Teaching Preschool is Hard:
Embodiment, Ideology, Fallibility and Futurity

by

Denise E. Bailey

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Sociology)
in the University of Michigan
2017

Doctoral Committee:
 Professor Karin A. Martin (Chair)
 Associate Professor Elizabeth A. Armstrong
 Associate Professor Karyn R. Lacy
 Assistant Professor Christina J. Weiland

Denise E. Bailey

denise.e.bailey@gmail.com

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-5721-7361

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Cheryl and Harold Pickern, mother and father figures. And to my Benji Boo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Between the moment I began the research for this dissertation and the moment of its defense, five years have passed. In that time I have become a mother, married, divorced, experienced grief for the first time, and shifted into an alternative-academic career trajectory. Above all else I have learned from this process that we are all connected, that one's ability to exercise one's will (their agency) is inextricably and necessarily bound and dependent upon an entire network of others. Whether we are children or adults we rely on others to reach our goals.

I must begin by thanking the teachers, administrators and children at Block Tower Preschool[1], who let me into their classrooms and hearts. I loved my time there, even though it was exhausting. I hope this dissertation helps Block Tower in its mission in some small way, or otherwise contributes to the acknowledgement of the important work that the teachers (and administrators) do. Many of the children will likely not remember me years from now, but I will always remember them. Interacting with them taught me a lot about how to be a better facilitator, playmate, mentor, and mother.

Next I want to recognize Karin Martin for her indispensable advising and support. She has been steadfastly open to my ideas, providing thoughtful feedback every step of this long journey. I deeply appreciate her willingness engage with me in the many spiraling peregrinations that sprout and intertwine when one spends a good deal of time thinking and reading about gender, childhood, education, work, theory, and methodology. I also appreciate her openness to

---

[1] Pseudonyms have been assigned to the preschool and all study participants to ensure their confidentiality.

my choice to take an alternative path through the end-stages of this process. When I nervously told her I was pregnant she simply said, "Yay!"

I also greatly appreciate my other committee members for their various contributions to the project. Elizabeth Armstrong provided valuable feedback on theoretical framing and writing for publication. Karyn Lacy offered insights especially into the aspects of the dissertation that touched on race, social capital, education, and emotional labor. Christina Weiland helped me to better link my insights to the field of early childhood education.

I want to acknowledge Sarah Burgard as well, who as Graduate Director after I "went alt-ac" embraced my slow but steady plan to finish.

Thanks are also due to Tomoko Wakabayashi for offering me a research internship at the Center for Early Education Evaluation at the High Scope Foundation in Ypsilanti, which allowed me to understand the High Scope curriculum in a much deeper way.

I want to acknowledge the talented and thoughtful colleagues who collaborated with me throughout my graduate school experience. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with many in the Gender and Sexuality workshop, a special space where everyone puts their insights into a pile in the middle of the table and we all take away from it what we need. Lotus Seeley and I, in particular, have traded ideas in a non-stop feedback loop starting from the night she drove me to the airport after recruitment weekend. Claire Herbert and I bonded over being mother-sociologists. Mathieu Desan and I bonded over being labor-activist-sociologists. And Heidi Gansen and I geeked out for hours over our shared interest in all things preschool.

Another group of graduate students has also greatly contributed my sense of purpose: those who have volunteered and worked alongside me at the Graduate Employees' Organization (AFT-MI Local 3550). Working for a labor union has been indispensable for clarifying what I

mean when I talk about "work." In addition to Lotus, Matt, and Claire, I also want to recognize Urmila Venkatesh, Renee Echols, Kiara Vigil, Ian Robinson, Jon Curtiss, Robin Zheng, Austin McCoy, and John Ware for their gifts of solidarity. All the activists at GEO deserve recognition for their commitment to making the University better for graduate laborers than they found it.

I must also recognize Josh Steverman, my son Ben's father, who has been a devoted co-parent even in the darkest and most confusing times. With the odd exception of cutting Ben's fingernails, I can say with the confidence of someone who has taught The Sociology of Marriage and the Family from a feminist perspective, that he does his fair share of doctor's appointments, birthday present purchases, swim lessons and school-related meetings, bedtimes and bathtimes, visits with relatives, clothes and shoes, meals and laundry. His willingness to cooperate with me in our equitable arrangement has provided me with the time to get everything done, simple as that.

I cannot say as much for my son, who adds significantly to my work load! But I will say that what he lacks in an ability to get more than 70% of his food into his mouth at any given meal, he makes up for in helping me remember there is life outside of myself. He is the reason I strive for a decent work-life balance, for good health and a good mental attitude. (He's also pretty sweet and cute and gives good cuddles.)

Looking back at my own childhood, there have been some key mentors who deserve recognition as well. My grandmother, Dorothy Sloter, who is 94 years old this year, remains the matriarch and primary breadwinner of my maternal side. She held a court-reporting job during WWII and kept it after, rare for a woman at that time; and when she retired she served as President of the San Diego County Retired Employees Association for eleven years. She provided my mother with child care in my first five years, talked to me constantly, and taught me

to read, write, and "enunciate." My grandfather, who passed away in 2013, was an early source of warmth and care as well. He watched cartoons with my sister and I on Saturday mornings, told silly stories, danced funny dances, and gave good cuddles too.

My two high school soccer coaches also deserve recognition for helping me weave the subconscious safety net I carry around with me. Coaching team sports is a wonderful example of how more experienced humans can facilitate their team's intentional behavior against the many things they cannot control. When I feel weak or tired I often draw on their lessons of perseverance to keep working hard.

Of course my mother and father also provided mentorship in ways only parents can. I appreciate my mother especially for all the physical affection I received as a child, and I appreciate my father for all the moments he coached me. I know I am lucky that I can say without hesitation that both of them were there and continue to be there for me unconditionally. It has been especially fun to watch them become grandparents, to be there for Ben unconditionally, too.

Finally I want to acknowledge Harold and Cheryl Pickern, an artist and a nurse, who were my best friend's parents and my fictive kin for a huge swath of my childhood and adolescence. Participating in their family lifeworld provided me with not only exposure to the cultural capital my parents could not offer, but more importantly facilitated my thinking about that capital. Harold died in 2013 six weeks before my grandfather. His death ushered in the most difficult year of my adult life. In grief I was forced to examine all of my connections and to process the painful reality of their limits. My best friend and I idolized and looked up to Harold, working to live up to the high expectations he set for us. During one of my last visits with him, he asked me what it was I *wanted to do* (characteristically, in the "big picture" sense). I said all I

really wanted to do was speak loudly and clearly. At this he chuckled. When I asked him why, he said that he used to tell us when we were kids that speaking loudly and clearly was the goal. I had no memory of this.

It was not until after Harold died that I recognized Cheryl's presence throughout all our time together. She too worked hard for him. She supported his artistic pursuits, going so far as to be both breadwinner and homemaker of their family. On the many weekends we spent together, she frequently prepared breakfast, lunch and dinner, Saturday and Sunday, in between trips to the beach, and long conversations, and hanging the towels to dry in the sunshine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines adult-child relations in a way that challenges prevalent understandings of adult power in childhood studies. It aims to examine preschool teachers' experiences under the same lens as children, as prescribed within childhood studies paradigm -- which is to say, to extend them the same openness to their experiences and perspectives in the research. The goal is to provide a more balanced picture of adult-child interaction, where adult actions that many childhood scholars might obscure or interpret as always-already oppressive are considered from more positive angles. The author writes with an eye toward re-valuing adults' interactions alongside children both in the subfield and the broader culture.

Combining insights from childhood studies and feminist scholarship, the author explores the particular embodied skills entailed in the labor of teaching preschool, as well as the ideologies to which teachers themselves subscribe and the theories that inform and are reflected in them. Research was conducted at a preschool serving exclusively at-risk children. The primary methods employed were ethnography and in-depth, semi-structured interviews.[2] Interviews were conducted with all eleven of the teachers at the field site, as well as with the director of the preschool. Participant-observation occurred in four of the six classrooms over a period of thirteen months. Rapport between the researcher, teachers, and children developed concomitantly, while

---

[2] A full interview schedule can be found in Appendix B.

the researcher's own embodiment, especially her pregnancy, lent emotional weight to the project, the work, and the rapport between herself and the research participants.

The substantive chapters of the dissertation consist of three distinct but related papers, separated into chapters. The first, titled "Getting on Their Level: Preschool Teachers Embodying the Ideal Preschooler" provides a descriptive account of the unique embodied skill sets that the preschool teachers developed through repeated interactions with a "large N" of preschoolers. The author describes these skills as "embodying the ideal preschooler," which entails the enactment of exaggerated friendliness and passive openness to children's interaction initiations, play preferences, and usages of adults' bodies. She shows how the teachers were motivated to take up and practice this embodiment by their own beliefs about good pedagogy, which were founded on a valuation of child-centered, active-participatory learning. In the conclusion of this chapter, the existence of such skills and the teachers' commitment to practicing them in spite of their physical and emotional intensity, are used to justify the normative argument that such work deserves more societal recognition and valuation.

The second paper, titled "The Ideal Carer Role: Acknowledging Maternal Potential in Preschool," builds on this argument for valuation by attending to how the lack of such maps onto gender. The author aims to correct the tendency in childhood studies, and especially childhood ethnography, to disappear and devalue the feminine, caring aspects of adults' everyday interactions with children. She begins by showing how ethnographers of childhood contributed to this trend largely through the promotion of "least-adult methodology," and to a lesser extent through poststructuralist critiques of this approach. An alternative methodological approach is then offered – taking up the ideal carer role -- which better accounts for how adult interactions

with children are gendered. This is an especially important methodological tool for studies of preschools, which are staffed disproportionately by women.

The third paper, titled "Coercion and Confession: Understanding Adult Fallibility in Preschool" then explores three key theoretical moments in childhood studies over the last 40 years, in particular their approaches to understanding power and agency in adult-child relations. The author characterizes the earliest set of approaches as the "structural moment," the subsequent set as the "poststructural moment" and the final set as the "critical realist moment," describing how each contributed to strong or weak conceptualizations of agency, and how these, in turn, generated different understandings of how power operates in adult-child interactions. She then examines the relatively rare moments of adult coercion of children at the preschool in order to show which aspects of these theories are reflected in, and thus best inform, these experiences. She concludes by suggesting that childhood scholarship utilize theories that most adequately explain the experiences of adults' everyday interactions with children, with special attention to their reflexivity and fallibility.

In the concluding chapter the author discusses the applicability of her approach to studies of other childhood centers, other ages, other levels of analysis, and other fields. This points the way toward future pathways of research. She then further elaborates her argument for better scholarly and political support of early childhood educators in light of the problems and issues identified in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

My best friend's parents are the reason I went to graduate school. Statistically speaking a white girl with working class, uneducated parents has a better shot than her African-American or Latina counterparts at climbing up the class ladder a rung or two. But the likeliest outcome, regardless of race, is the reproduction of parental class and education level (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Kearney 2006; Mitnik et al. 2015). My best friend's mother Cheryl was a nurse and her father Harold was an artist. They were educated and politically aware; they were feminists. Between the ages of seven and seventeen I spent countless weekends at their house, often from Friday after school to late Sunday night. It was not uncommon for me to kiss them good morning like family. It was never a problem for Cheryl to factor in an extra plate for me at meals. And after dinner Harold would occasionally engage my best friend and I in lengthy dialogues about abstract matters, asking us what we thought, holding us accountable for our explanations. Cheryl would also contribute her adamant two cents to these conversations, often from the kitchen.

Harold and Cheryl were my first mentors. They taught me how to make creative leaps of thought, to ask questions without tentativeness, and indeed to seek out subsequent mentors. They showed me that seeking out knowledge from others was part and parcel of developing one's own knowledge. Being a fictive member of their family also allowed me to access cultural capital and habits of the professional and creative classes that my own working class family could not

provide. Over the years I adopted their belief in my intellectual capability into my own self-concept. My grades eventually proved good enough to get me into college at UC Berkeley, which I attended at Cheryl's urging. (I would not have understood the caliber of the university into which I had been accepted had she not explained it to me, and I trusted her guidance so much that I left behind a controlling boyfriend who was pressuring me not to go.) I graduated with honors and began my graduate studies at the University of Michigan, where I embarked on a research program in childhood studies.

Yet while my personal experience showed me the potential value of mentorship as a positive, ongoing collaboration between adults and children, the childhood studies I became enmeshed in intellectually led me to the conclusion that I, as a childhood scholar, should fix my research lens on children to the exclusion of adults. This is because studies on children's "worlds" and "lived experiences" "in their own right" have enjoyed a place of privilege in the subfield since its paradigm shift in the 1970s (Cook 2010; James et al 1998). The paradigm shift turned on a critique of prior traditions of childhood study which, it was argued, tended to examine children and childhood only from within "the family" or institutions, or only as passive recipients of adult training. Traditional models were also criticized for focusing on children only insofar as this might predict something about their future adulthood, rather than say something about their current, lived experiences. All of these critiques added up to a rejection of "adult-centricism," which resulted in a body of research that stressed children's competencies and abilities, rather than their vulnerabilities (James et al 1998; Pugh 2013).

When I initially gained access to Block Tower Preschool -- a local, nationally accredited center that provided affordable childcare and education solely for "at-risk" families -- my intention was to therefore study the children and to bracket off the adults, whom I expected,

given my training, to be "always-already" oppressive forces on the margins of the children's worlds. Yet perhaps in part because of my own childhood experiences, I felt pulled toward the teachers' experiences from the outset. I suspected that I could learn as much from them as from the children. So I decided instead to extend the same openness to them as prescribed to ethnographers studying children's worlds (Christiansen 2004; Raffety 2014).[3]

What I was able to access by doing so was the shared world of the classroom, rather than children's or adults' worlds bracketed off from, and oppositional to, one another (Fernie et al. 2010). And within the shared classroom culture I indeed found (and eventually joined in) well-established norms of collaboration with children in their learning. This collaboration was based on a deep-seated respect for each individual child, and "where they were at" in various learning processes. Notably I also found that the children were comfortable asking teachers for help and asked often; and that the teachers considered their duty to help a central component of their role in the classroom. These aspects of preschool classroom culture seem obvious to me in retrospect (especially since becoming a mother!) But their prominence initially gave me pause. My prior training had not adequately prepared me to find such commonplace adult-child relations and patterns of interaction, bent as it was on emphasizing children's "worlds," perspectives "in their own right," and capabilities over and above their vulnerabilities.

Increasingly I felt that the story I needed to tell was one that better accounted for the fact of children's vulnerabilities. The teachers figured prominently into this story, as the primary others sought out by the children to address their vulnerabilities. There was unabashed recognition of interdependency even though the teachers in many ways had more power than the children. "I need help," was a commonly heard phrase at Block Tower, and the children voiced

---

[3] For a more extensive methodological discussion, see Appendix A.

this because they knew help was available. I had found, in other words, that children sometimes also exercised their agency by asking grown-ups to assert their power over them in some way -- to do something for them, to advise them, to even enforce a rule upon them.

This dissertation thus asks how and when such collaboration is possible between children and adults and provides an extensive qualitative account of the hard work of responding to children's requests as a familiar, caring adult.

First, in Chapter 2, I show that this work is both deeply embodied and subject to myriad ideological pressures. I provide a descriptive account of the unique embodied skills that preschool teachers develop through repeated interactions with a "large N" of preschoolers. I describe these skills as "embodying the ideal preschooler," which entails the enactment of exaggerated friendliness and passive openness to children's initiations, preferences, and usages of adults' bodies. I also show that teachers are motivated to take up and practice this embodiment by their own beliefs about good pedagogy, which are founded on a valuation of child-centered, active-participatory learning.

Then in Chapter 3 I aim to correct for the tendency in childhood studies, and especially childhood ethnography, to disappear and devalue the feminine, caring aspects of adults' everyday interactions with children, much of which is encompassed in "embodying the ideal preschooler." I begin by showing how childhood ethnographers contributed to this trend largely through the promotion of "least-adult methodology," and to a lesser extent, through poststructuralist critiques of this approach. I then offer an alternative methodological approach -- the ideal carer role -- which I argue better accounts for how adult interactions with children are gendered.

Chapter 4 then situates the insights and arguments of the prior two chapters within an exploration of key theoretical moments in childhood studies in the last 40 years, in particular their approaches to power and agency in adult-child relations. I characterize the earliest set of approaches as the "structural moment," the subsequent set as the "poststructural moment" and the final set as the "critical realist moment." Then I examine the relatively rare instances of adult coercion of children at Block Tower in order to show which aspects of the theories are reflected in, and thus best explain, these experiences. I conclude by suggesting that, in order to move the field forward, childhood scholarship should utilize theories that most adequately capture the experiences of adults' everyday interactions with children. I suggest in particular that childhood studies continue moving toward critical realist approaches that "split the difference" between strong and weak conceptualizations of agency, in order to account for both similarities and differences of power in adult-child interactions. Critical realism achieves this in part by re-centering human intentionality, which is both future-oriented and fallible.

Finally, in the Conclusion I discuss the applicability of my approach to adult-child relations to studies of other childhood centers, other ages, other levels of analysis, and other fields. This then points the way toward future pathways of research. I end by re-emphasizing how each of the previous chapters build toward a moral and political argument for greater valuation of preschool teaching, as well as for greater scholarly and societal recognition of adults' hard work of mentoring children. I then further elaborate my argument for better scholarly, political, and cultural support of early childhood educators.

References

Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Christiansen, Pia Haudrup. 2004. "Children's Participation in Ethnographic Research: Issues of Power and Representation." *Children & Society* 18(2):165–76.

Cook, Daniel Thomas. 2010. "A Ghostly Presence." *Childhood* 18(1) 3-6.

Fernie, David, Samara Madrid, and Rebecca Kantor. 2010. *Educating Toddlers to Teachers: Learning to See and Influence the School and Peer Cultures of Classrooms*. New York: Hampton Press.

James, Allison, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout. 1998. *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kearney, Melissa S. 2006. "Intergenerational Mobility for Women and Minorities in the United States." *The Future of Children*. 16(2):37–53.

Mitnik, Pablo, Erin Cumberworth and David Grusky. 2016. "Social Mobility in a High-Inequality Regime." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 663(1):140-184.

Pugh, Allison J. 2013. "The Theoretical Costs of Ignoring Childhood: Rethinking Independence, Insecurity, and Inequality." *Theory and Society* 43(1):71-89.

Raffety, Erin L. 2014. "Minimizing Social Distance: Participatory Research with Children." *Childhood* 22(3): 409–22.

"Getting on Their Level": Preschool Teachers Embodying the Ideal Preschooler

Figure A: Rules for Adults During Play Time

Introduction

In recent decades childhood scholarship has witnessed a shift in the conceptualization of both "the child's level" and adults' relationship to it. The general sentiment is captured in the placard above. The Child has been increasingly conceived as agentic and participative, with a perspective and lived experience worth taking seriously (James et al. 1998; James and Prout 1997). "Rules for adults" interacting with this participative child flip the traditional expectation by encouraging adult deference to children's preferences (Smith 2011). They admonish adults to

engage with children in the way children prefer – through play – and to do so attentively, respectfully, and flexibly.

