

Expanding Educational Methods for Students and Staff: Exploring Non-traditional Methods

Senior Thesis

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### **Keywords**

**Sociology:** According to Merriam-Webster (2019), sociology is the study of societies and human behavior. It includes the development, structure, and interaction between social systems and social problems (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Sociology can include systems such as race, class, gender, crime, and education to demonstrate how they interact to create societal norms and conducts of behavior. In this thesis, sociology will be used to understand the education system and its interaction with other social systems in place.

### **Introduction**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), from the fall of 2000 to the fall of 2015 the population of children enrolled in public schools increased from 47.2 million to 50.4 million, and is projected to reach 52.1 million by the fall of 2027. The two million increase in the number of students enrolled in public schools is extremely significant given the current climate within the educational system in the United States. As the population of students in schools increases, schools have to be able to accommodate the needs of each of these students. The traditional educational model in public schools in place today already fails to meet the needs of all students and lacks individualized educational methods (Gao, 2014). Through analyzing the current system, alternative or non-traditional models of education, exploring the roles of educators, school social workers, counselors, and educational policies, interventions are recommended at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels to assist schools in changing to better fit the needs of all students as the population increases.

### **Traditional Education**

#### **History and Policy**

Taking a historical approach, education serves to prepare young people for the future of society, to turn students into professionals and give them the tools necessary to enter the workforce. Gao (2014) examined how the educational system in the United States has shifted to align with economic practices over the years and produces students that are fit for the labor market. According to Gao (2014), the traditional educational model puts teachers as all knowledgeable beings who teach students to be submissive, lack critical thinking skills, create a hierarchy with the most successful and useful students at the top, and devalue creativity. Furthermore, standardization and the stress placed on testing encourages students to memorize information and perform well or else the teacher and school may be punished (Gao, 2014). This standardization movement began with the implementation of No Child Left Behind, and is still felt deeply after its wake. According to the United States Department of Education (2002), No Child Left Behind requires all schools to provide a quality education regardless of demographics and ability, and if schools fail at this, the parents can choose another school for their child to attend. According to Rowley and Wright (2011), No Child Left Behind outlines accountability in schools and aims at reducing discrimination and the academic achievement gap between white and middle-class students and minority and low-income students. No Child Left Behind set unrealistic goals creating too high of stakes for schools to meet therefore, forcing states to lower their standards in order to remain successful (Gao, 2014; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Out of No Child Left Behind, came concepts and policies such as Race to the Top, Race to the Bottom, and Common Core Standards (Lee & Wu, 2017). Due to poor outcomes from No Child Left Behind and the immense pressure on schools to succeed, the Common Core Standards were developed as the standards that every child should know in English language arts and math by the end of each grade level from kindergarten to twelfth grade, in order to be prepared for

college or the workforce (Lee & Wu, 2017; Polikoff, 2017). Common Core Standards represent a form of standards-based education, and seek to align and promote content standards, performance standards, and opportunity-to-learn standards, while also balancing instructional choice with accountability in performance outcomes. (Lee & Wu, 2017). Furthermore, Common Core Standards were designed to create high quality curriculum and instructional materials, professional development support for staff, revision of student assessment, raise performance standards, and hold schools accountable for the results (Lee & Wu, 2017). Research measuring the success of Common Core Standards is lacking due to the fact that it is up to each state to implement the standards, and delegate the instruction of the standards in schools. Since there is such diversity within each state that adopts Common Core Standards, research is necessary in order to truly understand the effects of this policy on individual schools and students of different backgrounds (Lee & Wu, 2017; Polikoff, 2017). This is especially true for low income areas that have less money to give to schools, reducing the amount and quality of resources available to their students, therefore reinforcing the academic gap seen from the educational policies in place (Lee & Wu 2017; Polikoff, 2017; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

The academic achievement gap described refers to the difference in outcomes between groups, such as the difference in test scores between white and black students (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Analysis of the academic achievement gap demonstrates that there are many influencing factors, such as student role performance, school environment, role of teachers, family socialization and peer influences (Rowley & Wright, 2011). The most significant predictor of test scores was a family's socioeconomic status, and for each increase in socioeconomic status there is an increase in test scores by fourteen points regardless of race (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Therefore, in order to understand the academic achievement gap, a

closer look at family's needs to be taken to help these students learn and succeed. Rowley and Wright (2011) additionally found that schools with higher quality environments such as those with less bullying and harassment, have higher test scores than schools with lower quality environments. Furthermore, teacher's perception of student's ability also relates to academic success or failure, demonstrating the need to improve school cultures and environments (Rowley & Wright, 2011). School environments within the age of standardization reflect the emphasis placed on succeeding on tests. The classroom design of traditional education reflects the desire for students to be the same, as desks and chairs are placed in rows facing the teacher in order to centralize the emphasis on memorization and testing (Dillon, 2018; Gao, 2014). While there is flexibility in style of tables, chairs, and desks almost all classrooms in America are designed this way, requiring that students be seated for most of the day with their attention towards the subject the teacher is presenting (Dillon, 2018; Gao, 2014). Teachers are therefore placed central to education in classrooms, and require the students constant focus and attention.

