Poststructuralism, Citizenship and Social Policy
ALAN PETERSEN, IAN BARNS, JANICE DUDLEY & PATRICIA HARRIS
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The central question for this book concerns the role that discourses of citizenship might play in resisting neo-liberalism. The significance of post- structuralism in the title stems from the insights which ideas about power/ knowledge and governmentality might offer into the rise of neo-liberalism and the possibilities of a discursive strategy around citizenship.

The book presents four case studies from welfare policy, tertiary education, healthcare and technology loosely held together by their use of poststructural tools of analysis, their concern with the encroachments of neo-liberalism, and their interests in the possibilities for a strategy of citizenship. Patricia Harris uses the idea of governmentality as a framework for tracing changing constructions of welfare through classical, expansive and advanced phases of liberalism. She demonstrates how the political economy of globalization shapes the rationality of advanced liberalism in dealing with welfare needs, dominated by a discourse of reversing welfare dependency. However, there are resistances and she ends with some reflections on discourses of justice, a multiplicity of justices, as a theme around which resistance might organize.

Janice Dudley reviews the directions of higher education policy in Australia and the UK with a focus on the contradictions associated with slogans such as 'lifelong learning' and 'the clever country'; the ways in which they mediate the neo-liberal agenda while offering some space for discourses of resistance.

The third case study, presented by Alan Petersen, explores the impact of new genetic technologies on discourses of prevention. He examines the engagement of the expert rationalities of various programs of prevention through genetic screening with the lay rationalities of worldly judgement. He presents the contrast between these two as an illustration of what might be involved in a restored discourse of citizenship.

Finally, Ian Barns asks some questions about the ways in which we conceive technology and the implications of different constructions of technology for a renewed citizenship movement. His focus is on the conditions for selfhood and citizenship in an increasingly technological environment. He concludes by calling for critical reflexivity in relation to technological development.

Choices about alternative technological trajectories and systems, about what sorts of regulatory regimes are in place to assess, monitor and redirect technologies are thus not only important expressions of a renewed active citizenship: they are also important sites for recovering the underlying political and ontological conditions of human selfhood and hence for the possibility of citizenship as a moral practice.

The book starts with some far-reaching ambitions, to explore the implications of poststructuralism for social policy and citizenship. The final product is more modest but useful, nonetheless. However, the underlying argument of the book is poorly developed and the contribution that each of the case studies might make to enriching that argument is not clear.

It does not appear that the authors undertook the case studies as part of a collaborative project employing a common methodology to explore a clearly articulated and shared problem. On the contrary, it seems that poststructuralism, social policy and citizenship were recognized fairly late in the project as the common themes which might hold the four case studies together. The authors note in passing some of the pitfalls associated with the application of poststructuralism in social policy but they do not engage directly with these problems.

How shall we conceive of unifying slogans such as justice and citizenship after Lyotard's warnings against grand narratives? How shall we signal the personal and local considerations that shape our contributions to debates such as these? How important is respect for difference and listening for different life worlds when we are dealing with the rampant forces of globalizing capital?

It is the spectre of relativism rampant that underpins the most frequent criticism of poststructuralism and other forms of constructivism in policy work. Relativism is seen as under-mining normative standards about beauty, truth and justice. In the face of gross unfairness, such as widening global inequality, the poststructuralist is understood to be denying the existence of universal standards and weakening the authority of the slogans around which we should be organizing. In fact, tensions between relativism and universals emerge in several of the chapters of this collection but the contradiction is not addressed in any depth despite the authors' stated aim of exploring the implications of poststructuralism for social policy.

Despite the spectre of relativism, poststructuralism, as an approach to thinking about society and our own practice, has a useful contribution to make to social policy analysis and critique. Indeed, there is a significant movement within the policy studies literature that has been exploring some of these ideas. It is a weakness of the present collection that Petersen et al. do not cite, for example, the work of Murray Edelman in thinking through the role of language and symbolism in mediating policy making (Edelman 1985) nor the 1993 collection by Fischer and Forester that brings together policy writers with interests in language, truth and power. Emery Roe is another policy analyst who has deliberately sought to apply deconstruction to policy mediation (Roe 1994).

In fact, this book is less about poststructuralism and policy analysis than it is about the strategic potential, for limiting the neo-liberal ascendancy, of a discursive movement built around reclaiming and reframing citizenship. The case studies presented in this collection illustrate what this might mean.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of a discursive strategy centred around citizenship in limiting the encroachments of neo-liberalism is an empirical question, whether such a strategy works. Does it provide a useful organizing framework for disadvantaged people confronting a punitive welfare system; for opponents of privilege and instrumentalism in higher education; and for consumers confronting the hubris of medical technology? Does the new rendering of citizenship point towards new pathways where previously all we could see were brick walls? Will the debate about citizenship create opportunities for working on new solutions to the problems for which neo-liberalism claims to have the answers?

These are questions where a case study approach, perhaps using an action research design, could generate new insights and new directions for political engagement in the social policy field. There is more work to be done.

## References

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