A long legacy of childhood research, occurring within a historical era characterized by an increasing need for adult flexibility (Lee 2001; Smith 2011; Swadener and Lubeck 1995; Vandenbroeck and Bie 2006) has contributed to this expectation of adult-child interaction, which has increasingly become "common sense" amongst early childhood educators and middle class parents. National policies governing early childhood education emphasize "active participatory learning" and "developmentally appropriate practice," which aim to "meet children where they are at" (Bredekamp 1987; Fernie et al. 2010; Hohmann 2008). At the same time, intensive mothering, with its emphasis on spending "floor time" with children, maintains its position as a dominant ideology in parent-focused media, especially parenting magazines, and "mommy blogs" (Hays 1996; Smith 2011).

Proponents consider this "getting on a child's level" to be the most appropriate and pedagogically effective way for adults to interact with children. But while curricular guidelines and parenting blogs offer plenty of advice for enactment, we know very little about the actual experience of enactment. What is it like to get on a child's level when one is simultaneously charged with moving the child to a different, more complex (though not necessarily "higher") one, as in educational settings like preschools? How, for instance, do preschool teachers incorporate these recommendations into their everyday embodied labor?

Using ethnographic data gathered over thirteen months at Block Tower Preschool, I show that the pedagogical goals of the preschool, coupled with exposure to a "large N" of young children, necessitate that teachers develop and sustain a highly specialized, intensive set of embodied interactive skills. I characterize this labor as "embodying the ideal preschooler" where

8

teachers use their bodies to promote positive affiliation with the children. These embodied behaviors, which entail exaggerated friendliness and passive openness, lay the foundation for effective pedagogical interactions (Hamre & Pianta 2005).

Leveling Levels

What is The Child's level? How does it differ from The Adult's? And how are the two related? When early childhood scholars and educators talk about the "child's level" they are referring not only to the child's physical stature, but his "developmental level" and perspective. To get on a child's level, therefore, an adult must "meet him where he's at." She might lower her body down to achieve eye contact with him on the same plane. But she should also understand what he desires, perceives, and is capable of, at that moment. The admonition to "get on a child's level" assumes that that level differs from the adult's, but is simultaneously accessible to her, and valid enough in its own right to be reckoned with, even prioritized, throughout the interaction.

The Child's "developmental level" has been scrutinized scientifically but has also received elevated valuation over the last century (Smith 2011; Turmel 2008). The fields of developmental psychology, childhood sociology, and early childhood education have all contributed in overlapping ways to its promotion as a standard for understanding and interacting with children. Of the three, developmental psychology has the longest legacy of scientific scrutiny, which was tied from the beginning to educative ends (Turmel 2008).

The US government began investing in children through public, compulsory schooling during its industrial revolution, enrolling the expertise of developmental psychologists to aid in its mandate to mold the country's children into a productive citizenry (Turmel 2008). Children's physical features, and later their behaviors and abilities, were measured and analyzed, producing

official texts on normative trends and divergences. These early texts have since informed classroom practices, curricular guidelines, and teacher expectations, as well as teachers' advice to parents and referrals to specialists, pediatricians and social workers (Turmel 2008). Over time teachers have come to increasingly play the role of researcher as well, collecting "anecdotes" about their students that are turned into data, coded, and analyzed by curriculum evaluators and social scientists (Epstein 2007; Fernie et al. 2010).

Sociologists of childhood arrived later on the scene than developmental psychologists (around the late 1970s), premising much of their work on critiques of developmental psychology. They argued that developmental psychologists based too much of their research on a limiting foundational assumption that children were incompetent by nature but then developed into competent adults (James et al. 1998; Lee 2001). Competency, they argued, was itself a social construct, shaped and limited by historical contexts and understandings of appropriate adulthood for those contexts. Sociologists of childhood also critiqued developmental psychology for presenting children's development as a universal (rather than culturally-constrained) process proceeding linearly through discrete stages toward an idealized, normative end-point (Corsaro 2003; James et al. 1998). This resulted in a scholarly emphasis on "children's perspectives" rather than adults' perspectives of children. Studies "from children's perspectives" helped reframe children's tendencies and preferences as lived experiences in and of themselves rather than just preparation for adulthood (James et al. 1998; Prout 2005; Pugh 2013). Sociologists of childhood like Corsaro (1992) argued that children were sophisticated creators of their own peer cultures, for instance, which both borrow from and reinterpret meanings from the adult-centric world(s) they inhabit, and then evolve with age. By applying the language of competency

traditionally reserved for adults, children's unique embodied realities became competencies within age-bound contexts rather than indices of lack.

Although the sociology of childhood defined itself in contradistinction to traditional developmental psychology, it would be unfair to claim that developmental psychology did not evolve in a similar direction as the sociology of childhood. By roughly the 1980s the most influential developmental psychologists on early childhood education were Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner. All of these theorists' key contributions were based on similar assumptions to those under the paradigm shift in the sociology of childhood. Piaget's theories of child development, for instance, had at their core an assumption of an active participatory child, which has contributed to adults' ability to empathize with and understand "where children are at" as much if not more than the many sociological studies that advocated for the same (see Smith 1985 for an overview of Piaget's influence on the field of early childhood education). Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the "zone of proximal development," which has been equally as influential in early childhood education, similarly laid the foundation for the concept of "scaffolding" (Wood and Middleton 1975). And Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological view of the child, which highlights the developmental influence of one's environment, helped lay the groundwork for the HeadStart model, which treats the "whole child" – one embedded in a family and community – in addition to school (Cesi and Bronfenbrenner 1985; Darling 2015).

This valuation of children's lived experiences and perspectives in both the sociology of childhood and developmental psychology contributed to a shift in early childhood education toward child-centered curricula and "active-participatory learning." Early childhood scholars began to suggest that approaches that acknowledged children's preferences were most pedagogically appropriate because they offered children more ownership over their learning than

traditional, top-down instruction (Hohmann 2008.) "Active-participatory" and "child-centered" curricula, which aim to "take the child's lead" during instruction, were increasingly recommended in state and federal guidelines for early childhood education (Bredekamp 1987).

In preschools employing these guidelines, teachers are expected to gently transition children toward the more institutionalized routine of school, but always "alongside" them, moving at their pace and "holding their hand." In other words, they are expected to bring them into studenthood while retaining warm, familiar elements of the (idealized) home -- to facilitate this transition in an empathetic, caring manner. This expectation places teachers' bodies in the liminal space between the home and the school. Curricular guidelines offer facilitation strategies such as scaffolding, or "gently challenging" children to expand upon their current understanding, always starting from a child's current interest and never pushing too hard toward the new information (Epstein 2007; Wood and Middleton 1975).

The concept of scaffolding is an understandable outgrowth of the idea that The Child is a participative agent in his own education and socialization. Differences between the child's "level" and that of the interacting adult are implied, yet the hierarchy between them is expected to be respectfully leveled or lessened by the adult. The adult must acknowledge where she and the child differ – what, for instance, the child feels or understands relative to her – and then reconcile it to her pedagogical goal if she can. In the preschool setting I examined, the meeting of such goals was regularly measured and assessed. My goal is to provide a clearer picture of what teachers actually did in the intervening space and time between the setting and meeting of such goals.

Block Tower Preschool

Between May 2010 and June 2011 I spent over 600 hours participating in everyday life alongside children and their teachers at Block Tower Preschool. Block Tower provided full-day preschool and daycare services for six classrooms of sixteen three to four year olds per class. I obtained parental assent for 94 children to participate in my research (50 three-year-olds and 44 four-year-olds), who were spread across four classrooms between which I rotated on a weekly basis. Classrooms contained an array of materials appealing to preschool-aged children, arranged into "areas." The day was organized into a regular, predictable routine including multiple "work times" (see below).

To attend the children had to meet at least two of twenty-four criteria identifying them as "at-risk" for later school failure. All criteria were associated with poverty and lack of access to adequate educational opportunities, including, for example, having an unstable home life due to parental joblessness or drug addiction, parental imprisonment or teenage parenthood (Fraser et al. 2004). The children, on average, met four criteria, the most common of which were coming from a low-income family and being a racial minority. The majority were children of color, mostly African-American and Latino/a. About 20% were English Language Learners (with Spanish being the home language of 90%).

All eleven of the teachers employed during the study were women. The only man on the staff was the custodian. The majority of the teachers were white (seven out of eleven)[4]. The teachers did not appear to exhibit racial biases that have been documented elsewhere (Ferguson 2001; Glock and Karbach 2015; Van den Bergh, et al. 2010). However, the fact that none of the teachers spoke fluent Spanish was clearly a shortcoming. One of the administrators did, however,

---

[4] I cannot reveal the ethnicities of the non-white teachers without risking their confidentiality.

and she translated when necessary, primarily in interactions with parents. Another responsibility

of the teachers was to expose children whose home language was not English to the primary

language that would be used in their schools. Although many of the items in the room were

labeled with both Spanish and English words, helping them learn English was seen as a facet of

facilitating "kindergarten readiness."

Although it faced a certain amount of financial volatility5 Block Tower was among the

best early childhood centers for at-risk children in the area. Operating on state and local grants

allowed it to provide affordable early childhood education and care services for poor and

working class families, while supporting eleven teachers, five staff members, a cook and a

custodian. It was also among only 8% of preschools in the state accredited by the National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Accreditation mandated various

criteria for quality, including a low student-teacher ratio (1:8) and a relatively high bar for

teacher credentials (www.naeyc.org). Moreover the teachers were unionized and received

benefits, causing turnover to be much lower than the national average (Boyd 2013).

The preschool also employed the HighScope curriculum, a well-researched active-

participatory pedagogical approach (Schweinhart 2005). NAEYC accreditation standards also

specified that preschools should ideally employ a curriculum that centered children's active

participation and encouraged play-based learning. The HighScope curriculum was one of three

recommended curricula that met these specifications at the time of my study.6 The curriculum

---

5 I contextualize this more in Chapter 3.

6 In recent years, early education scholars have reconsidered NAEYC's recommendation of HighScope and other play-based curricula because some re-evaluations of their longitudinal data have not produced statistically significant effects on content learning for preschoolers (Leak et al. 2013). However, this remains a contentious issue. Proponents of the HighScope approach maintain that long term outcomes, for instance likelihood of later school, job, and relationship retention (which they link to increased intelligence), can be traced back to participation in their preschool programs. Proponents also argue that although HighScope tends to "follow children's lead" in learning, this does not mean it does not provide content instruction (Schweinhart, personal communication). I would add that

stipulated that teachers receive ongoing training in child-centered pedagogy; and collaboration with children was expected and built into the daily routine. "Work time" was the name given to periods of time where children could choose to do whatever activity they wished (within the confines of the classroom areas or centers). This occurred up to four times a day and was considered an important part of the routine. During work times teachers were expected to be available to children for play "on their terms" and "on their level," and to scaffold learning when appropriate.

Methodology: Rapport-Building through "Leveling"

I gained access to the preschool as a volunteer, trading help in the classroom for the opportunity to research. This volunteer-researcher positioning exposed me to Block Tower's pedagogical orientation rather intensively. Given that the teachers generally considered it most helpful for volunteers to interact meaningfully with the children, I gained significant rapport with them by involving myself in the implementation of the play-driven pedagogy as often as possible. I also intentionally built rapport with the teachers by interviewing all of them in the first months of the research. I framed these interviews as opportunities for me to learn from "the real experts," asking them what preschool was like at Block Tower, what was most challenging and rewarding, what they thought I should focus on, etc. Involving them in the project in this

---

it is very difficult to know when and to what extent a particular curriculum is being implemented "correctly" because it is very difficult to quantify complex qualitative interactions.

The teachers at Block Tower did not consider themselves to be perfect practitioners of the curricular approach. They followed it to the best of their ability but also claimed that sometimes other approaches were "more effective depending on the child." The main aspect of the curriculum they valued, which was reflected in their practice, was that it treated children as active participants in their own learning. They held this ideal in high regard and found it an effective pedagogical starting point.

way, and working hard to replicate their teaching skills accurately, helped level my status as a researcher with more education and prestige (Raffety 2014).

I took jottings in a small notebook throughout the day and then elaborated in as much detail as possible at home, noting the embodied qualities of interlocutors and their attendant meanings. Field notes were then thematically coded using NVivo software. The coding process was inductive (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I developed themes as they presented themselves, checking my assumptions and interpretations against the teachers' by informally soliciting their feedback. I recorded reflections on these conversations in the expanded field notes as well.

The teachers often emphasized the intensity and complexity of their work to me, stressing that they were much more than "babysitters." Gaining firsthand familiarity with their work made me increasingly aware of this intensity and complexity. It also bears noting that I had become pregnant halfway through the fieldwork. This embodied experience further intensified my engagement with the work. Both personally and professionally I was deeply interested in one of the main questions the teachers were constantly asking of themselves: How best to go about this? My attunement to my pregnant body also heightened my focus on embodiment, and the pregnancy itself likely helped build rapport with the (all women) staff, of whom half were also mothers. (I elaborate on this in Chapter 3.)

Findings

In the following analysis I offer a detailed qualitative account of the teachers' experiences and perspectives of their work, particularly as "facilitators of learning." I focus heavily on the embodied qualities of this work in order to emphasize the physicality and physical intensity of enacting ideal pedagogy. I detail their relationship to the curricular prescriptions for

"how best" to go about their teaching. I explain what they believed constituted the ideal preschooler before I describe how they enacted it themselves. I then describe the teachers' embodied labor which, when enacted "on the child's level" for pedagogical purposes, I characterize as "embodying the ideal preschooler." Finally, I tie these practices back into the curricular contexts of the daily routine.

Teachers' Ideals

Preschool teachers labor under myriad sets of expectations, including federal and state policies, curricular guidelines, and parental pressures. The teachers at Block Tower were well aware of these expectations, and regularly expressed that awareness to me. They were especially thoughtful about curriculum implementation, highlighting positives and negatives in their interviews, staff meetings, and private, informal conversations. It was not uncommon for them to use examples from the day to explain their teaching to me. In the beginning of the research this was also how they informally instructed me in curriculum implementation.

When asked the majority said they found the curriculum valuable because it encouraged active-participatory, child-centered learning. It provided a general set of guidelines that fell in line with what they felt was an overall effective way to teach. Ms. Jennifer gave a typical explanation:

> I think that, for me, it's all about – I mean this is something I believe about education, period: That we're not really teachers; that we're facilitators. You know, we don't teach them anything really; we just facilitate their own learning. And especially at the younger ages where they're discovering on their own, our goal is for them to learn, but to facilitate their own learning… I would really just say, 'come in, get on their level, interact with them, and through your interaction with them, you know, guide them through their play and interaction.'

Ms. Jennifer's comment illustrates the extent to which "respect" for children's preferences and interests was valued at Block Tower. The teachers believed that ultimately children learned within their own minds and on their own time, but felt they had a shaping or guiding role to play in the process. They sought to interact alongside them, on their level, gently offering more complex experiences or abstract knowledge when appropriate.

Of course interactions in the actual classroom did not always occur exactly in this fashion. Effective scaffolding often occurred in somewhat unpredictable or fleeting moments, when child and teacher were momentarily mutually engaged, focused, and interested in dancing the subtle, vulnerable dance of learning/teaching something new. It was more likely to happen when neither teacher nor child felt distracted, stressed, or mistrustful (Hamre and Pianta 2005). Effective scaffolding was, as one curricular text put it, "as much a science as an art" (Epstein 2007).

The teachers illustrated an awareness of this complexity when describing "the ideal preschooler," or those they referred to as "easy kids." An "easy kid" "like[d] to have fun," was "eager to do activities," was "laid back," "ha[d] good self-control," and was "comfortable with [the teacher]." That is, the ideal preschooler had a happy but relatively calm temperament and was willing and able to engage meaningfully in interaction for a sustained amount of time. By contrasting this ideal "easy kid" with her opposite -- a "difficult kid" -- we glimpse the factors within and amongst the children that the teachers felt most hindered pedagogical implementation. "Difficult kids" were "disrespectful," "impulsive," "pushed the teacher and other kids' buttons," and/or were "emotionally unstable." These children were, in other words, less bonded to those around them, were prone to emotional outbursts, and had trouble remaining focused on, and taking pleasure in, interaction or shared activity.

The children's diverse demeanors could generally be classified along this easy-difficult spectrum, with a large swath falling somewhere in the middle and exhibiting a moderate shifting toward either end. The teachers felt they had some influence over the children's shifting, especially toward more ideal behavior. However they also felt limits to their influence. All noted in their interviews, for instance, that they believed in "both nature and nurture," implying that children's temperaments were somewhat fixed and somewhat malleable. The teachers also took care to place children's behavioral variation within the context of the children's home-lives. Many noted in their interviews that difficult children and children who became difficult were more likely to be facing difficulties at home, especially those associated with the socio-economic risks mentioned above (income instability, food scarcity, parental stress, etc.) This correlation has of course been documented extensively (Davies 2004; Fraser et al. 2004).

In addition to facilitating academic learning, therefore, the teachers were also in the business of emotional support. The science and art of facilitation involved deciphering "where they were at" emotionally as well as cognitively. Ms. Miranda explained it this way:

> I've found a lot of times, I mean it doesn't always work, but sometimes with those kids if you just say, 'Do you just need a hug?' And they say 'Yeah.' Or, 'Do you just want to snuggle for a minute?' And if you just hold them on your lap for a minute and just talk to them… they chill out. Then it's an easier morning.

Here Ms. Miranda describes a familiar aspect of her everyday labor in the liminal space between home and school. Warmth, familiarity, and empathy ran parallel if not prior to instruction (Hamre and Pianta 2005). This work occurred through the body, interlaced with emotion, intuition and conscious reflection. It was a small yet utterly vital part of a larger repertoire of

intensive embodied skills that she and the other teachers employed in order to "reach and teach" the children in their charge (Stuart and Bostrom 2003).

In the remainder of the analysis I focus on interactions in which children were being relatively "easy" or behaving more ideally. This allows me to focus on teachers' experiences while holding children's influence relatively constant. Of course, as explained above, children expressed a range of behaviors, contributing to pedagogical maneuvering as much as teachers themselves. The fact that I must hold this constant artificially should serve to remind the reader of the complexity of preschool teaching "on the ground."

