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**Allyship of Teachers and Drama Therapists: How Drama Therapy Can Empower
Educators Restricted by Neoliberalism; A Literature Review**

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Drama Therapy

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Abstract

The philosophy of neoliberalism has made a significant impact on America's public school system, as its principles push for an emphasis on standardized testing and increased evaluation in the classroom and curriculum that will ultimately make a student more marketable in the American workforce. This systemic approach leads to increased stress and anxiety among teachers, students, and school-based drama therapists alike. In this literature review, I investigate the literature on neoliberalism, its impact on teachers and therapy practices, specifically drama therapy, and how educators and therapists may resist this system through pedagogical approaches. I will argue that teachers and school-based drama therapists form allyship in the classroom, wherein the principles of drama therapy lend themselves to pedagogy, in order for teachers to educate beyond the confines of neoliberalist reform and use creative expression to reduce their occupational stress.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Pedagogy, Drama Therapy, Public School

The author identifies as a queer, cisgender, white woman from Baltimore, Maryland of mixed European ancestry.

Allyship of Teachers and Drama Therapists: How Drama Therapy Can Empower Educators Restricted by Neoliberalism; A Literature Review

The first time I considered the idea of embedding drama therapy principles into pedagogy was my senior year of college, during my Senior Acting Seminar course. A classmate had tearfully fled the room after being pushed to her emotional limits during an exercise using the Meisner technique. This response may seem disproportionate for the setting, but I had found that it was not all that uncommon throughout my time in the program. I knew that I would soon go on to study drama therapy (I was just six months from beginning my master's program) and I began to wonder about drama therapy's potential role in the training of actors. The need for increased emotional support in Acting classrooms was evident, and I wondered if using techniques specific to drama therapy may be a helpful way to usher in some of that support. It was then that I decided to write my undergraduate thesis on drama therapy in pedagogy, specifically in a place where dramatic principles would not be entirely foreign: the theatre class.

Three years later, as I considered topics for my graduate thesis, I felt a call back to this focus. I still wondered about drama therapy in pedagogy but was no longer fascinated by specifically collegiate theatre education. I wanted to take a broader look, examining how drama therapy may fit into a more generalized curriculum. Therefore, I chose to look at the American public school system, in grades Kindergarten-12, and how drama therapy might function within its curriculum. In exploring this curriculum, I quickly began to understand just how much the American public school system was impacted by neoliberalism, an economic theory and policy practiced in the United States that seeks to encourage free-market capitalism through a reduction in government spending and a move toward privatizing trade.

A long-time critic of capitalism and neoliberalism, I knew I had several objections to this philosophy's role in the classroom and more specifically its impact on teachers (Dunn, 2018). I began to consider how drama therapy could help teachers themselves, as they work to resist these principles and increase their job satisfaction. Once again, I found myself drawn to pedagogy as the vehicle with which to do so.

My long journey with this idea has led me to construct the argument that drama therapy in the classroom can improve teachers' experience in the classroom by helping them to resist neoliberalist reform in schools. I have conducted a literature review that looks at neoliberalism in schools, drama in education and drama therapy in schools. In this paper I examine three key pillars to this proposition. First, I examine neoliberalism. I will look at its roots and trace its journey to present day America in order to illustrate how it has become embedded in the American public school system, specifically looking at grades Kindergarten-12. I look specifically to its impact on pedagogy, paying attention to both curriculum and teaching styles, before critically reviewing the literature that exists surrounding how this pedagogy effects teachers.

Then I look at how drama has been used in education thus far, paying particular attention to its benefits for American teachers, their ability to teach in creative, process-based ways and their satisfaction with their work. I will then examine the impact of neoliberalism on School-Based Drama Therapists (SBDT). I next look at the impact neoliberalism has on pedagogy, and review literature related to resisting this pedagogy. I go on to examine what has been written of drama therapy in schools, to identify specific principles and practices that could best fit into teaching. I also compare the specific challenges school-based drama therapists face in American schools, in order to note how teacher and drama therapists might align themselves with one

another, to create a more cohesive and creative classroom in environment in the face of neoliberalist reform.

This thesis will serve to review what has already been written and where more research is needed in order to argue for the allyship of teachers and school-based drama therapists through pedagogy. Neoliberalism's policies have impacted American education by placing an emphasis on standardized testing, limiting funds allocated to subjects viewed by neoliberal proponents as 'less valuable', and narrowing curriculum used in the classroom (Weiner, 2012). These practices directly and negatively impact teachers' mental health and job satisfaction, as competitive workplace environments and limited ability to connect with students increases rates of anxiety and depression in teachers (De Lissovoy, 2013; McClean et al., 2017). In 2022, a National Educators Association survey found that 55% of teachers are considering leaving the field earlier than they had initially planned. The survey also found that 90% of teachers attributed their impulse of exodus to the burnout they are experiencing, as they feel strained by the short staffing in schools that causes feelings of isolation, the excess of required paperwork, and the missed connections they feel in interactions students. These rates indicate that the need for change in schools is evident. We must address the needs of these public-school teachers so that they might feel compelled to continue teaching. The principles and practices of school-based drama therapy have been shown to increase creativity and spontaneity, while facilitating the formation of meaningful connections that embrace and account for the intersectional identities of each student (Feldman et al., 2015). In this thesis, I will address this need by arguing that the collaboration of drama therapists and teachers, along with the use of drama therapy practices in pedagogy, may help to improve teachers' job satisfaction and encourage them to continue in the field.

