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Rebecca Medrano
The Power of Play: A Theoretical
Study of Play, the Self, and the
Public School

ABSTRACT

The objective of this theoretical study was to examine how the decrease of play in early childhood education is affecting the developmental process of the child. Noted implications for the lack of play in schools included a decrease in creative thinking and imagination in childhood, an increase in ADHD and depression in children, an increase in preschool expulsions, an increase in special education services, and disparities in access to play for children of color and children living in poverty. A theoretical framework was used to examine the intersection between play, the school environment, and the developing child. The analysis utilized Donald W. Winnicott's theory of object relations and Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power to address four central questions regarding this phenomenon: 1) How does the lack of play in school affect the child's sense of self? 2) What environmental factors maintain the decrease of play in early childhood education and how do these factors affect the child? 3) Who is most effected by this phenomenon and why? 4) How can we begin to think of education in a different way in order to value academic learning while remaining sensitive to the child's growing sense of self? Implications for clinical social workers were explored. Finally, this thesis suggests that if we are to create spaces in this world for children to become fully alive, then we must find a way to mitigate our demands for who they should be so that we can allow them to become who they are.

**THE POWER OF PLAY: A THEORETICAL STUDY OF PLAY, THE SELF, AND THE
PUBLIC SCHOOL**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks...

...to my thesis advisor, Narviar Barker, PhD, for her guidance, trust, and support throughout this project.

...to the children with whom work, learn, and play. “If the clock stops, *use your own hands to tell time.*”

This thesis is dedicated to the life of Gloria Medrano. The woman who saw my strength, awoke my wonder, and nourished my soul. I hope to live with the same unapologetic vitality and power that vibrated so deeply throughout your life.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

For several years I worked in the public schools of Oakland, California where I was confronted by the compounded circumstances under which many students are attempting to learn in our country. According to the 2014 Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) Public Education Progress Report, 77% of students in the OUSD – over 36,000 children – meet criteria for being socioeconomically disadvantaged. My relationships with the children and teachers of the OUSD generated a personal inquiry into the conditions required to better support not only a students' relationship to learning, but also their relationship to their growing sense of self. Reflecting on my own experience as a student who grew up in the public schools of the San Francisco Bay Area, I began to make connections.

I was a creative and inventive child who was highly sensitive to the world. I felt most invigorated and invested in school when I was encouraged to explore the world around me, follow my creative intuitions, and express myself authentically. What this explorative learning gave me was a sense of validation between who I was, who I was becoming, and who the world valued me to be. These tasks, though frivolous to most any onlooker, were deeply meaningful processes that were allowing me to foster a love for learning, develop my creative confidence, and strengthen my critical thinking skills. Most importantly, though, I was interacting with the world in a way that I felt most fully alive within myself.

As a result of the 1998 Standardized Testing and Reporting policies, an increased focus on standardized testing prevailed in the classroom. Soon thereafter, my relationship with school shifted and I found myself feeling less inspired and invested in learning. I grew to relate to school as a place where I was to retain and regurgitate information, perform well on tests, and adopt rules that I did not fully understand. School was no longer a place where I was able to locate a sense of aliveness; rather what formed was a growing necessity to comply. I began to reinvest my energies away from school and into interests that were formerly a part of my educational experience, interests like art, story telling, the natural world, and my own self-expression. But this did not rectify my new relationship to school, and I quickly found myself becoming increasingly unmotivated, less confident about my creative capabilities, and generally apathetic towards the world and my future.

Although I continued to appear successful in school and have become a seemingly productive member of society, there was a subtle shift in how I experienced myself that seemed to correspond to a shift in how the education system in which I existed invested in me. At the core of this shift was an exchange in which I was slowly being removed from the content of my own education and learning was replaced by more tests and stricter state standards. Many years later, when I returned to work within the school system as an adult, I observed similar phenomenon in several locations. But, what seemed most concerning was the omission of self-expression and creativity within early childhood education, where play was seemingly removed as a necessity.

At its most fundamental level, play serves as an expression of the self for both the child and the adult. It is paramount to a sense of aliveness. And yet the same standardized pressures that overtook my education in the 90's are overtaking play in early childhood education today.

This, then, is the launching point of my research inquiry into the relationship between school and the young child's developing child's sense of self.

Overview

Imagine a world in which children do not play. A world in which children as young as five are required to wake up before dawn in order to attend school, returning home at dusk, tired and hungry. Met with greetings that remind them of their school day struggles, the children have a snack and begin that evening's homework. Eventually, they make their way to bed, exhausted and anxious about the day that is looming ahead. Neighborhood streets are quiet and empty, playgrounds are left untouched, and schoolyards, once full of children, lay abandoned behind locked gates. Teachers are frustrated, families are fearful; and the students, unable to understand it all, feel defeated, unmotivated and are left to protest in the only way that they can, through the development of behavioral and psychological symptoms.

This reality is not a foreign dystopia. In fact, it simulates the lives of many children in our schools today. Since the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), play in the life of the child has become an increasingly endangered activity (US Department of Education, 2002). Every minute of the school day has been scrutinized for its instructional value leaving little to no time for play, particularly for children living in poverty (Jarrett, 2003). Despite long-established principles of child development and ample multidisciplinary research documenting the importance of play in the health of the child, academic pressures have trickled down to the most vulnerable in our public system: the preschooler and the kindergartener (Almon & Miller, 2011). The traditional kindergarten classrooms that most adults would remember from their childhood, classrooms with abundant space that were grounded in explorative learning and creative pursuits, have largely disappeared (Etherington, 2012). And not without a cost!

For many young children, the outcome of this hurried curriculum has been painful. In his 2005 study entitled, *Pre-K Students Expelled at More Than Three Times the Rate of K-12 Students*, Walter Gilliam, the director of the Edward Ziegler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, surveyed 4,000 preschool teachers and documented that three- and four-year old children were being expelled at three times the national rate of K-12 students. Simply put: less play, more expulsions (Almon & Miller, 2011). This shift is also evident in the clinical sphere where children are being referred for treatment at an increased rate for disruptive school and home-based behaviors such as defiance, aggression, inattention, and hyperactivity (Murray, 2008; Wenner, 2009). Many of these children are put on behavior plans, prescribed medication, and endure long and frustrating educational and therapeutic experiences. Some continue on in the school system only to drop out before graduation; others will be kicked out and become another causality in the school-to-prison pipeline, and almost all internalize a narrative that they are the ones to blame.

The current state of childhood is troublesome. Children need ample access to play in order to develop into healthy, integrated, creative individuals, particularly those who face environmental stressors and oppression (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2007). There is extensive empirical and theoretical support for the benefits of play on the cognitive, affective, and social systems of the child. However, there is limited inquiry into the theoretical underpinnings that explain the current phenomenon of decreased play in early education and its effect on the developing child. This research, then, is not so much concerned with the empirically supported processes of play, as important as those bodies of research are. Rather, it is the intent of this theoretical study to investigate how the lack of play in school effects the child's developing sense of self in relation to the world. The research question to be explored in this

theoretical study is: how does the lack of play in public education affect the developing child's sense of self?

Application to Social Work Practice

Social workers hold a unique position within public discourse that is rooted in a firm ethical commitment to fight oppressive systems and to advocate for the wellbeing of all people. While the current literature on play stretches across many disciplines, social workers outside of school systems are largely unaware of the state of early education and therefore may overlook its impact on the child's presentation in the clinical and political spheres. Clinical social workers that work with young children and their families must be aware of the state of public education and the effects this system may be having on the health of some children in order to properly treat and advocate for change. Though one may assume that it is not the place of social workers to assert themselves within educational policy and practice, social workers hold a unique and comprehensive lens of the developing person that is helpful to understanding the complexities of this issue.

Shama Olfman reminded us in her book, *All Work and No Play: How Educational Reforms are Harming Our Preschoolers*, that as play disappears from the landscape of childhood, social workers can play an important role in addressing the fact that minimized access to play is harming children, particularly those most marginalized within our schools. Its demise will have a lasting impact on society. Decades of compelling research have shown that without play, children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development is compromised. They will develop without much imagination and creativity. They will struggle to feel real and alive in the world. Their capacity for communication will be diminished and their tendency towards aggressiveness and violence will increase, as seen in many preschools across the country. In

short, human nature as we have known it will be profoundly altered, intensifying many of the problems that are already afflicting children and society. If we do not invest in play, we will find ourselves investing much more in prisons and hospitals, as the incidence of physical, and mental illness, as well as aggressive and violent behavior escalates (2003).

Focus of Study

This study uses a theoretical approach to assess the ways in which the disappearance of play in schools is affecting the mental health of children. I examine this phenomenon from two theoretical perspectives: Winnicottian object relations theory and the concepts as defined by the social theorist, Michel Foucault. The following chapter outlines the theoretical conceptualization and chosen methodology utilized to provide an alternative understanding to the phenomenon at hand.

CHAPTER II

Conceptualization and Methodology

The current state of affairs in education and reform is receiving a great deal of attention from concerned parents, teachers, and students. As academic pressures rise, educational practices are becoming increasingly more standardized limiting what is possible in the classroom. This is evidenced in the lack of play within many early childhood education systems. Kindergartners are now required to master more than ninety academic skills, leaving little room for other types of learning. Though the disappearance of play has grabbed the attention of many interdisciplinary thinkers, the dominant discourse remains consistently focused on how the lack of play in school affects a child's capacities to learn, their social behaviors, and their development into a productive adult. Valuable as those arguments are, this research varies in its scope. This study focused on the phenomenon of play as it relates to the child's developing sense of self. I used a theoretical framework to examine the intersection between play, the school environment, and the developing child. My analysis attempted to address four central questions regarding this phenomenon: 1) How does the lack of play in school affect the child's sense of self? 2) What environmental factors maintain the decrease of play in early childhood education and how do these factors affect the child? 3) Who is most effected by this phenomenon and why? 4) How can we begin to think of education in a different way in order to value academic learning while remaining sensitive to the child's growing sense of self? To address these questions I selected two theories, Donald W. Winnicott's theory of object relations and Michel Foucault's theory of

disciplinary power. I begin by briefly introducing the proposed theories and their applicability to the phenomenon. I then outline my method of analysis, and identify possible sources of methodological bias. Finally, I discuss the strengths and limitations of using this theoretical approach to examine this chosen phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

I have selected two theories to understand the phenomenon at hand: Winnicott's (1971) object relations theory and Foucault's (1979) theory of disciplinary power. Though these theories differ significantly from one another, used together they provide a useful understanding of the effect one's environment has on one's growth, sense of self, and wellbeing. As such, each offers an understanding of how the lack of play in schools effect children's wellbeing. In Winnicott's theory of object relations, particularly his theory of the True and False self, he elucidates how one's environment effects an individual's sense of self throughout the life span. Though he focused most of his energies on the earliest parts of developmental life, Winnicott is valuable in the understanding of the ongoing need for a good enough environment. Unlike many of the psychoanalytic theorists of his time, Winnicott focused his analysis on the realities of the child's environment and the presence of nurturing others as primary forces in healthy human development with special interest in one's capacity to be together as a prerequisite for the ability to be alone (Berzoff, 2011). Winnicott exerted the notion that the self is fundamentally rooted in a persons' ability to play, to be creative, and to function from a True Self organization. Applying Winnicott's theoretical ideas of the developing child to the current school system provided an insightful and important perspective into the potential effects the school environment is having on young children.