Embodying the Ideal Preschooler: Exaggerated Friendliness, Passive Openness

Early in my jottings I noted that the teachers "seem[ed] to always be modeling politeness." Later I realized what I initially labeled politeness was actually part of a broader set of practices of exaggerated friendliness. Teachers expressed this friendliness outwardly through their bodies. Their tones of voice were often sweet and expressive; they laughed out loud to punctuate novelty or silliness; they put on big smiles and were occasionally prone to giggling and dancing around. Taking a cue from the teachers (and the children who would often respond in kind) I too smiled often. I clapped and cheered "Yay!" when celebrating an accomplishment. I took on a lilting tone and tried to speak clearly and deliberately, using simple straightforward sentences, especially with the English Language Learners. When we sang songs and danced I tried to match my embodied enthusiasm and joyfulness to the children. I was silly with them, acknowledging their silliness with giggles and telling jokes: "Soon my belly will be so big it will bump into everyone when I walk by!"

The positive tone and sweet facial expression the teachers affected is captured in the following field note:

> Ms. Janet is sitting on a chair outside while we're eating popsicles. Neveah comes up to Ms. Janet and embraces her, putting her face within an inch of Ms. Janet's. They smile at each other and Ms. Janet places her hands over Neveah's arms, which are resting on Ms. Janet's legs. "What's your favorite flavor of ice pop?" Neveah asks her. "Blue," Ms. Janet says in a matter-of-fact tone similar to the quizzical but playful way Neveah asked the question (which also happened to be a way Neveah spoke often.) "What's yours?" Ms. Janet asked with matching curiosity. "Orange," Neveah replied matter-of-factly.

Ms. Janet had learned to speak in this sing-song way by speaking with children often. She was likely to enact this tone not only when talking to Neveah but when reading stories and leading large-group activities. Having 27 years of experience, Ms. Janet was strikingly engaging in these moments, often able to sustain a group's concentration for more than ten minutes. The children tended to bond with her quickly and hugged her often.

In her study of preschoolers' entry into play with other preschoolers, Elgas (2010) identified matching tone and facial expression as "affiliative strategies" which they used to effectively enter into play. Such strategies "communicate[d] friendship" through the body (2010: 49). The teachers communicated affiliation and friendship with the children similarly. This had the dual effect of making the teachers recognizable as potential playmates or friends and in turn lessening or leveling traditional, hierarchical age distinctions and expectations.

In the excerpt above Ms. Janet also talks to Neveah nose-to-nose. Another common way teachers used their bodies to encourage positive affiliation was by allowing children access to their bodies. "Getting on their level" physically involved much more than sitting with them on the floor. It entailed a passive openness to and acceptance of child-initiated bodily contact.

Indeed the children were prone to getting into the adults' physical space. They climbed and hung on us, invited themselves onto our laps, stepped on our feet, hugged us, held our hands, placed their faces near ours as we spoke (like Neveah above). They desired interaction, attention, validation, and touch and asked for and initiated it often.

> I notice excited giggling even before I get to the door of the Eagle Room today. When I step inside I see three of the girls giddily circling around Ms. Polly who is seated in a chair. "Close your eyes!" Ariana tells her with a big smile. The girls have covered Ms. Polly's head, face and body with scarves and are delightedly adding more. Then they tell her to open her eyes. When she does she feigns surprise and wonder at the girls' work and they all laugh. When she catches my eye she says, "It's kind of nice. Like being in a cocoon."

This particular interaction turns status-quo generational distinctions quite rightly on their head and the children are clearly enjoying themselves. Bodily control is often treated as evidence of independence and authority, characteristics traditionally assigned to adults (Bordo 1999; Prout 2000). The ability to physically overpower another person's body is moreover one that adults tend to have over small children. Yet Ms. Polly obeys the children's directives willingly (closing her eyes) and sits still on a chair low enough to allow them to cover her body, head and face with scarves. She "plays along," letting them cover her again and again. She even takes care to note to me that she is enjoying herself, describing her bodily passivity and the interaction it invites as a pleasant experience. (This in turn inspired the children to cover me several times.)

Play as Work, Work as Play

The curriculum supported the emergence of these particular embodied skills by allocating time specifically for play, into which the teachers were expected to be integrated. This was especially true during the part of the daily routine called work time. During work time both the

teachers' and children's work was expected to be play, involving an array of materials set out in advance by the teachers or in one of the many areas of the classroom. By renaming "free-play time" as "work time" the preschool illustrated its core pedagogical belief that children's self-directed exploration was a key source of their academic self-discovery.

A typical work time scene entailed churning movement of children's bodies often in dyads and small groups. Groups formed and re-formed, gained, lost, and occasionally resisted new members (Corsaro 2003). The adults could be found interspersed in these activities -- sitting on tiny chairs in the kitchen area, holding a baby doll while a child cooked for them; or sitting on the floor in the book or game area with one child on their lap and a few more peering over their shoulder or squeezed in close next to them. As an unfamiliar participant-observer I was initially hard-pressed to focus on any particular interaction given the cacophony of enthusiastic voices, the busy flitting of bodies, the constant shifting between curious exploration and intense concentration – all in addition to the distraction of constant, often competing requests for interaction. Yet over time I developed a comfort with the chaos. This comfort entailed a mental shift toward flexibility and openness, of "being in the moment" of interaction but also calmly and quickly reflecting, looking for opportunities to extend the children's learning in natural-feeling, non-threatening, relevant ways. I observed this initially in the teachers' and then sought to emulate.

Teachers signaled their openness to play, their playfulness and flexibility, through their bodies as well, as the following example illustrates:

> Lance introduces a ghost into the structure Ms. Melinda and Brittani are building. Lance makes scary noises as he introduces the ghost. Ms. Melinda asks them if the animals are scared and, receiving an affirmative, asks where they might hide. Brittani suggests an overturned plastic tub sitting nearby. Ms. Melinda begins

tossing them in the tub haphazardly but this upsets Brittani, who says she wants her to set them up in there one by one. Ms. Melinda apologizes, explaining that the animals were in a hurry because they were scared.

Here Ms. Melinda sits on the floor, her face on the same plane as the children's, speaking in a happy-go-lucky tone. She gazes at and plays with the toys in the same way as her young playmates. She contributes a suggestion for the direction of play (that the animals are scared) but indicates openness to the children's preferences by framing it as a question. When she throws the animals in the bin unknowingly against Brittani's wishes, she acknowledges Brittani's preference to keep the animals turned upright by explaining her unwanted action through the pretend they had agreed upon (being scared thus hurrying away). Here she also indicates that she is using her imagination alongside the children, while simultaneously modeling it. If describing her behavior without knowing her age we might assume she was herself a child, (albeit one who was, in that moment, behaving ideally.) In so doing, she simultaneously maintained the children's engagement and encouraged them to emulate it in order to keep the play going smoothly. In the same moment, moreover, the children learned social skills, practiced story-telling, and received information about the category "farm."

Again sustaining the kind of empathetic and pedagogically purposeful interaction described above was a skill Ms. Melinda developed through practice at playing, or joining children "on their level." By purposefully and repeatedly eschewing conventional interactional strategies that prioritized adult definition of the shared scene, she had developed the children's trust that influence and negotiation was possible. Like Ms. Janet and Ms. Polly from the previous examples, Ms. Melinda used her body in ways that did not necessarily align with that of the traditionally authoritative teacher. Her purposes are ultimately pedagogical, but prior to that, they are affiliative in ways that are familiar and appealing to children.

Moments like these occurred outside of work time as well because the curriculum specified that teachers plan all activities with children's interests in mind and be willing to alter them based on their changing foci, even sometimes in the moment. The teachers thus planned their large and small group undertakings on a day-to-day basis and adjusted them according to their daily observations of the children. This too indicated to the children that they could negotiate changes to the plan, which in turn further provided the adults opportunities to practice openness and flexibility:

> During circle time Neveah suggests we change the "Wheels on the Bus" song to "The Wheels on the Ice Cream Truck" song. Ms. Karen smiles approvingly. "Ok!" she says to the group, reiterating the new plan. Then she says to me and Ms. Janet (her co-teacher) more under her breath and above the children's heads, "That's very Block Tower," [referring to "the way things are done around here"]. Ms. Janet smiles and nods at me in agreement. Then we proceed to sing a few verses of "The Wheels on the Ice Cream Truck" as a group. Many of the children smile with delight at our new rendition. It is awkward to me to squeeze so many extra syllables into the original song. But Neveah's suggestion is prioritized over maintaining the more familiar rendition.

Again here Ms. Karen approves Neveah's request for redefinition, which Neveah knows she should secure in order to have it incorporated into the activity. Ms. Karen recognizes and validates Neveah's request in her role as the ultimate gatekeeper of the moment's plan, but Neveah knows she can ask.

This was "the way things were done around there." Prior to this moment Ms. Karen and her co-teacher had repeatedly shown, through openness to negotiations with children in other moments, that children could vie for co-construction of the scene if they wanted. Neveah trusted in Ms. Karen's flexibility, or openness to her preferences, which indeed resulted in a child-

initiated alteration of the group's activity – one that the group seemed to enjoy! Highlighting the extent to which the teachers valued this pedagogical orientation, Ms. Karen's reaction to Neveah's suggestion was not only approval but pride, which she shared with her co-teacher and me. It was important that I, as a researcher, take note of the evidence -- initiated *by a child* -- of the pedagogy they were charged with and invested in enacting.

Facilitating a Shared Classroom Culture

The teachers invested their bodies in the project of honing affiliative skills in order to signal openness to the children's perspectives as well as their peer-specific meanings and rituals. This resulted in an emergent classroom culture (Fernie et al. 2010) where teachers' and children's group goals momentarily harmonized in unpredictable ways:

> Mr. Singerman has come in to play his guitar and sing songs with us. We all stand in a circle and begin to sing. However some of the children seem more distracted than usual. Suddenly Sela crawls into the middle of the circle, where she begins to buck her hind legs like a donkey over and over. Ms. Melinda turns to the children to her left and giggles, "Hee hee, look at Sela." Mr. Singerman notices too and keeps singing even though the group's attention has shifted to Sela's silliness. A few more children join Sela. Then Leila suggests they sing "Row Row Row Your Boat" and asks Ms. Melinda to join her and Sela "in our boat" by sitting in a row on each other's laps then leaning back and forth together while singing. Ms. Melinda joins them enthusiastically on the floor, and the rest of the children follow suit. Mr. Singerman obliges by playing "Row Row Row Your Boat" on his guitar while they sit stacked on top of each other in their boats leaning forward and backward, forward and backward.

This final example comprises many of the practices already discussed, while simultaneously showing how such practices contributed to the co-construction of a classroom

culture that incorporated and often harmonized both children's and adults' preferences. Sela's silliness – an embodied habit common to young children's peer-culture – was not disregarded or discouraged but treated as a valid expression and use of the group's time (Neimark, 2010). The shared goal that emerged (to play the "Row Row Row Your Boat" game) was child-initiated as well, then validated and pursued by both the teacher and Mr. Singerman. The children were still singing (the adults' goal for them), but singing in a way they preferred.

Not Just Babysitters

Teaching preschool clearly involves much more than "just babysitting." The image of the babysitter is a young distracted girl who "fills in" for a few hours; she is either aloof or "just plays" with kids at their mindless games and sometimes struggles to maintain order. Preschool teachers do play. But, as I have shown, this play entails quite a lot of work. Through repeated interactions of this kind with a "large N" of children, and supported by an active-participatory curriculum, teachers' develop and enact an intensive set of embodied skills meant to communicate affiliation and facilitate children's learning.

Moreover this particular set of skills exists in balance with others. I have limited my discussion here to teachers' embodied practices in relatively ideal circumstances, which occur in parts of the day that are relatively unstructured. In other parts of the day, where, for instance, teachers must orchestrate the group's movement from one part of the building to another, or must help them practice sitting and listening quietly during large group time, or must intervene on children physically harming one another, more top-down authority is often necessary. In these contexts teachers enact other sets of embodied skills meant to convey more authority. Teachers thus must have a sense of when different kinds of bodily enactment are appropriate, and at what

level of intensity. In other words they must not only display flexibility and openness to children's preferences in moments of play, but must also learn to flexibly shift between different levels of authority.

It also bears mentioning that I have isolated teachers' embodied physicality artificially. In practice, each of their embodied behaviors simultaneously entailed mental and emotional labor, both during and after the fact.

Recognition and Valuation of the Labor of 'Getting on their Level'

Unfortunately the complexity and intensity of the labor of preschool teaching is often obscured if not invisible in both theory and policy. Early childhood education policy, mired in quantitative cost-benefit analyses, generally fails to adequately account for the fact that factoring children's preferences into pedagogy relies largely upon the complex, intensive, skilled labor of teachers. Through repeated interactions alongside their young charges, teachers develop these embodied strategies for meeting curricular expectations.

Feeling a lack of valuation at the level of policy added a palpable weight to the teachers' insistence that they were so much more than babysitters. The average salary of a lead teacher was $32K, a co-teacher (with less education) $14K (and these teachers were relatively *highly* paid because they were unionized).

Childhood scholarship also contributes to the devaluation of teachers' labor insofar as it obscures the positive potential of their skills. While important contributions to early childhood education have been made through revaluing "childlike tendencies" and encouraging adults to recognize their socially constructed power over children, by centering these ethical commitments too intently on children, they failed to make equal space for the valuation of the positive

everyday labor of children's adult carers. By calling attention to the intensiveness and intentionality of teachers' bodily enrolment in the creation and sustenance of classroom culture I hope to have contributed to a more balanced valuation between them.

References

Bredekamp, Sue (ed.) 1987. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8, Expanded Edition.* Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bordo, Susan. 1999. *The Male Body: A Look at Men in Public and in Private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Boyd, Margaret. 2013. '"I Love my Work but..." The Professionalization of Early Childhood Education', *Qualitative Report* 18(36): 1-20.

Darling, Nancy. 2015. "Bronfenbrenner and the Ecology of Human Development." In *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophies and Theories of Early Childhood Education and Care.* Trisha David, Kathy Goouch and Sacha Powell (eds.). Abingdon: Routledge.

Ceci, Stephen J. and Urie Bronfenbrenner. 1985. 'Don't Forget to Take the Cupcakes out of the Oven': Prospective Memory, Strategic Time-monitoring, and Context. *Child Development*, 56(1): 152–164.

Corsaro, William. 2003. *We're Friends, Right?: Inside Kids' Culture*. Washington DC: Joseph Henry Press.

Corsaro, William A. 1992. "Interpretive Reproduction in Children's Peer Cultures." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 55(2): 160–77.

Davies, Douglas. 2004. *Child Development, Second Edition: A Practitioner's Guide*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Elgas, Patricia. 2010. "A Peer Culture Perspective of English Language Learners' Social Competence", in *Educating Toddlers to Teachers*, Kantor, F., Madrid, S. and Kantor, R. (eds). New York: Hampton Press, Inc.

Epstein, Ann S. 2007. *Essentials of Active Learning in Preschool: Getting to Know the HighScope Curriculum*. Michigan: HighScope Press.

Ferguson, Ann. 2001. *Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity.* Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Fernie, David, Samara Madrid, and Rebecca Kantor. 2010. *Educating Toddlers to Teachers: Learning to See and Influence the School and Peer Cultures of Classrooms*. New York: Hampton Press.

Fraser, Mark W., Laura Kirby and Paul Smokowski. 2004. "Risk and Resilience in Childhood." In M. W. Fraser. *Risk and Resilience in Childhood: An Ecological Perspective*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm Strauss. [1967] 2009. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Glock, Sabine and Julia Karbach. 2015. "Preservice Teachers' Implicit Attitudes Toward Racial Minority Students: Evidence from Three Implicit Measures." *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 45: 55-61.

Hays, Sharon. 1996. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hohmann, Mary. 2008. *Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

James, Allison, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout. 1998. *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

James, Alison and Alan Prout. 1997. *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood, 2nd ed*. Washington, D.C: Routledge.

Leak, James, Greg Duncan, Weilin Li, Katherine Magnuson, Holly Schindler, and Hirokazu Yoshikawa. 2013. "Is Timing Everything? How Early Childhood Education Program Impacts Vary by Starting Age, Program Duration and Time Since the End of the Program," Working Paper: Center on the Developing Child. Harvard: Harvard University.

Lee, Nick. 2001. *Childhood and Society: Growing up in an Age of Uncertainty*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Neimark, Anette. 2010. "Learning from Children's Humor: Peer Culture as a Teaching Tool", in *Educating Toddlers to Teachers*, Kantor, F., Madrid, S. and Kantor, R. (eds). New York: Hampton Press, Inc.

Pianta, Robert. 2005. "Can Instructional and Emotional Support in the First-grade Classroom make a Difference for Children at Risk of School Failure?" *Child Development* 76(5): 949–967.

Prout, Alan. (ed.) 2000. *The Body, Childhood, and Society.* London: Macmillan Press.

Prout, Alan. (ed.) 2005. *The Future of Childhood*. New York: Routledge.

Pugh, Allison J. 2013. "The Theoretical Costs of Ignoring Childhood: Rethinking Independence, Insecurity, and Inequality." *Theory and Society* 43(1):71-89.

Raffety, Erin L. 2014. "Minimizing Social Distance: Participatory Research with Children." *Childhood* 22(3): 409–22.

Schweinhart, Lawrence. 2005. "Lifetime Effects: The HighScope/Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40." Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

Schweinhart, Lawrence. 2015. Personal communication.

Smith, K. 2011. "Producing Governable Subjects: Images of Childhood Old and New." *Childhood* 19(1): 24–37.

Stuart, Tim and Cheryl Bostrom. 2003. *Children At Promise: 9 Principles to Help Kids Thrive in an At Risk World, 1ˢᵗ Edition*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Swadener, Beth Blue and Sally Lubeck (eds). 1995. *Children and Families "At Promise:" Deconstructing the Discourse of Risk.* Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

"The Ten NAEYC Program Standards." https://families.naeyc.org/accredited-article/10-naeyc program-standards.

Turmel, André. 2008. *A Historical Sociology of Childhood: Developmental Thinking, Categorization and Graphic Visualization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Van den Bergh, L, Eddie Denessen, Lisette Hornstra, Marinus Voeten, and Rob W. Holland. 2010. The Implicit Prejudice Attitudes of Teachers: Relations to Teacher Expectations and the Ethnic Achievement Gap. *American Educational Research Journal* 47(2), 497 527.

Vandenbroeck, Michel and Maria Bouverne-De Bie. 2006. "Children's Agency and Educational Norms: A Tensed Negotiation." *Childhood*, 13(1): 127–143.

Wood D. and Middleton D. 1975. "A Study of Assisted Problem-Solving." *British Journal of Psychology*, 66(2), 181−191.

Yoshikawa, Hirokazu, Christina Weiland, Jeann Brooks-Gunn, Margaret Burchinal, Linda Espinosa, William T. Gormley, Jens Ludwig, Katherine Magnuson, Deborah Philips and Martha Zaslow (2014) 'Investing in our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education', Society for Research on Child Development. www.srcd.org.