### **Teacher Training**

Teacher training and educational backgrounds help to shape perceptions of students and are important to consider when analyzing the traditional model of education in place today. According to French (2010), low pay, poor benefits, low morale, and high turnover are all factors that significantly impact early childhood educators across the United States. However, along with No Child Left Behind came a call to raise requirements for educators in order to ensure the highest quality of teachers, but with little to no additional funding to support this (French, 2010). Adding to the issues with teacher training is the lack of requirements relating to the social foundations of education and multicultural education (Neumann, 2010). According to Neumann (2010), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) does not require

programs to implement specific courses relating to these topics. This means that teachers are not receiving consistent educational preparation and do not fully understand the social and democratic purposes of education, cultural diversity and its implications on schooling (Neumann, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the number of Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and those identifying as two or more races increased from the years 2000 to 2015, and is expected to continue increasing. With diversity increasing it is essential that teachers are adequately trained in the social foundations of school and cultural diversity to best educate students. Therefore, the required training and education for teachers and current policies are inadequate and fail to meet the needs of the diverse range students in schools today (French, 2010; Neumann, 2010). However, to better meet students' needs non-traditional models of education can be explored and adopted.

### **Methods of Non-traditional Education**

Traditional and non-traditional methods of education are not limited to the United States, as schools using either of these methods can be seen around the world. In order to best understand models of education, they need to be approached from their global place of origin and understood within the global context of education. The Montessori Method and the Reggio Emilia Approach are analyzed as two examples of non-traditional models of education, but other examples include Wilderness Education, Democratic Education, and Progressive Education. Furthermore, these two specific methods are not regarded any higher than other non-traditional methods of education. The Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach were chosen because both methods included an aspect of child centered learning, meeting the child where they are at, and holistic focuses of education including the family and community (Katz, 1998; Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Montessori, 2013). Although these methods share similar

principles, they also differ in their approaches to learning but contribute to comprehensive child education and meeting the needs of all children.

### **Montessori Method**

The Montessori Method is an educational approach primarily focused on early childhood education, but has evolved over the years to expand into secondary levels of education (Sutton, 2017). Created in Rome, Italy in the nineteen hundred's, the method spread to America shortly after its development. Created by Maria Montessori, this method is focused on child-centered education with foundations in developmental psychology (Hiles, 2018). This alternative approach to education allows for curriculum to be designed based upon the student's interests, talents, and their needs (Hiles, 2018; Williams, 2017). Furthermore, the philosophy of Montessori education includes respect for each child, creating an environment where children can best explore and learn, and protecting the child's right to learn (Hiles, 2018). Montessori classrooms are designed to reflect the philosophy of the method by encouraging physical activity and freedom to choose subjects, providing access to all materials in the classroom and designing these materials to be self-correcting, so that they allow students to recognize and learn from their own mistakes (Hiles, 2018; Williams, 2017). Additionally, students are grouped together in age ranges and remain with the same teacher for three years to promote their development as individuals and as a class (Williams, 2017). Another highlight of the Montessori Method, is the focus on play as part of the curriculum and allowing for children to learn academically and socially through play within the classroom environment (Williams, 2017).

### **Classroom design**

Montessori classrooms are designed to promote healthy development in children and align with the psychological needs of children (Montessori, 2013). The environment is created to

suit the needs of children corresponding to their size, proportions and working to meet their comfort levels (Montessori, 2013). In addition, the classroom is designed to allow for a choice of activity, with low walls for separating space within larger rooms that allow for movement between spaces (Montessori, 2013). This design allows and reinforces the ability for children to choose what learning activity they would like to participate in (Hiles, 2018; Montessori, 2013; Williams, 2017). The environment therefore, reinforces the emphasis on children learning through choice and play. According to Kloss (2018), an increase in a playful mood can spark an increase in creativity among children. Montessori education creates an atmosphere that inspires a playful attitude towards learning, encouraging students' own discoveries. Kloss (2018) also notes that lessening the focus on evaluation and assessment and emphasizing creativity through play can increase students' performance. It is these philosophies and attitudes towards learning that perpetuate the success of Montessori schools and the students who attend.

### **Success of Montessori**

The reasons parents choose to send their children to Montessori schools reflect the principles ingrained into the Montessori education, and how it is different from traditional educational methods (Hiles, 2018; Robinson, 2006). Hiles (2018) found that parents chose to send their children to Montessori schools because of the Montessori principles, like auto-education, or the freedom to choose and learn on one's own and with respect for the child. These principles are what sets the Montessori Method apart from other models of education, and for those reasons are important to current and prospective parents of students to be familiar with. Montessori is also adaptive to be aware and supportive of cultural differences among students. According to Robinson (2006), the Montessori Method provides students with the physical, social, emotional, and academic growth with respect to each student's racial or ethnic

background. This is accomplished through giving students choice, respecting their languages, fostering respect and empathy, and creating environments where all differences are celebrated (Robinson, 2006). Furthermore, the Montessori program outlined by Robinson (2006) proved to help academic achievement, increase test scores, and enable children to learn from one another and at their own pace. The Montessori Method is one alternative to the traditional educational model in place, and highlights aspects of learning that are otherwise overlooked in the current system.