By contrasting and complimenting Winnicott's work, this study utilized Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power, docile bodies, and governmentality to explore the power relationship between school and children. While Foucault's theoretical ideas have a wide relevance, the complexity and sometimes-contradictory nature of his body of work make it difficult to synthesize one coherent Foucaultian theory. Therefore, this analysis centered on concepts within Foucault's 1979 work titled, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault is applied to the phenomenon of play in early childhood education to analyze how knowledge about children and schools produces norms and practices that often remain hidden and naturalized (Sawicki, 1986). His theories have been utilized to uncover the ways in which disciplinary power contributes to the formation of what he calls "docile bodies." I have selected each theory in an attempt to provide a multidisciplinary insight into the phenomenon of play in schools. As both focus their attention on concepts of individuality, the environment, relationships, and conformity, they are contrasted and synthesized with the intention of furthering and complicating the current understanding of play while uncovering new questions to be considered.

Plan For Analysis

In my discussion in Chapter V, I used Winnicott's object relations theory and Foucault's theories of disciplinary power to analyze and contribute to the growing understanding of the relationship between children, school, and play. I synthesized key factors from both theories to describe the psychic, environmental, social, and political factors underlying the lack of play in schools and the effects this has on the developing child's sense of self. First I argued that the current state of the school system is not sufficient to support the development of the child's True Self organization, as Winnicott comprehends it. I proposed a potential understanding to why the current school environment is experiencing an increase in children's externalizing behaviors and

a decrease in their capacity for creative thinking. I do this by applying Winnicott's concepts of the holding environment, good enough mother, and transitional space to the phenomenon of play in schools as well as by utilizing Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power to challenge how the structure of schools creates what he calls "docile bodies." I proposed that the current school structure does not support Winnicott's concept of the True Self. I then explored who is most affected by this phenomenon, making the claim that young, poor, marginalized children's development is being disproportionately affected by the lack of play in schools. Finally, in applying Foucault's concept of governmentality to child development, I problematized the way fixed knowledge about education and children is harmful and proposed new ways of thinking about and understanding what is "best" for the wellbeing of children in early childhood education.

Disclosure of Methodological Bias

My investigation into this topic reflected my critical and feminist perspective as well as my orientation as a psychodynamic social work student. My inquiry into how the social institution of school impacts individuals' quest for health and wellbeing is influenced by this worldview. Specifically, my research rested on the critical assumption that our current school system is not adequately supporting students in their current lives and instead are organized around the production of future industrious, docile individuals. I hold that the school environment is fundamental to the growth of the child and can no longer risk remaining narrowly focused on the academic, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of the child's functioning. It is my belief that the school must address the growing child as a thinking, feeling, relating, knowing individual who is deeply rooted in relationship. Failure to incorporate these many ways of being is harmful to individual growth. Finally, my writing inevitably reflected my own position within

social systems as a middle-class, mixed-race, white presenting, heterosexual cisgender woman, an identity that informs my beliefs about what constitutes a healthy childhood and fulfilling education.

Strengths and Limitations

The ideas developed in this thesis did not aim to objectively explain the phenomenon. Instead, my goal was to add a new understanding to the ways in which children are being affected by the current school structure. To do this I offered an additional theoretical perspective to uncover how and why this is occurring. It was my intention to highlight the nuanced, personal matter of the phenomenon, to complicate previously held beliefs about children in school, to offer alternative ways of seeing and understanding, and to raise new questions. Further, my use of psychodynamic and social theories was consistent with the social work understanding of person in environment and upheld social work's commitment to understanding and dismantling systems of oppression.

With any intellectual inquiry there were limitations. Most obviously, as a theoretical thesis, this study did not take into account the voices of those most affected, the child. Though I work closely with children in clinical settings and have a history of working in schools, I am not a child who is currently a part of the school system. I have positioned myself as a knowledgeable adult speaking on behalf of the child, the "other," as Foucault states. There was an inherent limitation in my ability to speak fully to the experience of a marginalized group who is not afforded the opportunity to speak on their own behalf. Thus, my positioning is born within my own privileged identity, school experience, and observations; both in my school based and clinical work with children and families.

This study was also limited in its isolated focus of the school environment. It was not within the limits of this paper to adequately address the ways in which the child's broader context (family, community violence, biological delays) also impact the child's self development. Likewise, it is challenging to be able to decipher between potential influences over the growth of the child. Though no single environment can adequately encompass the healthy growth of the child, it remained the goal of this study to focus on the school's contribution to the child's wellbeing.

As a clinical social worker I am positioned outside of the school. I am not an educator or educational theorist. This was limiting to my understanding, application, and methods of analysis. Often my interactions with school systems are in support of students who are struggling in their school environment, who have been referred to treatment for externalizing behaviors or depressive presentations, and who are in general conflict with their school. I recognize that this position limits my understanding of the school system, and has in turn limited my study. I did not intend to make suggestions to the field of education; there are many knowledgeable and experienced individuals who work in schools daily who can do that much more skillfully than I can. Instead, this study was limited in its attempt to highlight and uncover a phenomenon that became apparent in my clinical work with children in an attempt to add a new lens to understand the problems at hand.

Summary

This chapter aimed to provide a map of analysis, methodology, as well as address the biases, strengths, and limitations of this study. By utilizing Winnicott's theory of object relations and Foucault analysis of power, the phenomenon of play in school will be analyzed to provide a deeper understanding of the effect the decrease of play has on children's wellbeing. This study

supports social work's core values of understanding the person in environment in an attempt to uncover and dismantle oppressive systems. However this study was limited in my own personal bias as the researcher as well as in the inherent limitations as a theoretical study. The following chapter will provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of play in school.

CHAPTER III

PHENOMONON

School days continue to be filled with academic instruction designed to teach-to-the-test as play quickly becomes a distant childhood memory. In fact, the most recent adoption of The Common Core State Standards calls for kindergartners to master more than ninety skills related to literacy and math, with a primary focus on getting children reading by the end of kindergarten (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). This push towards standardization and high-stakes testing is contributing greatly to the decline of play within early childhood education.

Overview of the Phenomenon of Play

This theoretical study examined the phenomenon of play in the context of the school and its relationship to the vital process of creativity, a process in which psychoanalytic theorist D.W. Winnicott locates the birth of the self (1971). Play supports the cognitive, affective, and social systems of the child (Ellis, 1973). The benefits of play range from social skill development, increased problem solving abilities, lower stress levels, language skill development, and positive self-esteem (Ellis, 1973). Play allows children to explore alternative ways of knowing, to uncover new and unfamiliar forms of expression, to discover their likes and dislikes, and to process their complex lives. However, the lack of play has dire consequences on these developmental processes as well as in later life outcomes (Schweinhart et al., 2005). The effects of decreased access to play in many K – 12 classrooms is reflected in the clinical sphere where

children are being referred for treatment at an increased rate for disruptive school and home-based behaviors such as defiance, aggression, inattention, and hyperactivity (Murray, 2008; Wenner, 2009).

Play Defined

The concept of play poses difficulties by definition, as there are many theories that attempt to define and categorize play. The logic is, however, straightforward: Play involves personal inner control, "an intermediate area of experiencing" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 2), and a capacity to invent reality (Leichtman, 1996). Play occurs when children are in relationship with one another, where boundaries are created and eventually become fluid, dissolve, and soften (Etherington, 2012). It involves free choice and is self-organized, though it often appears to the onlooker as chaotic and disorganized. *Play* encompasses pretend play, body play, object play, outdoor play, physical play, and social play (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Jarvis, 2007). Play also entails "activities wherein children can imitate, fantasize and practice make-believe safely by testing roles and feelings" (Van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 91). Play is an act of self-discovery, self-development, and self-expression.

As evidenced by the literature, defining play is a grand task. For that reason, Almon and Miller's (2009) definition of play will be utilized for the purpose of this study. They state,

We use the word 'play' to describe activities that are freely chosen and directed by children and arise from intrinsic motivation. Within this definition are many different kinds of play, including dramatic and make-believe play, block play, sand and water play, art activities, play with open-ended objects, spontaneous physical play, exploring the outdoors, and so on (p. 15).

As Almon and Miller note, play is vast and diverse. But what remains preeminent is that play is pleasurable and child directed.

Theories of Play

The theorizing on play has proceeded sporadically since the times of classical Greece and remains contextually bound (Ellis, 1973). Theories of play range in contribution from child development specialists, philosophers, psychologists, education reformers, economists, public health advocates, pediatricians, and human rights organizations. It is not within the limits of this study to fully encapsulate the array of research available. But in an attempt to illustrate the diverse contributions made in understanding play, I will include that the theories of play vary from play as: an expression of surplus energy (Spencer 1896), as a form of relaxation from the pressures of the world (Partick, 1916), as energy restoration (Lazarus, 1883), play as catharsis (Menninger, 1960), play as a form of wish fulfillment, pleasure seeking, and ego mastery (Freud, 1967), as a vehicle of personal development (Erikson, 1963), as a quest for cognitive consistency (Piaget, 1962), and as a space between its participants and as distinction from private fantasy and imaginative activity (Winnicott 1986). These are just a few of the many theories on play.

