The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
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**The Discipline of Silence: Children’s Bodies as Public Space**

I am a mother to two children, one eleven-year old boy in sixth grade and one nine-year old girl in the fourth grade. Their adventures through public school have been inspirational in this research, and have taken me to my seat of interest concerning the analysis and discussion of public school curriculum. It would be too simple to say “public school curriculum” as this is a vine of direction, control, pedagogy and power. Public schools, unarguably, are epicenters for cultural development – they are the houses of normalcy, the fortresses of socialization for people ages five-six to seventeen-eighteen. That being said, while there are several components that shape young people through the many curricula of a public school, the shaping of sexualities, the instruction of identity and the various forms of moral imposition concerning sex and bodies are of particular interest to me. To be even more specific, the human health curriculum and the sexual abuse prevention curriculum – and the texts that define, organize and inform the body.

There is a lot going into this, of course – and for the sake of time, one specifically interesting concept in the human health instruction, coupled with the sexual abuse prevention strategies and languages for children in public schools, is body space. According to the curricula, when does a child’s body belong to them? When is their voice important? I do not remember empowering conversations in my elementary or secondary public school experience. A whole system devoted to listening to children instead of speaking for them? No way. I began to realize through my investigations that the curricular body of a child is very much public property. Allow me to explain.

Quite simply, the health curriculum does not address the reproductive system, the urinary system, or the endocrine system with its students until they are about ten, or in the fifth grade. So, at least according to the policy, children do not have penises, vaginas, scrotums, bladders, specific hormones or social experiences until they are ten. What does this imply? They are not completely, curricularly embodied until they have been through the health lessons developed for kindergarten, first, second, third and fourth grades; in the meantime, they exist within their bodies everyday, experiencing them everyday – living the body whole. Why is that information kept from them?

The sexual abuse prevention curriculum refers ambiguously to the penis, vagina, breasts and “bottom” as “private parts” from kindergarten until fifth grade, not obviously in conversation, but perhaps there is more going on here than meets the eye or the ear. Aside from the blatant absence of information for children, they are instructed with such
smoky methods that their bodies, dissected, seem to become even more the property of their parents, property of the school and subsequently property of the state. Are childrens’ bodies public spaces of control and power – when both the “private part” and the public body become disciplined in the curriculum? When does the body of the child belong to the child?