

Pedagogy of Recognition: Winnicott, Honneth and Learning in Psychosocial Spaces

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Abstract

This paper explores the links between Donald Winnicott and Axel Honneth in relation to developing a pedagogy based on recognition. Winnicott's understanding of emotional development is centred on the intimate infant/mother dyad, in which the notions of 'good enough mothering', potential spaces and the true and false self are central to developing a sense of selfhood. Honneth's three part model of relating-to-self proposes that the recognition of others has an impact on constructing an identity that has social and cultural value. A synthesis of these two approaches provides a pedagogical framework based on mutual recognition with caring relationships. For example, 'good enough' (m)others are able to recognise and acknowledge that the infant is deserving of love, which leads to a learner who has the self-confidence to feel as though their efforts are of value. Recognition that learners have autonomy and can participate in playful potential spaces provides self-respect to enable learners to separate and be active agents. Finally, the wider recognition that individuals are valued and contribute to the community provides learners with a meaningful sense of self that has sufficient self-esteem for a creative and spontaneous true self to encounter learning throughout the lifespan.

Keywords: Winnicott, Honneth, recognition, learning, education, experience, potential

Introduction

This paper provides a discussion on how Winnicott's thinking can be applied to education by considering the links between his clinical work and the process of learning across the life-span. It is contended that Winnicott's focus on early relationships provides a context for understanding learning that is life-wide and lifelong. The work of critical theorist Axel Honneth is also introduced to explore the importance of recognition in the context of the development of a relation-to-self and the role of reflexivity in learning. Parallels between Winnicott's concepts of the 'good enough' parent, playing in potential space and the true and false self are made with Honneth's notions of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Although Honneth's ideas have been influenced by Winnicott and object relations theory, this piece makes direct links between the two and focuses on the impact of recognition by the 'other' to highlight the relationship between learning and selfhood: particularly that learning is an existential phenomenon experienced in a psychosocial world. Learning is presented as troubling and education is seen to evoke archives of past struggles for independence and autonomy.

Winnicott: from the clinic to the playground

Donald Winnicott's career as a paediatrician and child psychoanalyst spanned over 40 years, during which his central concern was to provide a satisfactory theory of emotional development that could be applied to pathological conditions and to the everyday interactions he witnessed between the infant and (m)other¹. His ideas moved beyond the Freudian assumptions of drive theory and the conflicting triangular relationship inherent in the Oedipus complex and began to inhabit the comparatively new world of 'object relations' (Abram, 2012). Freudian principles offered Winnicott theories with psychological depth and yet he was searching for a means to understand human emotional development that considered the importance of early experiences, and for him depth did not equate to 'early'. Depth psychology required a developed cognition and the capacity to

¹ The 'm' in mother is placed in parenthesis to indicate the importance of both the maternal parent and also the significant others who have influence on the early life of an infant.

think and from his carefully observed research, Winnicott was convinced that the foundation of emotional development resided in the quality of very early experiences: drives were seen as less important than the environment. It is this paradigm shift, initiated by Winnicott, which makes his ideas particularly apposite to education. The subsequent rejection of a dominant reductionist drive theory allows the complexity of human interactions to be more fully appreciated, and as such also serves to illuminate what may happen in the messy and troubling world of education.

It should be made clear at this stage that Winnicott mainly focused on interactions between (m)other and infant, but he also suggested that such ideas could be applied throughout the life-span. In the paper, I use the notion of education as learning experiences that are both lifelong and life-wide and not confined to earliest experience, or schooling and/or other formal education contexts (Bainbridge and West, 2012). Education can often be regarded as synonymous with schools and schooling and yet, as shall be discussed later, education begins at the cradle and continues to the grave. During the lifespan, education takes place in formal and informal settings: when infants negotiate feeding routines; in families and wider social groups; in professional contexts, as new knowledge and skills are acquired, and of course in schools, higher and adult education, and what has now become known as the 'silver surfer' generation. By considering learning in more expansive contexts, the opportunity is opened up to appreciate the capacity for play and an openness to experience that is cultivated in relationships with others. Such a stance further confirms the suitability of using Winnicott's fundamental understanding of emotional development as the perception of education provided here as one that is readily aligned to the importance of psychosocial experience and the quality of the environment to promote and support this.