Literature Review

Neoliberalism

The History of Neoliberalism

To begin this literature review, I will first discuss the history and progression of neoliberalism. Emerging from classical liberalism, neoliberalism developed as both a philosophy and practice that emphasizes a free global market and argues for minimal government involvement in economic matters (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism's roots are found in Adam Smith's 1776 book *The Wealth of Nations*, in which he argued for any government assistance in economic matters to be abolished and that the global market be rid of tariffs and trade restrictions. Proponents of a free market believed this to be the best way to develop a self-sustaining nation and emphasized the belief that the individual citizen can further their status and prosperity by working hard and participating in the workforce. This ideology was prevalent in American society throughout the 1800's and 1900's, however the Great Depression shifted the public belief in the lack of government assistance (History.com, 2009).

Following the Great Depression, the U.S. saw increased government measures to assist American citizens, as seen through the funding of public services and institutions such as schools, as well as regulations for workers (Anderson, 1979). While modern liberalism of the mid-20th century sought to address social inequities such as race and economic status through increased government intervention, a return to classical liberalism in the 1970's became known as neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). Once again, the U.S. saw a reduction in government assistance and allowed for trade to continue. Proponents of modern neoliberalism assert that a free market allows for individual freedom (Harvey, 2005). However, critics of this ideology note that it serves to perpetuate the dehumanizing principles of capitalism, increases the wealth gap, and

further the notion that the utmost priority for the individual should be their advancement in the workforce (Giroux, 2005). This brings us to neoliberalism's role in education, and education's role in neoliberalism.

The Impact of Neoliberalism on Teachers

Several neoliberal initiatives have been created throughout the late 20th century and into the 21st century. President George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" act was one such attempt at neoliberal reform in schools, by putting measures in place that aligned with neoliberalism's principle of accountability (Hursh, 2007). "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) was a law passed in 2001 that required states to test students yearly in grades three through eight and once more in high school. Under NCLB, schools that did not make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (2002) were subject to sanctions, including potential shut down or chartering of a school. Charter Schools in the United States are schools that are publicly funded, but independently run, often by corporations (Cannella & Perez, 2010). While initially designed to offer more choice in American education, it has been argued that charter schools perpetuate the market-based ideas of neoliberalism by preying upon parents disillusioned by the deficits in public school education and continuing teaching practices meant to prepare students for the workforce (Saltman, 2007). In regard to teaching, NCLB placed emphasis on assessment, annual reports and targets of achievement in schools. Weiner (2012) notes that this act appealed to the working class because of its claim to increase job opportunities for minority groups. Weiner asserts, however, that this goal veils the true aim of neoliberal reform: to privatize public schooling in order to mold the American workforce. Weiner notes that these government initiatives fail to take a student's circumstances into account when assessing performance.

In 2015, NCLB was replaced by the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA). While ESSA was created to better address criticisms of NCLB, its measures still emphasize standardized testing, rates of academic achievement, and preparation for higher education and careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESSA still adheres to the neoliberal ideal that public schools should utilize tactics that mold children into future members of the workforce, with little room for systemic issues and context (Weiner, 2012).

Neoliberal education reform directly impacts teachers in that their training faces limitations in cultural competency, creativity, and flexibility within the classroom (Apple, 2006). They are often weighed down by the measures in place, as their energy must be directed toward paperwork and standardized testing preparations. Teachers must shape their curriculum and lesson plans around preparing students for the workforce, using curriculum such as Common Core, or literacy and numeracy plans passed down from NCLB (Rodriguez & Magill, 2016). Within this framework, teachers are meant to stick to their script, and never venture beyond their role of creating academic results (Katz, 2008). Studies have indicated that neoliberal reform in schools may impact teachers by reducing their ability to be creative and disenfranchising them by discouraging self-advocacy (Tsang & Qin, 2020). This discouragement to challenge the system creates a sense of internal dissonance among teachers who are teaching their students to self-advocate and strengthen their sense of autonomy (Sonu, 2012). This dissonance can create role confusion, causing teachers to feel disingenuous in their teaching (Webb et al., 2009).

Rates of anxiety and depression have been shown to increase when new teachers transition out of training and into the classroom, with some suggestion that a contributor may be organizational challenges and lack of community due to standardized and competitive environment (McClean et al., 2017). Further, as schools become increasingly business-like,

teachers experience isolation and anxiety related to the competitive nature of their environment (De Lissoyov, 2013). Teachers become disheartened when they find that they must use narrow tactics to educate, as they observe limitations in their student's growth. Some teachers note that this narrow curriculum also limits their ability to create meaningful connections with their students (Fisher-Ari et al., 2022).

