Life in Inclusive Classrooms: Storytelling with Disability Studies in Education

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Introduction

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Table of Contents

Alba Somoza , Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas, 36' x 48", 2014

Disability Studies in Education: Storying Our Way to Inclusion

Joseph Michael Valente and Scot Danforth

This issue of the Occasional Papers Series aims to draw attention to the use of storytelling as a medium for provoking dialogue about inclusive classrooms and school communities. It offers readers stories of classroom life that provide insights into understanding the complexities that make up the lives of children with disabilities, their families, and teachers.

Scholarship on inclusion is often disconnected from the lived experiences of those it intends to describe. Far too often discussions about the education of children with disabilities is informed by deficit perspectives. And much of the scholarship on children with disabilities has revolved around debates about competing, one-size-fits-all inclusion paradigms. Both these perspectives ignore the many promising inclusive classroom pedagogies and practices being used in classrooms today. Stories from real classrooms are drowned out or undervalued by larger scholarly discussions. What seems to get lost are the multiple ways teachers and teacher-educators are already implementing innovative inclusion practices.

What is inclusion? Why the Urgency?

The use of the term "inclusion" or "inclusion education" has become so commonplace that it is often conflated with what in years past we would have called "mainstream" or "integration" approaches to education. Two key features that distinguish inclusion from earlier and lesser approaches is the commitment to school/community transformations and to collectivist strategies of difference and schooling. Mainstreaming and integration, although frequently described as "inclusion," involve merely individual placements of disabled students into general education classrooms. These timid, often contradictory approaches to inclusion prioritize the maintenance of the customary routines and structures of general education while placing primary responsibility for the success of the placement on the shoulders of the individual student. Significant reform of classroom procedures, pedagogy, or organizational structures are thus avoided (Danforth & Jones, 2015; Slee, 2011; Waitoller & King, 2015; Boldt & Valente, 2016).

By contrast, what Ferguson (1995) and Thompson (2015) describe as "genuine inclusion" involves serious reform of the curriculum and teaching in general classrooms as well as the organizational processes of the school. Inclusion isn't a one-off, fragile arrangement that may return to a default segregation position at any moment. General educators, special educators, and administrators, support professionals, students, and parents unify in active commitments to developing and maintaining classrooms and schools that support all students and value the biological and cultural diversity of the school community. As the narratives in *Life in Inclusive Classrooms* will demonstrate, pursuing the fuller, more genuine version of inclusion is no easy task. Even making a lesser commitment to integration arrangements effective is challenging.

One reason that conversations about inclusion in the United States are complicated is because inclusion is not a requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). One could say that the federal law is quite ambivalent about the status of disabled students in American schools. At the heart of IDEA is the requirement that children with disabilities be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE). It is the highly flexible LRE provision that gives rise to endless interpretations and misinterpretations of what, in fact, amounts to the LRE for each child and how to put it into practice (Waitoller & King, 2015).

More than ever, there is an urgent need for dialogue about inclusion and the implementation of inclusive classroom practices. Recent Office of Civil Rights reports (2012, 2014) show that young children with disabilities and minority students experience much higher rates of abuse, mechanical and physical restraints, seclusion, suspensions, expulsions, and in-school arrests than their white, able-bodied peers (Boldt & Valente, 2014). For teachers and teacher-educators, dialogue about more respectful and equitable practices is an integral part of the inclusion process.

What is Disability Studies in Education?

To help promote this dialogue and to address shortcomings in inclusive scholarship, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) developed the tradition of using storytelling in research. Based on personal and collaborative narratives, the goal of DSE is to give life to stories of exclusion as well as to stories of successful inclusive classrooms. DSE is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that includes scholars in the sciences, humanities, and arts. Early DSE scholars, led by Susan Gabel, Linda Ware (a contributor to this issue), Scot Danforth (co-editor of this issue), and colleagues

asked questions such as: Why should a person with a disability, a teacher, or a parent care what academics say in their research and writings? Why should they care about the seemingly distant and esoteric writings in research journals and university textbooks? What is happening in these worlds that makes a difference? (Connor, 2014)

The DSE tradition of research based on the personal and collaborative narratives of informants originated from criticisms that the mainstream education and special education research were de-emotionalized, depoliticized, and disconnected from the immediate realities and complexities of the lives of children, parents, and teachers. Scholarship that privileges storytelling offers counter-narratives that disrupt mainstream, ableist accounts of what disability means (e.g., Valente, 2011; Smith, 2013).

The storytelling tradition, in DSE as well as the DSE interdisciplinary lens, offer the larger fields of education and special education a unique take on contemporary schooling for children with disabilities. *Life in Inclusive Classrooms* brings together storytelling scholars to show how disability, inclusion, and exclusion feel inside inclusive classrooms in order to effect change in teaching beliefs and practices.

Nine (Classroom) Lives

The nine contributions to this issue include lived narratives and analyses presented from a wide range of useful subject positions: parents, general and special education teachers, researchers, advocates, siblings, and persons who are themselves disabled.

The opening essay by Diane Linder Berman and David J. Connor, (Eclipsing Expectations: How A 3rd Grader Set His Own Goals (And Taught Us All How to Listen), kicks off with a description of an illuminating journey through the eyes of a parent, Diane, who wanted a more inclusive experience for her son Benny. For Diane and Benny, this meant becoming meaningful participants not only in Benny's own classroom community but in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings that determined his educational goals. David uses a DSE framework to analyze and highlight the importance of context, as opposed to focusing on the disability condition, in enacting inclusionary practices. The authors argue for an "adhocratic" model of education that views children, educators, and parents as allies.

In "Teaching Stories: Inclusion/exclusion and Disability Studies," Linda Ware and Natalie Wheeler-Hatz describe an exceptional collaboration between a university teacher-educator, Linda, and a public school teacher, Natalie. Together they develop a "Teaching Stories" in-service workshop for Natalie's

colleagues to learn about disability studies, as well as a curriculum for her fifth grade class. Teaching Stories participants engage in self-reflection to examine personal biases about disability, use media to critically review representations of disability, and learn how to harness the potential of young adult literature to provide illustrative, non-deficit perspectives on disabilities.

Louis Olander, an Iraqi war veteran and special education teacher in New York City, crafts a powerful story about his experiences coming to terms with a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and navigating the quandaries and everyday realities of what he terms "quasi-inclusion." In "Rethinking Those Kids: Lessons Learned From a Novice Teacher's Induction into In/Exclusion," Louis argues for reframing inclusionary practices as pedagogies for equity that attend to the intersectional dynamics of race, class, and disability. He also encourages more local control over the implementation of inclusionary classroom practices.

Inspired by Vivian Paley's storying scholarship, the essay "The Unfolding of Lucas's Story in an Inclusive Classroom: Living, Playing, and Becoming in the Social World of Kindergarten," tells stories about a vibrant kindergartner named Lucas through the viewpoints of his mother (Emma), teacher (Carmen), and teacher-educator (Haeny). In this multi-voiced story, the narrative centers on Lucas and shifts outward toward those orbiting Lucas's wondrously playful universe. The magic of Lucas's unfolding story is in the ways it disrupts conventional discourses about labels, interventions, and imposed meanings of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Karen Watson's ethnographic study, "Talking Tolerance Inside the 'Inclusive' Early Childhood Classroom" provides an inside look into what the Australian government calls "inclusive learning communities." This term emerges from a national early-years learning framework that highlights ability and disability as diversity. Following the course of a six-month period in three "inclusive" early childhood classrooms, Karen offers an account of the transformative potential of inclusion in contrast to the harmful effects of teaching tolerance. Tolerance, as Karen's study reveals, preserves the dualism of normal versus abnormal (or Other) and hinders critical reflection about ableist assumptions.

"Hitting the Switch: ¡Sí se puede!" takes us into the lifeworld of first-grader Jason at Castle Bridge Elementary School, a public, dual-language school in New York City. Written by Jason's teachers Stephanie and Andrea in conjunction with his mother Sandra, this essay puts forward the ethos ¡Sí se puede! (Yes, you can!), which relies on children's empathy and calls for a collective response to inclusion. "Hitting the Switch" concludes with practical suggestions for creating an inclusive space for

children who use assistive communicative devices so that they can become meaningful participants in the classroom community.

Emily Clark's "I [Don't] Belong Here: Narrating Inclusion at the Exclusion of Others," privileges the voices of families in their quest for inclusive education. Borrowing from narrative research and Disability Studies in Education, Emily tells the story of her adoptive siblings Maria and Isaac, who were orphaned by AIDS. She explores the paradox of inclusion which is that it sometimes, if not oftentimes, fails and results in exclusion. A chief reason for the failure of inclusion, Emily argues, is that children with real and perceived differences challenge the "grammar" of schooling—that is, they stand out for their differences.

A beautifully crafted ethnographic description of a rural Midwestern middle school, "Lunch Detention: Our Little Barred Room," by Lisa A. Johnson, pulls back the "facades of inclusion" to reveal emotional violence and deep-seated discriminatory practices against special education students. Lisa, herself blind, describes how she was approached by an administrator to take over the role of lunch detention supervisor for the "little barred room." In a short time, the "little barred room" becomes a place of refuge for Lisa and the other students, who share stories of friendship and create an inclusive space that empowers them to challenge a culture of oppression.

Melissa Tsuei's "A Circle With Edges: How Storytime Privileges the Abled Learner," takes a critical look at one of the commonplace features of early childhood classrooms—story time. In her essay, Melissa considers the ways in which story time reinforces unequal power dynamics for diverse learners by privileging the able-bodied learner. In response, Melissa creates and presents the SPHERE model, which promotes active engagement and shared dialogue through collaborative storytelling and nurtures an inclusive literacy-learning environment.

Taken together, these essays are intended to offer readers an applied DSE approach to inclusive classroom pedagogy. These essays frame disability and the lives of young children with disabilities in ways that: privilege the self-understandings and experiential knowledge of the children and their families; illuminate oppressive systems, arrangements, and circumstances that deny them opportunities for access to participation and equality; and create opportunities for greater levels of access, participation, and equality for them. It is our hope that these essays will further amplify and provoke unending discussions about how to create and sustain genuinely inclusive classrooms and communities.

Acknowledgement

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Eclipsing Expectations: How a Third Grader Set His Own Goals (And Taught Us All How to Listen)

Diane Linder Berman & David J. Connor

In this paper we share a narrative about Benny, a third-grade student with multiple disabilities who comes to shape his own educational goals.[1] The first part is written by Benny's mother, Diane. It describes her effort to seek an authentic, inclusive educational experience for her son. Her focus is upon particular ways in which children, parents, teachers, and the school community worked together toward providing greater access to both curriculum and social experiences for Benny. In the second part, David uses a disability studies in education framework to analyze and discuss key issues raised within Diane's narrative, emphasizing the influence of context—rather than disability—upon the success or failure of inclusion.

Using a Disabilities Studies in Education (DSE) Framework

A DSE perspective privileges the contextual understanding of disability and all of the complications that it brings. Bearing this in mind, the tenets of DSE include engaging in research, policy, and action that contextualizes disability within political and social spheres; privileges the interests, agendas, and voices of people labeled with disability; promotes social justice and equitable and inclusive educational opportunities; and assumes competence, while rejecting deficit models of disability (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008, p. 448).

Using a DSE framework includes valuing disabled people—as well as, we argue, their family members—theorizing about disability. It also allows us to theorize about, among other things, contrasting disability as portrayed in medical, scientific, and psychological accounts with social and experiential understandings of disability; to focus on political, social, cultural, historical, and individual understandings of disability; to acknowledge the embodied experiences of people whose lives/selves are made meaningful as disabled; and to challenge the school and societal discourses that position such

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1   All names are pseudonyms including Benny (the child), Boulder (the school), and all teachers except for Benny's mother, and co-author, Diane.

experiences as "othered" in relation to an assumed normate.

The Power of Narrative

The power of narrative is reflected in Lincoln and Denzin's (2000) description of it as "a minimal ethnography with political teeth" (p. 1052). In using personal narrative, we foreground experiences of a mother and her child, voices that are not sufficiently represented within educational research. Stories, which are among the most widely used ways of communicating, are ubiquitous. This has led Mishler (1986) to support "the view of some theorists that narratives are one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to order, organize, and express meaning" (p. 106). Richardson (2000) shares a similar sentiment, asserting that "Although life is not a narrative, people make sense of their lives and the lives of others through narrative constructions" (p. 10).

In many respects, a personal narrative is a form of self-representation and is potentially useful because it can lead to better understanding about various phenomena. As Worth (2008) has noted, "it can be argued that there is a significant increase in epistemological value in a well-told story" (p. 52). In brief, a well-told story has both epistemological and ontological value, as it holds a form of "truth" deserving of study, along with methodological value, in that narratives provide access to how we better understand situations in which human differences come to be called disability.

Background Setting: City to Suburbs, Exclusion to Inclusion

At an early age, Benny had been given many disability labels, including pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) along with various expressive and receptive language disorders. According to the local education authority (LEA), he had "failed to function" in two exclusionary/ highly restrictive special education classrooms there, and was therefore recommended for placement in an even more restrictive environment. Exasperated and in deep disagreement with the LEA, Diane searched elsewhere in the state to find a school that she believed would be a potentially "good fit" for Benny, eventually finding one in a suburb and subsequently moving the family there.

This article provides a glimpse into the Boulder School, the place that successfully included Diane's son. We share this account to show how Boulder welcomed Benny, supporting him and his family in finding ways to ensure his inclusion in all aspects of schooling. Subsequently, Benny's presence and participation within the school grew over the years and significantly influenced its general culture in a

myriad of positive ways. In brief, we seek to share a successful story of inclusive education.

Diane: Setting Goals and Letting the Child Help Guide

The first few years at Boulder proved to be a time of adjustment for Benny and for his school. Boulder developed and implemented a behavior intervention plan for Benny that became part of his individualized education program (IEP). By second grade he had made wonderful strides in his ability to be part of the school community. Everyone was happy. Benny was already a success story. His academic progress was slow, but there was constant incremental growth. He was accomplishing his IEP goals with greater frequency.

Lucy, Benny's third-grade teacher, was a quiet woman with piercing eyes and a gift for maintaining a highly organized classroom that at the same time pulsed with creativity. She originally seemed to be a little nervous about having Benny in her class, confessing anxiety early in the year. This gave way to delight when she quickly found out that it was easy to "read" him most of the time as well as to find ways to support and challenge him.

Third grade progressed with remarkable smoothness. However, at home I began to see a sadness take root in Benny. He was moody and told me several times that he did not want to go to school. Instead of fighting with him, on a few occasions I took him to work with me, where I teach middle school math. Benny was bright and cheery there, surrounded by older students who were interested in him. He answered their questions. He told them knock-knock jokes. When the time came for my class to get to work, Benny wrote most of my notes on the board and then read them aloud. He spoke with an intensity that I had not heard from him, showing self-confidence and pride. I saw a part of him come alive: a voice that demanded to be taken seriously, a desire to connect and to entertain that had lain dormant for years. I began to realize that Benny craved the spotlight in ways I never ever thought possible.