The State of Play in Schools

Play is under attack by the conditions of our modern world, particularly within the sphere of public education. Academic pressures and increased state standards have become central to the life of the child (Ellis, 1973). Expanding interest to take advantage of the earlier, more plastic years of the child's development is evident in much of today's educational discourse. Almon and Miller (2009) state, "Early childhood education, the care and instruction of young children outside of the home, over the last half century has become a downward extension of schooling. It is now the first run on the educational ladder" (p. 9). This extension of schooling into early childhood classrooms has come at the expense of play. In an increasing number of kindergarten classrooms, teachers are required to follow scripts and are unable to deviate in order to meet the

needs of their classrooms (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

In their recent study, Bassok and Rorem (2014) found that time spent on reading and language arts in kindergarten had risen by about 25%, from roughly 5.5 to 7 hours per week. This change was likely compelled in part by a significant increase in the length of the kindergarten school day, which shifted from about 56% to 75% (Flanagan & McPhee, 2009; Walston & West, 2004). Nevertheless, despite the escalation in the overall time kindergartners are spending in school, Bassok and Rorem (2014) noted a substantial decline in time spent on social studies, music, art, physical education, play and recess. Over the past few decades the amount of free play for children has reduced across environments (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009). In their 2009 report, *Crisis in the Kindergarten*, Almon and Miller review the latest research that indicates that on a typical day, children in all-day kindergartens spend four to six times as much time in literacy and math instruction and taking or preparing for tests (about two to three hours per day) as in free play or ‘choice time’ (30 minutes or less).

Implications For the Decrease in School Based Play

Decline in childhood creativity

The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) is a widely used measure of creative intelligence, specifically as it relates to innovation later in life. Creativity researcher Kyung Hee Kim (2011) analyzed data from almost 30,000 Torrance scores of kindergarten through twelfth grade students and adults. In 2010, she reported that creativity scores had been steadily rising until 1990. Results indicated that since 1990, though IQ scores had risen, creative thinking scores had significantly decreased. The decrease for kindergarteners through third graders was most significant (Kim, 2011). Kim concluded that younger children’s ability to produce statistically

infrequent, unique, and unusual ideas significantly decreased after 1990. Kim attributed this decline in creative thinking to a scarcity of environmental influences that promote early and frequent imaginative play in children, which included school atmospheres that promote pretend games, or even just tolerated them in the curriculum.

The implications for the decrease in creativity are significant. Kim (2011) found that over the last 20 years, children have become less emotionally expressive, less energetic, less talkative and verbally expressive, less humorous, less imaginative, less unconventional, less lively and passionate, less perceptive, less apt to connect seemingly irrelevant things, less synthesizing, and less likely to see things from different angles. The results indicate that younger children are becoming less capable of the critical thinking, processes of synthesis and organization, as well as demonstrating an ability to capture the essence of problems. The results indicate that younger children are tending to grow up more narrow-minded, less intellectually curious, and less open to new experiences (Kim, 2011).

According to Kim, children need to be afforded the psychological safety and psychological freedom needed to foster creativity. Most notably, they need time to think. Children have an ever-increasing opportunity for knowledge gathering and study, a process called “empirical abstraction” (Piaget, 1981). But to be creative, they also need opportunities to engage in the mental process of building knowledge through mental actions that are performed on those perceived objects (Piaget, 1981). This “reflective abstraction” is necessary for creative products because new ideas are generated from mental actions, not external objects (Piaget, 1981). Kim argues that free, uninterrupted time for children should be restored on school and home schedules.

Similarly, Ashiabi's 2007 research entitled, *Play in the Preschool Classroom: Its Socioemotional Significance and the Teachers' Role in Play*, and Singer and Lythcott's 2004 research, *Fostering School Achievement and Creativity Through Sociodramatic Play in the Classroom*, suggests that access to recess leads to greater amounts of imaginative thinking, enhanced creativity, and to the development of a positive relationship to school and learning in preschoolers or early school-agers.

Increase in suspension and expulsion rates

Educational and disciplinary shifts in schools have resulted in an increase in expulsion, suspension and child aggression in the classroom and for many young children, the outcomes of the hurried curriculum has been painful. Walter Gilliam, the director of the Edward Ziegler Center in Child Development, surveyed 4,000 preschool teachers and documented that three- and four-year old children were being expelled at three times the national rate of K-12 students (2005). His data showed a correlation between the amount of dramatic play in preschool and expulsion rates. To reiterate: less play, more expulsions (Almon & Miller, 2011). By the time many of these students enter secondary schools, they have acquired long records of suspensions, have been put on Individual Education Plans (IEP), prescribed medication, and struggle to find a meaningful connection to their school experience.

Increase in attention deficit disorders, depression, and misconduct

Attention, hyperactivity, and conduct disorders continue to dominate the clinical conversations regarding children's difficulties and more and more children are being medicated based on these diagnoses. In, *Running From Ritalin*, Murray (2008) analyzed the clinical trials of behavioral psychologist Alan Fridlund and established that restrictions on play are partially responsible for a steep increase in attention deficit disorders. He argued that there is a direct

relationship between the incidence of attention deficit disorders and the physical restrictions placed upon students. Clinical trials published in, *Depression in Young People: What Causes It and Can We Prevent It*, by Burns, Andrews, and Szabo (2002) also highlighted that highly structured environments with minimal or no play opportunities increase the number of young people who describe themselves as depressed. In the paper, *The Serious Need For Play*, Wenner (2009) took this observation one step further, arguing that early career burnout in the workplace, as well as misbehavior in schools, correlates with a reduction in play.

Long-term life challenges

In the late 1960s, Schweinhart (et.al) began the Preschool Curriculum Comparison Committee in partnership with HighScope. The study randomly assigned 68 at-risk children from low-income families to one of three pre-school classes. These classes ranged from: (1) a classroom that was a direct instruction program (referred to as DI), where teachers were scripted and required correct answers from students; (2) a traditional nursery school, where children engaged through play and large-group activities; and (3) the HighScope program, where children learned through group time and play with a “plan, do, and review” focus. The latter two emphasized child-initiated activities. With support from the staff, the three and four-year-olds in the study pursued their own interests. All were followed until age 23 (Almon & Miller, 2011).

By age 23, when the study was finished, the DI program students showed serious challenges in overall development: 47% of the DI students had required special education, compared to only 6% of the other students; 34% had been arrested for a felony offense, compared with 9% of the others; 27% had been suspended from work, while none of the others had been; none of the DI students had married and were living with spouses, compared with 31% of the others, and only 11% of the DI students had ever done volunteer work, compared to about

43% of the others (Almon & Miller, 2011). Clear correlations to early play-based education and later development had been made.

Disparities in Play

Reduced access to play is affecting all children. Societal shifts including increased enrollment in structured afterschool programs and extra-curricular activities, more time spent watching TV or using electronics, unsafe neighborhoods and an increase in parental fear, and highly academic classrooms, have all contributed to the reduction of play in children's lives. However, some children are being affected more than others.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on Rights of the Child states,

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity (United Nations, 1989).

Though all children have the right to play under this clause, not all children play equally. Access to play in schools within the United States varies greatly from state to state, district to district, and classroom to classroom. According to the U.S. Coalition of Play (2013), a study was conducted in 2002 that compared access to recess across a randomized sample of children on a randomly selected school day and found that 79% of children had recess. However, only 61% of African American students and 75% of other minority students had recess compared to 85% of white students; and only 56% of those living below the poverty line had recess compared to 83% of those above the poverty line.

Similar disparities were found in the 2010 study titled, *The State of Play: Gallup Survey of Principals On School Recess*, conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The study

found that length of recess was affected by school size, location, region, minority enrollment, and eligibility for free and reduced lunch. It was reported that large, urban schools with high poverty and high minority populations had the least recess, sometimes none at all. The study specified that, in the Atlanta area, school systems with a high percentage of white students had recess at much higher rates than schools with high percentages of African American urban children. It was also found that African American and Hispanic male children are regularly deprived of recess as a consequence for disruptive behaviors (2010).

Presenting Problems in the Clinical Sphere: A Clinical Example

The clinical implications of the lack of play in the lives of many of today's children can be evidenced in the case of Ben. Ben is a five-year-old African American male who lives with his adoptive parents in a diverse city in New England. Ben attends kindergarten at a rigorous charter school just outside of his hometown. He is referred by his school as "scholar" and has received collegiate-focused narratives from the moment he entered the school's doors at a young five years old. Ben's day begins at six in the morning when his mother wakes him up. He is on the bus to attend full-day kindergarten by 7:15 and arrives at school at 7:45. Ben's classroom is small and noisy with college posters crowding the walls. Ben remains in his chair and does work for the majority of the day; receiving two ten-minute recesses that include adult structured and supervised games. Ben returns home by five in the afternoon, at which point he has a snack and begins working on his homework. Ben's homework takes him close to two hours to complete most nights, in part because he is challenged by the work, but mostly because he does not want to do it. This is a frustrating experience for both Ben and his mother, who helps Ben complete his homework after returning home from her long day at work. Ben eventually finishes, often agitated and tired, eats dinner, takes a bath and goes to bed.

Ben is an intelligent, capable, creative child who loves to learn and demonstrate mastery of new tasks and knowledge. However, Ben struggles behaviorally at school and is often removed from the classroom or separated from his peers in response to his defiant and disruptive behaviors. Ben does not seem to be motivated by the behavioral systems being utilized at school. His mother receives daily calls from his teachers because of Ben's behavioral difficulties.

Ben is struggling with structural and environmental stressors that are deeply a part of his experience in school. Because of the academic and behavioral expectations Ben faces, he has very little time for play. During the school day, he engages in drill and re-drill activities that are fast paced and manualized. The teachers are scripted in their interactions with the children and when Ben becomes frustrated or agitated by the pressures he is facing, he is told that he is not going to earn a star on his behavioral chart for that academic period. Overwhelmed by disappointment, Ben becomes dysregulated, engages in disruptive behaviors, and is removed from the classroom. He has been suspended twice for "crawling, telling the teacher 'no,' and pushing his desk."

Ben's interactions with his mother are often focused on his "bad" behavior. She receives daily texts from his teachers who inform her of Ben's ongoing struggles. Ben is punished for his school day behaviors at home, and his toys are taken away regularly. After numerous failed attempts to change Ben's behavior, his mother is left feeling helplessly at odds with Ben's difficulties in school. She eventually seeks services at an outpatient mental health clinic for children where Ben was diagnosed with Disruptive Behavior Disorder and ADHD and put on medication. In session, Ben regularly plays out feelings of anger and frustration directed at his school experience. He recently attempted to run away from school, later disclosing that he was

trying to run home because he “hates that place.” He is suspended for the third time after this incident.

