequality, i.e. the mere fact that some parents have more choice than others. The ideology of choice, however, presupposes that choice exists for all parents and as a consequence, it looks at parental behavior (e.g. the choice for low quality early childhood education) as the result of bad choices (e.g. Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001). Moreover, examples of democratic experimentalism, to use the words of Peter Moss, show that excellent early childhood education can exist without choice. Practices such as in Reggio Emilia, in some children's centers in the U.K. (e.g. Sheffield), or in the French parental crèches, where curricula are developed with the local communities in a critical and collaborative way, show that parents can have a voice that is listened to. Their curricula take into account the social contexts but do not speak the neoliberal language of choice that is omnipresent in neoliberal market ideologies (for a more elaborated documentation on these practices, see Blanc & Bonnabesse, 2008; Moss, 2008).

The emerging discourses on freedom of choice are supported by specific constructions of childhood and parenthood. The current emphasis on the rights of the child arose within a climate of sentimentalisation and a growing focus on the symbolic value of the child (King, 1997; Pupavac, 2001). Beck states that this relates to the development of a risk society in which 'the

child is the source of the last remaining irrevocable unexchangeable primary relationship. Partners come and go. The child stays. Everything that is desired, but not realisable in the relationship is directed to the child' (Beck, 1994, p. 118). This sentimentalisation refers to the 'priceless child' (Zelizer, 1994), the child as Emperor, or the Holy Child. It is the child that is agentic, to be listened to, able to make choices (and willing to do so), the child with rights, among which the right to the best possible parents (those who make the right choices). It is an autonomous child, autonomy, serving as a proxy for the active consumer, self-sufficient, and detached from maternal constraints, the perfect future entrepreneur and – in this sense – the future capital of the nation.

The view of the child as 'priceless' may have negative consequences (Roose & De Bie, 2007). For instance, it might lead to a 'misanthropic view of adulthood' in which 'the very idea of parental authority has been compromised as abusive in itself' (Pupavac, 2001, p. 106). From this view on the child the rights of the child are prioritised. The emphasis on individual autonomy of the child and on the prioritisation of the rights of the child creates a dichotomy between the rights of children and the rights of parents. At the extreme, in the light of this concept educational practices are considered as a type of legal protection of the child in which parents only have rights as long as they act in the child's best interests (Westman, 1999; Howe, 2001).

Constructions of childhood cannot exist without parallel constructions of parenthood. These constructions of childhood frame parents as their mirrors: the entrepreneurial self (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005), capable of *managing* his life, taking the best possible decisions to invest in the future of his child, and willing to do so. It is the parent who is informed, who is aware of the importance of an early "head" start in life, who subscribes to the meritocratic ideology that anyone can achieve anything in life, provided one does his best. Vis-a`-vis the state, the parent becomes a parent who has to be educated, a parent who must learn to act in the child's best interests (Moqvist, 2003). The construction of the autonomous, entrepreneurial self evidently leaves little room for concepts such as interdependency and the ethics of care, just as it makes it difficult to speak a language of solidarity and community learning. It is at its culminating point in the language on leadership that is so present today. Yet, as Freire (1970: 138) already stated: "These courses [leadership training courses] are based on the naïve assumption that one can promote the community by training its leaders – as

if it were the parts that promote the whole and not the whole which, in being promoted, promotes the parts”. Obviously, the entrepreneurial ideology, also constructs its own downside: the parent not negotiating the right choices and therefore responsible for jeopardizing his child’s future in the pursuit of happiness in the global market. It is an individualizing construction that may exclude precisely those who have always been on the margins.

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[i] I do not wish to say that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not the same as what is bad. If everything is dangerous, we will always have work to do (tentative translation by us).

Authors: Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck is senior researcher at the Department of Social Welfare Studies of the Ghent University (Belgium). His main areas of interest are diversity and social inclusion in early childhood education, parent support and family policies.

Rudi Roose is professor at Ghent University, Department of Social Welfare Studies. His main research topics are social work theories, social pedagogy and children's rights.

Maria Bouverne-De Bie is professor at the Department of Social Welfare Studies at Ghent University. Her main research interests center on forensic social work, social pedagogy and welfare rights.