Benny's IEP meeting came in early spring, and it was a celebratory event. His scores, while still far below average, had risen somewhat in every area, and his behavior had become exemplary. Both his therapists and teachers radiated delight as they reported their own stories of his progress. I knew that Benny needed something from us, but I held back, wanting his teachers to enjoy the success he demonstrated on paper. When I picked Benny up after school that day, I told him how happy his teachers were with his progress. He began to cry deeply and heavily. It had been a long time since I had

heard him cry like that, maybe not since he was a toddler struggling to imitate a sound. I recognized the sadness as similar to the sadness Benny felt when there was something he wanted to do but could not. At the moment, Benny was unable to tell me why he was so sad. I knew, though, that when I relayed the good reports to him, they did not bring him comfort; instead, they triggered a feeling that he was not doing all that he wanted to do or all that he felt he could do.

Successes, Continuing Challenges, and Collaborative Solutions

Teachers and therapists had been able to see Benny tackle more and more subjects with increasing ease. But he still was quiet in class. Although he continued to raise his hand as he had done in second grade, Benny was seldom able to answer the question when called on. Lucy was not quite sure how to handle this, and neither was I. She called on him anyway and gave him extended time to respond, but most often he was silent. Every few weeks, we would discuss this behavior, and neither of us understood it. It was clear that Benny desired to be called on, so Lucy continued to do that, even though he seldom gave an answer.

While I strained to find some clues from Benny, conversations over the following few days brought little illumination. One day when I walked into his room and sat beside him on his bed, he looked at me with an intensity that I had grown to see as a signal that a transformational event would follow. Benny's body was still droopy with sleep as he looked up with eyes that have the power to embrace and asked, "Mom . . . why do all my teachers tell me I am doing so well, when I never am able to answer any of the questions?" I did not have the words to respond, but my silence allowed him to continue. "Do you know why I never answer the questions?" he asked, with eyes wide with the purest insight, "I know the answers in my head . . . but I do not know the words to use." I knew then that this was at the heart of his sadness.

Benny's demeanor lightened instantaneously. While I had no ready answer, he relaxed as soon as he knew that I had heard and understood. When I took him to school the next day, he was already a happier child, as he knew we would find a way to help him. I found Dr. Ruby, the school psychologist—a wellspring of positive energy who brimmed with ideas about constructive and positive ways to help her students fit in and grow—and we made a plan to chat. I stopped by to speak with Kaitlyn, Benny's speech therapist, and over the next few days, the three of us came up with a few ideas. I remembered that earlier in the year, Lucy had assigned the students a project on sound for which they had to create and present a poster board. Benny loved the project, putting together an extra-large board and asking

to use both sides of it. Already an avid computer user, he found photos online of thunderstorms, trains, planes, musicians, and machines. When the day came to share the projects, Lucy was prepared to let him do only as much as he could, but Benny surprised her by standing in front of the class and presenting with ease and great pride.

We realized that with prompts in front of him, Benny was able to speak and to share. We also discovered that he craved these opportunities. Sitting quietly was no longer enough for him, and even though it was enough for us, we had to listen to his desires; his goals for himself had to be recognized and addressed. The IEP is a guide, but I saw that those static goals were insufficient for Benny. He desired something greater. He wanted to be heard, to contribute fully and reflectively to his class. Dr. Ruby, Kaitlyn, and I decided that he would prepare posters for several of the topics the class would be covering. Benny could use speech therapy time to prepare his presentation, and Lucy would give him a few minutes to share. It worked beautifully. Benny's sadness faded fast, his spark intensified, and he dove into these projects with great enthusiasm. His first poster presentation was on Kenya, and Benny got his first score of 100%.

Eclipsing Expectations

I had not looked too closely at the school clubs before, since getting through the school day had been enough for Benny to manage. However, I now reconsidered them, knowing that he was ready for more. One of them was the Junior Announcers Club. Each morning and afternoon, students made a series of announcements over the loudspeaker, informing the school community about the weather and the day's events, sending out birthday greetings, and giving reminders of upcoming deadlines. Because Benny had been mimicking the announcements at home for a while, I asked him if he wanted to join the club. He said it would be very hard and that he was unsure. But as he spoke, an irrepressible smile broke out on his face, and I knew that we had found another part of the solution.

Speaking to a large audience was not something anyone could have predicted would appeal to Benny—a child with serious expressive language delays (in the decimal percentiles on most official tests) who mumbled most statements and who appeared to be very shy—but it did. This was a challenge he was craving, that he delighted in. Benny wanted to be heard and seen. He was going to conquer his difficulties not only by speaking to his class but also be addressing his entire school community—more than 300 people—over the loudspeaker.

On the morning of Benny's first announcement, which happened to be on his ninth birthday, the area outside the office was crowded with teachers, therapists, school personnel, and one very nervous mother. Together we waited for the chimes that signaled the start of announcements. There was a hush upon the school. I was trembling. When I peered into the office, I saw Benny looking small and timid. His hands were wrapped tightly around the microphone. We heard soft chimes and then, suddenly, a voice, strong and clear—a mature voice, a voice never to be taken for granted, a voice that rang out from the microphone and filled the hallways and classrooms. The voice was in control, commanding, like a melody to my ears. "Good morning, Boulder School. Today is Monday, March 15th. The junior announcers this morning are Becky, Tom, and Benny . . ." The transition from silence to sound in the hallway transformed us. Something shifted for us all. We all learned about rising to a challenge, about eclipsing our expectations, and about pushing ourselves to our personal limits, as the principal so often suggested.

Benny returned to his class to a student-led standing ovation. Later that day, the teaching assistant, Lenore, overheard a few boys discussing their own desire to become a junior announcer. One of them had said to another, "I was going to try and do it, but now I don't know . . . I could never do it as well as Benny." At the end of the day, when I came to pick up Benny and Adam, his younger brother, my eyes fell first on Adam. He was radiant with pride. He had already decided he was going to join junior announcers the next year.

When Benny was in third grade, I finally understood that we construct deficits by the way we analyze and categorize. I saw that the labels we choose are subjective, that with freedom and support everyone can excel. In many situations, the IEP can appear somewhat meaningless to parents (and, I would argue, probably to teachers and students too). I learned that we must listen carefully to the child and use his or her dreams as the basis for the goals we strive to reach.

While the IEP is important and serves as a baseline for teachers, it is not an absolute. It is hard for a team to accurately predict how much children can grow or to anticipate the goals they may have for themselves. While many of us can find ways to achieve what we strive for, some students, like Benny and other with profound language impairments, may have difficulty taking advantage of opportunities within the school community. As teachers, we also have to be aware that we may unconsciously encourage some students to participate in optional activities while assuming that other students are not interested in engaging in them. None of us could have imagined that Benny would be interested in public speaking. Finding ways for him to grow entailed finding ways to listen to him.

David: The Context of Inclusion and Some Key Issues Raised

The theme of this article, letting the child be the guide, may sound idealistic to some educators. However, from a DSE perspective, privileging the voice of the disabled is central. Although Benny's journey was unpredictable, his behaviors, emotions, and actions informed Diane about his general state of mind. These revelations showed he experienced a great deal of frustration and pain before being given the opportunity to do more in school. Diane's recognition of these painful experiences, along with Benny's frustration, was the first step toward discussing possibilities with his speech therapist and the school psychologist both of whom was instrumental in developing new goals for him.

Although his school reports showed academic improvement, at home Diane had noted Benny's emotional shifts. She "began to see a sadness take root in Benny. He was moody and told me several times that he did not want to go to school." Here we can see an example of the emotional toll that school situations and commonplace practices have on some students who struggle to always understand what is going on—a struggle exacerbated by difficulties they have in expressing themselves.

Diane notices what could be a pattern in Benny's pain, observing, "It had been a long time since I had heard him cry like that, maybe not since he was a toddler struggling to imitate a sound. I recognized the sadness as similar to the sadness he felt when there was something he wanted to do but could not." Rather than pleasing Benny, his good school reports had the opposite effect because, Diane notes, "they triggered his feeling that he was not doing all that he wanted to do, all that he felt he could do." Then Benny himself found the words he needed, asking his mother a difficult—yet sensible— question: "Why do all my teachers tell me I am doing so well, when I never am able to answer any of the questions?" Benny goes on to tell Diane that although he knows the answers, he can't find the words to express what he knows.

At first this is a major conundrum for Benny and his teachers, yet addressing it became another example of problem solving by professionals and parents collaborating within a specific context. Contemplating the issue, the psychologist, teacher, and speech therapist agreed that Benny's desire to participate was not necessarily just about being able to answer questions when he was called on, but also about having the opportunity to share his knowledge with his peers. Previously, when Benny had been given the chance, like his fellow students, to present a project to his class, Lucy was "prepared to let him do only as much as he could." But when he had time to research, organize, and display his project, he had demonstrated his abilities, and his teacher was surprised when he stood in front of his

peers "presenting with ease and great pride."

What this situation revealed is that sharing knowledge in the moment was extremely difficult (perhaps, at that time, even impossible) for Benny, but that with preparation, he could manage it. The speech therapist then worked to help Benny further develop the abilities he already had by capitalizing on his strengths and using them to realize his desire for greater participation in class. Similarly, Lucy accepted and encouraged this arrangement, permitting Benny to share his knowledge with his peers in a way that worked for him and benefited them as well. The fact that Lucy "would give him a few minutes to share" reveals her flexibility in shifting pedagogy to match the needs and abilities of her students. Giving Benny these opportunities to engage in schoolwork in his own way is an example of an organic response to the conundrum originally presented.

The success of this arrangement can be measured by Diane's observation that Benny's "sadness faded fast, his spark intensified, and he dove into these projects with great enthusiasm." Providing an alternative method that permits students to share and contribute what they know and think allows them to be active—and equal—members of the community. Benny's situation showed us that not every student responds well to being called on in class to provide a response to teacher-directed questions on the spot. This is the type of learning that we, as educators, gain from students in the context of our classes.

Having confidence in speaking before others is a skill that many adults do not possess. For a child who struggles with expressive language, it seems like an impossible expectation. Yet it can be argued that when adults around him did not expect it of Benny, he expected it of himself. Diane and the professionals at Boulder came to realize that "Sitting quietly was no longer enough for him, and even though it was enough for us, we had to listen to his desires; his goals for himself had to be recognized and addressed."

It was at this moment that Diane put two and two together, noticing Benny's mimicking school announcements and subsequently feeling him out about the possibility of being a junior announcer. His first response was that it would be "very hard and that he was unsure." Yet his smile betrayed a desire to rise to the challenge, and as Diane realized, "we had found another part of the solution." This particular situation strikes me as a clear example of Vygotsky's (1934/1987) zone of proximal development. Among the many theories I have been exposed to, this is one that resonates with me the most because it is so simple that it seems like common sense. In sum, Vygotsky noted that in order

for students to grow in acquiring knowledge and/or learning how to perform a task, their current abilities have to be recognized. Then, with assistance and encouragement from the teacher, they can progress to their next level of growth. Such assistance and encouragement can take many forms, including modeling, giving examples and counterexamples, discussing specific dos and don'ts, and providing repeated exposure to a task, along with giving students multiple opportunities to experience new material—gradually transferring knowledge and skills before expecting students to "own" them. In the case of Benny possibly becoming a junior announcer, the timing was right for encouraging him to aspire to a higher level of public speaking than he had previously been able to reach.

At most schools, making announcements over the loudspeaker is an everyday act that most people take for granted. But for Benny, his family, and the team of professionals that have been working with him, making a school announcement is a watershed moment, a major accomplishment; when Benny did it, Diane observed, "Something shifted for all of us." Benny's success impacts his sense of who he is and what he can do and affects how his brother, peers, teachers, and parents perceive him. Indeed, Benny is demonstrating to the school community that he can do what some other children are not yet able to. As one of his fellow students himself said afterward, "I could never do it as well as Benny."

Among the many issues that this episode raises is the tendency of schools to conflate speech with participation and/or intelligence. A largely unquestioned universal classroom norm is having student raise their hands to be called on to speak, signaling their readiness and ability to participate in the learning experience. However, such expectations (or even requirements) neglect to consider a host of valid reasons why some students do not speak up in class (Schultz, 2003). Benny's narrative, therefore, highlights the need for teachers to consider how they can offer students multiple ways of communicating their learning on an ongoing basis.

Using a DSE framework, I see these episodes of Benny's presentations to his class and to the whole school as connected in ways that touch upon the importance of family and community and the "inclusion of disabled people in theorizing about disability" (Connor et al., 2008, p. 448). I believe in the importance of family members—in particular, parents, who come to know their disabled child in so many ways that others do not—theorizing about disability.

In Diane's representation of Benny, we see how he makes sense of the expectations in his class, his school, his community, and the world beyond. Diane has a sense of what Biklen and Burke (2006) have termed "presumed competence." This is a very important concept, as it invites us to begin our

understanding of a person in terms of their abilities, many of which we largely able-bodied people—because of our own limitations—have not yet discovered. This goes beyond the value of having a "strength-based approach"; it is a deep disposition toward primarily viewing everyone in an open-ended way.

Beyond a Strength-Based Approach

Although using a strength-based approach with students is important, it is not enough. The technical framing of this approach in IEPs leads educators to mechanical understandings of a child's academic skills and social abilities. The point I wish to make here is that the IEP is only a guide required by law. It is not something etched in stone, akin to a religious text. However, educational systems tend toward rigidity over fluidity. Rigidity is far easier to manage, to predict, to control, to budget, to schedule, and to revert to when unsure of a situation (and then seek documented expertise).

Diane calls attention to the limitations of IEPs and the danger of clinging to them lest they—in their reductive nature—inadvertently preclude possibilities for the child. Benny's experiences led his own mother to understand and share what many educators may find shocking: "I saw [at last] that the labels we choose are subjective, that with freedom and support everyone can excel. In many situations, the IEP can appear somewhat meaningless to parents (and, I would argue, probably to teachers and students, too)." We are witness to Diane's epiphany that the context determines the disability. If teachers and administrators also understood disability in this manner, then classrooms and schools could become far more inclusive. For educators who ask, "What do you mean by a social model of disability?" Benny's case is a prime example: the contexts educators create (including the pros and cons of an accurate and thoughtful IEP) can serve to either enable or disable.

This paper calls to mind ideas found in the work of Thomas Skrtic (1991), who analyzed how educational bureaucracies—including special education programs—function, primarily viewing themselves as rational and efficient. He points out the limitations of technical approaches to measuring "success" within education, and argues against a technocracy in favor of an adhocracy. This is an admittedly highly abbreviated version of Skrtic's important idea, but I include it to highlight the difference between these approaches to education. What is needed for a child's growth is created as a response to knowing that a child within a particular context (making the supports adhoc) rather than to what has been prescribed as part of a formalized professional system (making the supports technical).

Much of what has come to be known as special education is a dense conglomeration of laws, rules, and regulations; an IEP often serves as a pro forma document, rather than an actual plan developed in part by students to help them grow. Boulder's approach to education is one of thoughtfulness, of making multiple connections with a view to people sharing what's best and therefore what's next for Benny. However, at the same time, I see that many practices employed at Boulder are still possible within his former LEA; indeed, they have been used there before and are currently employed in pockets here and there.