CHAPTER III

The Ideal Carer Role: Acknowledging Maternal Potential in Childhood Studies

"There is no such thing as a baby. There is a baby and someone." - D. W. Winnicott

Introduction

Childhood studies has advocated adopting a "least-adult role" as a methodological approach to studying children. The role, which aims to eschew expected adult authority in interaction with children, was promoted by some of the most well-known childhood scholars to the extent that, over time, it came to be viewed as a "gold standard" for childhood ethnography (Corsaro 2003; Gallagher 2008). Proponents claimed that eschewing expected or conventional adult behaviors allowed ethnographers to participate more "fully" in children's lives (Lee 2001). Refusing to enforce rules and otherwise direct or teach in a traditional top-down way, these scholars claimed, overcame age-based power differentials that threatened the authenticity of children's behaviors, experiences and perspectives (Gallagher and Gallacher 2005). The least-adult approach gained popularity in childhood studies because of its novelty and moral appeal as centering children's active engagement in their everyday lives was at the time rare in the social sciences. It also fit well within the new childhood studies paradigm (initially called the "new"

sociology of childhood) that had emerged under the aegis of acknowledging and honoring children's lived experiences "in their own right" rather than through an "adult-centric" lens.

More recently the least-adult approach has drawn critique. Critics of the approach have suggested that adopting the role can foreclose certain adult-child interactions (Warming 2011). They have largely placed this critique in a poststructural frame, taking particular issue with the idea that some child behaviors are more "authentic" than others. Lee (1998) for instance argued that the approach reified oppositional binaries adhering to categories like age. Similarly Gallagher (2008) insisted that it reified power as a "thing we possess" rather than a diffuse, emergent and productive flow among social actors (Foucault 1978 1980 2003; Weedon 1987). Adopting the role therefore treated power as something to be used or given away, implying that traditional adulthood "contains" and uses power, and that such power can be given up or given to children only by becoming "unlike" an adult.

The breadth of this poststructural framing, however, minimized another significant limitation of the least-adult role. Drawing on thirteen months of ethnographic research at Block Tower Preschool, I argue that the least-adult role is implicitly *gendered* (regardless of the gender of the researcher employing it.) Its frequent usage as well as its justifications overly aligned adulthood with stark authority, glossing over adults' care-taking in adult-child relations. In preschool, the nurturing, tending, and befriending aspects of the teaching role are prominent. These characteristics are aligned with femininity generally and maternalism more specifically. Rejecting the least adult role, and instead employing what I came to call an "ideal carer role," provided insight into this maternalism, and how it played out in the preschool classroom. I show that the least-adult role ignores the complexities of care and power by aligning adulthood with

oppressive authority over children, which in turn leads to the disappearance and devaluation of feminized labor.

First I review the literature on the least-adult role and review the critiques. Then, drawing on data from my ethnographic observations, I use these critiques as a starting point to ask how gender shapes the least-adult role. My analysis grounds this discussion firmly in the practices of the preschool teachers, and in my own practices as a woman ethnographer, allowing for experiences on the ground to inform the theories that have in turn informed and shaped them.

The Least-Adult Role

Adopting a least-adult role entails consciously avoiding behaviors that might signal "expected adult authority" to the children ethnographers aim to study (Johannsen 2012). It was initially introduced to childhood scholars by a female researcher (Mandell 1988) and has since been employed by both men and women ethnographers (e.g. Ahn 2010; Corsaro 1992 2003a 2003b; Corsaro and Molinari 2005; Fine 1987; Hadley and Nenga 2004; Thorne 1993; Warming 2011). However, two of the most canonical early ethnographies using this technique were conducted by male researchers. The first was Gary Alan Fine's (1987) participant observation research with boys on a baseball team. The second was William Corsaro's (1992 2003a 2003b) ethnography of preschoolers' peer cultures. Corsaro's concepts of *peer culture* and *interpretive reproduction* have shaped the way childhood scholars think about children's participation in their own socialization and education; he is the scholar most likely to be cited in reviews of the least-adult role. Although I mention other studies (carried out by women and men), I examine Corsaro's and Fine's projects at length because of their prominence in the field and because

comparisons to their understanding of the least-adult role enrich the description of the ideal carer role.

In taking up a least-adult role, both authors described a process of actively distancing themselves from the authority of the adults "in charge." This authority aligned with coaches in Fine's case and teachers in Corsaro's. Interactions indicating such authority included telling children how to behave and enforcing rules of conduct. Rather than directing behavior or initiating contact, both waited for children to interact with them first, then reacted in turn, slowly learning the behaviors, habits and norms of the children's peer groups. Both Corsaro and Fine resisted reacting in ways that required them to engage in adult-specific behavior (according to the above definitions). They also avoided adult privileges, participating instead in the children's activities and routines. Corsaro, for instance, sat on the ground alongside the children during their activities, followed the teacher's directions, and played with the children's toys. Another well-known example comes from the work of Barrie Thorne (1993), who gave up her privileges to move about the elementary school she studied (as could the other adults in the setting) and instead remained confined to the spaces assigned to the children throughout the school day.

In their own methodological musings on the least-adult role, these authors, as well as others who adopted it, acknowledged that it was not possible to totally escape one's adulthood (Fine 1988; Corsaro 2003a 2003b; Mandell 1988). Still, they remained steadfast in their goal to reduce age-based power differentials. This led Mandell (1988) to insist that "even physical differences can be so minimized when participating with children as to be inconsequential in interaction" (1988: 435). Embedded within this statement is an assumption that differences themselves between adults and children *are typically* consequential, and in a negative way.

Specifically, the implied consequence is that conventional adult/child relationships constrain or limit the authenticity of ethnographic accounts of childhood.

Least-adult posturing was said to allow access to more authentic peer-specific meaning systems, whether at baseball practice or in preschool. Such meaning systems, or cultures, were constructed as age-bound not only by accessing them through least-adult posturing, but by highlighting the cultural elements or moments of children's resistance to and transgression against adult constructions, rules and meaning systems. Resistance is a key tenet of Corsaro's theory of interpretive reproduction, for instance. He suggests that children often innovate unique, peer-specific meanings by appropriating and creatively re-defining concepts from the adult world for their own purposes (1992: 161-2). When these are shared at the level of the group, they become part of a peer-culture and, as they evolve and are re-defined, can eventually foster cultural change.

The theory of interpretive reproduction, based in the assumption of children's active participation in the social world, has helped justify early childhood educators' inclusion of children's preferences and perspectives in their pedagogies (Fernie, et al. 2010). However, the concept, and the least-adult role that has illuminated and provided evidence for it, has tended to reify a sense of boundedness around children's "worlds" or cultures. This has in turn reified the notion that adults seeking access to such worlds should work to "overcome their adultness" in order to facilitate children's trust and enable children to reveal their most authentic behaviors and beliefs.

Poststructuralist Critique

Skepticism about authenticity is at the root of poststructuralist critique. Poststructuralists argue instead for plurality, emergence, and the partiality of subjecthood (Butler 1990; Derrida 1978; Haraway 1991). This theoretical position has motivated recent arguments against the idea that the least-adult role is the "best" way to gain firsthand accounts from children (Lee 1998 2001; Prout 2005). In his book *Childhood and Human Value,* Lee (2001) traces the origins of the concept of authenticity in traditional sociology, showing how "authentic accounts" were construed by early sociologists as emanating from "complete, mature beings" capable of accurately representing their own lived perspectives. In order to disrupt this notion of authenticity, which Lee (1998) and other poststructuralists take to be an inaccurate representation of human experience, he recommends that childhood scholars instead approach the study of *both children and adults* from a place of "theoretical immaturity." It was claimed that not starting from an assumption that self-representation intimates "authenticity" could enable scholars to avoid reifying binaries like complete versus incomplete or mature versus immature altogether (Alanen and Mayall 2001; Gallagher and Gallacher 2008). Therefore the least-adult role precluded ethnographic capture of the total variation in both children's and adults' experiences, while simultaneously obscuring the ongoing, mutual co-construction of meaning between children and adults (Christiansen 2004; Prout 2005).

These critiques created the space for childhood scholars to examine adult-child relations as co-constructions which in turn enabled ethnographers of childhood to be less rigid in their eschewal of rule-enforcement (Alanen and Mayall 2001; Punch 2002). However a strong emphasis on openness *to children* has remained in the literature. Johannsen (2012), for example, acknowledged the least-adult role as one (always incomplete) role amongst many that may be

taken up by adult researchers (also see Komulainen 2007). Similarly Warming (2011) suggested that ethnographers could best gain children's firsthand accounts by combining the embodiment of the least-adult role (joining children on their level and in their activities) with a reflexive understanding that the children might still sometimes treat them as adults with more conventional authority.

While partiality and multiple interdependencies that shape adult-child interactions tend to be acknowledged by these scholars, accessing children's competencies, abilities and perspectives have remained the central focus perhaps because of the strong, yet still relatively novel, moral appeal of treating children as active, capable participants in their own lives. Meaningful inclusion of research participants in ethnographic endeavors can "lessen the social distance" between the scholar and those she studies, thus producing "research with" rather than "research on" (Punch 2002; Raffety 2014). Yet the continuing lopsidedness of ethnographies of adult-child relations has led some to argue that the specter of "The Adult" -- one whose authority is "always-already" potentially oppressive -- lingers "on the margins" of childhood studies (Cook 2011).

The poststructural critique has thus still failed to adequately include the practices of adults in studies of childhood spaces, even in settings where adults and children regularly interact, perhaps because it widened its lens too far. By critiquing least-adult methodology for its foundational assumptions regarding authenticity, it actually ended up reifying "The Adult" as relatively amorphous, without any necessary characteristics, and concomitantly, without a gender.

Gendered Implications

The need to examine adults and children together while striking a balance between representing them as *both* part of a material reality *and* subject to partial, contingent, and fluid meaning systems is especially pronounced at the preschool level, where women make up 97% of the labor force (Maroto and Brandon 2011). The extent of overrepresentation of women in this line of work implies that preschool teaching inevitably entails maternal or feminine labor, including emotional labor and care work, which both the least-adult role and the poststructuralist critique obscure (Hochschild 1983; Wharton 2009).

It is well-established that women (and girls) are more likely to "tend and befriend" others (Gilligan 1982). This tendency can be heightened in interactions between women and children because "tending" to children is one of the most archetypical traits assigned to women, one indeed that many women practice throughout their lives (Brown and Gilligan 1999). In heterosexual couples mothers tend to do a disproportionate amount of the work of both thinking about and meeting children's physical and emotional needs (DeVault 1994; Hays 1996; Ruddick 1989; Walzer 1999). Mothers are also more involved in the everyday practices related to ensuring that their children fit in socially (and worrying about when they do not) (Walzer 1999; Ruddick 1989). Fathers, by contrast, tend to prioritize paid work over spending time with their children (Chodorow 1989; Hays 1996). And, compared to mothers, they tend to get to opt into and out of parenting time as they prefer, participating in "fun" and "exciting" activities more than the everyday drudgeries of reproductive labor (Chodorow 1989; Hartmann 1976; Hochschild 1989; Winnicott 1964). Similarly, even in workplaces where both men and women hold similar titles, women are more likely to attend to the needs of others and participate more in reproductive and emotional labor (Fletcher 1999; Wharton 2009; Williams 1995). And men who

work in feminized occupations (England 2002 2005) like teaching or child care tend to be typecast as disciplinarians and directors of sports and other physical activities (Coulter and McNay 1993; Francis 2008; Murray 1996 2000; Simpson 2009).

This extensive evidence of gender differences in adult interactions with children does not square with assumptions about adult-child relations that underpin the least-adult approach primarily because expectations of adults depend largely on their gender. I therefore ask: How might the researcher's role in studying children be shaped by such gender dynamics? And what are the gender implications of taking up researcher roles that emphasize or de-emphasize "conventional adult authority" in spaces where the adults are disproportionately women?

Setting and Methods Overview

Because the process through which I came into the role makes up a significant part of my analysis, I will describe it in greater detail later. Generally, I found that I gained rapport with both the children and the adults by involving myself intensively in the implementation of the child-centered, play-driven pedagogy. My methodological approach combined participant observation with in-depth semi-structured interviews with the teachers at Block Tower. Block Tower served an exclusively "at-risk" population, providing affordable full-day early education and care services for about a hundred and ten children between the ages of three and five[7]. It operated on local and state grants, was accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and employed the High Scope curriculum[8]. The participant-observation was ethnographic in the sense that I aimed to join the adults and children in their everyday classroom practices and to gain a sense of their shared meaning systems. I adopted the

---

[7] I obtained parental assent to study 94 of them; only those children are represented in this dissertation.
[8] For a more detailed description of the preschool see Chapter 2.

"ideal carer role" gradually, through an inductive process of feeling out the best way to include both the teachers and the children in the study. I used my bodily experiences, both physical and emotional, as well as those of others in the setting, as data (Hochshild 1983; Warming 2011); my jottings often included descriptions of the physical and emotional aspects of our experiences (Bondi 2005; Hochschild 2004; Procter 2013).

It bears noting here that Block Tower faced significant financial strain during the thirteen months I conducted research there. Early childhood education was hit hard by the recession, which was bottoming out in 2010 when my research began (Anonymous 2010). Grant agencies and donations had become fickle sources of support. And, of course, the families it served were struggling more too (Danzinger et al. 2012). This created additional strains on teachers' and administrators' emotional resources, beyond an already high level that is part and parcel of working with -- and caring for and about -- families in poverty.

I intentionally built rapport with the teachers by interviewing all of them at the outset of research. These interviews provided additional insight into the ideals that eventually shaped my conceptualization of the ideal carer role. I framed the interviews as opportunities for me to learn from "the real experts." I asked what preschool was like at Block Tower, what was most challenging and rewarding, how they felt about the curriculum and the challenges the children faced at home, and even on what they thought my project should focus.

The teachers took eager advantage of this opportunity to speak for themselves, as "experts in their own right" (Clark and Statham 2005). They were under regular scrutiny from accreditation boards to retain funding, which had reportedly intensified after the recession. They complained that these assessments often left them feeling unfairly judged, with no chance to explain themselves. Listening empathetically (indicated through my body, e.g. nodding and

facial expressions) had the effect of leveling my authority as an outside researcher from a prestigious university coming into their workplace and scrutinizing their work (Raffety 2014). I was not their evaluator but their student and eventually their peer. (In time I took up substitute teaching at Block Tower.) I joined them in their classrooms and attempted to enact the pedagogy to which they subscribed. They offered me gentle points of correction and redirection when they found my efforts wanting, which I listened to intently and without defensiveness.

As I mentioned previously, I had also become pregnant with my first (and only) child by the third month of fieldwork. This embodied experience further intensified my engagement with the teachers and children and lent genuineness to the rapport-building process with the staff. Scholars have noted how pregnancy and other visible signs of parenthood/motherhood effect rapport-building. Often these create an instant source of shared knowledge, credibility, and inclusion through a well-known and largely positive shared script (Leavitt 2003; Reich 2003). Given that half of the teachers were mothers, and all of them were intimately involved in caring for young children, my pregnancy lent credibility to my aims to care for the children as they did. It also provided a context in which to situate our ongoing informal discussions of how best to enact caring labor.

All of this taken together had the effect of "lessening social distance" (rather than social difference) between myself as a more educated researcher from a prestigious university and them as practitioners on the ground (Raffety 2014). Lessening social distance entails an ongoing dialogue between researcher and research subjects where the former creates the space for the latter to delimit the nature of her participation alongside them in their everyday activities (Raffety 2014). In turn I found that the more comfortable and competent I became in the ideal carer role, the more easily I bonded with the children.

Findings

Developing the Ideal Carer Role

Rather than adopting the least-adult role, I inductively developed the ideal carer role by modeling my position in the field after the adult-child interactions that the teachers themselves identified as ideal. Ideal interactions were collaborative rather than directive, and built on a prior and constantly reinforced bond between teacher and child. Learning and emotional support in such interactions were considered integral and mutually reinforcing.

Because I had worked to lessen our social distance (Raffety 2014), and expressed an openness to their expertise, the teachers felt comfortable correcting my behavior as I learned their role, and praising me when I enacted it well. Ms. Karen, for instance, made a point to talk through a moment with me early in the research when I became visibly and audibly frustrated with Sela, a three-year-old English Language Learner, who had become upset with herself (and me) when we could not understand each other. Ms. Karen suggested that I ask another teacher for assistance if I ever felt overwhelmed, gently indicating that ideally teachers should remain calm and positive when a child is not able to do so.

Later in the research I had become so integrated with the teachers that I was occasionally filling in as a substitute. At that point:

> Ms. Melinda privately confessed her frustrations to me regarding a student
> volunteer whom she did not feel was interacting with the children properly. This
> student was only willing to be an overseer, would often not move from her chair,
> and generally seemed motivated to get the children to occupy themselves when
> they approached her. By comparison she added, "When you're here it's different
> because *you get it*."

The teachers also provided clues in their interviews as to what they considered to be ideal. "Just get on their level," Ms. Jennifer admonished. "Just play with them. They will teach themselves," said Ms. Karen. They also praised the curriculum because they found its focus on play and children's preferences to be engaging and effective. "When you start [the pedagogical encounter] from their interests," Ms. Melinda explained, "they're gonna be more engaged."

Comparing and Contrasting the Roles

Some aspects of the ideal carer role overlapped with those of the least-adult role. It should not, therefore, be seen as its opposite, but a modified and expanded role that better accounts for the gendered labor present in everyday interactions between adults and children. (This then also better accounts for the productive power of adults' interactions with children, which I call maternal potential.) The key way the two roles overlap is in their openness to children's preferences. The key difference between them is that openness in the least-adult role is limited to childlike playfulness, while the ideal carer role entails pedagogical purposefulness, rule-enforcement, direction of child behavior, and comfort provision, *in addition to* childlike playfulness.

I have written about teachers' childlike playfulness as a reactive pedagogical strategy in Chapter 2. Briefly, these strategies, which are guided by the curriculum, entail pedagogically purposeful play in which teachers are expected to "follow the child's lead." The teachers used their bodies to signal what I call "passive openness" to children's preferences -- much like researchers employing the least-adult role. For instance, they often sat alongside the children on the ground, or on small chairs at low tables, using materials in the same way. The teachers also often employed sweet, happy and playful tones of voice and facial expressions (which I call

"exaggerated friendliness.") This strategy was highly reminiscent of children's embodiment, and was used in order to signal a positive orientation to the play/learning at hand. Here is an illustrative example:

> Lance introduces a ghost into the structure Ms. Melinda and Brittani are building. Lance makes scary noises as he introduces the ghost. Ms. Melinda asks them if the animals are scared and, receiving an affirmative, asks where they might hide. Brittani suggests an overturned plastic tub sitting nearby. Ms. Melinda begins tossing them in the tub haphazardly but this upsets Brittani, who says she wants her to set them up in there one by one. Ms. Melinda apologizes, explaining that the animals were in a hurry because they were scared.