The Impact of Neoliberalism on Therapy Practices

Neoliberalism has also had an impact on therapists and therapeutic practices. Some argue that the social inequities created by neoliberalism directly impact one's sense of self, and therefore these challenges will appear in the therapeutic setting (Foster, 2017). Further, therapists themselves may find themselves within systems and agencies that prioritize profit and a business-like approach that can dismantle the personalized nature of psychotherapy and instead prioritize a one-size-fits all approach to treatment (Mentinis, 2013). Sugarman (2015) examined the relationship between psychologists and neoliberalism and found that within psychotherapy there is an emphasis on individualism and self-responsibility, that does not always account for external systems that may be impacting the client. The experience of carrying out neoliberal ideas in the therapeutic setting can result in ethical dilemmas for therapists, as they reckon with the idea of thinking more critically about individualism in practice and the implications of challenging the norm (Lowenthal, 2015). Job security in a neoliberal environment may also be dependent on adhering to the system in place (Grey et al., 2015). Neoliberalism may impact therapists by increasing occupational stress to do with ethical therapeutic approaches and job precarity.

The Impact of Neoliberalism on Drama Therapists

Beyond the impact of neoliberalism upon therapists at large, drama therapists encounter even more specified challenges within the framework. Landers (2012) notes that drama therapy specifically comes into conflict with neoliberalism, as the model seeks to avoid instability, where drama therapy processes often occur within instability. Of the distinct challenges faced by school-based drama therapists in North America, Frydman and Mayor (2021) write

There are several important areas for further clarification as drama therapy practices in the schools continues to be investigated and promoted. These factors include the specific and structured role/s of drama therapy and drama therapists within the school, formalized inclusion in student support teams, consistent opportunities to support both students and staff, funding sources and implementation logistics. (p.10)

School-based Drama Therapists in America have encountered challenges working within a neoliberal school system, finding that several fundamental elements of drama therapy come in direct conflict with principles of neoliberalism. In a 2019 study by Christine Mayor, she investigated the challenges faced by SBDT in the neoliberal school environment, using discussion and arts-based research to better understand the experiences of 18 drama therapists. She found that school-based drama therapists face several challenges within the neoliberal framework, many of which align with the challenges faced by teachers. First, Mayor notes that the competitive nature of this practice creates anxiety around job security. Mayor also found that drama therapists in schools often experience a sense of isolation, heightened by neoliberalism's tendency to pit all members of a classroom against one another. Mayor found that the results-based nature of neoliberalism pushes drama therapists to quickly "fix" students with behavioral or psychological challenges, rather than take the time to explore and work collaboratively with them. It should be noted that a 2020 study by Dean et al. looked a drama therapy program called

The Animation Project that helped to prepare students for the workforce. In this program, role theory is utilized to help students develop their professional persona. This use of drama therapy works in accordance with neoliberalism, rather in resistance of it.

While teachers and school-based drama therapists play roles distinct from one another in the classroom, they encounter several of the same challenges brought about by neoliberal reform. Both drama therapists and teachers experience anxiety related to job precarity, a sense of isolation, a limitation of their role, and overall distress related to the hinderance of creating meaningful connections with students (Mayor 2019; Sonu, 2012; Webb et al., 2009). If they position themselves as allies to one another, teachers may be able to use the principles of drama therapy in pedagogy to creatively resist neoliberal reform in schools and improve their occupational experiences.

Neoliberalism in Pedagogy

In order to suggest how the use of drama therapy in pedagogy may be a method for resisting neoliberalism, it is important to understand what neoliberal curriculum looks like. First, neoliberal curriculum emphasizes testing-based teaching (Au, 2007) meaning that skills of memorization and calculation are prioritized over skills of critical thinking and expansion of ideas (Apple, 2006). Second, neoliberal curriculum emphasizes results-based learning without accommodation, excluding adaptations for students with disabilities (Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012). Third, neoliberal curriculum was narrowed and centralized, as it looks to shape students into marketable members of the workforce, and therefore subjects that are deemed most useful, like math and science, take precedent over subjects such as English and the arts (Apple 2006; Hursh 2008; Ravitch, 2011). Further, civic education is virtually eliminated under neoliberal reform, as students are taught skills designed to make them members of the market, rather than

members of the community (Apple, 2006). Finally, centralized neoliberal curriculum places a subject lens on politics and the economy that favors the market. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012) write that this pedagogical lens impairs political insight and reduces the risk of a student challenging capitalism's status quo.

Freire (2000) argues that neoliberal pedagogy is also marked by an oppressive power dynamic between teachers and students. This occurs because teachers must "deposit" information to their students effectively, making students entirely dependent on their teacher to succeed within this model (Freire, 2000). Research suggests that neoliberal curriculum is designed and adapted to lock students into their current socioeconomic status, by teaching them skills that will help them to succeed within the working class, but not to rise above it. These skills include rote learning, and ability to follow instruction (Vassallo, 2012).