Learning from experience is deeply problematic. Bollas (1987) contends that experience usually precedes understanding and this is why Winnicott felt he had to move from a Freudian depth psychology, to his own search for a psychology that took very early experiences, where full understanding may be absent, into account. The essential principles of Winnicott's ideas offer a pragmatic and non-systematized explanation of the interaction between infant and (m)other and consider how this dyad can make sense of experience (Winnicott, 1965a). Three central features that emerge from Winnicott's theory of emotional development that will be discussed here in relation to education in its widest sense are those that consider how a sense of self is developed from the maternal dyad and very early experience. This move from dependence to independence is one in which the infant must learn to discern the difference between self and other, while also appropriating societal values and practices. Initially for Winnicott, this troublesome move, which could threaten the understanding of self, was predicated on the presence of a 'good-enough (m)other' able to facilitate the infant's open exploration of the world. Secondly, from this position the (m)other allows the external environment, including knowledge, to become a 'potential space' where the encounter with novelty is a playful one that can ultimately lead to changes in behaviour and thinking. Finally, the troubling nature of learning to separate is acknowledged and Winnicott's concept of *true and false selves* provides an insight into the tension between exposing and defending a developing selfhood.

A closer look at good enough parenting, potential playful spaces and true and false selves will take place alongside a consideration of Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition, which has its genesis in critical theory, and Winnicott's developing understanding of object relations theory. The next section will introduce Honneth's ideas of relating-to-self, the importance of relationships with others, and the need for reflexivity to develop a sufficiently secure sense of self that is able to be an active agent and learn from and influence wider society. The case will be made throughout the chapter that Honneth's three levels of relating-to-self: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem can provide further insight into the three central themes that emerge from a consideration of Winnicott's ideas in relation to education.

Honneth: recognition, personal identity and learning.

The work of Axel Honneth (1995, 2007), a philosopher and critical theorist, will be used to support and develop the focus on early relationships and learning throughout the lifespan. Honneth uses object relations theory, including Winnicott, to argue that identity formation, or the move to selfhood, is a largely psychosocial process whereby successful participation results from receiving recognition from others. He provides a model on the relation-to-self within three realms: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. The role of empathic recognition and how this may impact on the relation-to-self will be discussed in the context of how individuals become successful participants in Winnicott's play-centred world of learning.

Honneth develops his understanding of the importance of empathic recognition in forming personal identity as a result of learning in a wider social world. He claims that:

A child thus learns to relate to an objective world of stable and consistent objects by taking the perspective of a second person, and thereby gradually decentering its own primarily ego-centric perspective ... and therefore begins to perceive objects in an impersonal and objective way (1995, p.114).

It is this 'second person' that becomes significant: depending on how they respond will determine the morals and values the individual will perceive as an objective reality that they in turn accept as their subjective experience. Honneth claims that it is this gaining of an objective reality from others that ultimately forms institutions and cultures and, as a critical theorist that this is where learning and societal change can occur.

This process of learning to construct an identity that has social and cultural value can be made clear by considering how Honneth's (1995) three part model of practical relating-to-self proposes that the recognition of others has an impact on reflexivity. He posits that if individuals receive empathic recognition within three levels of relating-to-self then individuals will have a sufficiently secure sense of self that will enable them to participate, learn and contribute to society. Each of the levels represents differing societal influences. The first represents the private sphere and is linked to love, or the emotional engagement that enables the child to take the perspective of a second person. The second level refers to legal recognition and includes the rights bestowed on an individual. Finally the third level is the public sphere that is linked to solidarity and esteem within a community.

Honneth (1995, 2007) defines 'recognition' as those responses from others that facilitate self-relating on the three levels described above and mis-recognition as when the responses of others preclude this. Individuals will develop *self-confidence* if the first level is met. They will experience a loving and empathic '(m)other' who recognises their needs and desires. This mode of recognition is vital and, as the child experiences love from the mother, they become aware that they too are deserving of love. The next form of recognition involves the mode of cognitive respect that occurs when moral and legal rights are bestowed on the individual. This enables *self-respect* to develop as the individual is now aware that others have sufficient respect for them to recognise their right to have their own autonomy and agency. The final level of recognition relates to social esteem in the wider 'public' domain and leads to the relation-to-self known as *self-esteem*. Receiving recognition at this level occurs when individual abilities and traits are recognised as being of genuine use in maintaining and developing the structures within an appropriate community. These can then become honoured and celebrated, which in turn leads to loyalty and solidarity. The following application of Honneth's theory of recognition to identity formation and learning will suggest links between Winnicott's concept of good enough care, playful potential spaces and the defences associated with true and false self-formation.