In order to better understand inclusive practices and encourage their growth, I believe it is useful for educators to become familiar with the adhocratic model of education as a way of thinking. For me, this model values teachers as reflective thinkers, collaborators, and allies with parents. It encourages teachers to study the children they are working with and be professionally invested in being proactive problem solvers. In contrast, the technocratic system appears to use educators as small cogs in a big machine, training them to unthinkingly generate pro forma and often decontextualized goals, set expectations for students with disabilities accordingly, and then (maybe) check the box if students approximate meeting them.

Conclusion

We believe the stories presented in this article can help in-service and preservice educators understand authentic inclusion, in part, as contextual, collaborative, and organic, and always as a work-in-progress. If teachers have no real voice in analyzing and contributing to solving the challenges of inclusive education, then there is even less likelihood that students can be heard. Diane writes, "We must listen carefully to the child and use his or her dreams as the basis for the goals we strive to reach." While some may argue that this is pure idealism, Diane's sentiment is actually very much in line with the intention of special education laws that seek to include children and their parents in the educational process. We believe that engagement with parents' knowledge of their own children can significantly help teachers understand how best to teach students with disabilities (Ginsberg, 2003; Valle, 2009). Learning what students think, know, and want—either directly from students or from their parents— allows teachers to work in ways that are deeply satisfying to both themselves and to those they teach, as the possibilities for learning—and inclusive education—are endless.

Postscript

Now in eighth grade, Benny is an active member of the drama club, where he regularly appears in performances alongside his peers. His experiences in third grade seem, in retrospect, to be natural stepping-stones toward his participation in these activities. Had he stayed in our original LEA, he would have remained in classes with only children who were identified as severely language delayed, and most likely he would not be performing with his typical peers in full-length productions where he continues to develop his talents in acting, singing, and dancing.

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Teaching Stories: Inclusion/Exclusion and Disability Studies

Linda Ware & Natalie Hatz

This research considers the journey of a public school teacher (Natalie) in partnership with her former undergraduate professor (Linda) to teach disability studies to her colleagues and to her fifth grade students. Our research involved multiple components and contexts that we characterize as "Teaching Stories" to consider disability, diversity, and exclusion across settings. Three components that we consider central to this research include:

Collaborative mapping of the contexts that prompted our research.

- Collaborative co-teaching of three workshops open to all teachers, administrators, and staff included: (1) Self-reflection, examining our own biases about disability; (2) Using media to probe our understanding of disability; and (3) Disability-themed literature.

Collaborative co-teaching with seven undergraduate students to develop and co-teach a ten-day curriculum unit to address disability studies through young adult literature (YAL).

These components are informed by multiple contexts that are not easily reduced to a bulleted list. For example, we consider aspects of the context for teacher preparation at the State University of New York at Geneseo, which in turn, includes reference to the college context; we consider the context of Natalie's fifth grade classroom with reference to the district administrative context; and we consider special education, inclusion, and disability studies in both the local and larger contexts. This account is just one aspect of a much larger project in which classroom teachers have begun to engage in conversation on disability in K-12 public education as suggested in this special issue.

Project Motivation

Natalie had the kernel of an idea and proposed it to Linda when they met informally over a winter break. She had just completed classroom instruction using Petey, a young adult (YA) novel required for all fifth grade students in her school. The book discussed disability, yet she soon realized that the

depiction of Petey and his life was framed by deficiency, needs, and powerlessness. Efforts to challenge these themes made Natalie realize that her students had little exposure to thinking about disability beyond stereotypical characterizations. The following excerpt appears on the book's back cover.

Petey has spent his life in institutions. Born with cerebral palsy, he was misdiagnosed as an infant and grew up in mental institutions. As an adult, he is bound by his wheelchair and struggles to communicate with the people around him…. Petey is a touching story of friendship, discovery, and the domination of the human spirit over physical objects. *Petey* (Mikaleson, 1998)

Natalie's students included a mix of those with complex needs, some with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), others with 504 Plans (outlined in Section 504 of the Disabilities Education Act to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and who attends an elementary or secondary school receives accommodations to give them access to the learning environment). Still other students had yet to be assessed, categorized, or labeled.

Natalie described her class as "inclusionary." It was not officially distinguished as such by her school district although efforts were made to include students with disabilities in the general education setting to the "greatest extent possible." The conversation on disability—informed by disability studies—was never made explicit in district policy or practice.

Now in her third year of teaching, and several years following her introduction to disability studies in education (DSE), Natalie wanted to explore critical disability themes with her students. In our enthusiasm to design the project for the greatest possible reach, we considered a district-wide theme of storytelling with the focus on disability. We identified potentially supportive teachers and administrators with whom we sketched out our "teaching stories" frame for a semester-long infusion of disability studies, titled "[Re]Thinking Disability in the 21st Century."

In a meeting with the district curriculum director who ultimately approved the project, we scaled back our plans for a two-semester rollout, given that instructional planning would compete with the state testing calendar. Natalie would move from the story presented in Petey to a more contemporary account of disabled people telling their own stories, such as those featured in her prior coursework with Linda. Natalie recalled the challenge of encouraging new thinking about disability as DSE turns much of what we understand about disability on its head—hoping her students would accept the challenge of "rethinking disability."

Mapping the Context of Our Research Background

Natalie was among the first students Linda taught in the Geneseo school of education (SOE) following her move from City College/City University of New York (CCNY). Linda was head of the special education master's program and with the enthusiastic support of colleagues, she led a major program revision that featured disability studies (Ware, 2013). At Geneseo, Linda taught one education course, as she was tasked to develop courses for a new interdisciplinary disability studies minor. The then President and Provost recognized the potential for disability studies to enhance the liberal arts mission of the college. Linda developed two college-wide interdisciplinary courses, and one women and gender studies seminar infused with disability studies. She also integrated cultural perspectives on disability into her education course, "Arts and Career Education in the Community."

Prior to Linda's arrival, the course, a requirement for junior level special education majors, was known as "arts and crafts," with a reliance on "puppets-glue-stick-play dough-coloring" activities. The non-academic content and activities, according to the program faculty, aligned with Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards and reflected the "arts" content provided to disabled students in the area. Given that Linda was hired on the strength of her research and publications specific to disability and the arts (Ware, 2008; 2010), she updated the course content. She minimized the rehabilitative focus that rendered: (1) "art" as therapeutic intervention; (2) "careers" as restricted to the local sheltered workshop experiences; and (3) "community" as contained by the four group homes located in the Village of Geneseo. The updated course interrogated the "problem of disability" approach sanctioned by medical, rehabilitative, and reductionist models and students were invited, instead to "imagine disability otherwise" (Ware, 2001).

Disability as Value-added Diversity

The context at Geneseo was aligned with more traditional course offerings and with programs that proved to be an obstacle to imagining "otherwise." With the exception of Linda's courses, disability was not viewed as part of the spectrum of human difference, nor was it considered underneath the umbrella of campus diversity. Inviting students to find "value" in disability involved recognition of the prevalence of deficit language that circulates in discussions of diversity and disability. Students were quick to recognize that campus discourse on diversity was exclusive to race, but they did not initially grasp how an exclusive framing of the "needs" of black families, the "needs" of urban youth, and the "needs" of those living in urban poverty contributed to the unyielding discourse of deficiency.

Area colleges had long utilized Rochester as a laboratory in which to "tackle" the burden of needs, including those posed by disability. Slowly we considered how diversity and disability were interchangeable "problems" in need of a "solution," which often came in the form of a grant with funds targeted to support universities in the development of "interventions." Local media and the college public information division reified the "needs/problem/intervention" narrative that slowly became more apparent to the pre-service students.

New activities were developed to trouble the over-reliance on rehabilitative frameworks that reified old conversations on disability as a curse, tragedy, or misfortune in need of a cure. Linda relied on disabled artists and performers to sharpen awareness and develop critical insights about the actual meaning of disability as "value-added diversity" (Ware, 2006a; 2010). Examples of communities that purposefully encouraged career integration experiences for disabled people (e.g., Visionaries & Voices, 2001; Puzzles Bakery & Café, 2008) replaced the regional norm where non-disabled people earned salaries to manage the lives of disabled people who worked in sheltered workshops for less than minimum wage.

The "hunt for diversity" assignment required students to research the Geneseo region (including the campus) for primary source documents that depicted the representations of difference in the example of diversity or disability. The exemplars could be either value-rich or needs-based depictions, those taken from archival representations or from the present moment.

Students learned that increasing rates of rural poverty dot the region; growing numbers of itinerant farm laborers reside nearby with their families; downstate families relocate to the region when a loved one is incarcerated; and one student's research captured what he referred to as the "herding of disabled adults" who are continuously processed through the "disability industrial complex"[1] (Snow, 2008). Others learned that very few Native Americans are enrolled in the local public schools even though tribal lands surround this region. That their indigenous history is excluded from the Geneseo teacher preparation curriculum was surprising. In a general response to this activity, one student explained the value of seeing beyond the "veneer." The students' research across multiple communities made evident the approach to disability and diversity that consistently failed to add value to the community of which they were a part.

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1   Snow outlines the growth of the "pro-business" model that has replaced the "human services" model of disability supports. She recounts how services that agencies once took pride in delivering, whether it was speech services or mobility equipment, are now profit-driven. "Service providers," she insists, can "outright fail their customers, yet stay in business!" In one example, Snow discusses the "dismal outcomes" for students who receive special education services and their "shameful" 75% unemployment rate. Her critique also takes aims at vocational rehabilitation, which like special education, continues – undeterred by its failure to provide meaningful outcomes for disabled children, youth, and adults.

The research activity confirmed the value of developing greater awareness of distinct and diverse populations nearby. The next step was intended to push pre-service teachers to imagine how their future students, who occupied these distinct cultural locations, might answer the question: "What does my presence and participation bring to this setting?" The question was often met with blank stares and clear difficulty completing the task. Natalie recalled the activity as particularly troubling because student frustration increased greatly at that juncture.

Most students could identify the ubiquitous use of discourses of deficiency in education, but they lacked the insight to value lives outside a normative existence. Linda shared this activity with colleagues during a SOE faculty brown-bag session where she was met with the same blank stares. Natalie was among the students who recognized the importance of teaching the development of critical insights on disability identity in much the same way we would teach critical thinking skills—whether to college or to fifth grade students—the goal wass to see beyond the "veneer" of manufactured identities (Solis, 2004; Ware, 2001).

Context Matters

School-based, collaborative researchers often insist that "context matters!" but it is rare to include problematic contexts within institutions of higher education – as if that "story" is somehow irrelevant. Through the cultural insights Natalie gained from disability studies in education (DSE) she learned to raise questions and to grapple with disability beyond the labels and categories. She completed the Geneseo program fully convinced that in the example of inclusion—neither general nor special education recognized its relevance (Baglieri, Bejoin, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Ware, 2001; 2004).

Natalie's new-found critical awareness influenced her decision to complete her student teaching in Brooklyn, NY. Following her success in that context, she was offered a temporary teaching position for the remainder of the school year. Natalie enthusiastically enrolled in every in-service workshop provided. Among her favorites were the "Teachers College Reading & Writing Project" (Lucy , "Units of Study" Heinemann); "Dialogic Teaching"; and "The Context for Learning Mathematics" (Adler & Rougle, 2009; Alexander, 2008).

When she returned to Geneseo this skillset led to quick employment and further opportunities to lead district workshops. Still her desire to introduce disability studies content to her students remained

unrealized. Efforts to locate materials to teach disability studies to her students proved futile. Later, she and her colleagues would realize that materials couldn't fill in the gaps in the absence of discussion on inclusion, disability, diversity, and disability studies.

Defining Inclusion and Exploring Disability Studies

Natalie and Linda organized three monthly workshops that were open to all administrators, teachers, and staff and structured in a seminar fashion. These were titled: "Self-reflection, examining our own biases about disability"; "Using media to probe our understanding of disability"; and "Disability-themed literature." We reminded participants that this was not a canned in-service and that their words, thoughts, questions, and discomfort were all valued aspects of the work we hoped to accomplish.

We explained that discussion of inclusion would be a recurring thread throughout the workshops although it was not a stand-alone theme. Inclusion is difficult to define, and, yet, it is peppered throughout educational discourse in both general and special education. The district boasted of inclusion as a "core value" and yet the visible exclusion of students often went uncontested. We did not rehearse the decades-old debate on the meaning of inclusion, but made it clear that literature on exclusion as a common feature of everyday schooling practice informed this project (Baglieri, Bejoin, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012; & Connor, 2010; Ware, 2004).

We began with the following writing prompt: "The simplest way to understand inclusion begins with recognition of the many ways that schools exclude certain bodies and minds. Reflect on this statement and identify what you might see in your school that 'looks like exclusion.'"

Natalie had learned this activity from Linda's course. The participants readily offered their responses, which Natalie listed as "sites of exclusion" on the whiteboard. These included:

Classroom activities that are difficult to perform with wheelchairs;

Pep rallies that begin before school starts, making them inaccessible for students who are transported;
- Too few accessible bathrooms;
- Inflexible overhead lighting / not enough natural light;
- Too much noise;
- Assemblies that run too long and require those who are transported to leave early.

Participants were well aware of the issues. Names of students who repeatedly experienced exclusion were easily summoned. One teacher noted that "my daughter and her wheelchair can't get into her friends' homes when they host birthday parties." In discussion, the participants considered various options to address exclusion, including raising awareness with families throughout the district.

Linda interjected to ask, "How do you think students might respond to a general discussion of access, or to discussions around particular activities?" We aimed to share relevant material between the in-service participants and Natalie's students. We also included academic readings that we hoped would lead to understanding that these same issues were not fully resolved in higher education.

Assigned Readings and Teacher Meetings

Until very recently, critical perspectives on disability were elided from general and special education teacher preparation. We stressed this and provided readings to address the issue. A self-study conducted by faculty in the Inclusive and Critical (Special) Education Program at Teacher's College (TC) served as a model to support program updates in teacher preparation.

According to TC Program Director Celia Oyler, faculty recognized the need to bridge what had been two distinct special education programs: "teachers must be able to examine cultural and social hierarches for the ways inequality and injustice are produced and perpetuated within the curriculum, the classroom, and the school" (Oyler, 2011, p. 205).

A "teaching tolerance" or "appreciating diversity," liberal-humanist perspective is insufficient; preservice teachers must graduate from their programs with knowledge about how racism, sexism, ableism (Hehir, 2002), heterosexism, nationalism, linguistic privilege, religious intolerance, and class bias operate in schools and society. Teachers must also have the skills to recognize how these forms of oppression are commonly expressed in the curriculum and in day-to-day school practices (Hehir, 2002, p. 205).

The TC program had long endorsed the view of classrooms as sites of cultural and social reproduction (Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu, 19777) and honored the relationships between and among families, communities and schools (Laureau, 2003). To this, Oyler introduced insights informed by DSE (Ware, 2007; 2010), specifically in Linda's discussion of Critical Special Education (CSE) that evolved in response to (a) special education's over-reliance on the medical model of disability; (b) the impulse

to "fix" the unfit child; (c) the rush to equate human difference with limited capacity and individual pathology; and (d) the paradigmatic change that was urgently needed to coax the field away from its exclusively behaviorist and reductionist worldview (2010, p. 254). Oyler further drew on "equity pedagogy" (Banks and Banks, 1995) and DSE for program reform that would build on shared "commitment to a disability studies/disability rights orientation" (Oyler, 212).