### **Reggio Emilia Approach**

The Reggio Emilia Approach is another alternative approach to education developing out of Italy. According to Gandini and Malaguzzi (1998), Reggio Emilia schools are viewed as living organisms continuously changing from the interactions and relationships between students and adults. In addition, Gandini & Malaguzzi (1998) state that the school organism expands into the family and community to include all of the patterns and interactions within those systems. The Reggio Emilia Approach encourages decision making, cooperation, and builds confidence in children through its focus on extensive project work (Katz, 1998). Katz (1998) defines this project work as in-depth studies of specific topics that are approached by groups of children. Furthermore, through exploring topics more familiar to children, project work allows them to unpack it further and learn discovery and mastery of subjects (Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Katz, 1998). Project work also reinforces the view that the school is a living organism because it requires teachers to observe, listen, and respond to students in order to determine what topics to approach next (Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998). The Reggio Emilia Approach also encourages creativity, inherently in project work, but also in using drawings or artwork as means for further

discussion or questioning (Katz, 1998). The relationship between children and adults and the familial model are also greatly emphasized within the Reggio Emilia Approach, understanding that children learn from each other, their teachers, and their parents, so the school environment has to be inclusive of all of these relationships (Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Katz, 1998).

### **Classroom design**

Reggio Emilia schools have a very intricate and purposeful design in order to support their approach to child education. According to Gandini & Malaguzzi (1998), the entrance of the school welcomes students with information about the school, is connected to a dining hall, a central space for attendees to socialize in, an *atelier*, or large studio space along with smaller studio spaces adjacent to classrooms for project work and individual classrooms. Classrooms are divided into two spaces, one where children and teachers interact together and the other where children can be alone (Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998). Each classroom is taught by two teachers as a pair, who meet with other colleagues and families to best educate students (Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998). The design of Reggio Emilia classrooms and schools strengthen the emphasis on discovery and relationship building through project work and social interactions. Furthermore, the design of Reggio Emilia schools likewise supports the familial model in place, appearing more as houses for learning than as large school buildings (Katz, 1998). The organization of space, furnishings, and displays reflect a cozy and comfortable atmosphere for children to learn in (Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Katz, 1998).

### **Success of Reggio Emilia**

Success within Reggio Emilia schools can be understood in various ways, as the curriculum design of project work provides opportunities for repeated success through the exploration of topics. However, success within this approach to education can also be measured

through how Reggio Emilia motivates students. According to Gardner and Jones (2016), the principles within MUSIC model of Motivation are clear within the Reggio Emilia Approach. The MUSIC model is broken down into eMpowerment, Usefulness, Success, Interest, and Care (Gardner & Jones, 2016). Within the Reggio Emilia Approach, eMpowerment, or autonomy, control and decision making are demonstrated through project work and how children are active agents in their learning process (Gardner & Jones, 2016). Children gain Usefulness or the belief that school is useful towards their goals in the Reggio Emilia Approach through how the curriculum is authentic and open to individual discovery (Gardner & Jones, 2016). Success and Interest, competence, motivation and self-efficacy, are present in the Reggio Emilia Approach within documentation, having a positive attitude towards learning, and the practice of listening to students (Gardner & Jones, 2016). Finally, according to Gardner & Jones (2016), academic and personal Care are provided in the Reggio Emilia Approach through the emphasis on relationship building, belonging, attachment, and community integration. Care and the associated feelings are crucial to a child's development because it lets them know that their learning is important and valued, and furthers the commitment to a common goal in the classroom (Gardner & Jones, 2016). The Reggio Emilia Approach provides specific methods on how to motivate students in school, as clearly demonstrated through the use of the MUSIC model and offers resources for other schools to adapt.

### **Conclusion of Non-traditional Education**

The Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach are extremely different from the traditional method of education seen today in the United States. However, they represent how education can be modified and altered to better meet the needs of all children. Furthermore, both methods demonstrate the importance of a child centered approach, and giving autonomy to

students in their learning process (Katz, 1998; Montessori, 2013). The success of both The Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach demonstrate how children can be successful outside the traditional model of education and can serve as a call to action for education reform within the United States (Gardner & Jones, 2016; Hiles, 2018; Katz, 1998; Montessori, 2013). While adopting concepts from these methods may not be easy in a traditional classroom, due to policy and issues of autonomy within the roles of teachers it is crucial to remember that there is no one size fits all model to education. If adopted into classrooms, tools, concepts, and philosophies from these models might significantly improve the current education system. Additionally, these models can serve as guides to better educate teachers, school social workers, and counselors, and connect these professionals to other critical thinkers within the education world.

### **Critical Thinkers and Theories**

Education has always been critiqued and analyzed throughout its development by many different thinkers and theories. Theories about education methods and about how education fits into the rest of society have been debated across time by countless scholars and philosophers (Bynum, 2015; Kohan, 2018). However, two major critical thinkers that have contributed their own theories and philosophies to education are Paulo Freire and John Dewey. They are both well known for their contributions to education and ways of thinking about education. Furthermore, both Freire and Dewey present ideas about democracy or choice in education, critical thinking, inquiry, and challenging the norms (Bynum, 2015; Freire, 1970; Kohan, 2018; Shih, 2018; Spring, 2008; Williams, 2017). It is important to also note how different their methods of education are, and how interpretation of their ideas alters the implementation of their practices. Furthermore, the philosophies presented by Freire and Dewey are relevant when analyzing both

The Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach, as their work supports concepts such as child centered learning, autonomy, and learning through discovery (Bynum, 2015; Freire, 1970; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Hiles, 2018; Katz, 1998; Kohan, 2018; Montessori, 2013; Shih, 2018).