Early Experience: good enough self-confidence

In 'Ego distortion' Winnicott (1965b) sees the role of the good enough (m)other to help the infant make sense of their own feelings of omnipotence and indeed the illusion that they can somehow 'magically' have their needs met. The illusion of magical abilities is of course intimately bound up within the early loving relationship where the good enough (m)other is sufficiently emotionally attuned to her child that the infant's perceived needs are 'immediately' provided for. For example, just as the infant experiences the sensation of hunger, or the need to be held to the breast, the (m)other discerns her child's need for food or comfort. For the infant there is the fantasy experience of magically having their desire met. It is important that this interaction is very early and pre-verbal; this is where Winnicott wishes to start to build his theory of emotional development, as its pre-verbal quality does not require the deeper psychological awareness of the Freudian Oedipal complex (Winnicott, 1965a). At this early stage the infant has an absolute dependency on the adult and as a result of the magical illusion is unable to distinguish between what is 'me and not me': the sensations of milk in the mouth or the nipple on the cheek are experienced as belonging to the infant and not as the result of an 'other' providing milk, let alone this 'other' having a separate body that has multiple parts. Despite the joy and reverie of this care-full moment, it is one that cannot last and the infant's bliss needs to be disrupted if normal emotional development is to progress. Significantly, it will be argued that this disruption and move away from absolute dependence represents the infant's first encounters with education.

A consideration of these first encounters with education requires a wider understanding of the good enough (m)other and how Winnicott conceives the move from absolute dependency to one of increased autonomy (Winnicott, 1964/1991). If the subjectivity of early infant life is linked to illusory feelings of omnipotence and to some extent 'magical' thinking, then the significant paradigm shift, or learning moment, for the infant is from fantasy to reality. It is this subsequent interplay between the infant's internal world and external environment that the good enough (m)other 'holds' and guides the journey from subjective illusion towards an objective reality. Winnicott developed his idea of holding as he observed and understood the need for the (m)other to physically and emotionally hold the infant. Physical holding may appear very matter-of-fact as babies need to be fed, bathed, dressed, played with, cuddled and caressed but Winnicott saw this as a fundamental precursor to the more influential notion of emotional holding. Good enough (m)others inhabit a state of primary maternal preoccupation in which they are attuned to their babies' needs and in the example of physical holding are able to respond throughout the day (and night) to ever changing developmental needs. But it is in combination with physical holding that emotional holding can develop in the child the capacity to move away from absolute dependence and to more realistically integrate their experience and develop a sense of self, of 'I am' and position themselves in a world where learning, in diverse ways, and processes of education, are, relatively, unthreatening, and can thus facilitate personal transformation (Winnicott, 1964/1991).

When viewed through Honneth's lens (1995), this early move from dependence to independence is one that is most successful within a 'good enough' loving relationship and reflects the recognition bestowed on the infant from within the intimate family setting. Honneth's 'good enough' mother is one that recognises and responds to the needs of her child. The meeting of the infant's needs represents the recognition that the infant is worthy of love and care, and for Honneth, this is the first stage in developing a reflexive understanding of a separate self. In this context, the young child experiences the interplay between their subjective feelings and the objective external world therefore learning that they are valued and loved by others and consequently worthy of love. The reflexive relation-to-self that develops is self-confidence from which the project of investing in and discovering a selfhood can begin. From this position it is the loving recognition of an 'other' that enables the child to learn that they matter and exist, separate from others.

At this essential level, education is, in short, about relationships and the fundamental 'anthropological' psychoanalytic premise that human beings are born prematurely, compared to other mammals (Bainbridge and West, 2012). Consequently humans are relatively helpless and

dependent on others in early life to provide both physical and emotional holding as well as the capacity to digest, process and remain open to experience. Physical holding provides the basic biological needs whereas in a good enough relationship, emotional holding can be crucial in cultivating an understanding of the external world and, further still, the desire *to know*, or its antithesis of *not to know*. It is Winnicott's (1965a) contention that very early knowing, and as such education, is facilitated within this moment when the good enough (m)other can be regarded as a mirror which, in Honneth's terms, recognises the child as an individual and reflects back a sense of who they are. These moments are not immediately conscious but full of unconscious processes where pasts and presents collide. The infant brings to the scene their present subjective feeling, based as it is in illusory fantasy, and it is the (m)other who receives this communication and reflects their perception of this back to the child.