Summary

In a 2012 article in *Education Weekly*, Matthew Etherington argued that scientific research is not the only way of contributing to the movement towards restoring play. Etherington used a two-fold argument to state that (a) we can know from personal experience that authentic play experiences are veridical (valid and truthful) and (b) we can show that play is vital for learning through scientific study. In other words, if you are an adult who had a positive relationship to play as a child, or if you are an adult who had a negative relationship to play as a child, your experience can inform you to the importance play has had in your human experience.

This chapter presented an overview of the phenomenon of play and discussed why play in schools is essential to the well being of children. Topic areas of discussion included the state of play in schools today, disparities in play, and clinical implications of the decrease of play in schools. The next chapter provides an overview of one of two theories used in this study to further understand the phenomenon of play.

CHAPTER IV

Donald Winnicott

This chapter presents the psychological concepts of Donald Winnicott as they relate to play in early childhood education. First, the historical context of Winnicottian theory will be reviewed with particular attention to its positioning within the larger body of psychoanalytic theory. Following this brief overview, a summary of the empirical studies that have been conducted on this theory will be explored. And lastly, the chapter will explore the key concepts of transitional space, the holding environment, true/false self, and creativity as they pertain to the relationship of play to the developing child in school.

Overview of Winnicottian Object Relations Theory

Donald Winnicott was a British psychoanalyst and pediatrician whose work greatly influenced the field of object relations theory and psychoanalytic theory as a whole. Winnicott was largely influenced by the work of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, and was understood by some as a blending of Freudian and Kleinian thought (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Though Winnicott considered himself a Freudian and was trained by Klein, he distinguished himself from his predecessors through his work on the emerging self. His approach to developmental theory was radically different from the psychoanalytic tradition in which Winnicott was a part (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Where Freud and Klein emphasized unconscious drives and fantasies in the child, Winnicott focused on realities of the child's environment and the presence of nurturing others as primary forces in healthy human development with special interest in one's

capacity to be together as a prerequisite for the ability to be alone (Berzoff, 2011).

Nearly all of Winnicott's contributions center around a fundamental struggle of human existence, a struggle of the self for an individuated existence which at the same time allows for close contact with others (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). As Winnicott (1971) states, "*This is the place that I have set out to examine*, the separation that is not a separation but a form of union (p. 115). A practicing pediatrician throughout his career as a psychoanalyst, Winnicott utilized his deep familiarity with babies and mothers to inform his work. Throughout his forty years of contributing to the psychoanalytic world, Winnicott tried to explain the early environment's influence over the individual's development into a distinctly different and all together ordinary individual (Phillips, 1988).

Winnicott and the Emerging Self

Almost all of Winnicott's contributions are concerned with the conditions that make it possible for the developing child to become aware of him or herself as being separate from other people (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). According to Winnicott, this originally happens within the mother child relationship in which the initial self of the infant begins to emerge. The unintegrated child organizes his own experience by drawing on the mother's organization of him/her. Winnicott states that in order for this to happen, mothers (or caregivers) do not have to be perfect, but they must be "good enough." The "good enough mother" provides a "holding environment" in which the child is contained and experienced in an attuned way (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Winnicott used the term "primary maternal preoccupation" to describe the state of devotion that characterizes the mother's offering of herself as a medium for her baby's growth during early development (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Through this primary maternal preoccupation, the mother is attuned to her baby's needs and responds in such a way that the

baby's needs and fantasies are fulfilled *as* they are created. The baby experiences this need gratifying process as a "moment of illusion" in which the baby believes that she creates what she desires, she is hungry and the breast appears. Thus the baby experiences herself as omnipotent—the source of all creation. The infantile omnipotence that is experienced by the baby because of good enough mothering and an adequate holding environment provides the child with a sense of, and power over, external reality (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). According to Winnicott, this illusion becomes the basis for the healthy development of the self (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983).

The period of mother-child union begins to shift as the infant grows in her recognition of her separateness (Berzoff, 2011). The need to remain in a "holding environment" continues to be necessary but the need for more independence also begins to emerge. Optimally the mother begins to reemerge from her primary maternal preoccupation and becomes interested in her own needs once again, becoming less responsive to the baby's needs. As a result, the baby experiences a delay in gratification and begins to realize that he is not omnipotent, that he is in fact dependent on the mother, that he is separate from others and they are separate from him. As the mother engages in this shift without receding too far away from the baby, the child begins to learn to trust that the environment is safe, protected and free of danger even when mentally separated from the mother. Through the presence of an attuned but non-demanding other, the child identifies his own bodily functions and impulses and grows in his capacity to be alone. Winnicott understood this to be the basis of the developing sense of self, "It is only when alone (that is to say, in the presence of someone) that the infant can discover his own personal life" (1958, p. 34). It is in this capacity to be alone that spontaneous gestures, the True Self, emerge.

In order to reconcile the anxiety that is provoked by this developing sense of separateness

and the disillusionment of his own power, the child turns to the use of what Winnicott called “transitional objects.” The transitional objects, the worn teddy bear or the scruffy blanket, offers a way for the child to hold onto the internal representation of others when she is not yet able to do it on her own, soothing her in times of separateness (Berzoff, 2011). The use of a transitional object demonstrates a gradual move toward objective reality. Winnicott came to believe that the ability to tolerate and enjoy being alone could only develop, paradoxically, in the presence of another. If aloneness is experienced as too empty, alone, or desolate, it becomes unbearable (Berzoff, 2011). It is in health, then, that the child experiences being near someone while also being separate.

True and False Self

In his paper, ‘The Location of Cultural Experience’ (1967), Winnicott tackles the question of “what life itself is about.” For Winnicott, the answer was in the experience of aliveness. Phillips (1988) summarizes this in the statement, “There were people who experienced such severe failure of the early holding environment that they felt they had not started to exist. Their lives were characterized by a sense of futility born of compliance. Psychoanalysis became, for these people, the provision of an environment in which, Winnicott writes, ‘the patient will find his or her own self, and will be able to exist and to feel real. Feeling real is more than existing; it is finding a way to exist as oneself, and to relate to objects as oneself, and to have a self into which to retreat to relaxation’ (p. 127). Winnicott understood that the development of a felt self depends on the presence of a nurturing environment. The self of the infant is only potential; the baby’s development relies on an adequate holding environment. It is through the mother’s recognition of the baby’s spontaneous gestures, in the baby being reliably seen by her, and in her surviving the baby’s destructiveness,

that the baby begins to feel real. Winnicott believed that attachment needs to be flexibly attuned enough so that it can nurture what he called the “True Self,” located at the core of human personality (Berzoff, 2011). It is through the True Self that we experience our unique individuality, vitality, and difference- a sense of feeling real in the world.

However, if a mother or caregiver is not able to be “good enough” and if demands are made on the baby that are stressful or outside of the baby’s scope of development, the baby must comply with the mother’s needs and a fragmentation of the self is experienced. This happens when a child needs to be attuned to those in her family system or when she must be a certain way in order to be recognized. When this occurs, the child experiences a terrifying interference with the continuity of her own personal existence, an “annihilation of the infant’s self,” and splits between True and False self organizations (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). In response, the child’s highly individuated True Self is hidden by a need for compliance to the environment. The child loses touch with his own spontaneous gestures and instead he must remain on guard and ready to respond to what is asked of him by others. What develops in this case is what Winnicott calls the “False Self.” The False Self provides an illusion of personal existence, which is molded out of maternal expectations and demands. It seeks to suppress the individuality of the child and molds itself to the needs of others all the while protecting the True Self from expression (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Winnicott states that the False Self has a defensive nature and “its defensive function is to hide and protect the True Self” (Winnicott, 1960). Uniqueness, vibrancy, creativity, and spontaneity are all submerged as a result, as the energy and power of the True Self are lost (Berzoff, 2011).

Play, Creativity, and The Self

No human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality. According to Winnicott, however, relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience. Winnicott understood this intermediate area of experience as the same play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play. It is in this intermediate area that the arts, religion, imaginative living, and creative scientific work are experienced.

Winnicott summarizes his thoughts on play into several main points but what matters most in children's play for Winnicott is the near withdrawal state that can be equated to the concentration experienced by adults and which can only occur if the environment has been "good enough." Playing implies trust, involves the body, and is essentially satisfying. He notes that play happens not within inter psychic reality nor within the external world, but in an intermediate area of experience, a potential space. There is a direct development, for Winnicott, from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared playing, and from this to cultural experiences that extend to greater society (1971).

Play starts in this intermediate area, this potential space, between the mother and the baby. As the baby experiences "magical control- or a sense of omnipotence" a confidence grows within the baby and sets the stage for the developmental achievement of being able to be alone while in the presence of another. The child integrates the belief that "the person who loves and who is therefore reliable is available, and continues to be available and remembered after being forgotten" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 64). As the mother and child play and as the mother begins to reemerge from the state of primary maternal preoccupation, the mother slowly begins to introduce her own ideas into play. As a result, the baby is able to allow and enjoy the overlap of two play areas (Winnicott, 1971). As in many of Winnicott's ideas, what is important is that the

process is gradual, it happens over a period of time, and it is flexible enough to allow the baby to adjust and tolerate this new stage of development.

Primary to Winnicott's ideas is a belief that certain conditions are necessary for the self to develop. In, *Playing: Creative Activity and The Search for the Self*, Winnicott connected environmental conditions to what he labeled "creativity." For Winnicott, understanding the complexity of creativity is to not simplify it down to the artist producing art or the musician producing music. Creativity, for Winnicott, is a state of living, a capacity to mentally and deliberately engage with the world. It is in playing that one is able to be creative and it is creative living that is the essence of the True Self. Winnicott states, "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self" (1971, p. 73). The self then, is fundamentally rooted in a persons' ability to play, to be creative, to function from a True Self organization. The False Self, he writes, "lacks something, and that something is the essential element of creative originality" (1960, p. 152).

It is apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a compliant relationship to external reality, a relationship that Winnicott describes as "the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation" (1971, p. 87). It is in this compliance that one experiences a sense of futility and is associated with as a sense of apathy. Winnicott noted that there could never be a complete destruction of human creativity. Instead, the False Self organization that forms as a result of inadequate environmental provisions hides the True Self, the source of creativity, to protect it from exploitation. When the individual is organized in such a way that all things personal and original are hidden, they experience a sense of not really

minding whether they live or die. Winnicott noted that suicide is of small importance if this is the case (1971).

