**Introduction**

Maureen Ford’s article is a rather complex and information dense exploration on the meanings of power within the norms of education and society. In her article, *Unveiling Technologies of Power in Classroom Organization Practice,* Power is “defined as the force teachers have to compel student compliance and it is declared legitimate to the extent that it is based on (natural) authority”(Ford, 2003). The main metaphor draws on the idea of panopticism. Through the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault’s analysis of panopticism (discipline), docility, and normalization, Maureen Ford draws parallels between schools and jail.

Panopticism can be viewed as “isolating visibility” by using power subtly in the organization of space, time, signal and activity, rather than a direct use of control. A Jail or traditional teacher-directed classroom may use isolation (organization of jail cells or  seating arrangements), the gaze (watch towers or the teacher's desk placement), and self- surveillance (a meta-view that good behaviors are self-disciplinary powers of normalization thus it is a decision to appease the system).

Foucault’s uses this model to create the docile body; someone that obeys the rules to avoid discipline or correction thus they are . The article also fixates on the idea of subjectification, essential it is the processes of normalization. This means that teachers use praise, influence, force, reward or punishment to make students comply with their request and commands. In this framework, visibility is trap and docile bodies are forms of teacher domination.

**Problems**

The main points are that all social interactions have consequences thus the way teachers orientate a classroom may in fact perpetuate a deeper problem of power, and domination. Maureen warns that the continued use of disciple, docility and normalization will harm students as teachers will mark and target the “other”. Being visible means that there needs to be acts of correction. The “big picture” is that teachers watch over students and teachers are watched over by administration and administrations are being watched by governing bodies.

Panopticism is a positive feedback loop that will enviably lead to normalization of “the other” until the vast majority of a population become docile bodies conforming to the social norms. This is a rather pessimistic lens in which readers view teacher and student power relationships based on seating arrangements.

Interesting observations noted by the article include critiques on documentation as a technology for teachers to target and mark dysfunctional students. Another tool for creating visibility. “The normalizing force of educational decisions hidden in the structure of report cards, standardized testing, and school accountability”(Ford, 2003) measures allows for noted diagnosis and corrections of students throughout their whole educational experience. Documentation allows for prolong conformed treatment and intern dominance of “the other”.

Another problem noted was the misinterpretation of resistance from students. The “space between surveillance and the evasion of surveillance can be often mis-read by teachers, parents, and community leaders” (Ford, 2003) as they locate the apparent trouble yet completely disregard the cries for help in terms of meeting the needs of the students. The example in the article revolves around the idea of “gothic” type students who try to intimidate the “gaze” of teachers and students alike.

Within the framework of panopticism, the “process of helping children to become skilled, disciplined, educated people, (the education system) can actually reduce their capacity to recognize the systems of thought through which we make the world intelligible and ourselves governable” (Ford, 2003).

**Solutions**

The points brought up in the article to avoid the isolation and separation of student from teacher relies on the ideals of the open-concept student centered classrooms in which students are part of their own learning. The materials and subject matter of the classroom are openly interpreted within the interests of each student. In terms of classroom organization, the article talks about having grouped desks to avoid the feelings of isolation and allowing for observations by teachers, parents and principles. The idea is for a more natural dividing process in which social communications dictate the organization of the class which means the power struggle is less noticeable.

Teachers understanding of power and the question of his or her decisions will be the ultimate deciding factor within the challenging the Panopticism framework. Normalization does occur in the student centered approach to learning but they are more subtle and covert. T Educators should critique their own involvements within power struggles. The author offers the idea of viewing student and teacher power relation as evolving from a top down hierarchy into a progressive tug-o-war relationship in which involvement of students allows for social growth.

**Discussion**

The article *Unveiling Technologies of Power in Classroom Organization Practice* by Maureen Ford tries to thread the needle between oppression from overarching power struggles and anarchy within a classroom setting. There are point’s good points that question the system in which a teacher must navigate. As a whole there are philosophical perspectives that unearth the hidden agenda and systems that set up certain students for failure. Do the ways teachers arrange students oppress them in a jail like method to correct the insubordinate student? The answer is yes because panopticism is a critic of society, and religion in general as someone is always watching someone but Maureen Ford avoids these topics thus her article lacks a real answer for the problem she is describing.