This is a significant event because the child now experiences a communication from the external world that confirms, for the child, who they are in the recognition and reflection back of their subjective experience. There is a reality in this dyad that what is received back is an objective endorsement of the infant's present experience based on the (m)other's past. During the process of mirroring and reflecting, the early infant is being educated into an understanding of the interplay between the internal and external world; for Bibby (2011) this is the beginning of education which has the potential to lead to creativity and primitive aliveness. Although Winnicott (1964/1991) sees the (m)other as the primary care giver, he does acknowledge the role of the family and wider social groups in providing both physical and emotional holding. For those involved in education beyond these very early experiences, it also provokes a need to approach the learner with authenticity and honesty, for these early learning moments will resonate throughout a lifetime. Ultimately, learners of all ages will seek, often unconsciously, recognition and approval in the faces and communication of those who 'teach'. For once self-confidence has been established it is possible to conceive of an agentic self that has the capacity to deal with coming to terms with tension between subjective desires and an external objective reality.

Therefore the beginning of education results from a relation-to-self of self-confidence. The creativity and primitive aliveness it may engender, provides the building blocks for learning and inspires the move away from dependency, towards the recognition of objectivity alongside the potential to develop symbol formation and a capacity to reality test. With effective holding and the associated mirroring and reflecting back, the good enough (m)other allows the infant to begin to explore potentially dangerous and unsettling territory, where the infant moves from the relatively safe place of subjective knowing towards an objective understanding of a complex external world. The move from subjectivity to objectivity, from the infant's own understanding to that reflected back by the (m)other, initiates the prospect of separation and as a result creates an arena fragmented by the fear of being alone and the possibility of abandonment (Winnicott, 1986 and 1993). Meaning has to be given to a world that, until the development of self-confidence, has little meaning beyond that which is understood within the subjective illusion of omnipotence, and for this to happen the sense of a concrete 'me' needs to be replaced by the possibility of a symbolic 'not me'. Such a state is one where there can be dialogue between an inner and outer world and illusion can be confronted with objective reality.

Winnicott also sees this as a shift into the Kleinian depressive position (Klein, 1935), which also reflects Honneth's understanding of self-confidence. The usefulness of considering Klein's depressive position in the light of Honneth's theory of recognition is in the explanatory power it offers regarding the move away from dependence. Being able to separate requires knowledge of the external world, sufficient to survive, where complex ideas can be held and thought about. To be separate is to become a known self-confident 'me' and to accept the ambivalent stance of knowing/not knowing or that love and hate are not mutually exclusive. When in the depressive position, complexities can be thought about and dichotomies can be seen in a non-threatening manner. What is apparent from this perspective (Richards, 2002) is that education can thrive in a place where ideas can be symbolised and thought about, and from a reflexive stance are not

perceived as threatening; rather as a means to motivate the desire to know and to find out more and fully experience some of the spaces represented by education.

The role of the good enough (m)other at this stage is to hold the anxiety that the infant may be experiencing as they move between positions of knowing/not knowing and towards ambivalence. The infant needs to be confident that their feelings of anger, frustration, aggression, hate, love and gratitude will not destroy the (m)other or cause them to be abandoned and that effective mirroring can still take place. The ability to stay with difficult material, to think and develop the full range of emotions, requires the infant to be able to accept the complex depressive position and associated ambivalence. Particularly the notion that not knowing does not destroy either the infant or the (m)other and that it is possible to experience both love and hate towards an object without destroying it. In the context of education it acknowledges the desire to learn or not to learn, and, indeed, that it is possible for learners to love and hate learning and their teachers; while teachers can both love and hate learners and also the knowledge they seek to pass on (Winnicott, 1975a).