### **Paulo Freire**

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher whose theories and ideas significantly impacted the education system. Most remembered for his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he tackles the ideas presented in traditional education and offers strategies to better support children. Considered a radical thinker, Freire presented many ideas that are used in alternative or non-traditional forms of education today, like the Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach. According to Freire (1970), the traditional educational model or the banking method, frames knowledge as a type of gift that teachers present to their students. The banking method therefore, views students as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge from teachers, inhibiting their ability to think creatively and independently for themselves (Freire, 1970; Gao, 2014). Freire challenges this method by proposing other methods of education such as problem posing education and dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Shih, 2018). Freire argued for critical consciousness and critical thinking in education, as ways to challenge and transform the status quo (Kohan, 2018; Shih, 2018). Furthermore, Freire viewed education as a way of inventing and reinventing knowledge between students and teachers (Freire, 1970; Kohan, 2018; Shih, 2018). In other words, Freire believed that knowledge was constantly created, recreated, and shared between students and teachers (Freire, 1970; Kohan, 2018; Shih, 2018). Another critical piece in Freire's approach to education, is dialogue between teachers and students (Kohan, 2018; Shih, 2018). According to Shih (2018), an effective dialogue presents each individual with the opportunity to speak, creates a space for love, humility, hope, humor, silence,

and faith, and promotes critical thinking. Each dialogue should allow for both students and teachers to learn and grow from one another, reinforcing Freire's educational philosophies (Freire, 1970; Kohan, 2018; Shih, 2018).

### **John Dewey**

John Dewey was another philosophical thinker who challenged ideas within the education system. According to Bynum (2015) and Williams (2017), Dewey viewed children as rational beings and education as a way to engage them to build knowledge and skills. Furthermore, Dewey believed the school should serve as a model or link to real life situations, to connect to communities, and to allow children to learn in flexible social situations (Bynum, 2015; Spring, 2008; Williams, 2017). These ideas link directly to the philosophy of The Reggio Emilia Approach, and demonstrate Dewey's influence on models of education (Bynum, 2015; Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Katz, 1998). A critical piece in Dewey's approach to education is the emphasis on democracy and critical thinking (Bynum, 2015; Spring, 2008). Education according to Dewey should aim to promote the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth and development of children (Bynum, 2015; Williams, 2017). Dewey supported this growth and development in children by educating them about social problems through project work and play in the classroom (Bynum, 2015; Spring, 2008; Williams, 2017). Dewey supported educational games and allowing children to explore their own interests through project work, building their sense of individuality and promoting the desire for future inquiry. Through the building of independence in project work, play, and critical thinking and questioning, Dewey created an approach to education that critiqued social problems and redefined democracy (Bynum, 2015; Spring, 2008; Williams, 2017).

### **Conclusion of Critical Thinkers**

Paulo Freire and John Dewey are two critical thinkers of education who represent how education can be modified based on a chosen philosophy. Their ideas demonstrate the different approaches to education, and reinforce the idea that there is no one size fits all educational model that will meet the needs of all students. Freire's focus on critical thinking, dialogue, and oppression highlight the need to be more cognizant of the needs of diverse students (Freire, 1970; Shih, 2018). Whereas Dewey's focus on democracy, discovery and learning through play emphasize the need for students to be active in learning (Bynum, 2015; Williams, 2017). The ideas put forth by Freire and Dewey are seen in both The Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach, through concepts such as student autonomy, project work, learning through play, and using dialogue to create a strong teacher student relationship (Bynum, 2015; Freire, 1970; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Hiles, 2018; Katz, 1998; Kohan, 2018; Montessori, 2013; Shih, 2018). Implementing education strategies based on the work on Freire and Dewey could help to better prepare teachers for realities in the classroom, but also begin to change philosophies within schools. In addition, expanding education and training for teachers, administrators, school social workers, and counselors to include a more humanizing and care-based approach, as can be seen in Social Pedagogy (Kaska, 2015) is crucial to meeting all the needs of students.