The description of classroom organizations as agents of power is apparent. The author tries to draw two different pictures in which a grid system seating arrangement is suppose to be the traditional type of education and the grouping of desks is supposed to represent the new and improved way of distributing power towards the students. This is a problem as the purpose of group or separating students is an essential tool for classroom management.  In this sense, the teacher is still the one who makes the call in terms classroom orientation.

The similes drawn by the author tended to victimize the students as well as the prisoners in terms of placement within their jails. There are undeniable similarities as schools aim to educate, while jails aim to re-educate and rehabilitate inmates. The practical power idea is an interesting but flawed metaphor. Jail involves convicts who have committed a crime. The article avoids mentioning the roles in which students have within their own education and autonomy. They are allowed to take advantage of the opportunities in which school offers yet they are punished if they are not?

This article assumes that students are free thinking adults. For students, teachers offer opportunities to grow but it is the student’s option to follow along. The one question about power, which was avoided, is on the teacher’s role. It is a teacher’s job is to persuade students towards higher learning and self-improvement. In terms of power hungry methods that target misbehaviors, one may view this as an effective and practical way to benefit the classroom as suppression of one student may benefit the vast majority. This is a moral question as teachers may question their own practices.

Maureen Ford tries to emphasis her “correct” use of power through a simple metaphor with the analogy of a charades game in which the player doing the motion and movements is as important as the people who receive the signals and messages. One may see this as a simple answer to her very complex and strong use of panopticism. She gives a very pessimistic direct comparison of school and jail organization methods and ultimately, the answer to her problem is essentially, “It takes two to tango”.  She is informally saying that both parties involved in power are responsible for it. Again, this article assumes the students are naturally cooperating docile bodies.

Another critique is on the idea of “traditional” teacher centered setups versus “open-concept” classrooms. This dialectic offers no grey area in terms of the organization with in a classroom setting. Either it is an oppressive power for teacher to enact their will or it is an inclusive learning area in which students can be involved and not feel targeted. On the same note the word traditional has the connotation that it is habitually done in the past meaning that it is a dying art. There are no more evolutions in tradition as they are practice from a past time.

In this two way thinking then the “open concept” classroom is the ever changing modern interpretation meaning that tradition is fading as the new way of thinking will eventually become the dominate force.

The Idea of open concept classrooms in which the seating arrangement is the key factor in social and power interactions between teacher and student is mostly applicable to elementary and middle school settings as students need this type of organizations. The social interactions may be very different for younger students as the questions on authority are not yet realized through active resistance. Teachers are view as role models and mediators of activities and inevitably controlling of laws and interactions.

One may see view “traditional” grid style classroom as an essential part of education especially in secondary and higher levels of educations as there is no fading or substitution to self-regulated learning. In this same breath, the use of “traditional” style seating maybe an intentional tool for teachers to further prepared his or her students for the panopticism world we live in. The picture drawn by Maureen Ford is rather bleak.

Ultimately there should be a time and place where teachers need to be the authority figure and times when they can subtly control grouping and open discussions. Without all the meta-analysis the same goals are achieved with altered methods. The sense of individuality maybe created but in terms of power, it remains that the teacher is in charge. The idea in which the teachers are in a game to appease their superiors may be a reality within a flaw system.

Panopticism is a very pessimistic view of the whole and “life” within the “rat race” of social conformity. And in terms of critiquing power relationships, the framework offered by Ford’s arguments lack a sense of practical use in the classroom in terms of organization but the strengths lie within the bigger question being asked. One may view nothing wrong with the idea of a “traditional” style classroom who punishes the students who do not conform since the classroom is a place of education and social interactions have consequence not just in academics but in behavioral repercussions. Can teacher critique themselves thus allowing for better leaning environment that has more meaning.

Ford, M. (2003). Unveiling Technologies of Power in Classroom Organization Practice. Educational foundations, 17(2), 5-27.