It has also been shown that pedagogy associated with neoliberal reform does a disservice to black people, indigenous people and people of color based on the inequality manufactured by neoliberal practices in schools (Apple, 2001). Research indicates that the one-size-fits all curriculum coupled with the emphasis on individualism fails students of color by disregarding the systemic racism they experience as students and will further experience as members of the workforce (Lipman, 2012). Further, by placing an emphasis on subjects such as technology, math and science, neoliberal practices work to perpetuate a business-centered, capitalist approach by steering students away from social justice reform, community engagement and critical thinking, which further encourages the racial inequities of the capitalist system (Morales-Doyle & Gutstein, 2019; Noguera et al. 2019). The abundance of standardized testing does not assist in achieving equality, as it disregards a student's cultural context, circumstances, and access to resources, creating greater inequality within the school system (Au, 2015). The emphasis on

testing also impacts the amount of funding public schools will receive, meaning that underfunded school districts with a large population of students of color may continue to fall short of testing standards, as they do not have sufficient educational resources (Au, 2015). In 2019, high school drop-out rates were highest among Hispanic and black students, with research indicating that economic disparity, lack of resources, and discouragement within the system may have contributed to these results (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). It should also be noted that bias toward varying English vernacular also hinders students of color (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). In turn, students of color face persistent, unique mental health challenges, due to the additional pressure they experience in working to overcome these obstacles (Alspaugh, 1998).

In 2019 it was reported that the graduation rate for students with disabilities was 67.4%, which is 17.5% lower than the graduation rate at large, meaning that one in three students with disabilities did not graduate on time or at all (National School Boards Association). As previously mentioned, neoliberalism also places students with disabilities at a disadvantage by presenting obstacles to receiving necessary accommodations (Dudley-Marling & Baker, 2012). Romstein (2015) attributes these drop-out rates to the failure by neoliberal practices to adequately fund special education programs in the United States and to provide students with the individualized approaches to learning, while instead preaching inclusivity as a means for pigeonholing students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms.

While the aim of this thesis is to better understand and propose room for improvements among the experience of public-school teachers, it is important to highlight the inequities students experience that are perpetuated by neoliberal practices. Proposing resistance to

neoliberal reform that would allow teachers to create better relationships with their students involves understanding the specifics in which students suffer within this system.

Resistance to Neoliberalism

Resistance to Neoliberalism in Teaching

Before positing creative resistance to neoliberalism through the allyship of drama therapists and teachers, it is important to first note what resistance has looked like for teachers thus far. There are multiple schools of thought about how resistance should occur. Studies have indicated that some teachers see success in working within the system, rather than overtly resisting (Carlone et al., 2010). Webb et al. (2019) wrote of teachers that “perform” the neoliberal pedagogies in one role, giving them the space to resist reform within their classroom. These covert measures allow for the neoliberal results to be produced but make the process or journey to achieve these goals more creative. De Lissovoy (2013), however, argues against the performative nature of working within the system, and instead asserts that educators must overtly resist by encouraging critical thinking and spontaneity in the classroom. Other overt measures of resistance by teachers include developing unionizing practices within schools in order to create cohesion and allyship among teachers, collaborating with students to boycott standardized testing, and utilizing social media to highlight the dehumanizing practices of neoliberal reform (Horn, 2004). A study by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) examined two cases of California teachers who resisted a school district mandate related to an intensive program. Both teachers utilized their guiding professional principles such as creativity, autonomy, and an emphasis on individuality to resist mandated curriculum. Results indicated that their students received high academic marks and produced strong test scores. Their findings determined that resistance occurs based on conflicted professional principles that caused distress. They write, “The two

cases highlighted in this study reveal that these teachers' resistance to their districts' instructional policies was rooted in professional principles, rather than in psychological deficits or a basic reluctance to change." While there is debate within the literature surrounding overt versus covert forms of resistance, research indicates that creativity and autonomy function as strong staples for resistance to neoliberal reform in schools.

Resistance Through Pedagogy

Another approach to resisting neoliberal pedagogy is through the pedagogy itself. Freire (1970a) developed the idea of critical pedagogy as a means for resisting neoliberalism. Critical pedagogy is marked by the facilitation of collaborative dialogue among a teacher and their students that encourages critical thinking and inspires action. Freire (1970) asserts that within critical pedagogy, discussing systemic issues on a deeper level will not suffice and subsequent action must be taken. In pedagogy this may look like educating students on social justice issues, and then encouraging them to volunteer, donate, and take steps in improving the issues they have identified. Critical pedagogy also relies upon a collaborative nature that serves to benefit both students and teachers as they exchange roles and learn from one another (Rule, 2009).