Here Ms. Melinda sits on the floor, her face on the same plane as the children's, speaking in a happy-go-lucky tone, gazing at and playing with the toys in the same way as her young playmates. She contributes a suggestion for the direction of play (that the animals are scared) but indicates openness to the children's preferences. Here she also indicates that she is pretending alongside the children, while also modeling it and other school-related competencies.

Over time I developed embodied skills similar to those of Ms. Melinda. In addition I developed an ability, like the teachers, but unlike researchers in the least-adult role, to shift into "higher" levels of authority -- especially if the children indicated that this was their need. Adopting these "higher" levels should not be taken as indications of slippage into a necessarily oppressive dominance, but into a role where age signals power or capability that is expected of adults by children. This too aligned with the teachers' understanding of child-centeredness enacted ideally; and this is the point at which least-adult posturing changes over into ideal carer territory.

The Children's Role in Shaping the Researcher's

When I started researching at the preschool the children were drawn to me immediately. Rapport-building happened swiftly, with multiple children competing for my attention and affection within the first few days. The teachers would introduce me during morning circle time by saying "Ms. Denise is here to play with you today." By the end of the first week, this announcement would typically be followed by a *yaaay!* from the group. Immediately following morning circle was the first "work time" of the day. Multiple children would often interrupt morning circle time to claim me for work time. My field notes frequently mention how exasperating it was to try to react to and remain open to all of their simultaneous bids for attention. I learned eventually that the children were generally put at ease by the following reassurance: "I'm going to work with Josue right now and then Brittani, and then it's going to be your turn."

These interactions were amongst the first clues that an ideal carer role, different from a least-adult role, might exist, and that taking it up might still enable me to gain ethnographic insights into children's worlds. Researchers enacting the least-adult role describe very different entries into their fields. Corsaro (2003) for instance describes his rapport-building process with the children as lengthy (2003: 11). To some extent they did not know what to make of his self-presentation, and did not initially invite them into his play. Fine (1988) similarly found such trouble initially gaining access that he admitted to facilitating his inclusion by offering bribes of gum (p. 25). Other scholars have also remarked upon the confusion they created for children by denying their requests for age-specific assistance. Children expressed not only confusion but frustration in response (Gallagher and Gallacher 2008; Warming 2011). In adopting the ideal

carer role, my entry into children's worlds was relatively quick and not met with confusion or

uncertainty on the part of the children. Indeed they partially helped in the construction of this

role by regularly asking me and the other teachers to *help them* academically, socially and

emotionally.

Helpfulness

The teachers considered it neither helpful nor appropriate to deny children's requests to

enforce rules or direct behavior, employ pedagogical purposefulness, provide comfort or

emotional support, or otherwise act with "conventionally expected adult authority" (Johannsen

2012). Enacting the aspects of the ideal carer role that moved it away from the least-adult role

thus entailed shifting into generally "higher" or more age-differential levels of authority that

underlined academic, social or emotional assistance. Pedagogical purposefulness, rule-

enforcement, direction of child behavior, and comfort provision can all be considered forms of

helpfulness, especially when enacted in response to a child's request. Below I provide examples

from the field of each. Although some occur with teachers and some with me, all can be treated

as examples of adult and child behavior when the adult has assumed the ideal carer role. Note

that in each example adult-child difference is assumed yet serves a positive, productive purpose.

Sometimes a child asked for an adult to enforce rules:

James and Jesús are playing with the dinosaurs when they begin arguing over the
large T-rex. After unsuccessfully convincing James to give him a turn with it,
Jesús approaches Ms. Janet who has been watching their ownership dispute from
the counter nearby. Ms. Janet says she will set the timer for three minutes, and
when it dings, she will let them know it's time to switch. They both agree,
seemingly relieved that their play has been preserved.

In this excerpt Jesús and James understand that Ms. Janet's authority as a rule enforcer is more likely to ensure their continued play than if either of them try on their own. They all share in an understanding that it is her age-based difference (supplemented by the timer) that will ensure that the toy is shared between them. Illustrating their understanding of this particular authority vested in the adults, the children seldom asked other children to resolve such disputes.

Similarly sometimes children requested that adults direct their behavior. Here is a typical example:

> Juan needs a seat on the balance beam during the game but it's too crowded and the other children aren't noticing. He whines almost inaudibly and then looks at me for guidance, with big puppy dog eyes. I tell him "you can say, 'Excuse me. I need a seat.'" He does and the girls make some room for him. Amaya and Caleb are in the same predicament a moment later (both also not assertive talkers.) I tell them the same thing I tell Juan, for next round. Amaya says ok.

In this excerpt Juan, Amaya, and Caleb know that I will extend my knowledge of social behavior to them when they are having trouble influencing their peers on their own. I also understand this as part of my role as an adult. Like Ms. Janet above I am paying close enough attention to the unfolding interaction to guess what Juan needs even though he tells me only with his eyes and barely audible whining.

> Children often initiated pedagogically purposeful play:

> Back inside for work time, Elia pulls me gently to the art area. She sets down paper and crayons in front of me and draws a circle in the air with her finger. I think she wants me to make a circle, but I ask her if she wants draw it (because the teachers want me to encourage them to practice drawing on their own.) But she shakes her head no insisting, "You." So I draw a circle on the paper with the green crayon. Then she indicates the next thing she wants me to draw, again wordlessly. I smile at her then lean toward her looking into her eyes and ask

quietly, "Are you going to use your words?" But she smiles shyly and shakes her head no. So I keep drawing and eventually she joins in on the same piece of paper. Together we draw a boy and a girl. She shows me on her figure how to draw each part and then I copy onto my own.

This interaction might not have even occurred at all had Elia not known, liked, and trusted me. She and I had interacted many times before. Through these interactions I knew that she was quite shy, especially because she was still learning to communicate in English. Here she nevertheless initiates the interaction. She knows that I will happily draw pictures with her. I recognize the pedagogical value in this task, and I ask her if she is willing to "use her words," which she denies. Her desire to interact on her terms here overshadows my desire for her to meet certain educational goals (to verbalize her thoughts). Nevertheless we are able to pursue others like practicing fine motor tasks and drawing shapes and human forms.

Finally, children sometimes asked for comfort:

I post up near the book area watching some of the children put together a puzzle. From the corner of the room I see Neveah, who seems sad. When she and I make eye contact she begins moving toward me with despondent eyes and her bottom lip stuck out for emphasis. Without invitation she crawls into my lap and curls up, snuggling her head against my chest. She puts her arms around me and squeezes while I pat her back with my chin resting on her head. "I miss my mommy," she says. "Aw," I respond softly and empathetically, "sometimes I miss my mommy, too."

Here Neveah indicates to me that she needs comfort, and I am able to offer her a momentary surrogate that bears some embodied familiarity to her own mother. At the same time I validate her sad feelings by saying I can relate.

This example also illustrates that helpfulness, as it is expressed within the ideal carer role, lent it a particularly feminine or motherly quality. To help is to tend to another's needs without the expectation of reciprocity. It entails a supportive response or reaction to admissions of vulnerability. "I need help," and, "Can you help me?" were common phrases children spoke to me and the teachers. To meet such requests for help is to tend, while to play with children on their terms is certainly to befriend. The least-adult role, by contrast, limits itself to befriending.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Duplication, Disappearance and Devaluation of Feminized Labor

Corsaro's relationship to the children was likely shaped by gendered expectations. Being a man may have allowed him to more easily eschew his alignment with the teachers at the preschools in which he conducted research, which were also staffed primarily by women (Corsaro 2003). He may not have been as *called* -- intrinsically or extrinsically -- as I was to tend to and befriend the teachers and children. His gender may also help explain why the children did not immediately approach him in the way they approached the (women) adults in the setting.

Because it was limited to playfulness rather than playfulness and helpfulness, Corsaro's role also mirrored and reified the gendered divisions of labor that have been documented in studies of both parenting and feminized professions. This is especially problematic because this gendered labor -- carried out in this profession primarily by women -- is physically and emotionally intensive, yet undervalued. The intensiveness of the work is largely due to the standard, to which preschool teachers hold themselves, of openness to a broad range of child requests. Adopting the ideal carer role entailed the development of myriad skills in managing a high volume of such requests, as well as in shifting flexibly between the levels of authority

51

required to respond appropriately. My pregnancy, which changed my body and made me more tired, further heightened my awareness of the physical and emotional intensity of the role. I could relate to the teachers' frequent complaints of exhaustion as I was asked throughout the day to focus on a less verbal child's subtle cues, maintain composure as I developed an acceptable plan for children to share toys, provide comfort to a child whose home life was in shambles, explain and then show how to toss a Frisbee, and use my (at times rusty) imagination to contribute to an engaging and pedagogically sound dinner scene in the kitchen area.

In addition to duplicating the gendered division of labor in preschool settings, adopting a least-adult approach makes it invisible. It downplays not only the extent that children request help, but the extent that adults respond in a supportive manner. This is especially problematic when set in the broader context of the devaluation of feminized labor (England, 2005). Professions that entail care work, which tend to be dominated by women, are less well compensated than male-dominated jobs requiring similar amounts of training. Ms. Janet, for instance, who had twenty-seven years of experience and worked full time, made $14,000 in 2010. She suffered from a number of physical ailments and often took sick leave due to headaches. Still, with her jovial and enthusiastic reading voice, she could maintain the engaged attention of sixteen three year olds for the entire duration of story time.

Acknowledging Maternal Potential

By describing the ideal carer role, and comparing it to the least-adult role, I have illustrated the productive power of care work in preschool, which is enacted primarily by women. I have suggested that taking up such a role does not necessarily bar childhood ethnographers from gaining trust and access to children's experiences. Rather, because it more

closely reflects expected adult-child relations in environments staffed primarily by women, it better captures experiences between adults and children that entail vulnerability and support. These experiences are common in everyday life in preschool not only because they tend to be staffed by women, but because the children are so young, and so relatively unfamiliar with the norms of school and the student role. To highlight this point, try to imagine an ethnographer taking a least-adult role in an infant care room of a daycare. Their presence would be confusing at best, dangerous at worst, and undoubtedly frustrating for both the infants and the childcare workers. Three and four year olds are not so developmentally distant from babyhood, and still require enormous amounts of assistance in their everyday operations in the world. One is reminded of D.W. Winnicott's (1958) quote here: "There is no such thing as a baby. There is a baby and someone" (p. 99).

Children's vulnerability and need for assistance are more common in preschools than studies employing least-adult approaches imply. By failing to adequately note this, proponents of least-adult methodology denied the equally as valid variation of perspectives and behaviors present in the common situation of a collaborative adult-child culture where cross-age bonding and adult support of children is foundational and expected. To the extent that men employed the role, they also foreclosed their own potential to enact and expand the skills required for caring labor, and missed an opportunity to show children that men, too, could play this role.

Taking up an ideal carer role, by contrast, allows for childhood ethnographers to place adults and children under the same lens, while accounting for embodied differences as well as the productive and diffuse flow of power amongst the differently-aged. This again more accurately reflects the lived, shared experience of preschool for preschoolers and their teachers. In her theorization of "maternal thinking" Ruddick (1989) suggests that it necessarily entails

flexibility, or an openness to change. She explains that the work of fostering growth -- a basic component of mothering as well as teaching -- "provokes or requires a welcoming response to change… As children try on shifting identities, their ability to create a self is inextricably and often painfully mixed with others' ability to recognize the self they are creating" (1989: 89-92). This insight assumes that subjecthood is emergent for both children and adults, but also grants some difference between child and adult, based in both age and (in Ruddick's work) gender. Maternal potential, or the productive power of caring labor, thus does not deny difference between adult and child, or even adult authority. It simply makes space for that authority to be productive in a positive or desirable way. Children are *both agentic and vulnerable*. Sometimes indeed their agency entails openly admitting to their own vulnerability, with the expectation of an adult's supportive reaction.

References

Ahn, Junehui. 2010. "'I'm Not Scared of Anything' Emotion as Social Power in Children's Worlds." *Childhood* 17(1): 94–112.

Alanen, Leena and Berry Mayall. 2001. *Conceptualising Child-Adult Relations, 1st edition*. London; New York: Routledge.

Anonymous. 2010. "Center for Michigan Issues Special Report on Early Childhood." http://greatstartforkids.org/content/center-michigan-issues-special-report Retrieved 3/8/2015.

Bondi, Liz. 2003. Empathy and Identification: Conceptual Resources for Feminist Fieldwork. *ACME: International Journal of Critical Geography* 2: 64-76.

Brown, Lyn Mikel and Carol Gilligan. 1999. *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Chiteji, Ngina and Sheldon Danzinger. 2011. "Family Finances after the Great Recession: Evidence from the Michigan Recession and Recovery Study." *National Poverty Center Working Paper Series.* http://npc.umich.edu/publications/u/2011-21-npc working- paper.pdf. Retrieved 5/21/2016.

Chodorow, Nancy J. 1989. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Christensen, Pia Haudrup. 2004. "Children's Participation in Ethnographic Research: Issues of Power and Representation." *Children & Society* 18(2):165–76.

Clark, Alison and June Statham. 2005. "Listening to Young Children: Experts in their Own Lives." *Adoption and Fostering* 29(1): 45-56.

Corsaro, William A. 1992. "Interpretive Reproduction in Children's Peer Cultures." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 55(2):160–77.

Corsaro, William A. 2003. *The Sociology of Childhood, 2nd ed.* New York: Sage Publications, Inc.

Corsaro, William A. 2003. *We're Friends, Right?: Inside Kids' Culture*. Washington DC: Joseph Henry Press.

Corsaro, William A. and Luisa Molinari. 2005. *I Compagni: Understanding Children's Transition from Preschool to Elementary School, Sociology of Education Series*, *illustrated edition.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Coulter, Rebecca Priegert and Margaret McNay. 1993. "Exploring Men's Experiences as Elementary School Teachers." *Canadian Journal of Education* 18(4): 398-413.

Cook, Daniel Thomas. 2010. "A Ghostly Presence." *Childhood* 18(1) 3-6.

Denham, Susanne A. 2003. "Preschool Emotional Competence: Pathway to Social Competence?" *Child Development* 74(1): 238–56. Retrieved September 13, 2016 (http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/1467-8624.00533).

Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

DeVault, Marjorie L. 1994. *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Emerson, Robert L., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

England, Paula and Michelle Budig. 2002. "Wages of Virtue: The Relative Pay of Care Work." *Social Problems.* 36(4): 455-473.

England, Paula. 2005. "Emerging Theories of Care Work." *Annual Review of Sociology.* 31:381 399.

Fernie, David, Samara Madrid, and Rebecca Kantor. 2010. *Educating Toddlers to Teachers: Learning to See and Influence the School and Peer Cultures of Classrooms*. New York: Hampton Press.

Fine, Gary Alan and Kent L. Sandstrom. 1988. *Knowing Children: Participant Observation with Minors*. New York: Sage Publications, Inc.

Fine, Gary Alan. 1987. *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Fletcher, Joyce. (1999). *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power and Relational Practice at Work*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. "Two Lectures*." In: C. Gordon, ed. *M. Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 – 1977*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must be Defended.* London: Penguin Allen Land.

Francis, Becky. 2008. "Teaching Manfully?: Exploring Gendered Subjectivities and Power via Analysis of Men Teachers' Gender Performance." *Gender and Education* 20(2): 109 22.

Gallacher, L. A. and M. Gallagher. 2008. "Methodological Immaturity in Childhood Research? Thinking through 'Participatory Methods." *Childhood* 15(4):499–516.

Gallagher, Michael. 2008. "Power is Not an Evil: Rethinking Power in Participatory Methods." *Children's Geographies* 6:2: 137-150.

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) Risk Factor Definition. www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Risk_Factor_Definitions_408472_7.pdf.

Hadley, Kathryn Gold and Sandi Kawecka Nenga. 2004. "From Snow White to Digimon Using Popular Media to Confront Confucian Values in Taiwanese Peer Cultures." *Childhood* 11(4): 515–36.

Hamre, Bridget K. and Robert C. Pianta. 2005. "Can Instructional and Emotional Support in the First-Grade Classroom Make a Difference for Children at Risk of School Failure?" *Child Development* 76(5): 949–67.

Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* New York: Routledge.

Hartmann, Heidi. 1976. "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex." *Signs.* 1(3): 137 169.

Hays, Sharon. 1996. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell and Anne Machung. [1989] 2003. *The Second Shift*. New York: Penguin Books.

Johannsen, Barbro. 2012. "Doing Adulthood in Childhood Research." *Childhood*. 19(101): 101 114.

Komulainen, Sirkka. 2007. "The Ambiguity of the Child's 'Voice' in Social Research."

Childhood 14(1):11–28.

Leavitt, Robin. 1995. "The Emotional Culture of Infant-Toddler Day Care" in Hatch, J. A
(ed.) *Qualitative Research in Early Childhood Settings* pp. 3-21. Westport, CT:
Praeger Publishers.

Lee, Nick. 1998. "Towards an Immature Sociology." *The Sociological Review* 46(3): 458.

Lee, Nick. 2001. *Childhood and Society: Growing up in an Age of Uncertainty*, *1st ed*.
London: Open University Press.

Lee, Nick. 2005. *Childhood and Human Value: Development, Separation and Separability*. (1st
ed.) London: Open University Press.

Mandell, Nancy. 1988. "The Least-Adult Role in Studying Children." *Journal of Contemporary
Ethnography* 16(4):433–67.

Maroto, Michelle and Richard Brandon. 2011. "Summary of Background Data on the ECCE
Workforce." Commissioned paper from *The Early Childhood Care and Education
Workforce" Challenges and Opportunities: A Workshop Report*. Washington DC:
National Academies Press. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK189910/.
Retrieved 8/8/2016.

Murray, Susan. 1996. "We All Love Charles": Men in Child Care and the Social
Construction of Gender." *Gender and Society* 10(4): 368-385.

Procter, Lisa. 2013. "Exploring the Role of Reflexivity in Research with Children."
Emotion,Space and Society 9: 80-88.

Prout, Alan, ed. 2005. *The Future of Childhood 1st ed.* New York: Routledge.

Raffety, Erin L. 2014. "Minimizing Social Distance: Participatory Research with Children."
Childhood 22(3): 409–22.

Reich, Jennifer A. 2003. "Pregnant with Possibility: Reflections on Embodiment, Access, and
Inclusion in Field Research." *Qualitative Sociology* 26(3): 351-367.

Ruddick, Sara. 1995. *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Simpson, Ruth. 2009. *Men in Caring Occupations.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Thorne, Barrie. 1993. *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School.* New Brunswick, New Jersey:
Rutgers University Press.

Walzer, Susan. 1999. *Thinking About the Baby: Gender and Transitions into Parenthood.*

Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Warming, H. 2011. "Getting Under Their Skins? Accessing Young Children's Perspectives through Ethnographic Fieldwork." *Childhood* 18(1): 39–53.