### **Social Pedagogy**

Social Pedagogy can be understood as another example of an alternative approach to education, but also as a foundation for teacher, social worker and school counselor training; because it is both a theory and practice to care, training, and policy. It is both an approach and a profession, because it requires multidisciplinary education, a strengths-based perspective, the ability to provide individualized services, and the building of a caring relationship (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Kaska, 2015). According to Kaska (2015), Social Pedagogy aims to promote social

justice through education, prevention, resolution of problems, and through holistic interventions. A social pedagogue is someone who practices Social Pedagogy as a profession, meeting the educational requirements necessary for the job (Cameron & Moss, 2011). Furthermore, social pedagogues are educated to work in a variety of settings, as their skills are easily transferable. The practice of Social Pedagogy requires the practitioner to meet the participant where they are at, focus on empowerment, learning, and development (Kaska, 2015). Additionally, since the practice of Social Pedagogy is so fluid and transferable across many settings and populations, it relies heavily upon the trusting relationship built between practitioner and participant (Kaska, 2015). Social pedagogues can be seen in childcare, working with people with disabilities, and elder care, as the practice of social pedagogy can be applied to all of these populations through a trusting relationship (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Kaska, 2015). The use of language is the main method through which social pedagogues communicate and build a trusting relationship with their participants (Storø, 2013). Language is also a method of sharing information and feelings, and is likewise understood as a means of providing interventions for both the social pedagogue and participant (Storø, 2013). Social pedagogues are able to provide interventions that are holistic and meaningful to each individual due to the use of language, extensive education and practice required of the profession.

### **Head, heart, hands**

An important model within Social Pedagogy is the interaction between the head, heart, and hands. According to Cameron (2004) and Kaska (2015), the head connotes learning and knowledge, the heart relates to morals and emotions, and the hands represent behaviors and actions or interactions. When interacting with participants it is crucial to keep in mind which modality is taking the lead; head, heart, or hands, as each individual will require a different

balance of these systems. Cameron (2004) further breaks down this concept, to relate the head to the theoretical knowledge a pedagogue relies on, the heart as the empathy, compassion, and ability to give emotional support, and the hands are how the relationship is built between pedagogue and participant through activities. In order to provide the most meaningful interventions, it is necessary to reflect upon which areas one identifies with most; head, heart or hands, as too much of one can break down interactions between pedagogue and participant. In other words, being overpowering in the head, might overwhelm the participant and cause a breakdown in the relationship, therefore requiring each individual to reflect upon which modalities they are strong in, and which they are lacking. (Cameron, 2004; Kaska, 2015). Moreover, reflection requires one to be able to build upon the areas they are not as strong in to best help participants.

### **Common thirds**

Within the head, heart, and hands method is the ability to complete a common third activity. According to Kaska (2015), a common third is an activity that allows the pedagogue and participant to work together to build their relationship, learn from each other and acquire new skills. Furthermore, these activities are consciously designed and require reflection once complete, as they should bring about challenges and growth within the participant (Cameron, 2004; Kaska, 2015). Implicit within common the third activity is long-term learning that comes out of completing the activity, that can be connected to other areas of life (Kaska, 2015; Storø, 2013). For example, activities should include methods to learn empathy, responsibility, cooperation and build self-esteem and confidence (Kaska, 2015; Storø, 2013). Almost any interaction can be developed into a common third with proper planning, as these activities should relate to participants interests. Gardening, cooking, playing with playdough, or a walk in a park

can be enhanced to build the relationship between pedagogue and participant and work to develop new knowledge, values, or skills (Cameron, 2004; Kaska, 2015; Storø, 2013).

### **Conclusion of Social Pedagogy**

The practice of Social Pedagogy is relevant because it incorporates another model that could be adapted in the United States, as an alternative to the traditional education model. Furthermore, Social Pedagogy includes concepts that are present in The Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach, and also in the theories of Paulo Freire and John Dewey. Concepts such as child centered learning, the importance of relationship building between student and teacher, empowerment, care, and autonomy are demonstrated in Social Pedagogy, The Montessori Method, the Reggio Emilia Approach, and in the work of Paulo Freire and John Dewey (Bynum, 2015; Cameron, 2004; Freire, 1970; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Hiles, 2018; Kaska, 2015; Katz, 1998; Kohan, 2018; Montessori, 2013; Shih, 2018). Social Pedagogy also highlights the importance of a humanizing approach to working with others, and this is essential when working with students in schools (Cameron, 2004; Cameron & Moss, 2011; Kaska, 2015; Storø, 2013). Adopting Social Pedagogy as a model for teachers, administrators, school social workers, and counselors to use within schools, is also relevant to explore when considering education as a human right.

### **Human Rights**

These models and theorists all demonstrate different lenses through which to analyze education and its purpose, especially when understanding education as both a human right and as a tool to promote human rights. In order to understand education as a human right, the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) was created to clearly define the rights children should be guaranteed, including the right to education. The right

to education is outlined in detail in Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The education guaranteed by this document has to be available and accessible to all and include different forms of education including primary education, vocational training, and higher education (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The Convention also includes that education should promote healthy and positive development within the child, respect their family and cultural background, and further encourage respect for human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Understanding education as a human right can be accomplished through adopting methods such as The Montessori Method, the Reggio Emilia Approach, and Social Pedagogy, as they all include humanizing modalities that view students as humans and work to empower them (Cameron, 2004; Cameron & Moss, 2011; Fyfe, 1994; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Hiles, 2018; Kaska, 2015; Montessori, 2013; United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Furthermore, both Paulo Freire and John Dewey present ideas such as equality, democracy, and critical thinking that are defined within the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Bynum, 2015; Freire, 1970; United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Another method to understand education as a human right, can be through adopting a humanizing pedagogy (Bartolomé, 1994). Through a humanizing pedagogy, teachers try and create the least restrictive environment by becoming aware of their own personal political clarity by not just adopting norms, but providing guidelines for conversation and equality (Bartolomé, 1994). Furthermore, this method requires that teachers be strategic in their own modalities, and be able to equalize the classroom and be more open to individualized learning, especially in terms of cultural competence and inequality (Bartolomé, 1994). It also brings to light the ideas of equity versus equality in the classroom, and how everyone learns differently (Bartolomé, 1994). The ideas put forth by a humanizing pedagogy, are also present in The Montessori Method, Reggio

