

Carlotta Castillo Moulder

PowerPoint Slide Notes for WinkWorld

Opening Slide 1:

Play is good for you; play is fun; and most importantly, play is the door to authentic learning. Darwin, Dewey, Elkind, Erickson, Freud, Piaget, Plato, Vygotsky, and Wink, just to name a few, all share an important common belief in the value of play as it relates to learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2010, p. 26). In order to facilitate that play, however, there must first be a sense of community, a feeling of belonging. As Abraham Maslow noted way back in 1954, we all seek to belong to a community (Maslow, 1970, p. 20). “[C]ommunity is not present until members experience feelings of belonging, trust in others, and safety” (Osterman, 2000, p. 323). The purpose of M&Ms is simple, yet powerful. It is a means by which we can strengthen our school community and the sense of belonging that is so necessary for the trust building and feeling of safety that must be in place for learning to occur.

My group’s question focused on the value of community building where individual competition is promoted because of the emphasis on SOL testing which was an outgrowth of our national political emphasis on becoming the world leader in an educated populace. Now we have Race to the Top. At CES, M&Ms seeks to provide an opportunity for students and teaching staff to feel more community affiliation through interaction and semi-structured play. Research into school communities shows that when students feel a sense of belonging and ownership within their school, they are happier and more successful as students. (Osterman, 2000, p. 324)

Slide 2: While reading Critical Pedagogy (Wink, 2005) Moulder happened upon an idea she had often heard her CES Principal describe. Young had been pushing to start something similar to School Families (p. 162) through M&Ms. Putting students in multi-age groups, kindergarten through sixth grade, allows teachers to lead team-building experiences through which students and teachers get to know each other and begin building a community. M&Ms got its name from the candy of the same name in a discussion between Moulder and Young; he mentioned he thought it would be really cool to have each team's color from one in a bag of M&Ms. This rainbow symbolizes and celebrates both our uniqueness as individuals (each color of the rainbow) and sameness (we are all part of the rainbow). M&Ms also stands for Mixers & Minglers and utilized five kindergarten teachers who were asked to lead four 30 minute team-building sessions.

Slide 5: When we play, we step out of our reality into a "higher order" of imaginary thinking that allows us to be however talented, tall, scholarly, creative, immature, or whatever we need. Vygotsky says, "In play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself." Another benefit of play is learning the intrinsic value of an activity. It is in play where we learn "to act in a cognitive, rather than an externally visible realm, relying on internal tendencies and motives, not on incentives supplied by external things" (Vygotsky, 2008). As theorized by Vygotsky, we move from interpersonal to intrapersonal communication and meaning making (Wink & Putney, A Vision of Vygotsky, 2010, p. 66) where learning occurs. "[I]n [this] zone . . . more capable peers are interacting with each other and offering assistance . . . participants are doing today what they are able to do with

assistance from others. They will be able to do this problem solving by themselves later when these ideas and words have become internalized.”

Through the authentic interaction of play, Moulder’s M&Ms are able to, in Vygotsky’s terminology, scaffold and build on funds of knowledge – inherent cultural resources (p. 71) of our school community that illuminate our connection to one another and the group and simultaneously satisfy each child’s need for belonging within that community.

### Findings and Implications

In reviewing the data it does not sound like M&Ms had much, if any impact on the CES’s community building efforts. Anecdotally, there is another story to tell based on the buzz from the administration, mentor teachers, classroom teachers in general and both the participating students and the non-participating students. Discussions among the mentor teachers indicated that those participants who did not have fun were mostly older fifth and sixth graders. **One sixth grader rolled his eyes every time I asked him to pair up with a particular second grader. 6th also responded on the first and second survey that he would not want to do it again. At the end of the third session however, he responded that he would indeed like to continue coming to M&Ms. When I specifically asked him what changed his mind, he responded that he had gotten to know the little second grader and decided he was an “ok kid and would be fun to have as a friend.” That said it all.**

Three 25 minute sessions are not enough time to build trust, establish relationships and feel a sense of community, however it revealed how much the students need and want a program such as this, even if you have to drag them, kicking and screaming to the event. My encounter with the sixth grader who initially was so not interested in staying with this serves as a testament to the notion that all students should participate with the understanding that even when some think they will not enjoy the experience; there is so much to benefit. Lesson learned – all of us, both children and adults should be strongly encouraged to try new things repeatedly.

## M&Ms at Centreville Elementary School

Films, R. L. (Producer), & Abeles, V. H. (Director). (2009). *Race to Nowhere* [Motion Picture].

Centreville Elementary School. (2010, July 26). Retrieved from Fairfax County Public Schools:

[http://schoolprofiles.fcps.edu/schlprfl/f?p=108:13:370923244921985::::PO\\_CURRENT\\_SCHOOL\\_ID:433](http://schoolprofiles.fcps.edu/schlprfl/f?p=108:13:370923244921985::::PO_CURRENT_SCHOOL_ID:433)

Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens* (Digital 2003 ed.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2010). Learning to play, playing to learn. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* , 23 (1), 26 - 50.

Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and Personality* (Third ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Student's need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research* , 70 (3), 323-367.

Pellegrini, A. D., & Smith, P. K. (1998). Physical Activity Play: The Nature and Function of a Neglected Aspect of Play. *Child Development* , 69 (3), 577-598.

Pink, D. H. (2009). *Drive*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Smith, P., & Pellegrini, A. (2008). Learning through play. (R. Tremblay, R. Barr, R. Peters, & M. Boivin, Eds.) *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* , 1-6.

Vygotsky, L. (2008, February 22). [www.marxist.org](http://www.marxist.org). Retrieved from Soviet Psychology: Play: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1933/play.htm>

Wentzel, K. R., & Caldwell, K. (1997). Friendships, Peer Acceptance, and Group Membership: Relations to Academic Achievement in. *Society for Research in Child Development* , 68 (6), 1198 - 1209.

Wink, J. (2005). *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Wink, J., & Putney, L. G. (2010). *A Vision of Vygotsky*. Wink, Joan and Putney, LeAnn and its licensors.