Weedon, Chris. [1987]1997. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, Second Edition.* Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing.

Wharton, Amy S. 2009. "The Sociology of Emotional Labor." *Annual review of sociology* 2009: 147-165.

Williams, Christine. 1995. *Still a Man's World: Men Who Do "Women's Work".* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Winnicott, David W. 1958. *Collected Papers: Through Pediatrics to Psychoanalysis.* London: Tavistock.

Winnicott, Donald W. 1964. *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World.* London: Pelican Books.

Yoshikawa, Hirokazu, Christina Weiland, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Margaret Burchinal, Linda Espinoza, William T. Gormley, Jens Ludwig, Katherine Magnuson, Deborah Phillips and Martha J. Zaslow. 2013. "Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education." Ann Arbor, Michigan: Society for Research in Child Development.

Zembylas, Michalinos. 2005. "Beyond Teacher Cognition and Teacher Beliefs: The Value of the Ethnography of Emotions in Teaching." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 18(4): 465–87.

CHAPTER IV

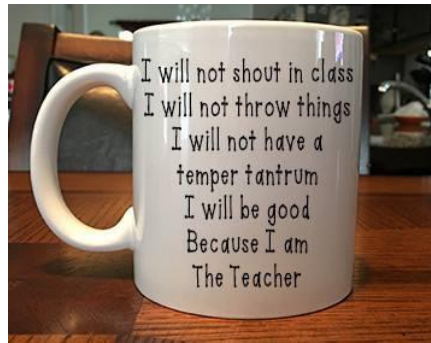**Coercion and Confession: Understanding Adult Fallibility in Preschool**

Figure B: Because I am the Teacher

Introduction

Childhood studies since its paradigm shift in the late 1970s has moved through three key moments of theorizing power and agency in adult-child relations. The first moment, which I call the "Structural Moment" imbued adults and children with differing levels of *inherent* power, underlying what I call a "stronger" sense of individual agency. Here both children and adults' influences upon their surroundings are motivated by internal intentions that are knowable to them (Lee 2001 2005). The second moment, which I call the "Poststructural Moment," reacted to the first by theorizing power as more diffuse, advocating "weaker" incarnations of agency (Foucault 1978 1980 2003; Lee 1998 2001). In these weaker incarnations, children's and adults' influence over their environment is not necessarily the outcome of internal, intentional motivation, but is (in its most diffuse form) an "emergence" of multiple, interlocking influences

of both humans and non-humans (Prout 2005). The third moment, which I call the "Critical Realist Moment" has attempted to synthesize aspects from each of the previous two by acknowledging the fallibility and temporal orientation of humans (Alderson 2013; Archer 2001). This theoretical moment encompasses aims to "split the difference" between the stronger and weaker forms of agency in the previous two by re-centering intentional human action within networks of constraints and enablements.

Although I characterize them as "moments" to emphasize their reactive unfolding over time, each moment provided an approach or orientation to studying adult-child interactions which are still used in the field of childhood studies today. To varying degrees, all three approaches have informed studies of children's experiences of power and agency. What remains unclear, however, is how these are reflected in the everyday understandings of adults who regularly interact with children. How did the teachers at Block Tower understand their power in interactions with children? How and to what extent are the three theoretical approaches reflected in teachers' understandings? And how might knowing more about their experiences and understandings help us better engage with the different theoretical perspectives?

Drawing on extensive ethnographic and interview data collected at a preschool over thirteen months in 2010-2011, I examine the teachers' mental and emotional processing of (relatively rare) interactions in which they coerced children, in order to clarify this. I show how the teachers grapple with their own power and agency when they feel they have not adequately lived up to the expectation to treat children as "beings in their own right." I suggest that this grappling between expectations and behaviors evinces broader tensions in the field of childhood studies regarding power and agency, and that indeed "splitting the difference" between stronger and weaker incarnations of agency best captures these adults' experiences "on the ground." In

order to show where and how elements of each of the theoretical moments are reflected in the teachers' processing of coercive interactions, I begin by providing a detailed description of each.

Literature Review

Mirroring broader philosophical tensions, movements and exchanges within the social sciences, childhood scholarship too has had to grapple with confusion revolving around the difficult question of the extent to which individuals can influence, or exert their personal power, over their own lives and the lives of others (Archer 2001; James et al 1998). These questions have proven especially salient to the study of childhood because of the unique embodiedness of children, who are born without language or an ability to move about independently, then gradually develop these and many other skills as they age (Alderson 2013). This development is facilitated by the child as well as by elements in the child's environment, including other people, with the relative influence of each existing at the core of childhood scholar's grappling with these questions.

Figure A provides a simplified roadmap of this review, which examines each moment's conceptualization of power, and difference (if applicable) between adult and child agency. I present the three theoretical moments in the order in which they appeared in childhood studies.

Time	Theoretical Moment	Power	Child agency	Adult agency
1980s	Structural	Essentialized, a possession	Limited by adults but possible; glimpsed in participation and resistance	Restrictive, top-down, always potentially oppressive
1990s	Poststructural	Diffuse, emergent	Possible, contingent, partial, interdependent	Possible, contingent, partial, interdependent
Early 2000s	Critical Realist	Diffuse, emergent, purposeful	Generally fewer (fallible) "personal projects" since birth	Generally more (fallible) "personal projects" since birth

Figure C: Table of Theoretical Moments

Structural Moment

The Structural Moment in childhood studies sprang from a paradigm shift in childhood sociology, which positioned itself against traditional "adult-centric" conceptualizations of children (James et al. 1998). Traditional conceptualizations, it was argued, tended to view children as passive recipients of adult inputs, with little to no attention given to children's active participation in these processes. In both traditional socialization and developmental approaches, for instance, adults were imbued with the ability to influence, shape, and move children -- in other words to intentionally and autonomously *act upon* them to produce an outcome in the child (Corsaro 2003a; James et al. 1998).

The paradigm shift in childhood studies entailed retaining this understanding of power and its operation as intentional and autonomous, but imbuing children with it too. This was often illustrated by highlighting children's re-appropriation of, resistance to or transgression against adult-centric meaning systems (Ahn 2010; Corsaro 2003a, b; Thorne 1993). Centering children's "lived experiences" and related competencies was justified by an underlying assumption that the power to influence others (and oneself) is an *inherent* quality of an individual human actor, thus that independence or autonomy of will is required for the individual, regardless of age, to exercise it.

These related notions of power and agency as inherent and independent have enjoyed a place of privilege in childhood studies since the paradigm shift. For example when consulting the text *Key Terms for Childhood Studies* one finds agency defined as "the capacity of individuals to act independently" (James and James 2008, p. 9). To act independently implies one must not

only possess a power to act within one's person, but that others (say, adults) who also possess this power, must not inhibit or constrain such action.

Qvortrop (2009) conceptualized adult's and children's differential expressions of (independent) power by reframing children as a minority group vis a vis adults (James et al 1998). He argued that because generations are constant elements of social structures, and because of adults' structural location in relation to children, adults (as a group) always-already have power over children. This power expresses itself through adults' structurally-reinforced control over children -- through, for instance, the (adult-created) institution of school and the (adult-enforced) laws requiring children to attend (Qvortrop 2009). In Qvortrop's conceptualization children also possess power. But this power necessarily entails confronting and often resisting adult power, which is greater because of its structural reinforcements.

Qvortrop's structural theory of generations has been highly influential on the field of childhood studies. Many empirical and ethnographic projects have utilized his theory to frame their focus on children's active participation in socialization processes (and concomitantly to bracket off adults.) Qvortrop's always-already more powerful adult can be glimpsed in Thorne's (1993) and Corsaro's (2003a, b) more interactional applications, for instance. Both of these scholars focus primarily on children's experiences living within this generational structural arrangement where much of the time their agentic acts occur in reaction to or in spite of adults' rules and norms. Thorne (1993) for example highlights the ways children both reproduce and "play with" received gender norms from the adults around them (see also Martin 1998). Similarly Corsaro's notion of interpretive reproduction turns largely on the idea that children often resist and reappropriate received meanings from the "adult world" (see also Ahn 2010; Hadley & Nenga 2004; Feagan & Van Ausdale 2001; Ferguson 2001).

Corsaro, Thorne, and many other scholars of their ilk have contributed to a "stronger" sense of agency to the extent that they implied that children and adults exist in separate, oppositional "worlds." Meanings and expectations travel across a symbolic boundary between these worlds, and are taken up by individuals who impose their own inherent power upon them in one way or another (i.e. reproduction, reappropriation, resistance). Thorne's metaphor of schoolchildren's playful moments as "little oases of imagination in dryly routinized scenes" captures the implied relation well (1993, pp. 15-16).

One of the most obvious contributions emerging from this theoretical moment was in insisting to the larger academic world and to the general public that children were morally deserving of subjecthood (or treatment by adults as subjects or "beings in their own right.") A related contribution was to show that adult power over children can be an arbitrary and potentially oppressive constraint upon that subjecthood (Pugh 2013).

Poststructural Moment

In spite of these contributions the Poststructural Moment emerged from concerns over the preservation of oppositional binaries adhering to the two generational categories, as well as a critique of the Structural Moment's understanding of the operation of power (Prout 2005; Honig 2009). Poststructuralist scholars sought to widen the childhood studies lens to better include adults (rather than bracketing them as always-already oppressive) thereby accounting for more variation, partiality and emergence of human characteristics regardless of age.

This weakened agency conceptually. Alanen and Mayall's (2001) notion of "generationing," for instance, characterizes adult-child relations as an ongoing, bi-directional negotiation, where influence is exchanged and meanings are diffuse and co-constructed by adults

and children (also see Punch 2002). Their concept preserves Qvortrop's (2009) understanding of "Child" and "Adult" as categories that always exist within any social structure, but emphasize their *relational* nature for any given set of generations. Relationality locates agency in the realm of the discursive or performative, diffusing power insofar as children and adults are granted the ability to influence meanings in an ongoing, always incomplete dialogue (Foucault 1978 1980 2003).

By drawing attention to co-constructive practices between generations, the concept of generationing opened the way for a multiplication of not only child subjectivities but adult ones (see Warming 2011; Johannsen 2012). Adult and child subjectivities, rather than existing in a fixed relation with essential characteristics (as "beings"), could then be seen as plural, emergent "becomings" (Lee 1998). Johannsen (2012) used this notion of becoming to frame her findings that she herself, as a childhood researcher, "emerged" as different types of "adult" in different contexts. She represented these types as having varying levels of power (granted largely by children). For instance the "adult-in-charge" was expected by the children to enforce rules while the "adult-included-in-commonality" was invited by children into their play, including play that went against school rules (p. 101).

Prout (2005) and Lee (2001) worked to widen childhood scholars' lens even further. They aimed to capture the power or influence of *non-human* entities as they interacted with human ones in processes of socialization and education. In a multidisciplinary move, they posited that sociologists (in particular) need not even grant primacy to the social as a driving force, but rather to the "heterogeneous, interlocking elements of networks, whether natural, material, discursive, cultural, institutional, ideological or technological" (Prout 2005, p. 64). Using actor-network and complex systems theory, these authors attempted to diffuse "agency"

(as a power to influence or create movement) into *all things*, thereby reconstituting human subjects as human bodies, networked in complex ways with (their own) brains, as well as ideologies, technologies, and so on.

Subjectivities (and their ultimately discursive practices) needed not be the initial or focal point in these a-humanist approaches. In fact this had the effect of over-emphasizing the causal primacy of human (social) action (Lee 2001 2005). Accordingly agency, as represented in the Structural Moment, only actually emerges momentarily or partially; and only appears to emanate from an independent will because multiple heterogeneous elements "work" together to present it as such -- elements including researchers retrospectively describing events. All "subjects" are thus actually human- non-human "hybridities" (Prout 2005).

Lee (2008) offered the example of a child's toy having agency to illustrate this. The toy had special meaning for the child, so that when it was left behind at a friend's house, the father was *compelled* to get back into his car and retrieve it. Lee highlighted the multiple elements contributing to the father's action of driving back, including the father's (empathetic) understanding of the child's need for the toy, the parenting ideology that encourages this kind of empathy, the child's need itself, the status of the toy as a transitional object, not to mention the car and the road and the infrastructure that enabled the road, etc. While the father certainly made the decision to retrieve the toy, Lee argues, the toy itself played a part in influencing or causing this decision. Therefore it is not entirely correct insist the father made the decision independently.

There is a certain poetry in describing all action and movement as partial emergence, retrospectively read into the ongoing, networked flows of power between human and non-human entities. The multidisciplinarity of the Poststructural Moment can help the most inclusive-minded

of scholars feel like they are covering all bases, accounting for the dizzying complexity of the world. But this theoretical moment arguably widened the lens too far, necessitating impractically large research questions and risking the disappearance of moments where differentials in power between human actors lead to real, material and felt consequences. It potentially diffused agency too much as well, leaving no space for humans' active, intentional, yet fallible, participation in the social world.

Critical Realist Moment

Childhood scholarship has most recently entered a Critical Realist Moment in order to strike a balance between the competing conceptualizations of power and agency within the two prior moments. This is especially important for theorizing the actions of children and their relationships to adults because of the unique temporal and embodied quality of childhood: All children grow into adult bodies over time; all adults were once children; and all children require care from others (usually adults) in order to survive and thrive. This is true at biological, interactional and structural levels.

Critical realism attempts to strike a balance between strong and weak conceptualizations of agency by centering humans' unique capacities to apprehend themselves temporally. The theory grants that human and non-human actors are networked much in the way poststructuralists conceive, with both human and non-human elements serving to constrain or enable (Alderson, 2013; Archer 2001). But it also insists that humans play a special role in the movement of and amongst those networks because of their unique embodied capacities. Among these unique embodied capacities are humans' possession of a "continuous sense of self," which enables them to mentally project themselves both backward and forward in time (Archer 2001). Because of

this, human agency is embodied in the intentional taking-up of "personal projects" (or plans for action) which are informed and guided by a (fallible) reflexivity. Here reflexivity is defined as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer 2001, p.4).

Properties of structures or cultures or nature (such as bias or ideology or the density of water) can constrain or enable human action in the Critical Realist account. But importantly in this account such constraints and enablements *always occur in reaction to human activation*. Archer (2001) offers the example of the personal project of swimming in a pool to illustrate this point. The water only "acts" as a constraint or enablement in the project of swimming *in response* to the human who activates its properties (by jumping in and swimming with a particular amount of embodied skill) (Archer 2001).

Attending to personal projects, and the reflexivity they entail, re-centers human and social action and acknowledges agency as an always-potentially constrained capacity. Because properties of structures or cultures or nature can and do constrain people in their projects, reflexivity (reflecting and planning) is in other words always fallible. This is especially so because projects are not necessarily utility-maximizing, but based on what people care about, or how they wish to see themselves in relation to social contexts (Archer 2001).

Setting and Methodology: Block Tower Preschool

Block Tower Preschool was a relatively unique early childhood education and care center. It provided full-day services on a sliding scale solely to "at-risk" families, and was among only eight percent of preschools in the state to be accredited by the NAEYC. This accreditation stipulated that it employ an active-participatory curriculum which in turn had its

own stipulations about teacher training and accountability. A mixture of state, local and private grants simultaneously provided funding. While this created a significant amount of administrative work, it also set a relatively high bar, especially for expectations of teachers. They were required to receive ongoing re-training, and collect ongoing data ("anecdotes") on all of their students. The teachers were also unionized, which provided them with a heightened sense of empowerment and collective voice.[9]

Yet as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the preschool's already tight budget faced significant strain and uncertainty. This economic reality inside the preschool and in the surrounding area inevitably affected everybody in the project, myself included. Preschools are generally spaces of heightened emotion (Hamre and Pianta 2005). But by all accounts, administrators, teachers, parents and kids were all more stressed than usual. As a result my rapport-building process intensified. In addition to providing extra support in the classroom as part of my participant-observation, I became a trusted, empathetic sounding board for much of the teachers' private stress processing. Field notes thus often included descriptions of the physical and emotional aspects of our experiences (Bondi 2003; Hochschild 1979; Procter 2013). Indeed the physical and emotional experiences of stress, guilt, empathy and relief were key aspects of the teachers' mental and emotional processing of moments of coercion.

Looking and Listening

I developed quite a strong rapport with both the teachers and the children through an ongoing process of lessening social distance. This process was partially intentional and partially facilitated by the pedagogical orientation of the school (among other things, to which I attend

---

[9] See Chapter 2 for a more detailed description of the school.

thoroughly in Chapter 2). Following Christiansen (2004) I entered the fieldwork with an intent to employ "ethical symmetry" with all participants, regardless of age. Extending the same basic ethical standards (protection of privacy, responsibility for safety and wellbeing of research participants, opportunity to opt out at any time, etc.), and then reacting to ethical dilemmas as they arise, avoids preemptively reifying research participants as inherently (socially) different.

I did this with the teachers in three key ways: First, I interviewed all of them at the outset of the project with the explicit intention of creating space for them to help define the goals of my research. (The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average and consisted of a series of open-ended questions.) I explicitly framed the interviews to them as opportunities for me to gain a sense of their work, from the "real experts," the ones "on the ground" every day. I listened intently to their answers and factored their suggestions for my research into the design by focusing on aspects of their work that they deemed important. The teachers took eager advantage of this opportunity to speak for themselves. They were under regular scrutiny from accreditation boards and curriculum evaluators to retain funding, which had reportedly intensified after the recession. They complained that these assessments often left them feeling unfairly judged, with no chance to explain themselves. Listening empathetically (indicated also through my body, e.g. nodding and facial expressions) had the effect of leveling my potential authority as an outside researcher from a prestigious university coming into their workplace to scrutinize their work.

Second, I asked the Director how I could be "of most help" when arranging my access to the field site. Given the constraints the preschool was under, I did not feel it would be ethical of me to gather data from them without offering something in return. Reflecting the preschool's pedagogical orientation and commitment to child-centered learning, the Director, without hesitation, told me that the way I could be of most help would be to assist the teachers in the

classrooms, especially during the parts of the day designated as "work time" (which could best

be described as child-driven play/work10).

Third, I indicated to the teachers that they were welcome to offer me suggestions for how

best to enact the preschool's pedagogical approach in their classrooms. They occasionally took

me up on this offer, which also helped lessen our social distance by bringing me closer to their

experience as teachers and placing them in a relatively more knowledgeable role.

This in turn quite seamlessly provided opportunities for me to interact with the children

in a similarly open manner, because "following their lead" was the point of departure for the

pedagogy, especially at "work times." I employed the "act of looking," or reading a play scene

for cues of culturally-appropriate behavior, and then joined children only after they initiated

contact with me (Christiansen 2004; Corsaro 2003b). I quickly became a very popular playmate,

with children regularly competing with each other to gain my attention. The teachers expressed

their appreciation of my helpfulness during work time as I began to understand how to sustain

enjoyable, pedagogically purposeful play with the children. "You're so patient with them," one

told me, illustrating their eventual trust in me to enact the pedagogy effectively. "You get it."