Natalie and Linda connected Oyler's "rights orientation" to their introduction of the DSE tenets[2] (DSE, Hunter College, 2012) and with specific reference back to the "sites of exclusion" list. Although Natalie was concerned that her peers would reject the claim that special education was incompatible with disability rights that did not occur. As our first meeting with the teachers drew to an end, participants were invited to consider the tensions/contradictions that could be more fully explored in further meetings in the weeks ahead.

The second teacher meeting opened with a powerpoint Linda used to introduce disability studies to Natalie's students. It combined questions, definitions, and visual images to launch the conversation. In some images, the representation of disability was evident, but the characterization of the individual was ambiguous. For example, students were invited to describe photographs of two contemporary dancers, Homer Avila and Fabienne Jean. Avila, who lost a leg to cancer, was captured in a still image (rachelhoward.com Google image) while Jean was featured on the cover of the *New York Times* holding her prosthetic leg above her head (Winter, 2011). The discussion was framed to avoid the standard question, "What happened to you?" Instead, students were asked to focus on what they saw in the picture and to imagine a story based on those facts. That Fabienne Jean is smiling as she holds her prosthetic leg like a trophy intrigued the students and the teachers, who each offered explanations for her apparent joy.

"Book Briefs," compiled from Natalie's YAL literacy unit and prepared by the undergraduate teaching team, were also distributed. Again, the focus was not on the visible representation of disability in the

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2   The DSE tenets were authored by members of the Disability Studies in Education (DSE) Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Education Research Association (AERA). These tenets capture DSE efforts to promote the understanding of disability from a social model perspective, drawing on social, cultural, historical, discursive, philosophical, literary, aesthetic, artistic, and other traditions to challenge medical, scientific, and psychological models of disability as they relate to education. The four tenets apply to our efforts to engage in research, policy, and action that

- contextualize disability within political and social spheres
- privilege the interest, agendas, and voices of people labeled with disability/disabled people
- promote social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for people labeled with disability/disabled people
- assume competence and reject deficit models of disability.

novels, but on the characters. Themes relative to exclusion were identified by the participants, and considered in reference to the DSE tenets presented at the previous meeting.

The final in-service meeting took an unexpected turn when Mindy, a paraprofessional and enthusiastic participant, arrived with several grocery bags full of library books that featured disability. She wondered if, as a group, there would be time to distribute the books and make a quick assessment of their value as Teaching Stories. Of course, there was! By this time, the group dynamics were such that the participants expressed the desire for more time and deeper discussion of the complex meanings of inclusion and the broad exemplars to support DSE.

During the three in-service meetings we were met with the recurring question, "Why wasn't this included in my teacher training?" It is a question that comes up frequently among those who teach from a DSE framework (Connor, 2010; Ferri, 2006; 2015 Valle, 2015; Ware; 2003; 2006). In the section that follows we capture the challenge that teachers face to unlearn much of what they have mastered in traditional teacher preparation. The material selected for this project is common in many schools, but the conversation that followed is not so common. Our approach to the conversations these texts elicited—among the educators and the students—was, we firmly believe, attributed to a paradigmatic shift in thinking about disability.

Teaching Stories

Dunn (2015) notes, that when teaching YA literature, it is assumed that teachers will raise "questions posed about [the works] to help students see, name, and confront harmful assumptions, whether about race, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender, or disability" (p. 148). Natalie's familiarity with disability studies and her desire to integrate disability themes into her teaching did not prove successful when she taught *Petey* because she had not yet asked her students to consider questions about disability. But by this point in the school year, her students knew the dialogic thinking approach without the need for cues from Natalie.

- Ask questions.
- Develop logical reasoning.
- Think about an issue from multiple lenses.
- Cope when things are unclear and ideas conflict.
- Seek complexity rather than simple answers.

- Challenge another's opinion or viewpoint.
- Think flexibly.
- Listen for unusual perspectives.

She was disappointed that her students focused almost exclusively on Petey's disability. Efforts to encourage the students to consider Petey from "multiple lens" fell short as the students reverted to the terms from the book (e.g., retard, idiot, Cerebral Palsy, spastic). In a discussion of the family's decision to institutionalize Petey, one student was adamant in his claims: "his family were farmers so he couldn't help them farming." It was the literal answer, but other contributions Petey made within his family did not figure into the text and students seemed particularly reluctant to think "flexibly" on such points. Online discussions of this award-winning book were unhelpful to Natalie as her concerns were not evident in those discussions.

There was so much in *Petey* that did not square with the perspective on disability that Natalie wanted to teach. She literally put the book down several times in frustration. Turning to her fellow teachers was not helpful as they were pressed to complete instruction prior to the winter break. They advised "It's just not a very positive story"; "Why go there?"; "Just finish the book, Natalie!"

When she contacted Linda, it was to verify the legitimacy of her concerns and to plot "strategies" for future use of this book. She decided to emphasize the historic context of *Petey* with an emphasis on why society no longer relies on institutions and discourages the language depicted in this book. In a workaround, she shifted her instruction to address the following:

- The origin of asylums and institutions at the turn of the century
- The impact of communication on understanding human difference
- The acceptance of social practices that enforced isolation of disabled people
- The potential for friendships across difference and disability
- The meaning of family responsibility
- The meaning of inclusion, and
- The impulse to bully people with disabilities.

Instructional Unit Overview on Disability Studies in YAL

In addition to the teacher meetings, Linda and Natalie created an instructional unit that considered

disability studies in YAL. Linda recruited a pre-service teacher team (PSTT) comprised of current and former students to develop eight days of instruction that would be taught by the PSTT in Natalie's classroom. Over thirty hours of preplanning discussion and curriculum development preceded the instruction, including mentorship from Natalie specific to her use of dialogic teaching strategies as inclusive pedagogy. Classroom instruction included a powerpoint overview on disability, art, and culture presented by Linda; and individual assignments following small group discussion of the books led by the PSTT. The PSTT made the book selections working from district-approved texts and in conversation with Natalie.

Dialogic Discussion as Inclusive Pedagogy

Natalie, Linda and the PSTT identified the instructional goals for the classroom teaching component of the project by explaining what we now referred to as the "Petey" incident. Natalie stressed:

> *I want my students to really examine disability as something that is made up. . . . I mean, I know it's real, but at the same time it's not. I think they can handle that conversation.*

Members of the PSTT expressed similar concerns:

> *I want to teach about disability the way we talk about it in our class—as just one part, but not the only part— of a person's identity. But will these young students grasp this content? Sometimes we don't even know how to think about the conversations in class.*

> *In all honesty, I don't really know how I might begin to teach from a disability studies perspective. I don't know how soon we can challenge medical views—or if the students even hold a medical view on disability in the first place.*

Identifying Disability-themed YAL

The PSTT began with an Internet search for disability-themed YAL. It generated many titles previously approved by Natalie's school district. However, there was too little description of the characters with disabilities to assess the agreed-upon criteria for text selection: How do these texts problematize the very real consequences of marking difference as "problem" on the bodies of disabled children?

The books with the most favorable ratings were selected, only to find that they contained stereotypical and negative portrayals of disability. Rather than continue the search for the perfect book, Linda encouraged the PSTT to utilize the available texts, as this was the exact dilemma that Natalie had faced earlier. The PSTT felt confident examining the troubling aspects of the texts as readers, but less confident teaching the book. We agreed to find at least one book with value-rich depictions of disability, which led to Linda's suggestion of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon, 2002).

Below we capture examples from the books of the medicalization of disability and the consistent use of ableist language. Consider that the emphasis on disability "ailment" in these plots operates in much the same way that labeling operates in traditional teacher education preparation and practice (both general and special education) which, in effect, "misreads" people with disabilities as the product of misfortune and less worthy lives (Elman, 2010; Solis, 2004). Additional text samples reveal bold and rich narrative possibilities that could be mined for deep meaning in the classroom (Ware, 2006b; 2013).

Stuck in Neutral

Stuck in Neutral is the heartbreaking tale of a young boy, Shawn, who has cerebral palsy and who is profoundly developmentally delayed. However, inside his broken body, Shawn believes himself to be a genius due to his ability to remember everything he has ever seen or heard. (http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-stuck-in-neutral/#gsc.tab=0)

Stuck in Neutral Sample Text

[I]n the eyes of the world, I'm a total retardate. A "retard." Not "retard" like you might use the word to tease a friend who just said or did something stupid…. everybody who knows me, everybody who sees me, everybody, anybody who even gets near me would tell you I'm dumb as a rock. (p. 4)

I do sometimes wonder what life would be like if people, even one person, knew that I was smart and that there's an actual person hidden inside my useless body; I am in here, I'm just sort of stuck in neutral. (p. 11)

In my father's eyes I'm a vegetable, a human vegetable, I'll never be able to enjoy life or be productive. (p. 25)

When people first meet me, they usually do their Annie-Sullivan meeting-Helen-Keller-in-The Miracle Worker routine. "HI SHAWN, NICE TO MEET YOU…MY NAME IS ALLY WILLIAMSON… HOW ARE YOU?" For some reason people always speak real slowly and loudly when they're introduced to

me. (p. 55)

Instructional themes: Perceptions of suffering, perceptions of competence, perceptions of communication exclusive to speech; the impulse to pity people with disabilities; disability in the schooling context; medical versus cultural meanings of disability; and claiming disability as a source of strength and power.

Freak the Mighty

In Freak the Mighty, "primary characters are friends Maxwell Kane, a large, very slow, but kind-hearted kid and his friend Kevin Dillon, nicknamed 'Freak,' who is physically crippled but very intelligent" (http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-freak-the-mighty/#gsc.tab=0).

Freak the Mighty Sample Text

> *I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that's the truth, the whole truth. (p. 1)*

> *I got my first look at Freak [in] that year of phony hugs. He didn't look so different back then, we were all of us pretty small…. (p. 2)*

> *I feel real bad for Freak, because he hates it when people try to rub his head for luck. (p. 72)*

> *The only reason I got passed from seventh grade is because they figured this way the big butthead can be—quote—someone else's problem, thank God, we've had quite enough of Maxwell Kane—unquote. (p. 73)*

Instructional themes: Family relationships when disability is present; perceptions of self versus society's perceptions; friendships across differences; accepting difference; disability in the schooling context; bullying disabled people; and claiming disability as a source of strength and power.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

> *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time is a story about a unique young man setting out to solve an unusual crime and to record his progress in a novel. The young man is Christopher John Francis Boone, and he*

is unique because he is severely autistic. (http://www.bookrags.com/lessonplan/the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-nightime/#gsc.tab=0)

Numerous lessons are available on-line for classroom use of this widely acclaimed novel, many of them considering autism to be the focus. Yet Haddon makes no specific mention of autism in the novel; in fact, Haddon went to great lengths to explain why he did not label Christopher as autistic (McInerney, 2003; Noonan, 2003; Ware, 2006b). When teaching the novel for this project, Linda encouraged the PSTT to likewise avoid characterizing Christopher as autistic. However, just a few pages into reading the book, students demanded verification that Christopher was autistic. The impulse to recognize Christopher as autistic rather than the richly layered character offered by the narrative presented a brilliant starting point, and one that we could never have anticipated.

Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time Sample Text

All the other children at my school are stupid. Except I'm not meant to call them stupid, even though this is what they are. I'm meant to say that they have learning difficulties or that they have special needs. But this is stupid because everyone has learning difficulties because learning to speak French or understanding relativity is difficult… (p. 43)

So I took deep breaths like Siobhan said I should do when I want to hit someone in school and I counted 50 breaths and did cubes of the cardinal numbers as I counted like this .. 1, 8, 27, 64, 125, 216, 343, 512, 729, 1000, 1331, 1728, 2197, 2744, 3375, 4096, 4913 … etc. (p. 213).

Instructional themes: The search for order and stability; perceptions of social behavior as an indicator of intelligence/ability; social injustice; Christopher's perception of ability; his perception of disability; disability in the schooling context; and claiming disability as a source of strength and power.

Discussion

The students responded to these texts with a mix of reactions: some accepted stereotypes on face value, some saw past the stereotypes and responded to the characters as more like themselves than they initially imagined; and others made bold connections to disability and to the world around them.

Shawn's interpretation of his imminent death at the hands of his father in *Stuck in Neutral* was probed by questioning: "Is this a plausible plot?" Consistent with dialogic discussion, the students formulated

a question that they then grappled with, offering various responses, including those related to Shawn's limited cognitive capacity given his inability to speak. Their ableist assumptions came unhinged as, newly informed about assistive technology, they recognized Shawn's humanity and his ability to communicate despite his lack of traditional speech. They discussed the meaning of intelligence. One student laughed aloud as he read Shawn's depiction of his "condition" because the details were witty, sarcastic, and self-mocking—attributes many middle school students shared with Shawn—despite his disability. These "personality traits" were clear signs of Shawn's self-awareness and his humanity, they argued, and in discussion, they redefined intelligence, spirit, soul and questioned the meaning of normalcy and their own neurotypicality.

The students readily identified the negative perceptions of Shawn held by other characters as dehumanizing and infantilizing (vocabulary that emerged from their discussions and our instruction). They debated how others, especially his father, could view him as an object of pity and less than human. For one assignment, they wrote poems about Shawn, informed exclusively by his self-narration and without focusing on his impairment and his disability. In a prewriting session students debated whether Shawn's physical appearance was or was not an indicator of his intelligence, and this led to an in-depth conversation about the social pressure to judge appearance. In dialogic discussion, one student outlined the many ways that stereotypical appearances are perpetuated. His list included: bullying in schools, fashion trends in schools, advertisements in the media, and racism that still exists today.

Such exchanges in small and large group discussion revealed the complex thinking that Natalie knew her students possessed, yet their ability to link disability discourse to larger social issues was surprising to all of us. Parallels to Linda's Geneseo coursework became more apparent as this unique mix of disability-related content proved to be another long overdue conversation on disability, exclusion, and social injustice that all students are in fact, able to consider.

Discussion of *Freak the Mighty* focused on Maxwell's placement in a Learning Disability (LD) class, on what LD really means, the everyday use of "retarded," and speculation about Kevin's claims to a robot identity rather than a "crippled" identity. Discussion of disability and ability encouraged students to speak freely, ask honest questions, and not be judged. Discussion on the historic context of language usage prompted one student to refer back to Petey, wondering if contemporary use of "demented" would be considered offensive, noting that in the novel, it seemed acceptable.

In the discussion about *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, students responded to the question, "In what ways are you like Christopher?" It is important to recall that initially some of Natalie's students insisted on knowing whether Christopher was autistic. One student said, "I am like Christopher because he does not like being touched. I like to have my own space. I also think that Christopher is very independent. I would also prefer to be independent."

Another noted: "I know what it's like to be away from someone you love. My dad is in Afghanistan and I miss him the way Christopher misses his mom."

We probed the obvious link to contemporary use of the "R" word, inviting discussion that was again much more sophisticated and nuanced than we anticipated in our planning. One student asked, with the utmost sincerity, "If the LD class is for students who learn differently, why isn't it called the 'Learning Differences' class?" Students rallied in agreement and moved to act on this issue, inviting the principal to hear their concerns. Taking turns they held up their placards that read: "Learning disability implies "no ability" which just isn't true!" "Changing the name to 'Learning Differences' is necessary because society is too quick to put the label of disability on a person." Finally, a quiet-voiced student presented her image of a wheelchair and reasoned that similar to wheelchair users, students with learning disabilities did not choose to have the disability and therefore should not be marked by the label of "learning problems." By a vote—including that of the principal—the students pressed to reappropriate the meaning of LD—at least in their school.