The shift from illusory omnipotence to a position of ambivalence is not simply facilitated by the holding of the good enough (m)other but also by the knowledge that (m)others and teachers must ultimately and empathically fail the children in their care. For to not fail, is to leave infants/students in a place of dependency and one where separation is undesirable and unlikely. The failure instigated by parents/teachers is empathic as they maintain the capacity to hold the anger and frustration experienced by the learner. To be safely held, in limbo between not knowing/knowing, provides the motivation for thought and emotional development and this requirement is one that remains with learners throughout the lifespan, as each new learning context provides new opportunities to move between dependency and greater autonomy. It can be argued that in the context of Honneth's theory of recognition, this ability to hold anxiety represents recognition by an 'other' of the subjective difficulty inherent in learning situations. When anxiety is successfully held, the learner has the experience that their problems have been recognised and that they matter, the resulting reflexive position of self-confidence is now sufficient to enable learners to be resilient and to persevere. If infants, or indeed students do not develop self-confidence within a good enough environment, then their anger and dissent at the point of failure is not held and returns to them to punish and quash thinking. Although the learner should not be seen as a non-agentic victim of their past, it is worth noting that Winnicott (1964/1991) assumed that the first very early moves from absolute dependency do provide archives, or mental models, that repeat, as timeless unconscious processes, whenever education is encountered.

Play: potential spaces and self-respect

It has been argued that education begins when the infant looks into the face of the good enough (m)other and can reflexively distinguish between the 'me' and 'not me'. This in turn leads to an awareness of an external objectivity, the subsequent capacity for symbol formation and the development of patterns of thinking. These first educational moments lead to what Winnicott (1993) refers to as 'potential spaces' where the (m)other and infant play. Winnicott (*ibid*) sees play emerging from the potential space where a dyadic dance is set up between (m)other/infant and of course we can also now contend, teacher/student. This is an interpersonal encounter that enables the infant learner to move between fantasy and reality and between 'me' and 'not me'. It allows separation to be experienced without becoming separate from the (m)other as the early feeling of being merged with the (m)other is replaced by the (m)other responding to the developmental needs of the child. What is happening at this level, is that the life experience of the infant has become one where they can move between fantasy and reality as the (m)other is available to hold the anxiety of potential parental abandonment that this process may engender. If the infant does not experience a holding environment where such thoughts can be developed, then the process of learning will be hindered as the ability to 'play' with the imaginary and external reality will, in turn, be diminished. Thus the infant can connect with an 'other' and test and take part in the reality of the external world and eventually manage the move from illusion to disillusion, as the fantasy of omnipotence is replaced by the reality of the thoughts and feelings of significant others in their

environment (Britzman, 1999). This is fundamentally a playful moment and one that underpins the process of learning, where existing ideas that are held, need to be replaced with new knowledge and the randomness of external things (Richards, 2002) needs to be negotiated alongside subjective omnipotent assumptions in a search for meaningful patterns. Not only can play bring the imaginary and the real together, but also it allows the gap between anticipation and experience, and how old knowledge and new knowledge are related and to be thought about.

For Honneth, the function of play within potential spaces involves a consideration of how role-taking and as such a sense of self and other develops. This can be explored within the relation-to-self of self-respect. Honneth sees this position of reflexivity as one in which the actions of an individual have received sufficient recognition from others outside of the family setting, to be regarded as a morally responsible agent who has rights and autonomy. At this level of reflexivity, a sense of selfhood, that reflects Winnicott's move towards independence, begins to emerge. From Honneth's empirical stance, he sees the play of role-taking as one where the Winnicottian oscillation between fantasy and reality is being lived out in a psychosocial context. Thus, once a sense of self and other has developed, it is possible, despite differing subjective experiences, to participate in activities that are bound by socially determined rules and morals. It is this invitation to participate, based on the recognition of an autonomous and agentic individual that allows for the consideration of education to be contexts in which individuals are able to participate and contribute to learning. Playful learners can now be thought as those who are able, from the reflexive position of self-respect, to participate.

The perception of education that has been provided is lifelong and suitably nuanced towards the human condition. The central principle, that play, thinking and participation are interlinked within a reflexive self-respect stance, offers the possibility that difficult thoughts can be encountered and dealt with within the life experience of the learner. It is important to move away from assumptions that learning is about formal structures or 'traditional' education and instead to see learning as being a creative act led by individual curiosity and natural cycles of development within a wider social setting. Coren (1997), Gaitanidis (2012) and Auestad (2012) all acknowledge that the predominance of education processes, often tightly controlled by government dictat, may, paradoxically, prevent rather than encourage thinking. Indeed, Bainbridge and West (2012) have suggested that there is something perverse about a concept of education that favours a separation of mind and body, cognition and emotion, by appropriating overly psychological approaches, rather than learning that considers the individual and how they may play with knowledge and educational process.