Other models of resistant pedagogy include "activist pedagogy" which educates students on oppression while also working to model an anti-oppressive environment from within the classroom (Preston & Aslett, 2014). Giroux (2005) posits that educators draw their pedagogical approaches from Cultural Studies theorists, teaching the ways in which the global economy and capitalism serve to further marginalize oppressed groups and subdue the working class. Giroux however emphasizes that this cultural competency be coupled with action and advocacy.

Resistance to Neoliberalism in Expressive Arts and Therapy

Expressive Art Therapists across modalities have also worked to resist neoliberal reform (Mayor, 2019). Similar to the Webb et al. (2009) findings that teachers who work within the system were able to resist with greater access to resources by performing some pieces of neoliberalism, Changfoot (2007) highlighted artists who went along with certain neoliberal practices in order to gain access to funding. Grady et al. (2012) presented a study around queer students of color that used the practice of dance to resist and critique reform, while working within it. Through Mayor's 2019 study of school-based drama therapists, she argues that creative resistance can occur while working within the "cracks" of the system. Results of her study indicated ways to creatively resist neoliberal reform in drama therapy. First, participants of her study reported that the use of aesthetic distance to allow students to tell their stories, was useful so that they might feel valued beyond their academic ability. Participants also highlighted the break from testing-based learning that drama therapy provides, the use of embodiment as a different way to process and tell stories, and the relational element of drama therapy as ways of challenging the environment created by Neoliberal reform.

While not all resistance efforts within the creative arts therapy and drama therapy communities overtly note neoliberalism as an oppressor, several efforts have been made to resist dominant structures within these communities. As Hadley (2013) notes, the westernized, white, patriarchal society in America influences creative arts therapists' own perspectives and therefore a constant examination not only of client and therapist identities, but also of power structures that emerge in art therapy, is an important way to think critically about dominant structures in creative arts therapy. Sajnani (2013) analyzes an intersectional approach to therapeutic performance research and found that the use of this approach can help drama therapists to resist dominant white, western narratives that pervade the current research. Yi (2018) offers measures

for art therapists to take a social justice approach in their work with people with disabilities. Yi offers snapshots of experiences in which art therapy intersected community engagement and allowed for clients to practice self-advocacy and self-expression. These experiences, Yi asserts, indicate that a dismantling of ableism in art therapy must involve a greater focus on connecting and collaborating with the disabled community, rather than playing the role of ‘expert’ and perpetuating a narrative that centralizes the limitations of people with disabilities, rather than focusing on their strengths.

Other forms of resistance against dominant structures in drama therapy look to therapeutic theater and performance. Cameron Wade (2020) created a musical comedy performance marking and exploring her experience of sexual assault and harassment from within the drama therapy community and found that the exploration helped her to process and begin healing from her traumas, particularly by working within the drama therapeutic principles of aesthetic distance and witnessing.

Research indicates that resistance against dominant structures can occur through several practices and approaches including aesthetic distance, embodiment, and performance (Mayor, 2019; Sajjani, 2013). These acts of resistance within the community can lend themselves to ideas of resistance to neoliberal structures for teachers and within pedagogy. In looking to neoliberalism and the use of its principles in schools, research indicates that the high-stakes testing, underfunding of particular subjects, and failure to accommodate for students with various needs creates a stressful and competitive environment for students and teachers alike. For teachers, this can lead to occupational stress and eventual resignation. Research indicates that teachers can resist neoliberal reform through pedagogy by working from within classroom

structures and creatively adapting pedagogy to encourage skills that are often neglected by neoliberal practices.

Drama in American Education

While research on the use of drama therapy within pedagogy has not yet been done, the use of drama within pedagogy has a long history. Formalized drama in education saw its roots in 20th century Britain when child-centered curriculum took precedent (Water et al., 2015). In the 1950's and 1960's Peter Slade published several works related to the use of drama in education (O'Hara, 1984). Slade posited that children had within them a sense of drama that could and should be used as they develop. Beyond Slade's work, the use of dramatic and theatrical principles has appeared in several iterations throughout the 20th and 21st century. Proponents for the use of drama in education argue that drama's emphasis on play encourages health neurological development (O'Hara, 1984; O'Toole, 2013).

Further, drama in education helps teachers to engage students creatively, teaching them to improvise, socialize, problem solve and safely express emotion (Ward, 1957). Bates (2007) wrote specifically about how drama in education may benefit teachers and help to resist neoliberal reform by encouraging critical thinking, empowering students to advocate for themselves, and emphasize learning through process rather than product. Studies have indicated that drama can be used to teach foreign languages through the use of vocal warm-ups and speech techniques (Wessells, 1987) as well as through the use of distancing and story to increase multicultural competency (Holden, 1982). Beyond the benefits of facilitating learning, the use of drama in the classroom creates socioemotional benefits for students that directly impact teachers. Studies have shown that the use of drama in the classroom creates a positive environment that

supports students' emotional needs (Catteral, 2007). This support can help to address teachers' concerns related to the dehumanizing nature of neoliberal reform.