Conclusion

We have captured only a fraction of our instruction that attempted to teach that students with disabilities can be "valued members of our schools and classrooms—not because we are charitable, but because students with disabilities, like all students, have a lot to offer" (Ferri, 2008, 427). This curriculum exploration of disability in YA literature would not have been possible in the absence of an administrative vision that holds to the belief that "all students have a lot to offer."

The importance of locating the goals of inclusive education squarely in the curriculum for consumption by all students can begin to challenge disability as a taboo topic. Until schools address the omission of disability history, art, and culture in the curriculum, where the real work of inclusion begins, society will continue to view disability as a devalued experience. This project is one step toward the larger goal: recognizing that in order to allay the stigma associated with disability, children and youth must be permitted to appreciate the story of disability as another aspect of human diversity—one made explicit

in the curriculum of inclusive schools through a disability studies framework.[3]

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Rethinking "Those Kids": Lessons Learned from a Novice Teacher's Induction into In/Exclusion

Louis Olander

My Own Resistance to Inclusion

I was not always a believer in inclusion; in fact, I actively resisted it initially. It seemed far-fetched idealism at best and injurious practice at worst. Much of this resistance came from misunderstandings about inclusion that were driven by my own teacher preparation course work and by poorly implemented quasi-inclusion structures in schools where I worked. Admittedly, my resistance usually materialized in the teachers' lounge as common grumbling and probably did not amount to much in terms of actual action. Nevertheless, my somewhat passive-aggressive stance was generally motivated by retaining control over my students, who were often derisively branded as those kids by general education teachers and administrators. This was largely because I felt that I could help them more that way, as I probably overestimated my own capacity to do good in their lives.

When I returned from a yearlong combat tour as a medic in Iraq in 2005, I struggled to make sense of my diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. I did not think the mold of a "disabled veteran" fit me, and I resented the guys who I came home with who had reconstituted their identities around an aggrandized sense of self-importance and sacrificial injuries. In a practical sense, though, I came to discover that I had a poor grasp of my temper, something that would come to make my work teaching unnecessarily difficult.

I came into teaching in 2007 through an alternative certification program in New York City and was assigned to become a special education teacher. I was told that my medical experience would make me a good fit for the position since I already possessed the mindframe to diagnose and treat illness. Per the terms of my fellowship, I received subsidized tuition at a public university, and my graduate course work followed a "clinical" model, emphasizing evidence-based practice. Inclusion was discussed solely in terms of technical skills: collaboration, co-planning, differentiation, and classroom management. In my teacher preparation program, reflection had one purpose—not to examine ways in which privilege

of all sorts colored our perceptions of our kids and of schooling—only to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of didactic techniques. In no uncertain terms, my cohort of teacher candidates was told that our sole mission was to make large measurable gains in student test scores; that was why we were selected for the program. Like many others, I walked into a class in September woefully underprepared and with my own biases unchecked.

Collaborative Team Teaching and Class 633

At the end of my summer crash course in high-impact teaching strategies for urban students, I secured a placement position in a large middle school in central Brooklyn with some 1,500 students in grades six through eight. I would later find out from a colleague that the principal had been reluctant to hire me, fearful that my military service had rendered me mentally unstable. In some ways, perhaps some of her concerns were well warranted; I had faced significant issues readjusting after returning home. Nevertheless, it felt lousy to be labeled. I did not think of myself as unstable—just as a person who sometimes experienced instability in certain contexts. At that point, I understood my own disability medically, as a set of symptoms that were exacerbated by triggers in my environment. As long as I could avoid those triggers, I thought, everything would be fine.

The first class that I taught had 38 sixth graders and was known by its number, 633. The class employed the collaborative team teaching (CTT) model[1] and had, by design, a ratio of 40% students whose disabilities were documented in their individualized education programs (IEPs) to 60% general education students. I was to collaboratively plan and deliver lessons in English, math, and social studies with three different co-teachers who would rotate into the classroom where I stayed with the students all day. Unlike most novice teachers, I was able to keep the class orderly and well behaved. However, doing so required occasionally unleashing a rage from within me that felt good to neither me nor the students. While my administration appreciated my ability to keep the kids in line, I felt like there was much I was not being told about who they were and what they needed beyond being controlled.

Michael[2] was a young, very dark-skinned 11-year-old boy from Jamaica who had an obvious speech impairment and an irregular gait. Though his IEP stated that he had a learning disability, what I came to know about him led me to believe that that label was either inaccurate, or, at best, incomplete—in any event, the result of a poorly done evaluation of his educational needs. Not mentioned in his IEP

1   Collaborative team teaching was renamed integrated co-teaching in 2009, but the model remained the same. This paper describes events before the name change.
2   All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

at all was that he was in many respects a very strong student. He often made intelligent, insightful comments in class, though they were difficult to understand because of his accent and a slur in his speech.

Michael would come to my class during lunch, sneaking in from the playground, crying because he was teased and called a "retard" by other students. His writing showed that he was not struggling cognitively, but his handwriting made his insights tough to read. The occupational therapist and I eventually unearthed his cumulative record file from a dusty cabinet and discovered that he was born with hemiplegic cerebral palsy, not at all the learning disability his IEP indicated. His mother, a hotel room cleaner who worked irregular hours, was baffled by the jargon and paperwork of special education. She would say, "he was born this way," but she did not know when or why he was labeled as having a learning disability. The words "special education" were an insult to her. "He's not a retard," she would say.

Kris was an incredibly intelligent, short Black 12-year-old boy with a fiery, mischievous smile. He was placed into 633 because of his behavioral issues, which were reported to our middle school by his elementary school. I remember the programmer telling me that she thought that it would help Kris to have two teachers in the room. He was loud and rambunctious, but never malicious—he always tried hard to make his friends laugh. At one point, I was trying to keep food out of the classroom (the room was infested with roaches), and he brought a rubber sandwich to class and would pretend to sneak bites. When I caught him with it, he threw it on the ground and it bounced up at me, eliciting laughter from everyone, including my co-teachers and me. Later, when I had his parents in for a conference to discuss his report card, they told me that they were afraid to let Kris play in the unsafe streets in their neighborhood, as they were recent immigrants from Haiti. It was then that I realized that he was so energetic in class because he did not have an outlet for his playfulness outside of school.

Kris did not have an IEP, but my mentor who was an older veteran special educator swore he should be referred for an emotional disturbance label. Since she thought he belonged in a self-contained class, the school's administration requested that the parents sign a letter requesting a special education evaluation. When I spoke to them about it, I quietly cautioned them against consenting for him to be evaluated, sharing my worries about the possible consequences of him being classified. I thought that his naughty behavior clearly seemed to me to be a function of his context, not of an intrinsic "disturbance" within him. Mostly, I was worried about what would happen to him if he was put into a system that he did not belong in—in my mind, very much like a patient taking someone else's medicine,

as I still saw special education as a para-medical field. Kris's parents ultimately did not sign the pretyped form letter requesting evaluation. In class, Kris also mellowed out quite a bit when I learned that the best way to manage his behavior was to enjoy the humor in it and find outlets for his energy.

I first encountered Quamasia when I went to get a bookshelf from her general education class. She was repeating sixth grade, having failed the tests for promotion, and was bigger and louder than all of the other children. When I walked into the room, she turned her attention to me and began to catcall me as I picked up the shelf and carried it out of the room. I contemplated yelling at her, but the crowd was clearly hers, and her teacher was clearly unsuccessful in trying to rein her in. Three months into the school year, in just enough time for a referral, IEP meeting, and placement, she was given an IEP with a Learning Disability label and placed into 633. She regretted her earlier actions the second she walked in and saw me, but I tried to be welcoming and forgiving. She sat quietly in class, ashamed of being in "special ed."

I came to understand that 633 was a big dumping ground for students who were unwanted, even though it masqueraded as an inclusion setting. Michael, Kris, and Quamasia were just three of *those kids*, joined by 35 other students with significant learning needs who were excluded from general education classrooms because of disability, academic struggles, or behavior management needs. 633 was not diverse at all; in fact, it was a somewhat homogeneous group of struggling learners. In my mind at the time, whatever benefits there were of educating students with disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers, they were far outweighed by the challenges associated with having so many needs in one place. Moreover, whatever advantages came with having two teachers in a class were outweighed by the demands of not having time or resources to plan collaboratively. While I personally got along with my co-teachers, they were weak classroom managers, which put me in the position of perennial disciplinarian.

That was how I came to misunderstand inclusion. It did not make sense to me to lump all students with significant—and often conflicting—learning needs together in one place. I became the disciplinarian, and my co-teachers delivered content in an endless "one-teach, one-assist" arrangement. Nevertheless, there were a few successful aspects of this arrangement. I was able to work closely with students, building relationships with them and their parents; I believe I got to know the students of 633 better than any other group I encountered over the course of my career. I still keep in touch with Quamasia and Kris, almost 10 years later. Additionally, the arrangement was successful in the sense that it met the administration's most immediate demands: I was able to control 38 of the school's most disruptive

students at one time. When I got sick, though, I would have the security guards in the building tell me that I was not allowed to take days off, as my students literally could not even be kept in the classroom when I was not there. I felt that I could do better on my own.

At the end of my second year of teaching the group, I wrote my master's degree thesis, which ended up being an indictment of CTT and, by association, of inclusion. It seemed that the promise of inclusive methodologies was entirely undermined by poor implementation of the critical features that would enable inclusion to be successful: purposeful pairing of co-teachers, time for co-planning, thoughtful selection of the general education students who would be in the class, and most significantly, a shared and clearly articulated vision of what inclusion should actually look like. As my wife and I moved to a new home across the city, I needed to find a new job. One of my main criteria was that I would not have to work in a CTT setting. I ended up finding a school that did not have an inclusion program to speak of. However, that school would prove to be an even bigger problem for me.

Convenient Segregation and the Self-Contained Model

Through a friend of a friend, I easily got an interview at a small high school with 300 students in the Bronx. The school consistently scored at the highest levels on both New York State and New York City accountability measures, based on its high pass rates for standardized exams.[3] When I interviewed there, I was told that they did not have any CTT programs and that students with disabilities were mostly placed in a self-contained setting made up of one teacher, one paraprofessional, and 15 students identified as having "moderate to severe" disabilities. A small number of other students with IEPs received special education teacher support services (SETSS) in their general education classes, probably because those students approximated what the school considered to be normal. I strongly preferred self-contained settings, as I enjoyed working by myself: there were no conflicts with another teacher regarding classroom management style, no need to find time to plan how to collaborate, and most crucially, a much smaller class size.

I was assigned to work with a tenth-grade class, teaching algebra, global history, and foreign languages— one semester of French, one of Japanese. I was told that there would be opportunities for me to take on a leadership role as well, even though I was only in my third year of teaching. I was also told that the students were a bit wild and needed a teacher with strong classroom management skills to keep the

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3   It is worth noting that while many students passed the exams, very few scored very high. Accountability metrics at that time tracked only pass rates, not overall scores.

class in control. The administration was seemingly happy to hire a male with a military background to that end.

What I was not told was that during the previous year, the students' behavior had led their ninth-grade teacher to quit after a few months and driven the long-term substitute to have an emotional breakdown; she was, stories said, taken away from the school in an ambulance. This created the opening of the position I was hired for. Given their past successes at disruption, this group of kids was emboldened to resist my control and was in truth difficult to manage. The administration also added an English class to my teaching load and appointed me as the transition coordinator. My supervisor, Ms. Santana, was a brand new assistant principal. She was charged with managing everything related to special education and oversaw all aspects of my work, most notably lesson planning and writing IEPs.

My class had its share of students who displayed distinctly troubling behaviors, but there were also a few who were curious and eager to comply. Emily was a 15-year-old Black girl with an obvious physical disability. She was overweight, walked with a limp, and had one immobile eye. Additionally, she wore long sleeves and pants to cover up a skin condition, even in hot weather. Yet, she, too, was labeled as having a learning disability. She was a dream to teach: she was curious, funny, and very supportive of her peers' academic and social needs. In many ways, she acted as the mother of the class. At Emily's IEP meeting, there was the suggestion of moving her to a general education class and providing her with SETSS there. However, she did not want to do that. "As bad as things are here," she said, "those teachers don't have the time to take care of the students who need help. I'd rather be in here."

Barry was a 15-year-old Black boy of unremarkable height and build who had a perpetual smile on his face and seemed kind. He was classified as having a learning disability, but the scores that the school psychologist computed for him qualified him for a Mental Retardation label.[4] He was unable to read or write independently, but he liked sitting with his friend Juan, a thin, light-skinned boy, born in the Dominican Republic. Juan often associated with the few notorious gang members in the school and was frequently involved in fights in and outside of school.

Barry increasingly became a pawn in the scheming of Juan and his associates, taking orders from him to pick fights with suspected members of rival gangs and destroy school property, so Santana decided that it was time for Barry to transfer to a more restrictive setting. Once a placement was secured for

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4   The disability category "mental retardation" was renamed "intellectual disability" in 2010 by PL 111-256, also known as "Rosa's Law." At the time of this story, the term mental retardation was still in use.

Barry in a special school—which was in a more distant neighborhood that was not easily accessible by public transportation from his house—it was put on me to convince his grandmother to approve the move. When the grandmother resisted by not showing up at several arranged meetings, Santana and her secretary began to phone her every day, until she eventually signed the papers.

Santana and I also began to bump heads. It started on Veteran's Day, when others were thanking me for my service—a popular expression of gratitude that I, like many other veterans, neither enjoy nor welcome (Richtel, 2015). She told me that I was culpable for the deaths of innocent civilians just because I had participated in the war. I did not control my reaction to her suggestion well, barking aggressively back at her in front of a few other teachers in the department. From that point on, she targeted me with unannounced observations, gave me poor ratings, and directly threatened my career. I struggled to keep my composure, often drinking too much at the bar after school hours, and my teaching and professionalism distinctly suffered. I was unable to keep up with a workload that was probably unmanageable in the first place. My teaching performance deteriorated and I failed to complete paperwork on time, which made Santana even angrier with me. One of my colleagues told me she encouraged two ninth-grade boys to fill up paper bags with air and pop them behind me, causing me to startle. I felt more disabled during that year than at any other point since coming home.

I complained to Principal Bullock about Santana, but he did not want to interfere. "I just want you guys to work together and deal with *those kids*, so I can worry about the ones who are going to college," he said. He pointed at his bookshelf, full of Department of Education manuals, saying that he had his plate full. Driven by accountability measures calculated from test scores, Bullock explained that his vision was to create a true prep school that would send poor Bronx kids to his own Ivy League alma mater; it was clear that my students were not part of his vision. In fact, I do not believe that he even expected my students to graduate. On the contrary, I think the school was required to take a number of students with disabilities and just needed a place to store them. Receiving no support from him at the end of the year, I found work teaching elsewhere.

With Bullock and Santana at the helm, the school was successful in achieving its goals: to segregate *those kids* so that they were out of the way of students who were deemed to be more capable. As a result, the standardized test score pass rates for the school flourished, and at one point the school was ranked among the top ten highest-achieving schools in the city. Yet, few students with IEPs ever graduated from the school, and when they did it was because their parents fought for them to transfer to alternative programs wherein special education did not exist.