Winnicott (1993) was very open to the possibility that the process of individual meaning making was far from logical or accessible by formal approaches. His own clinical work with young children avoided the more traditional process of regular attempts at interpretation until these 'made sense' to the analysand. Rather, he began to explore more playful and creative ways to engage children in a process of meaning making by using signs and symbols that could be both physically and intellectually played with. As long as these signs and symbols were encountered in a setting that provided suitable holding, then Winnicott contended that certain elements of understanding and explosions of meaning would emerge. This approach can be echoed in Honneth's acknowledgement of the need for a relation-to-self of self-respect where the actions of the individual are given recognition by others. As a result individuals can participate as autonomous agents. Famously, Winnicott (1965a) used what have become known as the 'spatula' and 'squiggle' techniques, during which he would observe what he saw as the child's interaction between reality and fantasy. In the case of the spatula, this involved observing and recognising the approach to and hesitancy to pick up and play with the spatula. How the children negotiated this game provided insight into the child's early thinking. At a more mature level, a whole host of alternative symbols and signs become available; for example, words, mathematical representations, diagrams and even knowledge itself. West (1996) makes the case for the collection of narratives and their subsequent

discussion as a means to enable adult learners to playfully and meaningfully engage with their own learning.

A wider sense of playfulness is facilitated by allowing the learner to take the initiative and to respond to their own motivation and desires. To impose a direction on learning/play would be to close down curiosity by creating a disjuncture between an individual coming to terms with the distinction between reality/fantasy, inner and outer worlds, the known/not known and the understanding of another that does not match their own. Coren (1997) makes the case that during play, something may indeed emerge from what objectively appears to be nothing. In other words, what lies at the heart of the apparent non-structured random processes of play, is a search for individual meaning that cannot be predicted or controlled. This is not to suggest that we can now cast education processes into a world of personalised learning that borders on anarchy. For just as the good enough (m)other physically and emotionally holds the infant, so to in more traditional education settings must the teacher. Winnicott's spatula game, despite being dependent on how the infant interacted, was in reality a carefully controlled external environment and the positioning of the spatula, mother and Winnicott himself were carefully considered and replicated each time the game was played. The setting provided by Winnicott was structured such that the infant could play within the boundaries set up; the spatula was accessible but just out of reach, the infant sat on the (m)other's lap and from here could approach the spatula or seek comfort and Winnicott was available to observe and intervene if required. If play is to be safe and therefore creative, to allow learning to emerge, then teachers/parents need to provide structures where the infant/learner can experiment. Without suitable boundaries holding will not be feasible and the infant/learner could become overwhelmed by not knowing or the impossibility of moving from fantasy to reality. The role of the adult, in Honneth's framework, is to recognise the learner's activities and provide boundaries that provide security. Only then will self-respect enable individuals to experiment, make mistakes and challenge boundaries to provide a sense of what the self is capable of.

Good enough loving (m)others/teachers should facilitate playfulness while not abandoning their charges to chaos and fragmentation, to do so would close down play and hinder learning (Winnicott, 1986). The proposal that learning across the lifespan should reflect the very earliest encounters between fantasy/reality and knowing/not knowing in a bounded and yet playful manner, offers many challenges to traditional education settings. The essential distinction as to how Winnicott considers education and the process of learning reflects his understanding of how new knowledge is obtained by the individual. 'Traditional' (formal) education settings and processes tend to view knowledge as being a transferable commodity that is given by a teacher and received by the learner – but for Winnicott (1986) this concept of learning ignores how learners may actually encounter such knowledge. For him, knowledge cannot be simply 'handed over', but instead must be actively internalised, played with, in a good enough setting, to allow the anxiety and confusion caused by new ideas, to be thought about, and finally accepted. From Honneth's concept of recognition these more formal approaches to learning fail to respect the learner's position, consequently they fail to engender self-respect and the possibility of developing learners who are autonomous and also able to contribute to a wider social project.