School-Based Drama Therapy

I will now look to how drama therapy has already been used in schools in order to understand how drama therapy techniques could function in teaching. There are several approaches and models for school-based drama therapy. The ENACT model has been used in New York City schools for more than 20 years. ENACT involves the collaboration of drama therapists and teaching artists who lead workshops with students of all ages (Cohorst et al., 2021). ENACT's method is based on creating a container within which students express their emotions and problem solve. The ENACT method involves placing students in scenes that are relevant to their own circumstances and working to find a solution to the conflict within the scene.

It is also important to note the use of Theater of the Oppressed within schools. Developed out of Paulo Friere's early work, Augusto Boal created Theatre of the Oppressed as a means to critique dominant and oppressive structures through devised and improvisational forms of theater (Boal, 2003). In schools, Boal's approach can be used to engage in dialogue around the oppressive structures that may appear, such as bullying, systemic racism, and socioeconomic inequities (Bhukhanwala, 2007). In schools, several of Boal's approaches are used such as Image Theater, Forum Theater, and encounters involving witnessing and rehearsing circumstances that may occur in a student's real life (Bhukhanwala, 2007).

Another approach to school-based drama therapy is what was formerly known as the Animating Learning by Integrating and Validating Experience (ALIVE) program and is now known as the Miss Kendra program. It is a trauma informed, preventative approach in which

play is used in the classroom to examine traumatic situations that students may experience in the future (Sanjani et al., 2019). Creative Alternatives of New York (CANY) is another model that was developed in New York but is now used throughout the country. CANY utilizes metaphor and role to facilitate group process and promote mental well-being (Sanjani et al., 2019). Mayor and Frydman (2019) report that Developmental Transformations (DvT) is most commonly used form by school-based drama therapists. DvT involves the use of improvisational dramatic encounters in order to help clients learn to cope with instability and help children to cope with stressors (Pitre et al., 2016).

Other approaches to SBDT include The Animation Project (TAP) which utilized digital storytelling in order to address mental health concerns of adolescents (Dean et al., 2019). Beyond specific models and approaches, Mayor and Frydman's 2019 study sought to examine SBDT by looking at drama therapy's core processes. Among the most utilized core processes were Life-Drama Connection and Role, however the researchers found that many core processes of drama therapy overlap when used in schools, regardless of approach. Overall, there are a variety of ways that SBDT is used, and the socioemotional benefits (which I will explore in the next section) are plenty.

The Impact of SBDT

I will now look at the impact of SBDT and identify areas in which the benefits of SBDT may align with creative resistance to neoliberal reform. As previously noted, the ENACT model serves to benefit students by improving insight and interpersonal relationship. A 2019 study by Burch et al. on a school that utilized the ENACT model in creating a piece of therapeutic theater found that the process of developing the piece led to improved socialization skills, a positive shift in behavior and an increase in resilience. Further, ENACT has developed and adjusted over

time to best address the needs of the students they are serving and gain a better understanding of students' cultural contexts and circumstances (Feldman et al., 2015). These benefits could serve to create a more well-rounded classroom environment in which teachers could form more meaningful connections with their students and reduce feelings of isolation among students and teachers.

A Rousseau et al. (2007) study looked at the use of drama therapy in schools over a 9-week period with immigrant and refugee adolescents. The study found that the use of SBDT did help the students to adjust to their new environments by decreasing symptoms of emotional and behavioral challenges. Another Rousseau et al. study from 2008 once again examined the use of SBDT and its impact on immigrant students who were experiencing language difficulties and academic delays. Results of the study indicated that the SBDT program increased the participants self-esteem and that they felt empowered by the ability to tell their stories. The empowerment of students may help teachers' distress as related to the struggles they experience in empowering their students within neoliberal reform. Further, drama therapy's principles allow for marginalized students to experience inclusion and a sense of community.

SBDT has been shown to improve the experience of students with disabilities (Geiger et al., 2020), students with ADHD (Keiani & Raesi, 2022), and students of color (McAdam & Davis, 2019). This inclusivity and empowerment of marginalized groups could help teachers to resist neoliberal reform by creating positive classroom communities and connecting further with their students. Further, the Geiger et al. (2020) study, which examined the impact of drama therapy on students with intellectual disabilities, found that one result of the study was an improved relationship between students and authority figures. A study by Frydman and Pitre (2019) examined the use of DvT as a means of reducing occupational stress in teachers. The case

study found that the use of DvT can be helpful in allowing teachers to engage and cope with their stressors. The use of DvT in pedagogy, therefore, may provide teachers with the ability to creatively address the elements of neoliberal reform that challenge them. Overall, SBDT yields results that could be beneficial in reducing occupational anxiety and stress in teachers by utilizing creativity, fostering more meaningful connections with students, and reducing role dissonance.