In 2012, Mayor Bloomberg initiated special education reforms that were targeted at placing students with disabilities in less restrictive environments (Wheaton, 2011). On the face of it, this would seem to be a systematic move toward inclusion. However, if we conceive of inclusion as a "principle of practice" (Kozleski, Yu, Satter, Francis, & Haines, 2015) instead of as a concrete set of implementable models, it is tough to maintain such an optimistic stance toward those reforms; in reality, the result was that decisions about the placement of students with disabilities were entirely in the hands of education professionals whose primary concerns were compliance and accountability, not accommodating student needs. Moreover, many parents and educators understood that the impetus for this reform was to cut costs (Wheaton, 2011). Indeed, the common practice of hiring alternatively certified special education teachers at the bottom of collectively negotiated pay scales is probably similarly driven by the desire to lower the cost of staffing fields with high turnover.

Systematic Exclusion

Connor and Ferri (2007) described how special education settings are used as a way to keep the peace through removing students that overextended educators fear to be disorderly or disruptive. There is little doubt that both of my former schools employed this rationale for exclusion, and that it enabled them to achieve their desired ends. Thus, in these schools, "special education literally [became] a way to 'keep the peace' by removing students who might disrupt the status quo of the general education classroom" (Connor & Ferri, 2007, p. 69). In this sense, Hockenbury, Kauffman, and Hallahan's (2000) claim that special education is "already in most aspects well enough integrated as a sub-system" (p. 5) seems analogous to arguments made in the late-19th and early-20th century for "separate but equal" racial segregation. Some may consider the comparison to be a bit hyperbolic; however, Ferri and Connor (2005) have convincingly demonstrated how the special education apparatus has in fact contributed to resegregation since the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. Moreover, I seriously doubt that any of my former students would agree that they were "well enough integrated" into the fabric of school life.

Furthermore, when Mayor Bloomberg and his education chancellors instituted changes in compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), what Danforth (2014) called "technocracy" became the *lingua franca* of the entire New York City school system, including its separate and unequal special education sub-system. Under this technocratic regime

The complexities, vagaries, and inconsistencies of everyday life are distilled into fields of

metric regularity and schemes of statistical determination. In this view, technocracy is a mental state, a way of thinking about, organizing, and interpreting the world that yields mechanized symmetry, predictability, and efficiency. What most teachers would describe in terms of human interaction and relationships is recast as a series of calculus problems. (Danforth, 2014, pp. 313–314)

There can be little doubt that this quantification of students drove Principal Bullock's triage of my students into the hands of the abusive and inexperienced Assistant Principal Santana and her similarly inexperienced staff (myself included). In his quest to improve the statistical measures of student learning, Bullock saw to it that those whose performance would not yield the desired results were marginalized by technocratic management. It would be nice to believe that this was an isolated case (and perhaps the more extreme aspects of it were), but I would contend that the proliferation of technocracy is likely to be a general feature of post-NCLB American education and underlie the marginalization of students with disabilities in a range of settings.

Tied to this phenomenon is the proliferation of so-called evidence-based practices, or instructional methods that purport to be scientifically validated. Gallagher (2010) convincingly argued that through dubious applications of statistical research methods in education, this paradigm contributes to the further marginalization of students who are already conceived of as being "abnormal." All of this helps create a broad system of exclusion, which Slee (2011) describes as "scraps from the table for children who, when all is said and done, are sometimes tolerated but never welcome" (p. 43). This would surely resonate with my former students, as it resonates with me and my experiences.

My own Paradigm Shift – Inclusion as Social Justice

My understanding of inclusion has changed from a fundamentally technical definition to a much broader and abstract understanding. Critical to this has been a shift from accepting a primarily legal definition and rationale for inclusion, such as compliance with the least restrictive environment requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to a moral and ethical rationale based on the civil rights of children with disabilities to not be segregated. The work of disability studies in education (DSE) scholars, especially David Connor, has been crucial in changing my perspective in this way. I first met Dr. Connor when I was seeking admission into my current doctoral program, and I remember him explaining DSE as an alternative to the field of special education. I was confused at first, I must admit, because I had never heard the professional, medical, and legal underpinnings of special education

questioned. I now realize, having worked with and learned from him, that desegregation of special education is not just a matter of compliance with the mandate of implementing accommodations "to the maximum extent possible" or even "with all deliberate speed"; it is a moral imperative to destigmatize disability in our schools.

Broadly, inclusion has been conceived as a way of meeting the learning needs of students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers and as a way of meeting the needs of all students by focusing pedagogical energies on the most marginalized students, with varying degrees of emphasis on disability-specific issues (Kiuppis & Hausstätter, 2015). For my purposes, the distinctions between groups for whom inclusion is done do not matter very much; on the contrary, I think inclusion can be best understood in opposition to the systematic "scraps from the table" exclusion that I witnessed and experienced as a teacher.

To this end, teacher education in inclusive practices must be grounded in a commitment to equity and acceptance of diversity first. This needs to be articulated in a vision for inclusivity that goes beyond technocratic notions of achievement; indeed, what I had missed in my training was the "why" of inclusion. Without that context, it was much easier for me and for those around me to accept the convenience of segregation. Much can and should be learned from teacher education programs that emphasize inclusive practice, notably at Syracuse University (Ashby, 2012). In my work as a teacher educator, I teach many of the very same technical foundations of inclusive practice that I once was taught: collaborative co-teaching, differentiation, assessment, and classroom management. However, though I finished my initial teacher training, my understanding was that those technical skills were to be used specifically to teach students with disabilities or perhaps could be stretched into benefitting "at risk" students; now I focus on framing those technical skills in a context of equity and civil rights for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, I seek to teach a more comprehensive but abstract concept of inclusion in order to convey that those skills need to benefit all students, from those who are profoundly disadvantaged by prevailing pedagogical models to those who are already the most successful in general education settings. Finally, by drawing attention to questions of who has access to those so-called inclusion spaces, I ask my students to be critical about whether the structures that they see in their fieldwork or in their schools are truly inclusive.

In addition to reframing inclusionary practices as pedagogy for equity, new models for inclusion need to come into practice, particularly in urban school districts, wherein disability, race, and socioeconomic status overlap profoundly. Slee's (2011) claim that theories of inclusive education are too often technical

prescriptions noted, there remains a need for practical suggestions for that can be put into practice, given the frequent inadequacy of existing structures in these places. This problem is particularly acute for secondary schools, as many models for inclusive practice are based on early childhood and elementary settings (Beckman & Odom, 2002; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004). In the broader context of inclusive education, the design of structures for inclusive practice requires some capacity for local flexibility in finding ways to address the non-negotiables, including meaningful collaboration, accommodation for student needs, and purposeful assessment, given the real world-fiscal and personnel problems that urban school districts face.

Finally, I am finding that working toward inclusion means coming to terms with my own disability. I understand my own disability and relationship with society differently now. My years of teaching changed my awareness of segregation and disability in profound ways, not least of all because the way that I was treated when my disability came to light and paralleled how the students I worked with were treated. For me, my "symptoms" are connected not merely to "triggers" in a direct causal relationship but also, in complex and dynamic ways, to the broad contexts in which I work and live in complex and intersecting ways. My awareness of how my own medical condition turned into something that was genuinely *disabling* also emerged. The ecological factors that I experienced that affected the expression of my own difference separated me from my peers, in much the same way that ecological factors affect the academic and behavioral performance of students with perceived disabilities in segregated classrooms. Michael, Kris, Quamasia, Emilie, Juan, and Barry's exclusion therefore should never be justified on the grounds that they were less "able" than others. Rather, their disabilities need to be viewed in the context of an exclusionary system that makes whatever unique characteristics that were intrinsic to them truly disabling.

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The Unfolding of Lucas's Story in an Inclusive Classroom: Living, Playing, and Becoming in the Social World of Kindergarten

Haeny Yoon, Carmen Llerena, & Emma Brooks

None of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes; we can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events.

(Paley, 1990, p. xii)

Classrooms are spaces where children make public their identities, in the company of other children and adults whose identities are also evolving. As Paley points out, in order for every child to be given equitable opportunities for self-expression, classrooms should be spaces where stories unfold. Artiles and Kozleski (2007) propose a transformative agenda for inclusive education that includes access and permeable curricular boundaries, reflective and inquiry-based praxis, and authentic assessments that work to respond to children's lived experiences.

In this article, we discuss inclusivity alongside children labeled with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)—a label that constructs assumptions and places limitations on enacting diverse identities. Lists of attributes and predetermined tasks are often assigned arbitrarily to children on the spectrum. Instead, why not view children through Vivian Paley's lens of storytelling and play? What unique resources do children offer when given the space to enact their own ideas as part of classroom communities rather than *apart from* them?

The Story of Lucas

The story of Lucas,[1] a kindergartner diagnosed with ASD, allows us to see the potential of play, stories, and daily interactions as intellectual and social activity. Lucas's complex thoughts, social acuity, and sense of humor create new storylines and directions that facilitate depth in play, for both adults and children.

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1   All children's names are pseudonyms.

We re-write the story of Lucas and others like him in order to highlight the funds of knowledge that children bring into the classroom community (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). As his parent (Emma), teacher (Carmen), and a teacher-educator (Haeny), we tell Lucas's story from multiple perspectives, hoping *all* student identities will be appreciated. We begin with Emma's description of Lucas.

²**Lucas Keeps Having "Meltups"

Imaginative. Inclusive. When asked to describe my son with high-functioning autism, these are the words that jump to mind. Yes, he can be in his own world, not atypical of a child with his diagnosis. But it is a highly adventurous world of heroism, deception, strategy, dark corridors, and bright endings. He wants more than anything to bring you in and make it come alive for you too.

When we think of autistic children, we tend to picture the reclusive child prone to meltdowns. Lucas is an ebullient child who is prone to what I call "meltups." These are wide-eyed, ecstatic affairs that are generally short-lived. No tears or crying here. Meltups are certainly something to be managed and tamed, but they are not the hair-raising, emotionally brutal events ascribed to ASD children.

Kids like Lucas—they always have contributed, even before they could verbally. Lucas goes for the laugh whenever he can. He asks classmates, teachers, and therapists alike to come over to our house for play dates. There is so much of his world to share. At home with me or in individual therapy sessions with adults, he is generally more reserved than when he is surrounded by peers. More time is allotted for verbal back and forth, and his spontaneous conversational skills are drawn out. It is real work for him, and he saves his spark for school and play dates. The opportunities for social interaction, and of course peers who appreciate his silly sense of humor, are what make him most vibrant, as a sense of motivation to deepen connections is being forged.

It is 2016, and merchandising for *Star Wars: Episode VII* is relentless and unavoidable. A fan of rocketry and space travel, Lucas was easily lured into George Lucas's world of intergalactic strife. As his mother, it was initially difficult for me to accept the aggressive conflict in Star Wars, especially with a child whose social development must be carefully monitored. However, the science-fiction genre is an engaging path for a young mind seeking creative input, and so our Star Wars adventure began.

At home, Lucas's fascination with Star Wars is reflective as well as exploratory. Sometimes he builds a

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2   Indicates a shift in author voice.

city (e.g. Coruscant, Naboo) out of blocks, and a flurry of spaceships and Lego characters descend on it. There is plenty of conflict. A green-faced fellow is taken prisoner, or someone must be saved from a sandpit. His cities are frequently leveled and quickly rebuilt by Lego workers. Usually, however, he is feverishly drawing with markers, hashing out elaborate play schemes.

These drawing sessions are not like the quiet time I had with my crayons as a kid. The movements of competing starships are shown in detail. There are explanations, sound effects, and a lot of "Look, Mommy!" His body is physically engaged, jumping during especially exciting parts of the story. He walks his fingers into the heart of battle, and his body reverberates when the Death Star's explosion rattles the galaxy.

Sometimes these drawings are incredibly touching. He recently asked about my late father, "PopPop," and where he went when he died. After my attempt to provide a reassuring answer, he stared at me with big eyes as he gathered words for his plan. He decided to draw a picture of PopPop flying a Star Destroyer (Figure 1). Next to my father was a small stick figure representing Lucas holding an X-Wing Fighter, and in the distance, another stick figure without toys but wielding a big smile (me).

Lucas had no memory of my father, but his instinct for inclusiveness inspired him to find a way to bring a man he knew only from pictures into the vivid playtime the rest of us got to enjoy. Most of his "keepers" are hung in the hallway, but Lucas insisted that this one go up in the living room, next to the toys.

Figure 1. Lucas's drawing of Pop Pop in the Star Destroyer.

I see this imaginative play as a kind of self-imposed homework. Lucas is working on ideas and even full-fledged stories, as well as the more arduous task of organizing language to go with them. He brings these schemes, what I call his "A-game," back to his peers at school or on play dates. Recently, I saw him organize a small group of unfamiliar children in the playground sandbox, taking them on a tour of the dusty planet Tatooine. He warned them of nefarious characters lurking in the surrounding rocks as well as a few scattered volcanoes (why not?). A little girl clutching a purple pony was intrigued and clearly pleased to be part of this grand adventure—like all of us.

**Framing ASD from a Disabilities Studies Perspective

By centering on the Lucas narrative, we shift the focus away from discourse about labels, interventions, and imposed meanings. We open up the idea that children like Lucas are intricate in their mind, body, and spirit. Their identities are multidimensional and full of emotions (meltups or meltdowns); their experiences and interests are varied and complex.

However, the larger cultural message around Autism Spectrum Disorder frequently overemphasizes the social behavior of ASD students as problems needing to be fixed. In popular culture depictions, disabled individuals are compared to perceived "norms." The media portrays individuals undergoing debilitating circumstances. Or ASD persons are exoticized by heroic narratives in which individuals overcome their disabilities (Connor & Bejoian, 2006; Davis, 2013; Linton, Mello, & O'Neill, 1995).

Inherent in the work of disability studies (DS) is a challenge to the idea of normalcy – the images, perceptions, language/discourse used to place social and cultural limitations on those with who are cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially different (Davis, 2013). Disability is often defined as a medical deficiency that needs treatment or intervention in order to fix individuals rather than fix systems. The focus of DS is on disability as a social, cultural, political construct that has consequences for those who are categorically labeled (Linton, 1998). The field brings to light "the critical divisions our society makes in creating the normal versus the pathological, the inside versus the outsider, or the competent citizen versus the ward of the state" (Linton, 1998, p. 2).

DS scholars interrogate the popular discourse, institutional limitations, and identity markers that construct disabled individuals. This shifts the focus from devising interventions and accommodations to a more critical stance on schooling.

Disabilities are a social judgment, and disability scholars have long since argued that "disability is an idea and not a thing…it is not the way in which people vary or the differences they have in comparison to others but what we make of those differences that matter" (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011, p. 270). As Simi Linton and her colleagues ask, "how can we redress problems in the structure as well as the content of the curriculum in reform efforts?" (Linton et al., 1995, p. 10). In other words, it is important to turn the lens on socially constructed schooling practices (e.g., curriculum, classroom management, schedules, movement) that create disabling situations for neuro-diverse children.