Findings

How did the teachers at Block Tower understand their power over children in moments of

adult-to-child coercion? How and to what extent are the three theoretical approaches reflected in

teachers' understandings, and in their mental and emotional processing of such moments? In

order to answer these questions I first delineate how teachers viewed and understood their role. I

then provide examples of moments where teachers perceived that they had failed to live up to the

---

10 See Chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation.

ideals of that role, which almost always entailed a stark display of coercion. Sometimes such moments of coercion were followed by a kind of "confession," where teachers processed or talked through the incident with me. These confessions highlighted teachers' recognition of and relationship to their own fallibility.

Teachers' Understanding of their Role

Ascertaining the teachers' ideal understandings of their role entailed asking them to describe ideal adult-child interactions during interviews, plus a lengthy inductive process of learning and adopting that role myself.[11] To them, ideal interactions should be respectful and collaborative rather than directive, and built on a prior and constantly reinforced bond between teacher and child. The facilitation of learning and emotional support in other words were considered integral and mutually reinforcing (Hamre and Pianta 2005).

In their interviews many of the teachers indicated their belief that children were much more likely to engage with academic material if they were emotionally at-ease. Putting them at ease, or otherwise supporting them emotionally, was therefore often prioritized over attempting to facilitate their (cognitive) learning, as illustrated here by Ms. Miranda:

> I've found a lot of times, I mean it doesn't always work, but sometimes with those kids if you just say, 'Do you just need a hug?' And they say 'Yeah.' Or, 'Do you just want to snuggle for a minute?' And if you just hold them on your lap for a minute and just talk to them… they chill out. Then it's an easier morning.

The teachers also emphasized *respect* for children as an ideal aspect of their role. "They're little people, you know?" Ms. Polly explained. "Yes," her co-teacher added, "they're

---

[11] I devote Chapter 3 to detailing this process.

very smart. They're smarter than we think." The teachers expressed appreciation of the curriculum here for its emphasis on "following their lead" and "getting on their level." It stipulated that in pedagogical interactions teachers should take children's points of view or preferences as an entry point to learning/teaching rather than prioritizing their own academic goals.

Finally, the teachers placed the ideal expectations of their role within a helping frame. This was reinforced by their gender (in particular the overlaps of the teaching role with the mother role[12]) as well as their socioeconomic status relative to the children and families they served.[13] While the teachers certainly had more education than the majority of parents they served, many of them came from similar class backgrounds. Yet the key difference between the teachers and the children's parents was in educational attainment. With the exception of a small minority of parents, most only had high school diplomas or less. The teachers thus saw themselves as part of an intervention on the reproduction of that level of educational attainment by providing affordable educational services to the parents' children -- services which moreover had shown in longitudinal studies to increase the children's chances of graduating high school and pursuing higher education (Schweinhart 2005). This lent emotional weight to their work and to the pursuit of doing it well.

---

[12] See Chapter 3

[13] The overall socioeconomic picture of the teachers relative to the population they served (and the racial implications therein) deserves an analysis of its own, space for which is inadequate here. The picture is complicated and deserves to be considered within an entirely different set of literatures. Here I will mention only that which is most pertinent to the present analysis.

The Collaboration-Coercion Spectrum

As I have shown elsewhere (see Chapter 2), the teachers were generally able to enact their role within these ideal parameters. Given the specific challenges of working with young children from sometimes stressful home-life circumstances, however, the teachers were simply not able to enact the role ideally all the time. These were times when coercion was likely to occur. Although such less-than-ideal moments were not nearly as common as more collaborative ones, it is useful to analyze the former because stark displays of coercion provide particularly straightforward illustrations of power in action.

Instances of adult-to-child collaboration and adult-to-child coercion can best be described as occurring along a spectrum along which adult-child interactions may be placed (see Figure B). Mutually constructed, harmonious and positive adult-child interactions occur at the most collaborative end of this spectrum, while unwanted adult forcefulness or movements of children's bodies, which produce an immediate, visible, negative effect in the child, occur at the most coercive end. To give a sense of the relative infrequency of coercion: recorded instances of collaboration totaled 150 while instances of coercion totaled only 20.

Collaboration >>>>>>	**Negotiation** >>> >>>	**Direction** >> >> >> > > > > **Coercion**

Figure D: The Collaboration-Coercion Spectrum

If adult-child harmony occurs at the most collaborative end of the spectrum, travelling along it toward the coercive end one finds a range of adult-child negotiations, where adults' and children's needs or desires do not initially match up, but some solution is worked out. These were also quite common. Travelling yet further toward the coercive end, one next finds adult-to-

child direction. These instances are somewhat difficult to classify along the spectrum because often adult-to-child direction is initiated by a child, as in the case where a child requests help resolving a dispute, sharing a toy, or writing a less familiar letter of the alphabet. Still ultimately they can be classified as "adults telling children what to do." Finally at the end of the spectrum is coercion. These are the moments I focus on in this paper.

Coercion

The moments of coercion -- or unwanted adult forcefulness or movements of children's bodies, which produced an immediate, visible, negative effect in the child -- can be thought of as continuing to occur progressively down the spectrum as it has so far been presented. Coercive moments that produced the least intense reaction from children but still generally took the form of teachers controlling them were when teachers issued directives from a distance, without the children directly asking for them. Of the three types of coercion this distant issuing of directives was the most common, and children were generally no more than slightly annoyed in response:

> As the class walks in line to the outdoor play space Ms. Melinda keeps an eye on
> Curtis, who tends to leave the line or cut in front of other children. The moment
> he seems distracted she quickly and straightforwardly redirects his attention to the
> task at hand: "Curtis! Stay in line please."

Coercively issuing directives (or enforcing rules) physically rather than just verbally tended to produce comparatively more negative reactions in the children:

> Able and Jesus are having a lot of trouble sharing the dinosaurs this morning and
> have been repeatedly tattling on one another to Ms. Janet and I. They are arguing
> again over a triceratops and Ms. Janet has had enough. She walks over to them,
> takes the triceratops out of Abel's hands and says, "I'm going to hang on to this

76

for a while. You two go find something else to do." Abel whines and Jesus looks relieved. As they separate to do other activities, Able pouts.

Finally, the starkest instances (occurring at the most coercive endpoint of the spectrum) were those where a teacher physically moved or restrained a child's body in a way the child did not want or like. Children indicated that this treatment was undesired by reacting in an immediate, visibly negative manner, for instance crying, pouting, or expressing anger. Here are two examples, in order of increasing intensity:

> Vince tells Ms. Karen that Felicia called him stupid. Ms. Karen calls Felicia over to her and admonishes her in a stern voice that it is *not ok* to call our friends names. Felicia clasps her hands over her ears. This frustrates Ms. Karen, who removes Felicia's hands while saying very harshly, "You do *not* cover your ears when I'm talking to you." Felicia looks very angry with Ms. Karen who then sends her to "have a seat" for a time-out. Felicia cries with her hands covering her face for several minutes as she sits at the table while the other children play.

> Today in the Unicorn Room Ms. Jennifer had to pick up and remove Josue from the classroom. He had growled at another child and Ms. Jennifer acted quickly and without warning because Josue's growls had previously preceded violence toward other children. Josue thrashed and screamed as he was being removed. Ms. Jennifer said sternly as she carried him out, "We do *not* hit our friends!"[14]

Taken together these three categories of teacher coercion of children represent the environment of a stereotypically oppressive classroom, where children have little control and are subject to near-constant teacher dominance. In reality these types of interactions represented

---

[14] This field note is in the past tense because it is excerpted from a memo written after the incident with Josue occurred. I was present in Ms. Jennifer's class the day of the incident and witnessed it, but was working with another child at that moment and did not have time to fully write about what happened until later in the day.

neither the norm nor the ideal at Block Tower. Especially in the case of the starkest forms of coercion, the teachers were no less pleased than the children when they occurred.

Emotional and Mental Processing

The teachers indicated their discomfort with less-than-ideal interactions by talking with me about them, often unprompted. Such reactions indicated that they were affected by the emotional climates of their classrooms, which they felt responsible for cultivating. The starkest moments of coercion (occurring at the farthest end of the spectrum) were often followed by the lengthiest explanations or discussions with me. During these moments the teachers seemed to "need to talk it through," "get it out," or mentally and emotionally "process" the incident. There was often a confessional quality to this processing, where teachers were admitting guilt and hoping to be absolved. Here is a description of Ms. Jennifer after her coercive moment with Josue for instance:

> Ms. Jennifer walks up to me as I stand at the edge of the play area watching the kids play. She begins talking in earnest without any prompting from me, like she "just needs to get it out." She says she feels really bad about what happened between her and Josue. "He started growling and I had no choice but to pick him up and remove him from the classroom," she tells me. I nod empathetically as we watch the kids play. Ms. Jennifer had used very assertive language with him, saying adamantly, sharply, that he "*can't* hit his friends" as she carried him out. She repeats this point to me now and I look in her direction and nod empathetically again.

What is most notable in this moment of emotional processing is Ms. Jennifer's adamancy about what Josue must not do, even though she knows I agree with her. She intimates here that

even though she was exercising her authority to the extent of overpowering Josue physically, she at the same time felt she had little choice to do otherwise.

In less stark and emotionally intense moments of coercion, the teachers intimated a similar sense of concern, disappointment, and frustration, though they often embedded these emotions within critiques of the curriculum. Also highlighting elements out of their control (even in moments of relatively stark controlling behavior), they cited the curriculum's denial of the complexity of their work, especially considering the population with which they worked:

> Ms Janet: If there is one thing I don't like about [the curriculum] it's that it doesn't leave enough room for discipline, doesn't take into account the special challenges our kids face.

> Ms. Karen: Yes, the books can tell you to do this and that but the kids don't read those books and they don't come from the same circumstances as the kids those books are written about… A [curriculum evaluator] came into our classroom on an especially hard day once and said, "I'm not sure that you played as much with this group." And I was like, "well we have to keep an eye on this child and this child and this child because otherwise the room would be in chaos."

These complaints of constraint evince frustration over the prioritization of children's cognitive learning above their emotional functioning, which the teachers prioritized in reverse order. In these moments they externalized their frustrations by critiquing the curriculum's assumption of implementation under constant emotional stability, which, in certain moments -- sometimes even on certain days -- was simply difficult to sustain.

Discussion

The examples of coercion provided above, whether stark or more directive, were over all driven by, or emerged from, a felt need on the part of the teachers to occasionally *discipline* the children. Their processing of these incidents indicated a general uneasiness about the inevitability of discipline, especially when it entailed the stark use of their embodied authority to bring children back in line with school rules.

Elements of all three theoretical approaches outlined earlier are applicable, to varying degrees, to the teachers' understandings of this need to discipline. Influence from the Structural Moment is most apparent in the teachers' expressions of frustration over a failure to live up to their role as warm, respectful, helpful facilitators. While insights from the Poststructural Moment help explain the teachers' sense that there were multiple, competing forces and influences in their classrooms, over which they sometimes felt they had only a fleeting, nebulous control, if any control at all. Finally, the Critical Realist Moment provides a frame for understanding their mental and emotional processing of less than ideal interactions with children, as well as their ability to apprehend themselves temporally, and to realign their fallible intentions back with their ideals.

Structural Understandings

The teachers believed that warm, respectful adult facilitators should ideally honor children's perspectives and respect their bodily autonomy. Disciplining a child through physical restraint was thus considered problematic. These ideals are quite clearly aligned with the strong view of child agency, and oppositional differential in adult/child power (as well as the admonition that adults not exploit it), espoused in the Structural Moment in childhood studies.

Picking up or restraining children's bodies as a form of discipline was an uncommon occurrence relative to other more collaborative disciplinary methods (e.g. talking it through, encouraging a child verbally to choose a different behavior and justifying or explaining why.) The latter were considered more "respectful" ways of addressing the behaviors of children that tested school rules as they better took children's perspectives of the situation into account. By talking it through or encouraging a child to choose another behavior, teachers could indicate trust in the child to make a better decision, providing the space for him to do so. Ms. Jennifer's choice to remove Josue physically from the situation, by contrast, implied that she did not trust him enough to extend him any other option. (She did it, after all, *just in case* he might hit someone.)

The Structural Moment also emphasized children's *resistance as an accomplishment of their will.* This too was acknowledged by the teachers. In general they respected children's points of view and tried to remain open to and encouraging of their intentional expressions. But when those expressions, intentional or otherwise, risked causing injury to other children or contributing to chaos in the classroom, the teachers felt a need to actively foreclose or limit them through an assertion of their embodied authority (whether verbal or physical). These particular agentic expressions of the children were troubling because, in a sense, they were too powerful. Threatening violence or disorder was after all a highly effective way to influence classroom climate and inspire the teachers to immediate action.

Poststructural Complexity

Whereas the teachers' desire to respect the children's preferences can be explained through the structural frame, we can understand the tension between this desire and the competing desire to maintain classroom order and control (sometimes through assertions of

bodily authority) through a poststructural reading that treats agency as diffuse. Ms. Jennifer, for instance, cited the No Hitting rule -- a non-human entity -- as a major influence on her choice to remove Josue from the classroom. The rule was intended to promote a culture of respect for everyone's bodies and bodily autonomy, in addition to encouraging less violent ways of problem solving. Yet although it is difficult to argue against the value of such a rule, it inevitably designated opportunities for teachers to use their physical, embodied power (stature and strength) to intervene on children's bodies in the event that they broke it (or threatened to). It thus relied on a much more starkly coercive form of adult power than encouragements to scaffold and facilitate.

As was a defining feature of confessional moments, it was important to Ms. Jennifer that I understand the dilemma this created for her. She felt the power of the rule so strongly that she insisted she in fact had no power over it, in other words that *it* made her comply. "I had no choice," she insists, then cites the *rule* as the driving force behind her behavior: "He *can't* hit his friends." Indeed one might say Ms. Jennifer was influenced by multiple non-human entities here -- not only the rule, but the myriad circumstances that led Josue to threaten it break it. A-humanist approaches might similarly interpret Josue's growl as a child-anger-vocalization-frustration-homelife- instability-teacher-attention "hybridity." Rather than construing the growl as evidence of a particular desire, and an autonomous expression of that desire (as stronger, structural approaches to agency would), this a-humanist reading construes it as more of a semi-conscious impulse emanating from the networked "intra-action" of elements beyond and around him (Rautio 2014).

The same interpretation can be made of both the children's and the adults' behaviors in the other examples of coercion. Indeed it bears noting that all three types of adult-to-child

coercion discussed above occurred more frequently in interaction with "difficult" or "challenging" children whom the teachers often took care to mention were "having troubles at home." Here again the teachers acknowledged the complex contexts in which the children's families were embedded, taking care not to personally blame or assume malicious intentionality in these children's misbehavior.

Critical Realism's Futurity

These poststructural interpretations situate teachers' and children's experience of their own power (or lack thereof) into the complex context of every other possibly contributing element to the scene. They especially highlight the limits of any individuals' agency by placing individual action (or motion) within a complex network of elements, human and non-human, material and immaterial. But by absolving any individual of culpability, or rendering their actions as un- or semi-conscious *re*actions to elements beyond their control, it fails to account for any conscious, intentional action at all. This is especially inadequate when accounting for the full story of the teachers at Block Tower because they did not see themselves as entirely powerless. Indeed they felt it was their moral and professional imperative to mentally process less than ideal incidents in order to "have a better plan" the next time challenges arose. By adding this element of future-oriented introspection, or futurity, Critical Realism builds stronger assumptions about agency (*qua* the Structural Moment) back into Poststructuralist complexity. It refocuses social scientific inquiry on human beings by asserting that they have unique personal properties that "act upon" the constraints and enablements of complex networks through conscious (if fallible) reflection and planning (Alderson 2013; Archer 2001).

To verbally process suggests the presence of an internal, intentional locus of control, accessible to the teachers through conscious reflection. A critical realist approach would still grant that the teachers (and children) were embedded in the complex networks of the poststructuralist's frame. But would consider elements of that network as either "constraints or enablements," which were to some extent known to the teacher as such (Archer 2001).

Processing moments of coercion helped the teachers work through the tensions arising from the complexities, or constraints, of the job, so that they might be capable of producing different results next time. This, to critical realists, reveals the unique personal powers of human beings to plan future activations of the constraining or enabling properties of the elements upon which they were inter/intradependent, and to help the children do the same. Ms. Jennifer, for instance, worked in the subsequent weeks to pay special attention to Josue, and asked her fellow teachers to "take him off her hands" if she became overwhelmed. These intentional strategies were just a few of a large repertoire that teachers utilized to avoid constraints and use enablements to their (and the children's) advantage in the future. They were based on working assumptions about what children needed that they were perhaps not getting (attention, skill practice, a change of scenery, comfort, etc.) which would then address or alleviate the underlying problem causing the rule-breaking. Here attention becomes an enablement, whereas lack of such proved a constraint. Of course with especially difficult children teachers would also consciously plan out how the many elements in the child's life (including parents, peers, and sometimes other professionals) should ideally work together.

Conclusion

Although conceptualizations of power and agency put forth in the Structural Moment most demonstrably shaped teachers' ideal expectations of their role vis-a-vis children, I have shown that insights from the Poststructural and Critical Realist Moments also help explain teachers' experiences as well. These experiences "on the ground" should inform theorizing in childhood studies moving forward. The poststructural acknowledgement of complexity helps illuminate the limits of teachers' powers; they feel these limitations "act" upon them, even in moments where they exercise great physical power over children. Moreover they know, through their experiences with a large-N of at-risk children and their families, that they too are embedded in complex, interconnected webs of elements that too have their own power to influence, constrain and enable.

Yet I would argue even more importantly, the teachers are simultaneously aware of their own (limited, fallible) ability to act upon and within this system in the future, in response to mistakes, and guided by new information and motivations gleaned from them, and to help the children do the same. They have undoubtedly experienced this capability repeatedly over time, in the frequent "mini-trials" with the many children with whom they have had multiple daily interactions, often over multiple years.

Both teachers and childhood scholars clearly feel immense pressure not to dominate or oppress children (Cook 2010). However, as the teachers' experiences show, discipline – a form of dominance -- is at times unavoidable. To simultaneously honor the necessity of both creates tension. This tension, I would argue, is reflected in the reactive unfolding of theories of power and agency in childhood scholarship: In the moment of adult-to-child coercion, both child and teacher express a "strong" form of agency, competing with one another for dominance.

Subsequently, upon reflection, both the adult's and child's expression of power can be contextualized within multiple influences, appearing then to be "weaker" incarnations. Then, faced with this tension -- produced by a question that is to some extent unanswerable -- there is finally no other choice but to look to the future. A plan is made; intentions are set with the expectation of facing unforeseen constraint.