Creativity, then, is present when anyone looks at things in a healthy way or does anything deliberately. For Winnicott, creative living is directly linked to living itself. He states, “We find either that individuals live creatively and feel that life is worth living or else that they cannot live creatively and are doubtful about the value of living. This variable in human beings is directly related to the quality and quantity of environmental provision” (1971, p. 95). The environment, for Winnicott, is the single most important concern when it comes to an individual’s creativity. He explains that the potential space where play occurs depends on experience and it is that experience that leads to trust. Though this process begins in the early life bond between mother and child, Winnicott extends this need throughout the lifespan.

Winnicott, Play, the Self, and School

The first and most important need in respect to creative living is protection of the parent-child relationship in the early stage of development (1971). It is within this relationship that the initial self emerges and begins to be experienced as real. Through a caregiver’s ability to maintain an adequate holding environment, the child moves from illusion to reality all the while growing in his capacity to trust the world around him. While his theory was originally conceptualized to explain how children develop a sense of self in relation to others, for Winnicott the developmental process did not end there. Winnicott extends this relational process outward, toward society at large, while maintaining a focus on the developmental capacities of the child. He states, “The second need is for those who have care of children of all ages to be ready to put each child into touch with appropriate elements of the cultural heritage, according to the individual child’s capacity and emotional age and developmental phase” (1971, p. 148). In

Contemporary Concepts of Adolescent Development and Their Implications For Higher Education, Winnicott notes that it is the role of the school and other community groups to act as extensions of the family idea and provide relief from set family patterns. He states that it is in health that the child is to attain identification with social groupings and with society, without *too great a loss* of personal spontaneity (1971).

Applying Winnicott's theoretical ideas of the developing child to the current school system provides an insightful and important perspective into the effects the school environment is having on young children, particularly in relation to play. Though much of the research conducted on early childhood education and play focuses on cognitive functioning, later life outcomes, and behavioral concerns, there is little research that explores a theoretical understanding of the origins of these problems in the context of school. Winnicottian object relations theory provides one understanding of how children are being affected by the current phenomenon of play in school, particularly his theories of the True and False Self. As Winnicott emphasized the primary importance of the holding environment in the healthy development of the child, it only seems fitting to conceptualize the school environment through a Winnicottian lens. In Chapter Six, a more thorough understanding of young children's increase of externalizing behaviors and decrease in their capacity for creative thinking will be examined by applying Winnicott's object relations theory to the phenomenon of play as it relates to the development of the young student's sense of self.

Summary

Winnicott illustrates an intrinsic connection between play, creativity, the environment, and the self. Phenomenological, conceptual and empirical applications are indicated by these interactions. Winnicott's theories are a fruitful guide for understanding the importance of play in

the life of the child and begin to connect these developmental needs to the responsibility of social institutions like the school. In the following chapter, Michel Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power will be explored to further this understanding of children in the school environment.

CHAPTER V

Michel Foucault

In the previous chapter, Winnicottian Object Relations Theory was introduced and the key concepts of transitional space, the holding environment, true/false self, and creativity as they pertain to the young child in school were explored. This chapter will depart from psychological theory. Instead, concepts defined by social theorist, Michel Foucault are used to better illustrate the various forms of power inherent within the current school system. This chapter begins with a brief review of Foucault's life, work, and theoretical context. Following the overview, Foucault's relevance to social work research and the topic of education discourse in particular is addressed. The Foucaultian concepts of "disciplinary power" and their use in the production of "docile bodies" as economically productive and obedient subjects will then be utilized in order to better comprehend the potential impact that the school structure has on children. Lastly, Foucault's concept of governmentality will be utilized to understand the history and effect of the field of child development and its influence over current systems.

Overview of Foucault

Michel Foucault was born in 1926 in Poitiers, France and grew up in the years between World War I and II. He is known as a prolific French philosopher and social theorist, actively contributing to the field until his death in 1984. His theories addressed the relationship between power and knowledge and the impact they have on individuals within social institutions. His work challenged all prevailing critical traditions of modern western philosophy in the twentieth

century including Marxism, phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism. Labeled by some as a post-structuralist, post-modernist, and Marxist, Foucault was greatly influenced by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. However, Foucault is considered controversial for his rejection of these academic identifications as well as his nontraditional quest for truth (Fendler, 2014). According to Foucault (1983), the objective of his work “has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (p. 208). This quest has been tied to the discourses and modes of power that are implicated in the construction of the human subject.

Foucault, in his work *Discipline and Punish*, aims to uncover and question the problems with contemporary, traditional constructions of ideas, thoughts, and knowledge. To do this, he attempts to reconstitute the concept and function of historical analysis through “discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, and transformation” (Foucault 1972, 21). Fundamental to his analysis are assertions that power is exercised, not held, that it is not singularly repressive, but also productive of norms and practices that often remain hidden and naturalized, and that it exists in all relations between individuals (Sawicki, 1986). By uncovering these discourses and the cultural context in which they are embedded, Foucault exposes both the material functioning of power relations and the generative and reflexive notion of power that invisibly expresses itself. Useful to this inquire are Foucault’s analyses of disciplinary power as a producer of knowledge, including the surveillance, examination, and normalizing of individuals.

While Foucault’s theoretical ideas have a wide relevance, the complexity of his body of work makes it difficult to synthesize one coherent Foucaultian theory. Therefore, this analysis will center on the concepts within Foucault’s 1975 work titled *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. It is in this work that Foucault investigates the history of society’s shift from physical

punishment as a means of social control to modern forms of disciplinary control, including surveillance and the conditioning of bodies into productive subjects, termed “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1975). When thinking about the construction and daily functioning of the school environment, Foucault’s ideas can be applied to provide a deeper understanding of the nuanced power relations between students and schools.

Discipline and the Production of Docile Bodies

The prison was meant to be an instrument comparable with-and no less perfect than-the school... acting with precision upon its individual subjects. (Foucault, 1980, p.40)

The applicability of Foucault’s work to the field of education has been widely recognized with particular attention to his concepts of disciplinary technologies. Foucault defines disciplinary technologies as objectifying techniques and operations that create human bodies as objects to be molded (Canella, 2000). Through these technologies, various forms of power are linked which maintain invisible forms of colonization. Foucault recognized several principles of discipline that control individual and group actions in order to create bodies that are easily supervisable, efficient, and productive, bodies that are “docile” (1975, p. 215). The individuals at the focus of these techniques are “objectified, subdued, docile, and fixed in their position in society and are unable to collaborate with others unless this is done within society’s prescriptions and norms,” (Jardine, 2005, p. 58). Disciplinary technologies construct invisible power, silently, creating individuals as bodies to be controlled (Canella, 2000). Foucault groups the disciplinary techniques into three main categories, those of surveillance, control, and normalizing.

As a product of these disciplines, Foucault describes what he termed “docile bodies.” He uses this term to describe the ways in which constant disciplinary technologies form bodies that are manipulated, shaped, trained, obey and respond. He states, “The body is docile that may be

subjected, used, transformed and improved” (1979, p. 136). Foucault named the school and the hospital as two examples of systems that control and correct the operations of the body (1979, p. 136). He stated:

Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies...In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity,’ which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection (1979, p. 138).

The concept of docile bodies is quiet familiar to the school environment. It can be evidenced in even the most foundational classroom expectations of the youngest children who are to remain in their seats for long periods of time while staying still and quiet. Within this exchange, the child’s body is in the command of the teacher, “eyes on me, raise your hand, no talking, no you can’t go to the bathroom.” Here the teacher is passively forming young bodies that are to be “manipulated, shaped, trained, obey and respond.” To further this point, we can also acknowledge the overwhelming amount of non-exploratory/hands on work that constitutes so much of the current day curriculum. In some schools, children as young as kindergarten are engaging in overly academic systems that utilize “lecture” based teaching. In these systems, students remain confined to their desks and are to complete worksheets for hours on end. These worksheets and all other work produced by students are well monitored for both timeliness and accuracy objectifying the learning process of the individual.

Disciplines of Power

As stated previously, Foucault discussed several domains of disciplinary power including those of surveillance, control, and normalizing. Through surveillance, every act of every person becomes known and eventually controlled. Foucault utilizes the concepts of the gaze,

panopticism, the examination, and the imperative to speak under the umbrella of surveillance. These are the monitoring techniques that he claims maintain “the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able to always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (Foucault, 1979, p. 187). In thinking about school systems, these techniques can easily be located within the daily functioning of the school. Foucault used the gaze to describe the ways different social institutions were designed to allow easy and constant observation of all individuals using physical spaces in order to gather information about them (Jardine, 2005). Though he describes an extreme level of surveillance by using the architecture of the prison system as an example, this idea can be illustrated in the constant surveillance within our school systems, particularly when considering the Zero Tolerance policies that have come into effect in the past twenty years and have led to tremendous levels of police and disciplinary surveillance in schools.

Panopticism is a term Foucault used to describe the ways in which individuals within social institutions are observed daily as a means of judging the worth of their products. Jardine (2005) describes this as, “No longer judged by the worth of their products, the focus of their supervision and their reward and/or punishment became based on how well and how regularly they worked throughout every minute of the day” (p. 61). The pervasiveness of the panoptic schema lies in the ways in which the observed are instilled with the “belief that, at any moment, they might be observed- that, in effect, they are observed at all times even if they, so to speak, are not observed at all times (Foucault, 1979, p. 201). As a means of complying with the observers’ expectations, individuals conform to the behaviors that are desired by the observers or else there is an understanding that they will be punished,

The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micro-penalty of time (lateness, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behavior (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body ('incorrect' attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency). At the same time, by way of punishment, a whole series of subtle procedures was used, from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations. It was a question both of making the slightest departures from correct behaviors subject to punishment, and of giving a punitive apparatus: so that, if necessary, everything might serve to punish the slightest thing; each subject finds himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality (Foucault, 1979, p. 178).

To reiterate, in order to avoid punishment and achieve conformity, the observed internalize the expectations for their actions that are dictated by the observer (Foucault, 1979, p. 201). Both the observed and the observers become "caught up in the supervising gaze. Everyone assimilates the prescribed knowledge and practices, so no one escapes being an objectified and controlled source" (Jardine, 2005, p. 61). Jardine illustrates the educational panoptic schema through the examples of continuous assessment in which there is no special gesture of monitoring but a continuous relentless gaze over progress and learning (2005, p. 62).