In the clinical setting Winnicott avoided providing interpretations, instead preferring to repeatedly make the analysand aware of their own thoughts, and to then leave them to provide an interpretation that made sense. He felt that repeated attempts at interpretation would fragment and hinder effective communication and that the role of the analyst was to sit with and accept what may first be perceived as nonsense. Although I am acutely aware of the problems this provides for education professionals, and of course parents, his advice to stay with what others perceive as nonsense is pertinent. If the parent or teacher continually interrupts the moment of intellectual play, then they disrupt very early thinking and prevent the learner from having a personal encounter with knowledge. The learner may even succumb to social pressures and appear to have understood but this does not represent effective learning and may leave many issues unresolved and not thought about. The advice we get from Winnicott's work is to provide a safe

potential space to learn, but to avoid being hasty and to rush learners into false declarations of understanding before they have resolved the dilemma of knowing/not knowing, and therefore can reach their own deep understanding.

Winnicott's use of the word 'play' can lead to some confusion as, despite his clinical focus on young children and observations of their actual play, he uses this term as a metaphor for the dilemma of resolving the disjuncture between what is known and not known. Infants resolve this through actual play and then as their intellectual capacity develops, play can involve symbols, signs and cognitive structures such as ideas and conceptual knowledge, which can be playfully manipulated. Just as physical play does not always lead to the appropriate answer, neither does intellectual play; the children in Winnicott's spatula game would have held fantasies as to the use of the spatula while also observing the reality of the metal instrument, ultimately the encounter would have 'taught' them that the spatula could be chewed, dropped on the floor and passed to the (m)other or Winnicott. The infant would not have known the possible uses of the spatula and there would have been many mis-uses as the spatula would have been avoided, accidentally dropped and not chewed. Play is not always successful and can lead to frustration and also involves disillusionment as an existing idea has to be given up (Winnicott, 1986). Such difficult feelings will be held by the good enough (m)other whose role is to recognise the activities and rights of the learner and to contain the anxiety of the learning moment - and not to provide the answer. We may all have had the experience of helping someone, infant or adult, and unable to contain their anxiety, we have given in and told them 'the answer', only to be soundly chastised by the learner who wanted to resolve the problem using their own resources. Stepping in like this frustrates the process of education and prevents the learner moving from experience to knowledge. It should be acknowledged that being wrong in play is good, as long as the learner's frustration is held.

Critically, being wrong during play is due to the learner having an experience before this is fully understood; for example the mis-use of the spatula before the infant can grasp what the spatula can be used for. To realise what potential the spatula has, is to negotiate between the worlds of illusion and reality. Bollas (1987) and Coren (1997) describe this as the experience of an object preceding an understanding of the object, the result of which is to initially position the learner in a state of not knowing, which can only be successfully resolved through personal experience, one of playful engagement. Coren (1997) claims that this is where the internal and external worlds interact and 'first thoughts' emerge and that if an answer was simply provided, then the perverse situation of knowing without thinking would have been achieved. Although it may be assumed that knowing alone is sufficient, the problem of knowing without thinking is that the experience has never been fully understood. O'Loughlin (2006) complicates this anomaly by suggesting that the (incomplete) learner will become encased in an identity that is not their own as the move between internal and external worlds is also a move between 'me' and 'not me', where the ability to be creative and fantasise is hampered. This degree of inadequate learning does not only reside within the learner but O'Loughlin (2006) and Pitt (2006) see the potential for this perverse understanding to become unspeakable and that the wounds and rupture of understanding created are capable of being defended and passed down through generations. For those who may enter education professions, the possibility exists for the impact of incomplete learning to be passed on to the learners in their care.

True self, false self and self-esteem

The prospect that the wounds and ruptures caused by incomplete learning could be passed down through generations confirms the relational nature of learning as being a playful interaction within a potential space. From a Winnicottian perspective, early interpersonal relationships offer the possibility for true and false selves to emerge as a result of the search for a satisfying sense of selfhood. Education in its broadest sense, involves the negotiation of the state of 'me'/'not me', knowing/not knowing and the illusory inner and objective external world, which in turn always represent a re-encounter with ourselves. Britzman (2009) suggests that the feeling of getting something right may simply be a transference relationship with knowledge where the existing/old

understanding is tenaciously held onto, in an unconscious attempt to protect the self from an attack that will potentially upset the status quo of what is already 'known'.