Emilia Approach, Social Pedagogy, and in the works of Paulo Freire and John Dewey (Bartolomé, 1994; Bynum, 2015; Freire, 1970; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Hiles, 2018; Katz, 1998; Kohan, 2018; Montessori, 2013; Shih, 2018). However, in order to best integrate human services into education, the traditional roles of teachers, administrators, school social workers and counselors need to be redefined.

### **Role of School Social Workers and School Counselors**

The roles of teachers, school social workers, counselors, and administrators are important because the most significant way to impact children and better meet their needs in schools, is to better prepare and support these school staff members. In order to redefine roles and definitions of roles, each profession needs to be understood as it currently works and as it has worked historically within the education system. According to Gherardi and Whittlesey-Jerome (2018) and Sherman (2016), school social workers used to be called visiting teachers, and had a more direct involvement in the classroom, acting as a link between the community and the school. However, as policy changed within the United States, so did the role of the social worker. The school social worker became isolated from the classroom and marginalized as a profession within schools (Sherman, 2016). Sherman (2016) notes that the paradigm shift allowed for school social workers to change their focus from the community to specific students bringing psychological issues to the forefront, and identifying and targeting at risk students. This change then gave school social workers a job definition more similar to a case manager, and changed the way this profession worked with schools (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Sherman, 2016). Gherardi and Whittlesey-Jerome (2018) and Sherman (2016), argue that the definition of a school social worker is currently too ambiguous and that varying educational requirements for this profession need to be more consistent in order for the profession to be more effective.

According to Ediger (1991), the role of a school counselor is to provide emotional support for students by viewing them as human beings, and assisting teachers in creating meaning in the classroom. Furthermore, school counselors should help to build problem solving skills among students and help them to celebrate differences (Ediger, 1991). According to Ediger (2001), the role of school counselors should be expanded to advise teachers and administrators on methods of teaching that work to meet all the needs of students and is supported by school counselors educational background in child psychology, development, and methods of learning. In addition to redefining the roles of school social workers and counselors, is expanding their education and training to be more multidisciplinary, and encompass other areas of study, such as Social Pedagogy. If school social workers, counselors, and teachers were given education and training in Social Pedagogy and human rights, then implementing practices would become second nature in the school setting, and allow for an underlying framework of care while also encouraging collaboration among roles (Bartolomé, 1994; Cameron, 2004; Kaska, 2015). Providing all of these occupations with further education would allow for them to better prepare to work with the diverse range of students in schools, while also working to reframe the traditional education system.

Concurrent with redefining the role of school social workers, is expanding the role as well. Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome (2018) & Sherman (2016) call for more research on the role of the school social worker, to learn more about challenges in the field and perceptions of the profession. Furthermore, integrating the social worker or school counselor into classrooms would allow for an interdisciplinary model and the exchange of ideas. Expansion can also be done through more collaboration between educators and social workers, such as allowing social workers to be more involved in the administration side of education and active in policy

discussion (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018). In essence, social workers could become key advocates for students if they were given the opportunity to work more closely with school policies and regulations (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018). Sherman (2016) also argues that through teamwork with other staff members, social workers can effectively bridge the gap between education and psychological well-being, and be available to meet all student's needs. An example of collaboration between school social workers, counselors, and teachers, is to build stronger networks among these roles, and work together when creating lesson plans, in order to meet academic, social, and psychological needs in the classroom (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Sherman, 2016; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Collaboration would also facilitate changes within the school environment, especially in low income schools (Rowley & Wright, 2011). School social workers, counselors, and teachers all play an active role in shaping the environment of the school, by working together to target instances of harassment, bullying, and discrimination, positive changes in environments can be made (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Likewise, these changes can be extended to create an environment that values education and not just standardization or testing (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Implementing these changes will not only benefit the students attending these schools, but also the staff employed by providing more opportunities for leadership roles.

Collaboration facilitates relationship building and strengthens teamwork among professional peers. Working together and sharing ideas also requires school social workers, counselors, and teachers to take on leadership roles. Sherman (2016) claims that inherent in collaboration, is self-advocacy and a call to bring social work ideas into the classroom. School social workers and counselors have knowledge that teachers and administrators will not necessarily have, giving these professions the opportunity to become leaders by sharing their

knowledge. For example, school social workers and counselors can teach colleagues about concepts in their own education such as the ecological systems perspective or understanding the child in their environment, strengths-based approach or focusing on individual strengths rather than needs, and self-determination or individual autonomy, as a means of being leaders and sharing knowledge to encourage collaboration in the future (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017; Sherman, 2016). Giving school social workers and counselors the opportunity to share their educational knowledge with teachers and administrators will help to bridge knowledge gaps, while also increasing collaboration (Ediger, 2001; Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2018; Sherman, 2016; Rowley & Wright, 2011). This leadership can extend into the realm of the school community, as school social workers and counselors can work to extend and improve communications with the larger community (Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017). Redefining and expanding the roles of school social workers and counselors to increase collaboration and leadership, are ways of implementing human services into education and ways to improve the education system overall. However, changing the roles of social workers and school counselors are not the only interventions that can be made to alter the current education system in place.