The examination is another form of surveillance analyzed by Foucault. Examinations are a way of ensuring that individuals possess the information and knowledge that they "should" possess. The examination, as a means of power, defines and regulates what is considered knowledge and what is not. It may be that a student knows a great deal about a particular subject or possess a particular skill, but it becomes arbitrary if that student cannot demonstrate them via examination. It is through the examination that individuals are classified, rewarded, and

punished, and that dominate “norms” about what is valuable knowledge and what is not are maintained (Foucault, 1979, p.185).

The examination is an insidious source of power because it combines the techniques of surveillance and those of a normalizing judgment, “It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them” (Jardine, 2005, p. 63). Results are used to measure an individual’s progress against their group as well as a means of distributing rewards or punishment. Foucault states that as a result of the examination, individuals could now be placed into a relatively permanent place in their society based upon their ability or willingness to conform to the disciplinary norms that society established as “true.” Instead of individuals being valued by their individuality, growth, creativity, or insight, they are valued based on their ability to demonstrate their adherence to the knowledge deemed as superior, on their ability to conform (Foucault, 1979, p. 190).

The rise of surveillance technologies meant that an increased amount of information was now available about individuals. This new wealth of information made it possible for those in the medical and social sciences to average and classify knowledge about individuals creating new and measurable norms, which operated as technologies of control (Foucault, 1979, p. 22). These norms “operate by prohibiting certain thoughts and actions but more often dictate what our thoughts and actions should be and therefore act to produce what each of us must be” (Jardine, 2005, p. 66). According to Foucault, disciplinary power encompasses five operations. Firstly, it compares individual actions to a whole and maintains the rule that is to be followed. Secondly, it differentiates individuals from one another. Third, it measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes individual abilities, levels, and “nature.” Fourth, it introduces the constraint of

conformity that must be achieved. And lastly, it traces difference in relation to all other difference, “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, and excludes. In short, it normalizes” (Foucault, 1979, p. 182).

Child Development and Governmentality

To illustrate Foucault’s concepts of disciplinary techniques, the concept of child development will be discussed. Contemporary post-modern thinkers have critically analyzed the role child development has played in the prescriptive and normalizing of childhood and how this has affected the field of education (Canella, 1997, Popkewitz, 1997). The most widely accepted discourse, one that is so pervasive it is often overlooked as “natural,” is the idea that children must develop according to physical, cognitive, and psychological norms. Child development knowledge emerged within multiple discourses that were characteristic of modernity in the ninetieth and the first part of the twentieth century (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000). This narrative, which is barely 200 years old, is guided by a scientific idea of development influenced by the perspectives of biology, psychology, and psychiatry (Wong, 2007). Though both Locke and Rousseau wrote at length about the child, their words were generalized and non-prescriptive. Wong (2007) explained how the formation of knowledge of children’s development began with Belgian astronomer and statistician Adolphe Quetelet. Through an application of the “Law of Error” and statistical thinking, Quetelet argued that there was a truth to be discovered about man’s development that governed every aspect of his maturation. He stated that the features of the average man could be considered a standard against which individuals would be measured. These new norms connoted health and categorized the abnormal to the deviant (Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 81).

As the narrative of “normal” child development grew, so too did the ways in which this knowledge was maintained. Through controlled laboratory settings, tools, techniques, and instruments, claims about children’s development were studied, measured and verified (Besley & Peters, 2007). Fields like pediatrics and developmental psychology became mature sciences and provided the masses with detailed, organized, and sequential developmental claims. This developmental knowledge changed the way we thought about and did things with and for children. Parents and educators had a new way of understanding children and sought out knowledge in pamphlets and popular parent magazines to inform their ideas of children (Besley & Peters, 2007). It soon became possible to think about the possibility of socially administering the child through family and schooling in order to produce a productive and well adjusted adult who would participate in the social and cultural institutions of their time (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000).

Foucault’s concept of governmentality has been used widely within critical perspectives to illustrate the ways in which individuals have been shaped, guided, managed, or regulated in light of certain principles or goals (Foucault, 1979). Applying his concept of governmentality to the field of child development helps one to consider “how child development knowledge has been inscribed in a broad, diffuse, and complex form of a governing of the soul; that is, the governing of the inner dispositions, sensitivities, and capabilities of the child’s being” (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000). Bloch and Popkewitz (2000) describe how the knowledge of development was embedded in a system of governmentalities “that ordered how difference was to be understood, classified the normal and that outside of normalcy, what care for children came to mean, and principles of ‘childhood’ that shaped and fashioned the ‘education’ and ‘care’ to take place” (p. 10). The power and knowledge that make up development, and in turn education, objectify and

subjugate the child by assuming and naturalizing their being and conceptualizing human needs in relation to the functioning of the state. It was this governing of individuals that was to produce a child who would develop into the new liberal, a democratic citizen who acted as a responsible and self-motivated individual (Foucault, 1979).

Implications

At the heart of Foucault's analysis is a quest to question the truth and its effects on power as well as to question power and its discourses on truth (Foucault, 1979). This does not mean, however, to throw out the knowledge gained by the science of child development, but it does mean that we must question the ways in which these systems function so to expose how power creates and maintains knowledge in order to reveal the power, contradictions, and biases within this dominant discourse. It is when we do not question that we become victims to knowledge as truth.

The field of child development, the standardization of growth and the normalizing of children have been deeply impactful within education. Through the use of disciplinary technologies, the governmentality of childhood has seeped into our classrooms at the most fundamental levels. Children are constantly assessed, evaluated, rated, and classified. They are either "normally developing" or "abnormally developing" and their every move is under surveillance in order to assure adherence to practices and policies that maintain optimal functioning. Canella (2000) states, "The discourse of education and the disciplinary technologies that are linked to it construct the perfect specimen for the educational gaze" (p. 42). The content and pace of learning is dictated and controlled by common core standards that were developed under the name of normal child development. The pressure to succeed in school is at an all time high as schools and districts are rewarded and punished based on students' performances. In

order to assure the production of a child who would develop into the new liberal democratic citizen who acted as a responsible and self-motivated individual (Foucault, 1979), academic pressures and behavioral expectations have trickled down to those in early childhood education.

These disciplinary technologies:

Made individual desires, affects, and bodily practices objects of change, and subjects of scrutiny to observe for ‘development.’ This decentralization and individualization of subjectivities can be referred to as the governing of the soul [people’s desires, attitudes, and bodily practices] as the focus of scrutiny and administration of the state (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000).

In other words, pedagogy would now rescue the child so that the child could be an adult who is self disciplined, self-motivated, and would function productively. This goal was fundamental to every school, every curriculum, and every interaction with the child.

As noted in Chapter Two, children of poverty, most often children of color, have less access to activities such as play and are more likely to be educated in highly controlled and surveillanced environments highlighting a bias that poor children of color are dangerous, must be controlled, and cannot be trusted. As a function of this power, voices outside of the dominant discourse, marginalized voices, are silenced and alternative knowledge is not included in decision-making and reform, “The hierarchical power of one group over the other is legitimized; children (and to some extent, teachers) are constructed as those without rights to privacy or self-determination, those without knowledge. They are the objects of our lust for education” (Canella, 2000, p. 15). Children and families are left with few options but to conform to the expectations of educational standards, to become docile, or else to protest, often through externalizing behaviors that get punished.

Summary

Foucault's theories of disciplinary technologies, governmentality, and docile bodies are helpful tools to analyze and dissect the dynamics of power in schools. Through surveillance, normalization, and examinations, children are monitored, classified, and controlled. They quickly learn what is expected of them and either conform to their environment or else struggle to function within the system of education. These disciplinary technologies form and shape knowledge and define what can and cannot be known. Powerful voices are heard and marginalized voices are silenced. The governmentality of childhood, particularly the rise and persistence of the field of child development, furthers the normalization and classification of children. Children become understood as passive, voiceless, unknowledgeable subjects who must be molded by smarter and more powerful adults so that they may one day too become productive and motivated grown ups.

In the following chapter, Winnicottian object relations theory and Foucault's theories of power will be utilized to analysis the phenomenon of play in early childhood education and it's impact on children.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion

In the previous chapters I introduced and discussed the phenomenon of play in early childhood education, defined my analysis, which included strengths and limitations, and provided an overview of the theoretical concepts of Donald Winnicott and Michel Foucault. In this chapter, both of these theories are applied to the phenomenon of play in school to advance understanding of how children's wellbeing's are being impacted by the school structures, including the lack of play in their school day.

Theoretical Concepts in Review

The central concepts of Winnicott's object relations theory were presented in Chapter IV. Winnicott, a British psychoanalyst and pediatrician, distinguished himself from his predecessors through his advanced understanding of the developing child in relation to their environment. His examination into the basic human struggle to maintain a certain sense of individuality, which also allows for close contact with others, remains fundamental to his ideas, and to this research inquiry. Winnicott (1971) explained this relational process through his concepts of primary maternal preoccupation, the good enough mother, the holding environment, and transitional space. Later, Winnicott introduced the concepts of the true/false self and creativity to explore, in essence, what "life itself is about." For Winnicott, healthy human development is deeply rooted in the environment and the presence of primary nurturing others. In order to develop into creative and spontaneous beings that feel a sense of aliveness in the world, these early environmental

provisions must be met. However, without this “good enough” early care and the attuned, trustworthy environment that is necessary for development, the child is forced to comply with their surroundings by sacrificing spontaneous gesture. Winnicott stressed the importance of a supportive environment throughout the life span. In his work, *Playing and Reality (1971)*, he attributed, though briefly, substantial responsibility to social institutions like the school in order to maintain this fundamental need throughout development.

Chapter V summarized the theoretical concepts of social theorist Michel Foucault and reviewed his concepts in their application to the context of the school. In his 1979 work, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault investigated the history of society’s shift from physical punishment as a means of social control to the modern forms of disciplinary control. The concepts of docile bodies and disciplinary technologies, which included surveillance, examination, and normalization, were applied to the school environment to uncover the powers of discourse that maintain our school based practices. Foucault’s concept of governmentality was also applied to the construct of the field of child development in order to examine the “truths” that construct our standardized understanding of children in schools.