Inclusion in Classroom Spaces

Already positioned within deficit terms, ASD students are assumed to be asocial and given reductive instruction meant to control their social behaviors and help them to "fit in." Rather, we highlight the benefits of lifting up the voices of ASD students within the broader community. Similar to multicultural education frameworks, inclusive education should not be viewed as additive (Banks & Banks, 2009), but central to socially just curriculum and practices. To say that all children must thrive in a prescribed, "normalized" setting, along a trajectory of "typical" behaviors neglects the non-linear ways that many children arrive at understanding themselves and their cultural worlds.

Children with identified disabilities are often treated as unable to function at the level of their peers and included as tertiary members of the classroom. Similar to the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), we begin with the idea that constructing difference as deficit overlooks the varied ideas, capacities, and resources that all children bring into classroom contexts. Thus, "inclusive education requires a transformation in curriculum and pedagogy…from a generalized, dominant culture perspective to a pluralistic and cosmopolitan one" (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Difference and deficit are not synonymous; instead, diverse voices and experiences offer the dominant culture new ways of thinking about ideas and approaching problems and issues.

In the next sections, we discuss the classroom community in which Carmen and Haeny's project took place by describing the foundation and application of our play/writing project as a tool for fostering inclusion. We place importance on allowing children's natural inquiries to emerge from careful attention to play in action. Weaved throughout the paper are descriptions conveying the complex actions of Lucas from our multiple viewpoints. We aim to dispel stereotypical views of ASD children, especially those that posit them as asocial and devoid of emotions (e.g., empathy). Our goal in describing the project within this particular classroom is to provide a counter narrative of what inclusive classrooms might look like.

**From Carmen's Treasure Chest of Stories

Lucas became central to the narrative at Elizabeth Browning Elementary School.[3] While he masterfully engaged his parents and peers in out-of-school spaces, he brought this imaginative, contagious energy into the kindergarten classroom, meltups and all. Our kindergarten classroom beautifully illustrated

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3   The school name is a pseudonym.

the diversity of New York City. The thirteen students and two teachers came from various racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The classroom followed an integrated co-teaching (ICT) model, mindfully structured to meet the needs of four students with ASD and nine neurotypical students. While the program provided a therapeutic environment designed especially for students with ASD, all students benefited from the instructional strategies and behavior supports. Among the therapies provided to students with ASD was Social Development Intervention (SDI), which focused on communication, problem solving, social skills, and pragmatic language development (Koenig, Bleiweiss, Brennan, Cohen, & Siegel, 2009). These daily sessions were facilitated by a specialized speech pathologist with the support of the classroom teachers.

In my thirteen years as an educator, I learned from children to presume competence (Biklen & Burke, 2006), recognizing that each child wants to participate and contribute to the classroom community—to be fully included, accepted, appreciated, and heard. Over the years, I amassed a collection of stories about my students and the daily occurrences in my classroom. These stories include exciting discoveries, mischievous acts, proud moments, and hilarious tales. Lucas was a frequent contributor to my treasure chest of stories.

Lucas Saves the Day

Lucas has a gentle demeanor and amiable disposition that drew me to him.His capacity for empathy surpassed that of most kindergartners. It did not fit the ill-conceived stereotype that children with ASD are not capable of understanding and sharing the feelings of others. Lucas is also a savvy problem solver. When one least expected it, Lucas chimed in to offer advice to a peer about how to handle a small conflict or disappointment before it escalated. He was generous with praise and was happy to share with his classmates. He loved to laugh and make others laugh. Lucas was enamored with all things Star Wars and often created intricate drawings that gave us a glimpse into his extraordinary imagination. At one point a new-found passion for chess brought out a competitive side of him I had not seen before.

Lucas consistently showed care and concern for me, despite developmental theories that deem children egocentric, more concerned about themselves than others. One day Lucas and I were working on a task that required him to cut sentences into strips and glue them in his notebook. Lucas noticed that I was rubbing my hands together after using a glue stick and asked if my hands were sticky. After I nodded, he affirmed the same thing happens to him when he uses glue and added his dislike for sticky fingers.

In what seemed like a random conversation shift, he asked for a water bottle. I thought he might be thirsty, but he said it was to rinse the stickiness off. I told him not to worry – we had plenty of hand wipes to clean our hands and pointed him in that direction. Lucas had difficulty opening the container of wipes so I went over to help him while he sat back down. I returned to my seat next to him and offered him the wipe.

He said, "I don't need it. It's for you. *You* have sticky hands." I had assumed that Lucas was concerned about his own needs when in actuality he was thinking about mine.

This attention to others is also evident in his peer interactions. For example, Xiarra was distressed to discover her pencil did not have an eraser. Though she had no need for an eraser, the possibility of making a mistake without one on hand was more than she could bear. She began crying inconsolably. Before I had a chance to intervene, Lucas jumped in and said, "Here. You can use mine and I'll use yours." I thanked Lucas and went off to find him a pencil-top eraser, which he graciously accepted with a smile. I anticipated he would put the eraser on his pencil. Instead, Lucas called out to Xiarra and said, "Here's an even bigger eraser for you," and once again they swapped pencils.

In many instances, Lucas found creative ways to diffuse situations, putting the needs of others over his own. In fact, meeting his own needs was not always his sole concern – attempting to understand and communicate with others seemed to motivate his participation in the classroom community – a clear goal in SDI.

Lucas's peers were drawn to his laid-back personality, responsive nature, and sharp wit. During SDI sessions, other children clamored to sit next to him, at times crying, whining, and heel-digging if there weren't enough spots close by. Trevor, the last child to enter the room, was disappointed and on the verge of tears to learn the only chair available for him was one chair away from Lucas. Ms. M wondered aloud how they could solve the problem before beginning the session. Lucas looked at Trevor as he pointed to the distance between the chairs and said, "You are *close* to sitting next to me." Trevor quietly agreed with Lucas's logic and sat down quietly.

In matters like this, Lucas taught us how children with disabilities are able to "enhance others' learning and living" (Edmiston, 2007, p.342). In addition, he allowed us to see new ways of problem-solving and to see the needs of others. Lucas was part of solving the problems evident in the social scene.

Telling Our Stories Through Play

Carmen and Haeny worked together in the classroom for most of the school year (2016-2017). Central to their work was the belief that understanding and utilizing children's culture was the foundation of curriculum and instruction.

Many scholars advocate for pluralistic, multicultural, and democratic spaces to reframe deficit paradigms. Using culturally sustaining frameworks, teachers seek to actively maintain cultural identities while providing marginalized groups access to knowledge and power (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; Sleeter, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2013).

Similarly, we believe (like many DS scholars) that there has been a long history of oppression and marginalization of individuals with a disability label (Baglieri et al., 2011). Culture (broadly defined) includes (dis)abilities since it influences the range of practices, affiliations, representations, and boundaries that make up individual experience. Thus, exploring the "multi" cultural lives of young children is important in understanding children's development as social, intellectual, and cultural beings (Rowe, Fitch, & Bass, 2001).

To prioritize inclusion means that social interactions are carefully observed, documented, and facilitated by teachers. In play, children build a shared culture, drawing from multiple cultural communities (linguistic, familial, cultural, and social) in order to create and sustain play episodes. Vivian Paley reminds us that "play is not enough; there must be a format that captures the essence of play while attaching to it a greater degree of objectivity" (Paley, 1990, p. 34). In our own quest to intellectualize play experiences, we describe a play/writing project where children's recorded and observed stories became the material used to "write" about life in this classroom.

We spent 30 to 45 minutes giving children opportunities for free play using a variety of materials and configurations (kitchen areas, dress-up centers, block/building areas, and train centers). Within these areas, we documented children's play with audio-recordings and transcriptions of dialogue, photographs of play scenes, collections of artifacts, records of questions/inquiries, and reflective notes. Carmen and Haeny discussed the transcriptions and field notes, paying attention to children's enactment of their identities, cultural affinities, interests, and social appropriations.

Finally, we shared our findings with the children in the form of play stories, using a combination of

photographs, artifacts, and their own transcribed words as resources. These stories had a permanent place in the classroom library; the children went back to read them again, as well as to initiate and continue storylines in play. For example, transforming superheroes became a common theme at the dress-up center – this gave children a way to try on different costumes (e.g., ninja turtle to construction worker to doctor) and simultaneously "try" on different roles. They used content from previous play stories to develop their own versions of transforming superheroes, reappropriating and thereby "transforming" stories through play. Our role as teachers was to give students the space, materials, freedom, and support to sustain their play (Chudacoff, 2007). In the next section, Haeny shares what she has learned from Lucas within this classroom context.

**Haeny's View of the Social Scene

> *Not too long ago, Lucas was sitting at a table, getting ready to eat lunch. He had a bag of chips that needed to be opened and asked Ms. Carmen for help. She was in the middle of chatting with me, so she asked Lucas to wait a moment. After finishing our conversation, I walked over to Lucas and offered to help him open his bag. He looked up at me and asked, "How did you know I needed help? Did you notice me?" I nodded my head and said, "Of course."* (Field Notes, 2/5/2016)

In fact, I had been "noticing" Lucas a great deal, particularly his astute attention to the social scene and his keen reading of those who were included and excluded. A couple of weeks before this instance, Lucas asked if I would go with the ASD group for SDI. When we got to Ms. M's classroom, Lucas informed her that we had a new person in the group—he pointed at me and made sure I had a place to sit. I was grateful for the brief introduction since even as adults, it is difficult to approach new people and a new situation.

Lucas did this for me and others quite often. During play, he would stop to tell me the rules or possibilities; he showed me the thermometer in the doctor's kit, explaining to me how to read the temperature, "This is the bad temperature…and that's the happy temperature." Or when Trevor during pretend-play yelled, "Help me Dr. Lucas!", Lucas was quick to rush over and ask, "Are you okay? What happened?"

On another occasion, Riley was sitting on a red chair wearing a teenage mutant ninja turtle mask (a popular dress-up costume), interacting with no one. I saw Lucas look over at Riley. I could almost anticipate what he would do, and consistent with my expectations, he walked over and said, "I'll sit

next to you, don't worry." Riley got up and pretended to shoot him with the magic ring on his finger,

"Pyooo!"

"He's still alive! Ahhhhh!" reacted Lucas as he fell to the ground dramatically and lay still, face down.

Within this single act of inclusion, Lucas seamlessly brought Riley back into the play scene through an empathic gesture and a logically constructed response to the ensuing play scenario. He weaved in and out of character (from a concerned friend to a fighter), actively participating as well as purposefully including other children.

Lucas could have easily continued to play with Trevor and excluded Riley. Instead, Lucas responded, revealing a heightened awareness of the entire social scene—the cultural tools, the participants, the storyline, the context, and the environment.

The Art of Improvisation

Lucas was attuned to his social surrounding rather than simply engrossed in his own play. Once, while cooking a pot of spaghetti on the kitchen stove, he continued to pay attention to Evan and Xiarra, who were sharing his play space. In the plastic kitchen area were many play items including pots, pans, containers, plastic food of all types, and a kitchen set with a pretend stove, microwave, sink, and cabinets. Lucas, along with two classmates, were role-playing scenes typical in the kitchen. Evan was flipping eggs on the fryer, Xiarra was boiling water on the stove, and Lucas was making spaghetti. At one point, Evan pretended to pour cold water on Xiarra, who was sitting on the carpet.

> Evan: *Did you know I put pepper in the water? Now I'm going to pour it on you!*
> Xiarra: *Ah! Choo!*
> Lucas: *I poured ketchup on you! (He takes the ketchup and pretends to put it on Xiarra.)*
> Xiarra: *Ah!*
> Lucas: *A person sandwich! Look, a person sandwich.*
> Evan: *Put mustard!*
> Lucas: *And then you know -*
> Evan: *Ketchup (pours it on Xiarra).*
> Lucas: *And you know, when we eat her, we can put a band-aid on her. When we eat her, we can put a band-*

aid on her.

Evan: I put water, ketchup, mustard.

Lucas: We can put a band-aid! (Lucas and Evan start laughing.)

Initially, it seemed as if Lucas was playing separately from Evan and Xiarra, but he joined them when the plot was "getting good." He contributed to Evan's story, transforming the complexity of the storyline. He not only poured condiments on Xiarra, but he also turned her into a person sandwich because that was what condiments were usually for. Furthermore, he suggested putting a band-aid on her because upon being eaten, she would be hurt. His storyline was also accompanied by an ongoing narrative that allowed me to piece together the sequence of actions in this story.

While Evan and Xiarra were actively participating and sustaining the play, Lucas gave insight into what was happening—they were making a person sandwich, they planned to eat it, and they were eventually going to patch her up with band-aids. Without Lucas's narrative of the event, it would have looked like a fake fight between the members of the center. However, as more careful examination of play reveals, children have much more invested in their play than a cursory glance allows us to see.

Tina Fey (2011), in Bossypants, advises improv actors to contribute to the scene, "It's your responsibility to contribute. Always make sure you're adding something to the discussion. Your initiations are worthwhile" (p. 85). She emphasizes the importance of listening and respecting your improv partners, being part of sustaining the story rather than relying on others to carry the load.

Lucas took a page right out of Tina Fey's book—he built on Evan's story rather than diverging from it and contributed his own ideas, elevating the quality of the scene. Almost on cue, as soon as the scene was over, he grabbed his pot of spaghetti, sat down at the table to eat his spaghetti dinner and carried on a conversation with me about what I liked to eat for dinner. He fluidly moved from scene to scene.

Call Me on My Cell Phone

Social relationships and making connections played a significant part in Lucas's improvised play scenarios. Most of his play times included enacting social relationships with other children in the classroom, teachers, or imaginary friends. On multiple occasions, Lucas would pretend to call people on the cell phone. I overheard him saying, "I'm going fishing and I'll meet you back at the basketball court." He was walking around the room pretending to talk to his friend while using his hands to

gesture while talking. His phone conversation typified a conversation with friends—the idea of making plans played a part in how Lucas understood relationships.

On another occasion, he appropriated a different kind of role and discourse style. He looked over at Mr. N, who was sitting alone at a table (once again involving someone who was solitary), called him on the cell phone, and proceeded to take his order.

> Lucas: I'm calling you, Mr. N. What would you like to order? (He stands a considerable distance from Mr. N.)
> Mr. N: (He pulls out his actual cell phone.) I would like a bacon cheeseburger. How long will it take?
> Lucas: Six minutes.
> Mr. N.: How much is it going to cost?
> Lucas: One dollar.

When Mr. N.'s order was ready, Lucas brought him the cheeseburger, informed him that there was no bacon available (it was not easy to find in the toy bin), and managed to wrangle an actual dollar from his new customer.

During this time, Lucas responded in character, answering Mr. N's inquiries. He also completed the task of taking, making, and delivering the order. Moreover, Lucas engaged in a spontaneous role play using humor, wit, and flexibility. Lucas navigated the social scene as well as expertly involving and engaging others around him. He adopted socially appropriate communicative and discourse styles as he engaged with others in play. Arguably, he kept these notions hidden until we transformed our own teacher/authoritative gaze into that of a co-participant and co-learner.

Lucas's play, while unpredictable, always followed a social trajectory— inherent in his play was responsiveness, attention to the ongoing (inter)actions, and a deep understanding of social cues and intentions. In the next section, we turn attention to Lucas' own social world. We begin and end Lucas's story with an enactment of Star Wars, as this seems only appropriate.