## **Interventions**

### **Micro and Mezzo level interventions**

Micro level interventions within individual classrooms can be facilitated by teachers own autonomy to better meet all the needs of students. These micro interventions may not solve the overarching issues in macro level educational policy, but can be adopted in order to change the traditional education system at the classroom level. Incorporating play into classrooms as a means of learning through playing educational games and through having a play attitude towards

learning can increase creativity among students (Kloss, 2018). Furthermore, incorporating play into the classroom can be adopted from the Montessori Method the Reggio Emilia Approach, and Social Pedagogy (Gardner & Jones, 2016; Kaska, 2015; Kloss 2018; Montessori, 2013). Sparking creativity through play simultaneously lessens the focus on standardization and testing while also allowing for children to learn and discover in the ways most meaningful to them. Kloss (2018) also calls for child centered instruction to be adopted in order to provide more individualized education to students. Putting the child at the center of their own education allows for educators to meet the child where they are at, and focus on their own strengths and abilities (Kaska, 2015; Kloss, 2018; Montessori, 2013). These interventions can be implemented by individual teachers at the classroom level to alter traditional education to better meet the needs of all students. They also represent concepts from non-traditional forms of education such as the Montessori Method, the Reggio Emilia Approach and Social Pedagogy (Gardner & Jones, 2016; Kaska, 2015; Kloss 2018; Montessori, 2013)

Mezzo level interventions can be strategized and implemented at the level of the whole school, so that the needs of all students in attendance can be better met. These interventions expand beyond individual classrooms, and require the participation and interaction of teachers, school social workers, counselors, and administrators to make change at the school level. Communication is the overarching strategy at the mezzo level, because in order for a school community to come together to make change, communication needs to be improved. Improving communication involves changing both the methods of communication, but also methods of listening and receiving communication (Fyfe, 1994; Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017). According to Pérez White & López Levers (2017), improving communication between administrators, teachers, parents, and students is crucial to enabling school wide change.

Furthermore, in order to increase communication between and among all these groups, letters can be sent home with students, calendars created, emails sent, a daily reminder text program can be implemented, and the amount of parent-teacher conferences can increase (Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017). Increasing communication also includes the roles of school social workers and counselors, as they can act as community liaisons to improve relationships between the school and its local community (Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017). According to Fyfe (1994), communication also involves the act of slowing down to listen more effectively. This is especially important when listening to the needs of students and their families, as taking time to hear what is said can also improve cultural competency and respect.

Staff development training is another mezzo level intervention that requires the participation of the entire school. Through improved communication and sharing of knowledge between teachers, school social workers, counselors, and administrators, staff development can become more relatable for each of these roles and build a stronger school community. According to Pérez White, & López Levers (2017), building the concept of hope within staff members can strengthen bonds among one another and between students and parents. The concept of hope refers to how students hope to succeed, parents hope their children are prepared to succeed in school and beyond, and teachers hope students are successful academically, socially, and emotionally (Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017). Creating a framework of hope within schools can aid in improving relationships between all these groups, and improve educational outcomes (Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017). Staff development can also be approached as it is outlined in the Reggio Emilia Approach. In this approach, relationships are viewed as the foundation of education so staff development is essential to working as a team with parents and students (Rinaldi, 1994) Furthermore, staff development in Reggio Emilia schools begins by building a

professional development system that is accessible to everyone and flexible to change for the needs of each individual (Fyfe, 1994). Within the Reggio Emilia Approach, staff development is interdisciplinary and requires individuals to map out their networks and goals (Fyfe, 1994; Rinaldi, 1994). Staff development can integrate ideas from all staff members professional backgrounds to better develop teamwork and bonding among educators and therefore improve competency for students.

Changing environments within schools includes both the physical environment and use of space, as well as the social environments and atmospheres. Adopting ideas from the Montessori Method or Reggio Emilia Approach when planning and designing schools and classrooms can allow for more diversity of activity and learning (Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Montessori, 2013). According to Fyfe (1994), the environment is the third teacher, which recognizes the influence of how a classroom is designed and what it looks like on children. Changing physical spaces from large classrooms with aligned rows of desks to more flexible spaces that encourage creativity and exploration will also allow for more choice among students (Dillon, 2018; Gao, 2014; Kloss, 2018). In regards to the social environment of the school, building a safe environment is at the core. Kloss (2018) recommends implementing a non-hierarchical system within schools, creating a more familial environment and leveling the relationships between students and teachers. Pérez White, & López Levers (2017) call for the need for empathy within schools. Empathy, understanding, support, respect, and kindness are all fundamental qualities that Pérez White, & López Levers (2017) recommend for strengthening relationships and targeting oppression in schools. Furthermore, environments of oppression require knowledge of culture but also respect in order to meet the needs of all students (Pérez White, & López Levers, 2017). Rowley & Wright (2011) build on the need for empathy by emphasizing the fact that

schools with less bullying and harassment or a higher quality environment have better test scores. This reinforces the connection between social environment and academic achievement, highlighting the need for improved school environments to better meet student's needs.