As illustrated throughout this study, the school system in the United States has remained highly concerned with providing “quality” education to all students. Under the name of accountability and in an attempt to ensure “quality” education, schools have found themselves under stricter controls and standardization pressures. Every moment of the school day is scrutinized for its instructional value, and this pressure has found its way into the classrooms of the youngest in our school system. What has resulted is a phenomenon in which the majority of kindergarteners have little to no access to play and recreational activities. Several studies (Kim, 2011; Ashiabi , 2007; Singer and Lythcott 2004; Murray, 2008; Burns, Andrews, and Szabo,

2002; Wenner, 2009) were reviewed in Chapter III of this study, and reiterate the importance of play in the life of the young child. Of the noted concerns that were included in Chapter III are: a decrease in creative thinking and imagination in childhood (Kim, 2011), an increase in ADHD and depression in children (Murray, 2008; Wenner, 2009), an increase in preschool expulsions (Almon & Miller, 2011), an increase in special education services (Almon & Miller, 2011), and disparities in access to play for children of color and children living in poverty (U.S. Coalition of Play, 2013).

The proceeding chapter builds on the existing theoretical analysis of play and suggests that the “symptoms” listed above need also include that as a result of the decreased access to play, children are also experiencing a deprivation in their True Self development. Winnicott’s (1971) True/False self is presented as an alternative theoretical lens in which we can gain further understanding into why children are demonstrating these symptoms in school.

Analysis

In Lisa S. Goldstein’s 1994 paper titled *What’s Love Got To Do With It?: Feminist Theory and Early Childhood Education*, she argued that the feminist emphasis of care, concern, and connection, which she integrated into the word “love,” has the capacity to offer a potential solution to the problem of early childhood education. She called for teachers of young children to feel, think, and act, to a certain extent, like parents. She discussed Gilligan’s (1982) work that asserts that female ways of knowing are based on interdependence and concern as opposed to the valuing of objectivity and neutrality that comprise much of the male dominated Western thought (Goldstein, 1994). She advocated for the centering of educational efforts to be around love and care, which she affirmed have never been given educational authority because of the dominate perspective’s criticism that the subjective, interpersonal, and experiential are “not ‘objective

facts' that constitute 'real' science" (1994, p. 17). Goldstein, more than anything, voiced concern with creating schools that care about caring, that take it seriously, that understand its value in learning, and that give caring the educational respect and weight that it deserves (1994, p. 16). Goldstein's argument is helpful to consider throughout the application of Winnicott's theoretical concepts to early childhood education. Both position relationship, environment, and individuality at the heart of healthy development and privilege the mother child relationship as a fundamental form of knowledge that can be utilized to enhance educational practices.

Winnicott Play, and the School

Though Winnicott initially developed his theories to better understand the primary provisions that constitute healthy development early in life, my analysis is focused on applying Winnicott's theoretical concepts to the school environment. Early childhood education plays an incredibly important role in the socialization of the young child. When a child enters school, it is often one of the first experiences that child may have of being in the world independent of a caregiver or familiar other. This can be a highly overwhelming experience for many children and families, a disillusionment in its own respect. Thinking of the early childhood education experience as an extension of Winnicott's developmental theory uncovers potential areas of critique that can help to offer alternative solutions to the current school system.

Winnicott held that certain conditions are necessary for the self to develop. In his work, *Playing: Creative Activity and The Search For The Self*," Winnicott connected those conditions to what he labeled creativity. Winnicott proclaimed that it is only in playing that the individual is able to be creative and use the whole of their personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual can discover the self (1971). The self is inherently rooted in an individual's ability to

play, to be creative, to access their truest expression of self. What, then, happens to the young child who is unable to play in school?

If we return to Winnicott's concepts of the holding environment, the good enough mother, and the True/False self, we can begin to uncover a potential answer to this question. For Winnicott, the capacity to play begins within the mother child relationship. As the good enough mother arises from her primary maternal preoccupation, a space emerges between the baby and the mother, a potential space. If the mother has been good enough, has created a holding environment in which the baby is seen in an attuned way, is able to trust that his environment is safe, trustworthy, and reliable, then the baby is able to escape into himself, to explore his imagination, his spontaneous gestures, his aliveness. He is able to develop as his True self. However, if a mother or caregiver is not able to be "good enough" and if demands are made on the baby that are stressful or outside of the baby's scope of development, the baby must comply with the mother's needs and a fragmentation of the self is experienced. When this occurs, the child's highly individuated True Self is hidden by a need for compliance to the environment resulting in a loss of spontaneous gesture.

It is in this compliance that one experiences a sense of futility, a relationship with reality in which life is recognized as something to be fitted in with or adapted to (Winnicott, 1971, p. 87). If we are to conceptualize the young kindergartner's development within the environment of school, we can recognize several areas where demands are made on the child in which this compliance is present. Winnicott's concept of compliance will be synthesized with the theories of Foucault and explored more deeply later in this chapter, however it is important to examine the ways in which compliance is a fundamental experience of the school child.

Though some level of compliance is necessary in order to function within social groups, Winnicott stated that it is in health that the child is to attain identification with social groupings and with society, *without too great a loss* of personal spontaneity (1971). It has been the argument of this paper that too many children in early childhood education experience too great a loss of personal spontaneity because of a need to comply with their educational environment. The lack of play in early childhood education and the increase of rigorous academic standards are one profound example of this.

As Winnicott has stated, it is in play, and only in play, that the child discovers the self. However in the current school system, students as young as four years old are confined to their desks as they are rushed to acquire new skills that are believed to enhance their future learning even though numerous studies have been conducted that reiterate the importance of play in a child's growing capacity to learn (Almon & Miller, 2011).

In an inner city public kindergarten in Oakland, California, the daily "art" lesson comprised of children coloring in photocopies of a coloring sheet by mimicking the teacher as she colored in the sheet on the overhead. The teacher began the lesson by instructing the students to, "Hold up the blue crayon." After all had obeyed, and after she had named the ones who hadnet, she added, "Begin coloring." The children would begin to color in the appropriate shape with the blue crayon as the teacher would scan around the room to ensure that they were staying within the lines and coloring in "dark and shiny." Once the majority of students had accomplished this task, she repeated the process by instructing the children to hold up the next color. After the coloring sheet was complete, the teacher moved from desk to desk to check each students' work, placing an "X" on the top of the pages that failed to meet the dark and shiny requirements or remain inside of the lines. The classroom was highly organized; the majority of

the students were well managed and knew what was expected of them, and predictable consequences were given if students were unable to comply.

However for Winnicott, what was important in such an environment is very different if our aim is to support the individual growth of the child. He stated, “a facilitating environment must have a human quality, not a mechanical perfection, so the phrase ‘good-enough mother’ seems to me to meet the need for a description of what the child needs if the inherited growth processes are to become actual in the development of the individual child” (1986, p. 144). What Winnicott meant when he said, “the phrase ‘good-enough mother,’” is a caring adult who sees and reflects the child in their rich individuality; who is attuned and reliable and allows the child the space they need to explore and learn while also remaining available. Goldstein (1994) made a similar argument when she called for the centering of early childhood education to be around love and care, when she emphasized a need for teachers to think, feel, and act as parents, or in other words, as “good-enough mothers.” And theorist John Dewey wrote, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his child, that must we want for all the children of the community. Anything less for our schools is narrow and unlovely, and left unchecked, destroys our democracy " (1902, p.7). Winnicott clarified this thought by stating that children can be fed without love, but loveless or impersonal management cannot succeed in producing a new autonomous human child (1971, p. 146).

Though the above example may seem like an anomaly, unfortunately it is not an uncommon scenario in many schools. What happens when a child is unable to access any form of true, creative expression of the self and to have that expression valued and reflected back to them by their environment is that they must comply with their surroundings. They must learn what it is that will win them the acceptance and approval that they need in order to survive in the

system. They must remain attuned to the expectations of their environment at *too great a* loss of their own spontaneity. They must function from a place of False self. In his 1953 work, *Education and the Significance of Life*, Krishnamurti stated, “Instead of awakening the integrated intelligence of the individual, education is encouraging him to conform to a pattern and so is hindering his comprehension of himself as a total process” (p. 2). Winnicott would surely add to Krishnamurti’s claim that the state of education is also hindering to the development of the individual’s True self.

Play, on the other hand, is the truest expression of self for the child. When play is incorporated into the classroom, when young children have access to free-play for even parts of the day, they are receiving a message that their lives, ideas, expressions, and discoveries are important. They receive a message that their True selves are valued. When a teacher allows a child to enter their own play, when that teacher sees and reflects the child’s exploration and discoveries, the teacher communicates to the child, “I see you, you are real, you are important, you exist.” When a teacher gives a child space to explore and question while remaining available to support them in a “good enough” way, they say to the child, “you are safe to explore, to learn, to be.” The child begins to trust in the school environment as a holding environment; as a place that is reliable, safe, and invested in their individual growth. A potential space opens up between the child and the school where true creative living can happen, where the child can come into existence in their relationship to school. Winnicott (1971) states,

The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience, which leads to trust. It can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living (p. 139).

To reiterate, it is within creativity that Winnicott located the self. For him, the search for the self is dependent on the child's environment. And the child's environment, or the conditions that support the child in this search for the self, are what he called creativity (1971, p. 72).

In contrast, Winnicott held that exploitation of this potential area leads to pathological conditions. It is possible to consider that the decrease in creative thinking that Kim (2011) noted, the increase in depression and ADHD that Murray (2008) and Wenner (2009) spoke of, and the increase in preschool expulsions and special education services that Almon and Miller (2011) illustrated are a partial response to the exploitation of this potential space. That they are a manifestation of the False self attempting to speak up against the rigorous demands being made on children. It should be remembered that Almon and Miller's (2011) study concluded quite simply: less play, more expulsions. For Winnicott, the anti social act and the pathological presentation are a return to the point at which the environment failed the child. They are an attempt by the child to alert the environment to the fact that she is being deprived in some way (Phillips, 1998, p. 17). And we must be willing to listen and see if we are functioning from a place of love, from a place of good-enough mothering, as Goldstein, Dewy, and Winnicott invited us to do.

Foucault and the School

Foucault's work offers a critical and nuanced understating of the manifestations, functioning, and effects of modern educational practices and institutions, "At the heart of the practice of teaching, Foucault argued, is a defined and regulated relation of surveillance which acts to improve its efficiency" (Deacon, 2006). Through disciplinary power, which includes surveillance, examination, and normalization, individuals are shaped and molded into docile bodies. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence explain in their 1999 work, *Beyond Quality in Early*

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Disciplinary power does not coerce in a straightforward sense, but achieves its goals through the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. In short, it normalizes, that is it shapes individuals towards a particular norm, a norm being a standard of some kind (p. 36).