This conceptual understanding of the relationship between the learner and knowledge may go some way to explaining the educational conundrum of why learning is difficult and experiences of not knowing are so common. As, throughout the life-span, learners continually re-encounter the dilemma of moving from dependency to a confident and separate 'me', with the appropriate understanding and resources to survive beyond the care of the (m)other/teacher. Winnicott's (1965b) idea of a true self, which represents who the person really is and the false self that is set up to defend the true self from attack, can also be used here to highlight the unconscious processes involved when a learner encounters education. By definition, education provides, in effect, an attack on the self through the continual arrival of new knowledge or experiences. As a result of this, it is most likely that individuals approach education from the position of the false self. Although Winnicott argues that a false self in everyday life has a healthy function to protect the true self, it is nonetheless, likely to hinder learning.

Winnicott's understanding of the true self, forged in a good enough relationship, is one that could take full advantage of education: the true self is inquisitive, curious, spontaneous and has desire, whereas the false self tends towards being compliant, restricted and un-creative. The true self represents the real 'me' which possesses a desire to learn and what Klein (1931) calls an 'epistemological instinct'. Alternatively, the false self is one that avoids the difficulty of learning and the self-doubt this can engender and in an attempt to sanitise learning experiences may present an illusion of knowing, when in reality little is understood. In the clinical setting the false self 'hides' the intended focus of the therapeutic encounter, which is the true self and Winnicott considered that two or three years of therapy were required for the true self to be safely exposed. It should therefore come as no surprise that learners may often over-confidently confirm their new understanding. Additionally, deep understanding may only take place in contexts where relationships are sufficiently established so that the effect of unconscious defences are reduced to allow a true self to be exposed (Bainbridge, 2013).

Only the true self can encounter learning with the authenticity, autonomy and motivation to be prepared to deal with the dilemma of knowing/not knowing, or of course, me/not me. In the context of true and false selves in education Honneth provides a cogent rationale for deep engagement with learning environments. In Honneth's theory of recognition the relations-to-self of self-confidence and self-respect can ultimately lead to self-esteem. From this reflexive position there is a reciprocation of mutual recognition and respect and one is now able to be accepted and have sufficient agency to fully contribute to the wider community (Huttunen and Heikkinen, 2004). The products of Honneth's notion of self-esteem are not dissimilar to those of the true self. The true self is creative, agentic and able to operate with others in a non-compliant and non-defensive manner. Honneth's individual with self-esteem has the requisite sense of identity and selfhood to be a co-operative and useful member of a wider community. Thus the social activity of encountering education in relation with others and developing deep understanding requires relationships that can hold the anxiety of me/not me and to also recognise and honour the activities of the learner. In this sense learning cannot be regarded as a simplistic imbibing of knowledge but rather an existential dilemma of moving from dependency to an agentic individual. As such, each time learning is encountered, we re-connect with the early dilemma of just who we are and might be.

Just as learners re-encounter themselves in the process of education, so also do those who work in education settings. I have described (Bainbridge, 2012) how new education professionals have a transference relationship with the process of education and may repeat earlier patterns during the initial phase of developing a professional practice. Britzman (2009) also notes this phenomenon and questions how professionals can learn from experience in these settings, when the impact of the transference is to bring an infantile past, with its associated thinking and feeling memories, into

the present. Teachers, for example, now enter a territory where the transference impels them to repeat past patterns of behaving and in doing so position themselves as both learners and teachers. This dilemma is not one to be solved by the imposition of 'standards' or government approved teaching methods, but instead by providing those who enter these professions a good enough space to bring their past into the present consequently, to allow a true self to emerge and develop a new professional practice.

Conclusion

It seems that if Winnicott is teaching (no pun intended) us anything, it is that both learners and teachers require safe potential spaces with good enough (m)others, who can hold infantile anxieties of knowing/not knowing and allow playful, curious and creative true selves to approach sites of troubling new knowledge that we recognise as education. Correspondingly, Honneth makes us aware of the nuances of a reflexive relation-to-self that provides a rationale for Winnicott's early interpersonal psychology. Good enough (m)others are able to recognise and acknowledge that the infant is deserving of love which leads to a learner who has the self-confidence to feel as though their efforts are of value. Recognition that learners have autonomy and can participate in playful potential spaces provides self-respect to enable learners to separate and be active agents. Finally, the wider recognition that individuals are valued and contribute to the community provides a learner with a meaningful sense of self that has sufficient self-esteem for a creative and spontaneous true self to encounter learning throughout the lifespan.

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