### **Macro level interventions**

Interventions at the macro level can include those at the level of a whole school district but also even broader to include changes at the state or national level. Ratifying the Convention of the Rights of the Child, will allow for human rights in education to be solidified (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Furthermore, adopting the view that education is a human right, will allow for an underlying framework of human rights or a humanizing pedagogy to develop in schools (Bartolomé, 1994; United Nations General Assembly, 1989). According to Kloss (2018), creating curriculum that is flexible and student focused along with assessments that measure more than academic achievement is paramount to reforming education.

Furthermore, allowing for more flexibility within curriculum and assessments, will give students more choice in studying the topics that are meaningful to them, while also allowing teachers to delve into subject matter more thoroughly with students and not be under a time constraint to teach so many subjects a day (Kloss, 2018). If a school district was to adopt this type of curricular flexibility, then students of all age ranges can have the opportunity to explore education and learning on their own terms, which has the potential to impact academic achievement (Kloss, 2018). Currently in the United States, education emphasizes academic achievement, as seen through policies such as No Child Left Behind and the Common Core Standards, and is not projected to change this focus (Lee & Wu, 2017; Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012; Polikoff, 2017; United States Department of Education, 2002). However, under the current policies schools across the nation can make adjustments that work to meet other needs of

students while also improving academic achievement. Palumbo and Kramer-Vida (2012) call for adopting an academic curriculum, or a curriculum that encourages success no matter the obstacles in the way. Students across the country are faced with obstacles outside the education system, such as racism, poverty, and classism and through creating a curriculum in schools that builds a culture of success and defies these obstacles through education, children may be able to tackle such obstacles (Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012). Additionally, Palumbo & Kramer-Vida (2012) note that schools need to do more to address the needs of their students from lower socioeconomic statuses. In order to truly help the most disadvantaged students and work to close the achievement gap, schools need to provide emotional support while fostering academic support through methods that are meaningful to every student (Palumbo & Kramer-Visa, 2012). Macro level interventions can also include entire school districts adopting non-traditional models of education including the Montessori Method, the Reggio Emilia Approach, Social Pedagogy, and concepts from Paulo Freire and John Dewey (Bynum, 2015; Cameron, 2004; Freire, 1970; Gardner & Jones, 2016; Hiles, 2018; Kaska, 2015; Katz, 1998; Kohan, 2018; Montessori, 2013; Shih, 2018). Altering the whole environment and function of schools to match the models outlined, will require work at the macro level to introduce such change, and then build from the classroom up each effective concept, modality, and method to teaching students. It is through the implementation of changes at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels that schools can best work to meet the needs of all students.

### **Discussion**

This thesis aims to bring awareness to the issues in the current traditional education system in place, by exploring other non-traditional models of education, critical thinkers, and suggesting ways for schools to adjust in order to better meet the needs of all students. As the

student population continues to increase, it is crucial to be able to meet all the needs of students within schools and better prepare them for the future. The traditional model in place fails to meet the needs of all students because of its inability to expand from focusing on academic achievement (Gao, 2014; Lee & Wu, 2017; Polikoff, 2017). Through this research process the positive impacts of specific models of education were highlighted as potential models a traditional school could adopt (Cameron, 2004; Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Hiles, 2018; Kaska, 2015; Katz, 1998; Montessori, 2013). The Montessori Method, the Reggio Emilia Approach, and Social Pedagogy along with the ideas of Paulo Freire and John Dewey, all presented different ways of thinking about education and educating students, by challenging the traditional model in place with concepts such as child centered learning, discovery, dialogue, care, and play (Bynum, 2015; Cameron, 2004; Freire, 1970; Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Gao, 2014; Hiles, 2018; Kaska, 2015; Katz, 1998; Montessori, 2013). However, within this thesis there are limitations in what non-traditional educational models were studied, and which critical thinkers or philosophers were included. All of the selected models and thinkers had connections in their philosophies, and could all draw from each other because of their focus on autonomy, care, empowerment, discovery, and play which are crucial to education reform (Bynum, 2015; Cameron, 2004; Freire, 1970; Gandini & Malaguzzi, 1998; Gao, 2014; Hiles, 2018; Kaska, 2015; Katz, 1998; Montessori, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

The traditional education model in place today is in clear need of reform. In order to better meet the needs of the diverse students in schools across the country, ideas from Paulo Freire and John Dewey need to be reevaluated to assess their value at the current time. Furthermore, adopting ideas or concepts from non-traditional methods such as the Montessori

Method, the Reggio Emilia Approach, or Social Pedagogy can broaden the scope of education, and give students a more comprehensive education. The education, training, and roles of teachers, school social workers, counselors, and administrators can also be reevaluated and reformed to collaborate in order to improve education. The adoption of a human rights framework within education is also paramount to reform and development within the education system. There is no one size fits all educational model that will meet the needs of all students, it is only through sharing, combining, and individualizing practices that education can serve all students and better prepare them for the future.

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