In reviewing the literature surrounding neoliberalism, it is clear that teachers are hindered and discouraged by neoliberal reform in schools. Research indicates that this job dissatisfaction can be correlated with the emphasis on high-stakes testing, the narrowed curriculum, and the inability to fully connect with and understand students under neoliberal practices. Further, the systemic racism and ableism endured by students indicates a need for alternative approaches to pedagogy within the American public school system. The literature surrounding school-based drama therapists reflected similar struggles related to the principles of neoliberalism and how they conflict with drama therapeutic principles. However, efforts of resistance have been seen among teachers, therapists and the creative arts therapy community. Research related to resistance of neoliberal reform points to the principles of drama therapy as a means of resistance that can lend itself to pedagogy and assist teachers in their own form of resistance.

Discussion

Drama therapists can offer teachers several of their principles and interventions and support them through incorporating them into their classroom. In pedagogy, drama therapists can collaborate with teachers in order to help them resist neoliberal reform from within the system (Freire, 1970; Mayor, 2019). By working in collaboration, teachers may experience a decrease in feelings of isolation (Horn, 2004). By aligning themselves with drama therapists, feelings of

competition among school personnel may decrease (Mayor, 2019). By using elements of drama therapy, teachers may be able to form more meaningful connections with their students (Sajani, 2014). By utilizing role to work within the system, teachers may experience less anxiety related to job precarity (Frydman & Mayor, 2021).

I will now examine what specific principles of drama therapy can be incorporated into the classroom and how they can be used. It is first important to note that I am not suggesting that teachers take on the role of therapist, as the use of therapeutic interventions alone would be beyond a teacher's scope of practice and area of expertise. I am instead suggesting that SBDT and teachers work together, designing interventions that can be incorporated into teaching and then implementing the practices with both professionals present. Blatner (2006) suggests that drama therapeutic principles can be utilized in educational settings for goals related to learning and classroom functioning by increasing empathy, cultivating creativity, and broadening students' perspective.

As noted earlier, Frydman and Mayor (2019) found that life-drama connection was the core principle that SBDT reported using most often in their work. In classrooms, teachers and drama therapists might utilize life drama connection to teach students skills that move beyond the narrow ones they are taught in standardized curriculum. By staging dramas that relate to or parallel potential challenges for students, they would be better equipped to problem solve and think creatively in the real world (Sanjani et al., 2018). Teachers and SBDT might also use the ENACT model to create a container within which students could explore dilemmas of morality, politics, oppression, and more in a safe space (Sanjani et al., 2018). This would encourage a collaborative community in the classroom and may increase meaningful connections and experiences between students, teachers, and drama therapists. Principles of the Miss Kendra

program may also be utilized as drama therapists and teachers work with students to encounter potential future challenges in the playspace. Of all three models (CANY, Miss Kendra, and ENACT), Sanjani et al. (2018) writes

All three approaches highlight the importance of curiosity and interest in student experiences of harm and survival, rather than beginning from a place of blaming students for ‘bad behaviour’ or pathologizing their experience. This curiosity relocates behaviour as the natural reaction of what has or is happening in students’ lives. (p. 39)

As previously mentioned, teachers partially attribute their lack of job satisfaction to the moral oppositions they hold toward curriculum that dehumanizes students. Teacher’s report feeling conflicted about telling their students to advocate for themselves while invoking pedagogy that silences both parties (Friere, 2000). One principle of drama therapy that might address this is the use of role. Role explorations can occur through creating distance, in which a student might embody a character going through a situation that parallels their own. This use of metaphor may empower students to approach problems in ways they may not have previously tried. Role reversal may also be used between teacher and student to explore problems that arise around power dynamics in neoliberal schooling.

Elements of DvT may also be beneficial within pedagogy, as DvT’s emphasis on embodied encounter and instability may teach skills of thinking on one’s feet, coping with instability and addressing stressors (Frydman & Mayor, 2021). For example, if a student is overwhelmed by their schoolwork, is resistant to a particular subject, or is struggling to engage in school, short-form DvT sessions might help the student to encounter their stressors and express their feelings in a safe way. Use of embodiment may help teach regulation and focus in the classroom, as embodied interventions help students to become attuned their bodies (Emunah,

2021). For example, sensory explorations may be used when teaching subjects that bring about physical sensations of anxiety. If students are provided ways to self-regulate during difficult subjects, learning may be improved, and a more positive teaching experience can be created. Embodied interventions may also include mirroring exercises, games, and tableaux (Frydman & Mayor, 2021).

The use of story and embodiment can also offer a way to teach material. For example, history lessons taught through the enactment of events or tableaux allow another opportunity for collaboration between students and teachers, offer a creative approach to learning, and facilitates classroom connection (Sanjani, 2014).

In discussing the increase in job satisfaction among teachers, it is important to note that a lack of cultural competency in the classroom is chief among complaints of teachers looking to reincorporate humanitarian ideals into their pedagogies (Apple, 2006). Principles of the ENACT program as well as the CANY model assert that cultural competency, an understanding of a student's full context, and a sensitive approach can be applied to classroom drama therapy as well (Sanjani, 2018).