Disciplinary power determines what is normal and acts to measure, compare, and categorize individuals against that norm. However, modern disciplinary power is increasingly nuanced. It is not a confrontation, but a “steering or guiding the subject to a desired end preferably without their awareness of what is happening” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 36). This is often achieved by the subject internalizing these technologies of control resulting in a governing of the self.

The use of disciplinary power in schools was explored in Chapter V, followed by an analysis of the field of child development and the governmentality of childhood. As Canella (2000) stated, disciplinary technologies construct invisible power, silently, creating students as bodies to be controlled. Through surveillance, examination, and normalization, students are shaped, trained, and taught to obey and respond. This production of students as docile bodies can be evidenced in the example of the art lesson that was previously illustrated. The students were under constant surveillance as the teacher scanned the room looking for and punishing any sign of defiance, their bodies were controlled and confined as she instructed them to remain in their seats and raise their crayons in unison, and their work was put under the scrutiny of examination as she placed an “X” on the unsatisfactory work normalizing and punishing those who did not comply with her expectations. This single example of classroom instruction also worked to produce and maintain knowledge of and about student behavior and appropriate ways of being. The children were rewarded if they were able to internalize their teacher’s expectations and govern themselves accordingly, and punished or humiliated if unable or unwilling to comply in

this way. Instead of the children being valued by their individuality, growth, creativity, or risk taking, they are valued based on their ability to demonstrate their adherence to the knowledge deemed as superior, their ability to conform (Foucault, 1979, p. 190). Children, like their coloring, are to remain inside of the lines.

It is important to acknowledge how and why schools continue to function in this way. But what is more important for Foucault is to uncover the knowledge and “truths” that have informed our relations with children so that we can begin to question their prevalence. The field of child development and its impact on early childhood education is one such place to question.

Developmental psychology and the experts within the field have played a particularly important role in the power relations of the school through a governing system of standardization and classifications. The field has been incredibly productive in constructing what it means to be a young child and how to be an early childhood institution (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). As a result of this construction, it became possible to think about socially administering the child through institutions like the school in order to produce a productive and well adjusted adult who would participate in the social and cultural institutions of their time (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000).

This governmentality of childhood has been incredibly influential in the modern day school systems. Early childhood education, to most people, remains a unique environment in which the child is the “center” of their own experience. Though post-modern thinkers like Canella (2000) have also questioned this narrative of childhood, the kindergarten classroom has shifted in recent years and an increase in the disciplinary controls that were once more evident in older classrooms have found their way into the lives of those in early childhood education.

Through the overreliance on the examination, the increased standardization of education, and the discourse of accountability, the pressures for schools to shape, guide, and manage children in

light of a certain principle or goal is at an all time high. This governmentality of the child has resulted in what Foucault (1979) called a governing of the soul. Bloch and Popkewitz (2000) explained this as a governing of the inner dispositions, sensitivities, and capabilities of the child's being. The child, more than ever, has become a product of the state. Every interaction, every moment of instruction, every act of surveillance, every examination, has this "principle or goal" in mind. The power and knowledge that make up development, and in turn education, objectify and subjugate the child by assuming and naturalizing their being and conceptualizing human needs in relation to the functioning of the state. No longer is the child valued for who they are in this moment, for their feelings and interests and questions, instead they are seen as a potential, as empty vessels that need to be filled, as formless beings that need to be molded. In this context, who has time for play? We must shape children for future production!

The diminished presence of play in education has occurred for several reasons that have been addressed throughout this thesis. However, I propose that play has also become less prevalent in schools because of its potential political and critical power. Play, taken seriously, assumes that children have something to say, that they have selves to express and discover. Play is the opposite of a docile body; it is the body in action, "Playing is doing" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 55). It implies that children are people worthy of expression right now, not just in the future. That their growth will not and cannot be standardized, that their learning can not be prescribed. Play would invite disorder, would allow children to explore alternative ways of knowing and being, it would invite questions, it would acknowledge alternative voices, children's voices, as powerful and important creators of knowledge. It would, in essence, challenge the prevailing governmentality of childhood.

Synthesis

Though Winnicott and Foucault would be considered by many to be diametrically opposed in principle, and though that difference may be true in many respects, useful similarities do exist between the two bodies of work. Education theorist John Dewey (1972) drew on the importance of both psychological and social theory in relation to education when he stated, “I believe that this educational process has two sides - one psychological and one sociological; and that neither can be subordinate to the other or neglected without evil results following” (p. 85). Both Winnicott and Foucault attempted to expose, in great detail, the danger and harm of individual and collective compliance. Both dedicated vast amounts of energy toward uncovering the source of human vitality, aliveness, and expression. Both searched, in their own way, for freedom, and place the environment and relationship at the heart of that quest.

Earlier in this chapter, the concepts of both Winnicott and Foucault were applied to the phenomenon of play in the school environment. By applying these concepts, it was illustrated that the current early childhood education system is not functioning in the attuned, reflective, “good enough” way so as to foster the development of the child’s True self. Rather, children are forced to comply with their environment at too great a cost to their spontaneity, vitality, and creativity, causing a fragmentation of the self and increasing symptomatic presentations. Children have been removed from the context of their own education, their voices have been silenced, and their bodies have been controlled. The developmental maps, the classifications, and the prescribed categories that children face have too often replaced the richly complex, lived experiences of the child.

In conceptualizing the educational environment through the lens of Foucault, it does not seem far-fetched to consider that the average current school environment is not conducive to

supporting the personal, spiritual, and individual growth of the child, particularly if a child functions outside of what is defined as “normal.” Disciplinary institutions like the school not only formulate norms for the actions and abilities they want (in the case of education it is the docile, liberal, democratic, productive adult) but they also enforce conformity to them (Jardine, 2005). The individual conformity that occurs in such an environment was, for Winnicott, the source of the false self-organization, and for Foucault, the source of the production of the docile body. When a child must adapt to their environment because of external demands, when they must modify who they are in order to be recognized or seen, the True self submerges and the False self surfaces in order to protect the True self from exploitation (Winnicott, 1971).

The True self can only be located in the creative act, and the creative act can only occur if the experience of the environment implies trust. However the application of Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power and governmentality expose the hidden ways in which the school shapes, guides and manages children with a special interest in molding who it is they become (Foucault, 1979). If children are valued solely based on their capacity to meet the state’s predetermined goals, there can be no trust; there can be no potential space in which the child can engage in the creative act. Just as the child cannot begin to develop his True self if he must adapt to be a certain way in order to gain his mother’s love, the child cannot engage in the truly creative act if he must conform to his school’s standardization of growth in order to gain approval and avoid punishment. This governmentality of children that Foucault speaks of is a direct exploitation of the potential space between the child and the school in which Winnicott locates the anti social act (1971).

The disciplinary powers that exist within the school demand the very conformity that is the source of the False self development. The disciplinary powers in schools are harmful to the

wellbeing of children as it negatively impacts the child's capacity to develop into a self in which "feeling real is more than existing; it is finding a way to exist as oneself, and to relate to objects as oneself, and to have a self into which to retreat for relaxation (Phillips, 2005, p. 128). Without allowing for the uniqueness of each child to be valued, without inviting and making space for alternative voices to be heard, without loosening our grips on the knowledge of normative development, without expanding our understanding of intelligence and learning, we will continue to stifle the vital creativity in many children. Play is one such way to begin to make this shift.

Play, for Winnicott, is the truest expression of the self. What happens when the child is able to access her natural form of expression in the school is that she is able to begin to discover, value and be valued for her own voice. She is able to explore alternative ways of being, to connect her life to the context of her school. Play's value lies in many places, the cognitive, the social, the emotional, but what has been and continues to be the concern of this study is play's value as an expression of the self. Hindering a child's access to play, for Winnicott, is a hindering of the child's self.

Strengths and Limitations

This study was aimed at addressing the question of how the lack of play in school affects the developing child's sense of self. Through Winnicott and Foucault's respective theoretical concepts, the school environment was analyzed, uncovering inherent forms of power and constructed knowledge about what it means to be a child. Though this study was fruitful in beginning to illustrate the nuanced ways in which social institutions effect the psychological and social development of individuals, in presenting new ways of understanding the impact schools may have on some children, and the ways in which knowledge about children have been utilized

to dominate and control, an obvious limitation lies in the study's narrow scope. The child's developing self is expansive and intersectional, incorporating many parts of her identity. Several social domains, not just the school, hold influence over its development. It may have, at times, seemed that this inquiry remained too narrow in its scope to provide useful thought, but I remain convinced, much like Foucault, that it is important to question the nuance, to uncover the hidden dynamics of power that are bound in small, seemingly invisible, interactions. For it is this invisibility that gives it power.

I am also aware that throughout this study I have privileged play as an important and universal truth. However, it is important to remember that Winnicott's concept of play is far reaching in its definition. For Winnicott, play is a way of living, a way of relating to the world. It is a form of relaxation and expression of the self. In this way, play can be defined by almost anyone in his or her own way and I hold that almost all can find a form of play that fulfills an importance to their wellbeing.

Implications for Social Work Practice, Policy, Research

Social work is deeply rooted in a firm ethical commitment to fight oppressive systems and to advocate for the wellbeing of all people. The issue of education is a prolific one and we are finding ourselves at a crucial time in which attention to the state of education is mounting. Social workers that work with young children and their families must be aware of the state of public education and the potential effects that social systems like the school can have on the wellbeing of our children in order to properly treat and advocate for change. The findings of this study should be utilized to enhance and inform assessment, evaluation, and treatment of children presenting with symptoms of ADHD, depression, and Disruptive Behavior Disorder. We are too

quick to locate the malfunction in the individual child without first taking into consideration the complexity, and sometimes deeply nuanced, web of systems that impact their functioning.

Conclusion

It was my intention with this inquiry to propose an alternative way of understanding the current early childhood climate and to offer play as a potential solution to that problem. For years I have worked with children who have felt a deep sense of futility, a disconnection from their school environment, an alienation from themselves and others, and a desire to conform to outside expectations. I have observed the difference between the education received by the privileged minority and the marginalized majority and I have questioned the reason for the prevalence of that difference. I have watched as play has disappeared from the classroom of young children. I have talked to the veteran public school kindergarten teachers who have chosen to retire early because they could no longer tolerate the standardized curriculums being enforced on them and their students. And, maybe most influentially, I have accessed my own experience of being a creative individual who grew up in the public school system. All of these different forms of knowing have impacted my understanding of this phenomenon and have led me to believe that if we are to create spaces in this world for children to become fully alive, then we must find a way to mitigate our demands for who they should be so that we can allow them to become who they are.

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