Time, like theory, continues unfolding.

References

Ahn, Junehui. 2010. "'I'm Not Scared of Anything:' Emotion as Social Power in Children's Worlds." *Childhood* 17(1): 94-112.

Alanen, Leena and Berry Mayall. 2001. *Conceptualising Child-Adult Relations, 1st edition*. London; New York: Routledge.

Alderson, Priscilla. 2013. *Childhoods Real and Imagined. Volume 1: An Introduction to Critical Realism and Childhood Studies.* London and New York: Routledge.

Archer, Margaret. 2001. *Being Human: The Problem Of Agency.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bondi, Liz. 2003. Empathy and Identification: Conceptual Resources for Feminist Fieldwork. *ACME: International Journal of Critical Geography* 2: 64-76.

Boyd, Margaret. 2013. '"I Love my Work But..." The Professionalization of Early Childhood Education', *Qualitative Report* 18(36): 1-20.

Christansen, Pia Haudrup. 2004. "Children's Participation in Ethnographic Research: Issues of Power and Representation." *Children & Society* 18(2):165–76.

Cook, Daniel Thomas. 2010. "A Ghostly Presence." *Childhood* 18(1) 3-6.

Corsaro, William A. 2003a. *The Sociology of Childhood, 2nd ed.* New York: Sage Publications, Inc.

Corsaro, William A. 2003b. *We're Friends, Right?: Inside Kids' Culture*. Washington DC: Joseph Henry Press.

Feagin Joe R and van Ausdale, Debra. 2001. *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*. Boston, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Ferguson, Ann. 2001. *Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity.* Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. "Two Lectures*."* In: C. Gordon, ed. *M. Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 – 1977*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must be Defended.* London: Penguin Allen Land.

Fraser, Mark W., Laura Kirby and Paul Smokowski. 2004. "Risk and Resilience in Childhod." In M.W. Fraser. *Risk and Resilience in Childhood: An Ecological Perspective.*

Hadley, Kathryn G. and Sandi K. Nenga 2004. "From Snow White to Digimon: Using Popular Media to Confront Confucian Values in Taiwanese Peer Cultures." *Childhood* 11(4): 515 536.

Hamre, Bridget K. and Robert C. Pianta. 2005. "Can Instructional and Emotional Support in the First-Grade Classroom Make a Difference for Children at Risk of School Failure?" *Child Development* 76(5): 949–67.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1979. "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules and Social Structure." *American Journal of Sociology* 85(3): 551-573.

Honig, Michael-Sebastian. 2009. "How is the Child Constituted in Childhood Studies?" in Qvortrop, J., Corsaro, W., and Honig M-S (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

James Alison and James Adrian. 2002. *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies.* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

James, Allison, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout. 1998. *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Johannsen, Barbro. 2012. "Doing Adulthood in Childhood Research." *Childhood*. 19(101): 101 114.

Lee, Nick. 1998. "Towards an Immature Sociology." *The Sociological Review* 46(3): 458.

Lee, Nick. 2001. *Childhood and Society: Growing up in an Age of Uncertainty*, *1st ed*. London: Open University Press.

Lee, Nick. 2005. *Childhood and Human Value: Development, Separation and Separability*. *1st ed*. London: Open University Press.

Lee, Nick. 2008. "Awake, Asleep, Adult, Child: An A-humanist Account of Persons." *Body and Society*. 14(57): 57-74.

Martin, Karin. 1998. "Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools." *American Sociological Review* 63: 494-511.

Procter, Lisa. 2013. "Exploring the Role of Reflexivity in Research with Children." *Emotion, Space and Society* 9: 80-88.

Prout, Alan. (ed.) 2005. *The Future of Childhood*. New York: Routledge.

Punch, Samantha. 2002. "Research with Children: The Same or Different from Research with Adults?" *Childhood* 9(3): 321–41.

Pugh, Allison J. 2013. "The Theoretical Costs of Ignoring Childhood: Rethinking Independence, Insecurity, and Inequality." *Theory and Society* 43(1): 71-89.

Raffety, Erin L. 2014. "Minimizing Social Distance: Participatory Research with Children." *Childhood* 22(3): 409–22.

Rautio, Pauliina. 2014. "Mingling and Imitating in Producing Spaces for Knowing and Being: Insights from a Finnish Study of Child–Matter Intra-action." *Childhood* 21(4).

Schweinhart, Lawrence. 2005. "Lifetime Effects: The HighScope/Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40." Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

"The Ten NAEYC Program Standards." https://families.naeyc.org/accredited-article/10-naeyc program-standards.

Thorne, Barrie. 1993. *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Qvortrop, Jens. 2009. "Childhood as a Structural Form" in Qvortrop, J., Corsaro, W., and Honig M-S (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Warming, Hannah. 2011. "Getting Under Their Skins? Accessing Young Children's Perspectives through Ethnographic Fieldwork." *Childhood* 18(1): 39–53.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have aimed to provide extensive qualitative support for the argument that adults' interactions with children are not "always-already" oppressive. I have examined preschool teachers under same lens as their students, extending to them the same openness to their experiences and perspectives as is expected of childhood scholars studying children. While I believe I have begun to balance the account of adults in childhood studies, some limitations of the study should be highlighted. These limitations imply pathways for future research.

First it should be noted that Block Tower was a relatively unique field site. It was not necessarily representative of the average child care center for either "at-risk" children or their wealthier counterparts. Although it served an underprivileged population, and overlapped in both its aims and funding streams with Head Start, it operated as a nonprofit which was thus able to collect grants and donations from multiple sources. While this did not necessarily create less bureaucratic overhead than a Head Start program, it did give the preschool's employees a sense of exceptionalism. Further lending to this sense of exceptionalism was the fact that it was among only eight percent of preschools in Michigan to be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Additionally, the teachers were unionized, which lent to a culture of open dialogue about the school and its pedagogical approach. The director regularly made space in meetings for this kind of feedback. The curriculum also created space

for teachers to think about their pedagogical interactions through its requirement that teachers participate in the data-gathering process meant to ensure the curriculum was being deployed properly.

All of this added up to what I have come to view as a field site which in many ways was ideal, yet was subject to very real circumstances. (My project could therefore be conceived as an examination into the limits of the ideal when tested against the real.) The Recession of 2008 was in full swing. Teachers, administrators, and families were more stressed than usual. Yet turnover was relatively low, teacher pay was slightly higher than average, and morale was decently sustained. This was perhaps because the teachers had outlets for "feeling heard." In addition to having supportive administrators and a union, my being there interviewing and assisting them in the classrooms may very well have lent to these feelings as well.

Because it was unique in these ways, it also bears noting that my findings of extensive adult collaboration with children, and minimal coercion, should not be taken as an indication that adult coercion of children should be treated as less concerning. I maintain that one of the most valuable insights the Childhood Studies paradigm has promulgated is that adult power over children can often be, or be perceived by children as, arbitrary and potentially constraining or harmful. And thus that adults should be more aware of their potential to oppress children arbitrarily or unintentionally. My approach to adult-child relations simply modifies and adds complexity to how adults' actions might be viewed when exploring generational power.

One theory to which I have not attended in this dissertation, but which is potentially relevant to future research in this vein, is the theory of governmentality. This Foucauldian theory, which advocates for the deconstruction of the "conduct of conduct," has led some childhood scholars to claim that even well-intended child-centered pedagogical approaches are

actually harmful to children insofar as they "responsibilize" children's choices (Ailwood 2008; Canella 1997). This argument is often embedded in larger critiques of contemporary compulsory public education, which is said to be in the business of producing not creative or critical thinkers, but "flexible" future workers for an increasingly exploitative, unstable, shifting neoliberal labor market (Canella 1997; Smith 2012). This is a compelling argument, the exploration of which requires complex, longitudinal research across multiple levels of analysis. The approach to adult-child relations which I have advocated here is applicable to these varying levels to different extents. It is most applicable at the interactional level, which most easily takes into account actors' current perspectives and their future plans and projects. At the meso- and structural levels, by contrast, embodied intentions are subordinated to "structural forces" or durable patterns and their outcomes. Even still, it is worth asking whether educating children to the best of one's ability to apprehend and utilize future enabling forces to their benefit is any worse than leaving them to educate themselves to do so. It seems inevitable, at any rate, that education occurs.

Finally it is worth noting that my attendance to vulnerability may have been intensified due the young age of the children in my study. Adult-child relations that entail "help" or "helpfulness" will likely look or be perceived as different in studies of adults' interactions with older children. Insights from critical realism may provide a viable way to map such changes over time. Understanding adult-child relations in preschool in terms of personal projects, futurity and fallibility grants individuals (regardless of age) with power and agency while simultaneously placing that agency within a potential trajectory or plan of action, the success of which will depend on myriad constraints and enablements. Over time children will have engaged in more

projects, and will have had more opportunities for reflecting on them, likely alongside the adults in their worlds who are "there to help them."

Teaching Preschool is Hard

Recognizing the limitations of the present study and the pathways for future research they imply, I maintain that teaching preschool is hard. As I have shown it requires the regular bodily enactment of a highly specialized set of skills performed under myriad pressures. It is emotionally and physically intensive, yet is often undertaken with great seriousness and pride.

Preschool teachers deserve more recognition and valuation than we in the U.S. currently afford them. The U.S. Department of Education recently reported that "the national median annual wage of preschool workers was… 55% of wages earned by kindergarten teachers and 53% of elementary school teachers" (www.ed.gov). This is an especially alarming and confusing trend given the paucity of research on the importance of supporting children's development in their first five years (see Bennett 2011 for a comprehensive overview of research related to childcare.) The importance of adequately funding early childhood education and care was even addressed in the 2014 State of the Union Address by President Barack Obama (www.whitehouse.gov).

The undercompensation of preschool teachers, and the undervaluation it evinces, has undoubtedly resulted from multiple macro-level forces, which can perhaps best be characterized by Hochschild's (1995) "cold modern" conceptualization of the political culture of care. In her cold-modern version of society the social safety net is eroded, and individuals are responsible for their own choices. Vulnerability is seen as a personal failing, disqualifying people from assistance. It is therefore a society that minimizes or ignores human interdependency,

generational and otherwise. In so doing it largely renders invisible (and takes for granted) the labor that is inevitably performed in care and support of the vulnerable. This in turn lends to the devaluation and disappearance of work disproportionately carried out by women (England 2005; Wharton 1995; Williams 2009).

Childhood studies, as a field, has inadvertently contributed to these trends by focusing on children as research subjects to the opposition and exclusion of adults. The bracketing off of adults in service of highlighting children's competencies exaggerated children's independence over and above their vulnerability. By bringing children and adults under the same lens, and extending adults' perspectives and experiences the same openness as to those of children, childhood scholars may tell a more complete story about children's lives. This will at the same time make the potentially positive roles adults play more visible.

Acknowledging the temporality, complexity, and ongoing conscious effort entailed everyday adult-child relationships creates the necessary space for mentorship at the center. It should not be understated that good mentorship for every individual child indeed requires a lot of space -- where "space" is a term meant to capture money, time and other resources like human energy conceptually. Good mentorship is not only about cultivating self-esteem in another but about passing along knowledge of structures so that, when mentees plan their own personal projects, they will be less likely to be fallible (Young 2004). The extent of control, of avoiding fallibility, avoiding constraint, is not foolproof but is statistical in nature. Avoiding more constraints, utilizing more enablements, depends at least in part on how one strategizes avoiding or using them. The extent to which the plan succeeds can therefore be attributed at least in part to the individual agency of the small minority who always buck trends in stories of class reproduction (Archer 2001).

It is a special task indeed to scaffold this kind of agentic action for another person. We should make every effort, whether theoretical or political, to support those who make it part of their personal lifelong projects to do so.

References

Ailwood, Jo. 2008. "Learning or Earning in the 'Smart State': Changing Tactics for Governing Early Childhood. *Childhood* 15(4): 535-551.

Archer, Margaret. 2001. *Being Human: The Problem of Agency.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bennett, John. 2011. "Child care - Early Childhood Education and Care." *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development. http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/ child-care-early-childhood-education-and-care/complete-topic*

Bredekamp, Sue (ed.) 1987. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8, Expanded Edition.* Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Canella, Gaile S. 1997. *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution.* (3rd Edition.) New York: Peter Lang Inc.

England, Paula. 2005. "Emerging Theories of Care Work." *Annual Review of Sociology.* 31:381 399.

Hochschild, Arlie R. 1995. "The Culture of Politics: Traditional, Post-modern, Cold-modern and Warm-modern Ideals of Care." *Social Politics.* 2(3): 331-346.

Smith, Leslie. 1985. "Making Educational Sense of Piaget's Psychology." *Oxford Review of Education.* 11(2): 181-191.

Smith, Karen. 2012. "Producing Governable Subjects: Images of Childhood Old and New." *Childhood.* 19(1): 24-37.

Vygotsky, Lev S. 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wharton, Amy S. 2009. "The Sociology of Emotional Labor." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2009: 147-165.

Williams, Christine. 1995. *Still a Man's World: Men Who Do "Women's Work"*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wood D. and Middleton D. 1975. "A Study of Assisted Problem-Solving." British Journal of Psychology, 66(2), 181−191.

www.ed.gov. "Fact Sheet: Troubling Pay Gap for Early Childhood Teachers." Press release from the U.S. Department of Education, June 14, 2016.

www.whitehouse.gov. "President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address. Video released January 28, 2014.

Young, Alford. 2004. *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity and Future Life Chances.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Appendix A: Methodological Appendix

The ethnographic component of the research was highly inductive. I did not enter the field site with any particular hypotheses. However, I did enter the field having developed scholarly interests in embodiment, feminist theory, poststructuralist theory, and pedagogy, all of which also emerged as themes in the data and/or shaped my ongoing interpretations. No ethnographer enters the field without preconceived interests, and much of the analysis that fills the pages of this dissertation entailed reflexively rooting through the "black box" of how those interests were carried and realized through the project (Emerson et al. 2011, Latour 1999).

While I was in the field I took jottings regularly throughout the day, which were roughly reflective of interactions as they unfolded sequentially. I tried to make similar numbers of jottings about child-child interactions, multi-child interactions, teacher-child interactions, and researcher-child interactions. This was especially true in the earlier months of the project, where I would alternate between participation and observation. However, over time as I developed rapport with the teachers, and gained confidence in myself in the ideal carer role, the jottings tended to capture adult-child interactions (whether between children and teachers or children and myself) more. These interactions were also more likely to occur at "work times" or outdoor play times because the other parts of the routine were more mundane and predictable.

The jottings were brief and factual, providing just enough information to jog my memory for later elaboration. I would jot down, for instance, "outdoor playtime, Neveah said she's always bad at home." Or "Curtis and Aidan and I played made-up ball game, good sharing."

Then in later elaborations I would often include how I felt, physically or emotionally, about what had occurred, as well as any background information that "felt" relevant. In the case of the second field note for instance, it was notable that these two boys were sharing turns effectively because they both had trouble getting along with other children.

As themes or patterns emerged that interested me, I would begin to talk to the teachers about them informally. I would ask them whether they noticed similar patterns, and why they thought they were occurring. I developed codes for the data informally at first, keeping a list and adding anything to it that I thought I should look into more. Once transcribed into the NVivo program, I coded interactions by every theme that I felt applied. Then I read through each instance of the data, and tried to come up with a definition of the code that encompassed every interaction coded as such. This was how I developed "what I meant," for instance, by the different types of coercion I discuss in Chapter 5.

In addition to taking jottings I also participated in the children's and teachers' activities, many of which involved making things. I might help, for instance, cut out sixteen big leaf shapes before an art activity, as well as decorate a leaf myself alongside the children during the activity. Or I would help set the table and also join the children for lunch. I also collected a large volume of drawings that I either produced with specific children (as in the case with Elia in Chapter 2) or that children gave me as gifts.

In addition to gathering ethnographic data and these artifacts, I also conducted interviews with all of the teachers at the site. The interview schedules can be found in Appendix B. I intended for these interviews to be a space where the teachers could become comfortable with my presence in their classrooms, to gain a sense of what I was interested in understanding, and to collaborate with me on what I should focus. It became obvious very early in this process that the

teachers appreciated these opportunities to express their views and "feel heard." I tried my best

to show, through my body, that I was listening empathetically to them by nodding, mirroring

facial expressions, and repeating back to them what they said by saying, for instance, "it sounds

like you're saying X" (Huitt 2009).

The teachers and I would talk to each other informally throughout my time in their

classrooms, and I included many of these moments in field notes as well. If I was not interacting

with a child, I was often interacting with a teacher, and the vast majority of our talk concerned

the children. This reflected the teachers' practices amongst themselves. They bonded over their

shared interest in the children, their identities as teachers and carers, and their mutual feelings of

frustration and joy.

References

Emerson, Robert L., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Huitt, William. 2009. "Empathetic Listening." Educational Psychology Interactive. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University.

Latour, Bruno. 1999. "Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Appendix B: Interview Schedules

Interviews were explicitly framed as "an opportunity for me to learn" from the teachers. Each of these questions produced at least one (at most six) follow-up questions. Interviews lasted on average 45 minutes, with the shortest being 33 minutes and the longest being 67 minutes.

Teacher Interview Schedule

How long have you been a preschool teacher?

Why did you become a preschool teacher?

What degrees do you hold?

What are some things you believe about children or childhood as a preschool teacher?

Have you always worked at Block Tower?

(If yes) How does Block Tower compare to other preschools at which you've worked?

(If no) How do you think Block Tower compares to other preschools?

What do you like most about working at Block Tower?

What do you like least about working here? What is most challenging?

Could you describe an ideal preschooler?[15]

Could you describe a difficult preschooler?

What is an ideal parent like? What is a difficult parent like?

Do you think there are any differences between boys and girls at this age?

---

[15] I eventually replaced "ideal preschooler" with "easy kid" to reflect the terminology the teachers used.

What particular challenges do the English Language Learners face?

Do you believe more in nature or nurture (and why?)

What do you think about the High/Scope Curriculum?

Was there anything from your training/education to become a preschool teacher that has stuck with you?

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you have any suggestions for questions I should add to this interview?

Do you have any suggestions for what I should pay attention to while I'm here at Block Tower?

Director Interview Schedule

How long have you been the Director?

Can you describe your role for me?

What do your duties entail? What does a typical work day look like?

How does Block Tower compare to other preschools in the area?

What do you like most about working at Block Tower?

What do you like least about working here? What is most challenging?

How do you feel about the teachers here?

Could you describe an ideal preschooler?

Could you describe a difficult preschooler?

What is an ideal parent like? What is a difficult parent like?

Do you think there are any differences between boys and girls at this age?

What particular challenges do the English Language Learners face?

Do you believe more in nature or nurture (and why?)

What do you think about the High/Scope Curriculum?

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you have any suggestions for questions I should add to this interview?

Do you have any suggestions for what I should pay attention to while I'm here at Block Tower?