Teacher Support through Drama Therapy

While one piece of improving teacher's job satisfaction was the collaboration of teachers and drama therapists to implement drama therapy into pedagogy, a second piece of my proposal refers to exploration between the drama therapist and teacher related to emotional challenges the teacher may face. I propose that the drama therapist and teacher also use drama therapy separately as well. While SBDT typically explores student experience, some drama therapists will also work with teachers (Frydman & Mayor, 2021). The drama therapist and teacher may utilize drama therapy techniques in exploring their relationship to neo-liberal reform. As Pitre

and Frydman (2019) assert, the use of DvT with teachers helped to decrease occupational stress by encountering their stressors in the playspace. The challenges listed earlier related to feelings of isolation, identity dissonance, limitations in role, and a lack of joy when teaching could be encountered and processed through the use of DvT.

Role may also be useful to teachers and drama therapists coping with neoliberal reform. While teachers report feeling limited in their roles, SBDT report experiences of playing several roles all at once and ultimately being spread thin. Role explorations may help teachers to expand their role repertoire in creative ways, while also increasing empathy for the drama therapist.

Life-drama connection may also be used in approaching the exploration of teacher's feelings, challenges, and stressors. As Frydman and Mayor (2021) report, life-drama connection was used by one participant of their study as a means for finding solutions to professional challenges, such as addressing behavioral difficulties of students and identify their own stressors. Additional work between drama therapists and teachers can help to address teachers' needs in the face of neoliberal reform by creating cohesion among the differing classroom roles, reducing the feeling of isolation, and decrease stress related to results-based teaching.

Limitations and Counterarguments

It is important to note that this review placed its focus on the American public school system, grades Kindergarten-12 and neoliberalism's role and impact on the personnel of that setting. Greater discourse exists beyond public education, with criticisms and analyses on the impact of neo-liberal reform in collegiate settings. It should also be noted that my focus in this thesis was limited to drama therapy's potential role in pedagogy to counter the effects of neoliberalism. Beyond this scope, there is literature on the use of drama in theories of learning that I did not address in this review.

Another limitation of this study exists in looking to the nature of my proposal at large. While this thesis touches on several concepts such as neoliberalism, its impact on American education, forms of pedagogical resistance, use of dramatic principles in pedagogy, forms of resistance within the creative arts therapy field and the use of drama therapy in schools, each of these areas contain a wide array of research that I have streamlined for the purposes of my argument.

Further, I understand that my proposal asks more of educators within the American public school system, by proposing means of resistance and offering the opportunity for continued efforts to counter the impact of neoliberalism. This writer wants to acknowledge the service of these teachers and the effort that is already evident in their work despite the challenging conditions created by neoliberal reform.

One potential counterargument to this review is my proposal that drama therapy be used within pedagogy, while still arguing that teachers meet some neoliberal classroom expectations. While my beliefs personally align with those of De Lissovoy (2013), who fundamentally disagrees with covert tactics of resistance, one goal of this review was to propose a method for decreasing anxiety related to job precarity in teachers. My argument sought to balance resistance while also mitigating teachers' persistent fear that they will be fired for doing so. Further research could seek to better understand how this pedagogical approach may be made more overt without the fear of job loss impeding it.

Conclusion

Neoliberalism is an economic ideology and practice that has permeated nearly every aspect of American society. Its influence on the American public school system in grades Kindergarten-12 has manifested through a narrowing of curriculum, increased standardized

testing, shifts in government funding based on performance, and the creation of a competitive school environment that mirrors the free global market, and works to train children to join the American workforce. Measures and restrictions related to neoliberalism have led to the increased dissatisfaction of teachers who report feeling isolated in their school community, suffocated by limited curriculum, and distressed at the dehumanization of their students.

School-based drama therapists have encountered similar challenges in working within the neoliberal framework, facing expectations of immediate, overt results, and feeling pitted against other school personnel. In reviewing the literature around resistance to neoliberal pedagogy, the use of drama in schools, and the use of drama therapy in schools, I have concluded that the allyship and collaboration of school-based drama therapists and teachers may serve to address and mitigate challenges of neoliberalism faced by teachers. In my two-pronged proposal, I posit that drama therapy principles and school-based drama therapy approaches be integrated into teaching curriculum in such a way that encourages critical thinking, problem solving skills, and cultural competencies that address teachers' concerns with neoliberal school reform. Second, I propose that teachers work separately with drama therapists to address their emotional needs, therefore decreasing their sense of isolation and increasing their sense of allyship.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

**Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Drama Therapy, MA**

Student's Name: Madelyn Dominiski

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: Allyship of Teachers and Drama Therapists: How Drama Therapy Can Empower Educators Restricted by Neoliberalism; A Literature Review

Date of Graduation: _____ **May 21st, 2022** _____

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Angelle V. Cook, PhD, RDT/BCT E-Signature 5/3/2021 3:15 pm EST