Entering Lucas's World

In a Tumblr post by Autistic Worlds, the author describes the idea of "traveling" as "a mental activity categorized by intense, divergent imagining" (2015). Her imagination is what supported her through

difficult moments and ableist barriers. She describes these moments as a journey from stifling, physical realities to imaginative and creative worlds inside her head.

Lucas "travels" quite a bit, but often seeks companions to travel with him. One day, he was describing a battle involving tie fighters (elite pilots in the Galactic Empire's military), shields, and the Death Star. He looked at me and asked, "You know how we will get them?" I looked at his drawing and said, "How?" He jumped out of his seat and put both his hands up and said, "Shoot them…from inside." He explained to me that the lone tie fighter can shoot through the shield, but "nobody can shoot into the shield…only if they shoot that tie fighter, the shield is destroyed" (Figure 2). He exclaimed that he would get colored pencils to illustrate the tie fighters hitting the shield.
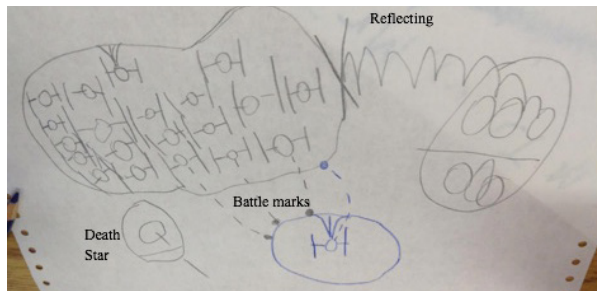
Figure 2. The battle of the tie fighters by Lucas.

"Another one shoots, and they are *not* getting through…now they are having a bit of a battle," he said, while drawing lines with the colored pencil to indicate the act of shooting and reflecting. Trevor (another student with ASD) interrupted him, insisting on showing Lucas his drawing of Mr. Jabes (a character he had just made up). He said, "It's us versus Mr. Jabes…we are on the Millenium Falcon." Lucas, in the midst of his own battle scene, stated rather logically, "I've got an idea. Should we pretend we can shoot the pages?"

Lucas drew on Trevor's paper, as Trevor's own story seemed to serve as a familiar parallel: the Millenium Falcon (also a part of Star Wars) and the battle language (e.g., "versus") was in line with Lucas's ongoing drama. He explained to Trevor, "Death star shooting!" but Trevor was not pleased.

Trevor angrily said, "Hey! I didn't want to shoot through pages." Trevor's picture now had the same, coiled reflection lines, colored pencil lines to indicate shooting, and Lucas's authorial imprint (Figure 3). Mr. N. came over to deal with the situation as Trevor burst into tears.

> *Mr. N: Trevor didn't like it when you drew on his paper (Lucas tries to draw on it again and starts whining a*

little.) Excuse me; Trevor didn't like it when you drew on his paper. You saw how he reacted, right?

Trevor: (in a calmer voice to Lucas). Can you not draw on my paper, please?

Mr. N: Good job using your words.

Trevor: (continues his story to Lucas). Hey, this is us three versus Mr. Jabes and this is…

Lucas: But excuse me, you know what? When you tell me how this story (referring to Mr. Jabes) is going, and I'm working on this story, you're kind of distracting me.
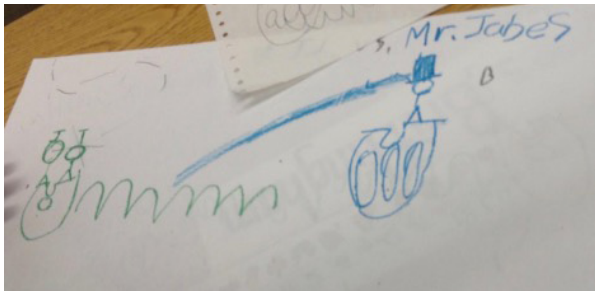

Figure 3. Trevor's drawing of Mr. Jabes.

In this scene, we see Lucas involved in his own story, so much so that he experiences an intense "meltup" (as Emma describes earlier) of an intergalactic battle and supernatural powers. His storytelling and story writing are brought to life by body movements, dialogue, and markings on the page. He continues the experience on Trevor's paper; Trevor unsuccessfully tries to interrupt the scene at its climax.

This is where Lucas's ASD label allows us to understand the complexity of neurodiverse children. On the surface, we can point out the rather simplistic diagnoses of the scenario: Lucas was "daydreaming" and in his own world—he seemed uninterested in what is going on around him. He misread Trevor's social cues and disregarded his peer's feelings. He was impulsive and drew on another classmate's drawing. However, when analyzing the full context of the episode, we see that there is more to Lucas's reactions. The level of detail in his drawings and words, and his ability to bring the page to life require more than just imagination and creativity. He was, in fact, directing the scene, situating the characters, improvising the drama, building momentum, and crafting the visual stimulus. He was also involving me as a willing participant and observer of this "galaxy far, far away"—he brought me into his world.

When Trevor brought his paper over, he found a way to connect Trevor's idea with his own; arguably, this could be seen as an inclusive act rather than an ill-intentioned compulsion. To be fair, Lucas was invested in his own story, but he found a way to connect Mr. Jabes, Millenium Falcon, and Trevor's story into the dramatic retelling. Thus, he brought Trevor into the play with him as well.

The miscommunication between the two boys was understandable, given the difficulty of negotiating social intentions and demands, especially when any two people want to play different things. However, Lucas confidently explained (in a "socially acceptable" manner) his feelings towards Trevor's interruption. He let Trevor know that "When you tell me how *this* story is going, and I'm working on *this* story, you're kind of distracting me." He utilized the tools learned at SDI in an authentic, social context—he used his words to mediate the conflict.

Entering Children's Cultural Worlds

Lucas is an integral character in breathing life into our classroom community. His unique story (along with the unique stories of each classmate) creates a collective story of our kindergarten space that belongs to all of us: the children, the teachers, the parents, and the school.

During play, different children displayed competence dependent on the nature and topic of play, providing an equitable space for children to reveal their sophisticated repertoire of social and cultural knowledge (e.g., making sandwiches, taking orders, dramatizing Star Wars). More importantly, play allowed the children to hold different positions of power and live out complex identities that were not tied to narrow and ill-conceived academic labels (e.g., struggling reader, special needs child).

Edmiston (2007) addressed the social construction of disability as a term used to exclude and "other" those who are different or impacted by physical, emotional, or intellectual labels. These labels simplify the complexity of children, labeling them with different abilities, while overlooking the role of learners as active agents in the construction of learning. He makes a case for dramatic play where children demonstrate competent language use and identify themselves as active and capable participants within their peer groups.

During formal, teacher-directed moments, it would be easy to dismiss Lucas as unresponsive, but as we move towards children's cultural center, we are afforded windows into their sophisticated and imaginative thoughts. From the above scenario, we rethink how we define "responsive." We ask, "What are children actually responding to as they engage with others?" And what can we learn as we inquire into the social imagination of children's worlds?

It is important to provide the time, materials, and space for children to bring these worlds to life. Therefore, we advocate for protecting and privileging spaces in school (e.g., free play) where children

are given agency to engage in authentic experiences and inquiry. Similarly, teachers need to rethink curriculum, structures, and classroom activities in order to make time for play and other agentive activity.

Through collaboration and interaction, children are able to draw on multiple resources to engage with others within literate acts: storytelling, oral language, drawing, numeracy, and writing. We began to see children's identities within their play by looking at the roles they relate to, the conversations they participate in, their enactment and placement of popular culture, and their transformative use of materials.

Lucas was engaged and social during play. He often asked clarifying questions of his peers and teachers; he responded to others when asked questions during classroom events; he referenced thoughts that others brought up. More importantly, freedom to play gave Lucas the opportunity to share his knowledge and experiences in a world that tends to silence and marginalize those who are different (Wendell, 1989).

Holding onto labels and focusing on (dis)abilities hinder the narratives that are constantly being constructed and reconstructed in social spaces like the classroom. Through careful observation and detailed analysis of children's texts and conversations, we place responsibility on teachers to strive for complete portraits of children's abilities and knowledge. The purpose of understanding individuals in self-motivated activities (e.g., play for young children) is important in revealing the multiple positions, roles, and traits individuals pursue across contexts. We avoid the "danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2007) that can potentially narrow the opportunities for individuals to creatively express their strengths and skill sets..

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Talking Tolerance Inside the "Inclusive" Early Childhood Classroom

Karen Watson

Tolerance and being tolerant are narratives that circulate and are taken up by the children in the "inclusive" classroom. Being tolerant is viewed positively as a shared and beneficial story line for inclusiveness in the classroom. However, when examined more closely and critically, tolerance can, and does, function in many other ways. Tolerance is often typically conceived of as an individual virtue, producing a degree of integrity for the tolerator and, in contrast, a position of deviance for the tolerated (Brown, 2006). Although tolerance has multiple and fluid definitions, in this paper the term implies a magnanimous act or capacity for enduring something or someone. The practice of tolerance blends goodness and generosity with judgment and aversion. It can articulate one's identity and one's difference as well as one's belonging and marginality (Brown, 2006).

Tolerance emerged as significant in the words, silences, actions, and practices taken up by the children and educators in the classrooms I researched for my doctoral degree. The study was conducted over a six-month period in three Australian inclusive early childhood classrooms. The collected data include conversations and observations of the children in their everyday encounters with each other. Participants in this ethnographic study included 75 children, ages two to six years old, as well as 12 educators. As part of the study, this paper employs a poststructural methodology and problematizes understandings that are taken for granted as well as practices of inclusive education that for the most part remain firmly embedded in special education discourses, where disability continues to be viewed via the medical model (Slee, 2011). Moving away from this more traditional standpoint, this work takes an alternative look inside the early childhood classroom in order to investigate more closely those who are deemed to be already included—those who might be referred to as the Normal and therefore not in need of being included.

Assuming "Inclusion"

"Inclusion" in early childhood education in Australia, as in other parts of the world, is a relatively recent phenomenon (Nutbrown & Clough, 2006). The Australian Government's *Belonging, Being, & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and

Workplace Relations, 2009) supports the idea of "inclusive learning communities" (p. 15) where ability and disability are viewed as aspects of diversity. Inclusion, for the most part, is taken for granted as appropriate practice in early childhood education today. While inclusive education policy and practice has been described as "far from ideal" (Grace, Llewellyn, Wedgwood, Fenech, & McConnell, 2008, p. 18) in early childhood classrooms, research continues to typically focus on how to better include the child with special needs.

The concept of inclusive education raises many complex questions, as the knowledge that informs it and the practices that sustain it continue to be grounded in many unchallenged assumptions. As Graham and Slee (2008) argue, there is a need to interrogate the normative assumptions that exist in the "including" group, to look more closely at the "center," and to find out *what it is* that we are including others into. Who is included? Who is not? Who needs to *be* included? Who or what decides? What is the role of the Normal? What are its effects on the developing identities of children and inclusion?

Conceptualizing the Normal

Understandings of the Normal in the early childhood classroom are governed by and created within medical and scientific knowledges. These understandings are for the most part uncontested in the classroom, as they have become a comfortable, familiar, shared truth (Harwood & Rasmussen, 2004). The construction of the norm is made possible by scientifically informed practices that individualize people and differentiate and categorize them, giving rise to comparisons and a desirable standard that imposes uniformity (Foucault, 1977). These scientific practices promote a homogenous social body, where differences are measured and, as they depart from the Normal, judged to be deviant. The word "Normal" continues to imply "good"—an ideal—across the multiple social disciplines that inform early childhood education (Annamma, Boelė, Moore, & Klinger, 2013)

Shared classroom understandings that produce and uphold the Normal are disseminated within the sanctioned discourses of child development, developmental psychology, special education, and classroom discipline. Children actively participate and negotiate within these acceptable discourses. As some children are positioned, and position themselves, as Normal, they take up the more "naturally" privileged position. As they encounter difference, they perform and defend their position because difference is positioned as needy and deficient when compared to the Normal. As they come to learn about themselves and understand others, the Normal negotiate to maintain their position and the

social order of the classroom.

Other labels

In the inclusive classroom, the child with a diagnosis is produced as Other, just as the Normal is produced as a comparison to the "not normal" (Rose, 1999). The term "child with a diagnosis" is used here to emphasize the child's marked position, as the diagnosis is considered to do the marking. Other labels used in special/inclusive education locate the "problems" associated with inclusion *in* the child, in *their* characteristics, and in *their* behaviors. There is no commentary on a child's diagnostic label in this paper, as the characteristics of the diagnosis do not alter the child's marked position. Making no mention of the diagnosis is one way of disrupting acknowledgment of it. The knowledge associated with a diagnosis confers a certain "truth" about the child and the inclusive process. Disrupting this truth and the idea of diagnosis-as-usual is one of the many challenges for inclusive education.

Tolerance as an effect

In the classrooms where I conducted research, tolerance came into view as an effect of the work done by the Normal in producing, reproducing, and maintaining themselves within the available classroom discourses. Tolerance is omnipresent in the inclusive early childhood classroom, with the promotion of tolerance in the classroom and elsewhere prominent in particular forms of integration and assimilation (Brown, 2006). Practicing and talking tolerance—"giving" sympathy and showing concern for the Other—is deemed virtuous and moral. However, in giving sympathy and showing concern for the Other, power is exercised. This power is discernible in the way the Normal, in their everyday interactions, tolerate the child with a diagnosis. Tolerance is a political, moral, and social discourse; however, it has other often unrecognized effects, as "almost all objects of tolerance are marked as deviant, marginal, or undesirable by virtue of being tolerated, and the action of tolerance inevitably affords some access to superiority" (Brown, 2006, p. 14).

Nuanced tolerances in the classroom

There are many ways of being tolerant and performing tolerance in the classroom. Helping is just one of the nuanced ways that tolerance is visible there. It is performed by the unmarked children out of concern for the Other. At times, the act of helping is quite direct and teacher-like, remediating the marked child's difficulties, telling or showing her or him what to do or how to do things better.

Sometimes the helping is mother-like, more gentle and nurturing, where the unmarked children tread carefully around the marked child. Conversely, there are children who do not "help" and do not want to help but nevertheless enact tolerance as they stand back and say nothing, give in, give up, or move on as performance of resignation. There are also those who need to be taught to help and tolerate as they have not readily taken up this discursive practice. These nuanced performances of tolerance maintain social order and the Normal.

In the classroom, the children's reiterated performances of tolerance are unmistakable. I am not proposing that the act of helping or being tolerant has no public value in producing a caring society. But I do wish to problematize the power of tolerance as a practice and the way it creates a narrative about the marked child as Other, as lacking or deviant. The naturalized innocence of the discourses that circulate around helping normalize it as an act of virtue, without any questioning of the power and the effects that has on all the children. Helping and tolerance are relational; they occur in the interactions that the children have with each other, and it is in the performance of these acts that power is exercised.

A community of tolerance

The children gradually get settled onto the mat after pack away [cleanup] time. Michael (a child with a diagnosis) is seated at the back of the group, holding some trucks in his hands.[1] A teacher, Chris, seated next to Michael, tries to take the trucks away, as there is a "no toys at story time" rule. Michael protests loudly. Without warning, the director, Sue, moves quickly from inside her office where she has been watching through a window, calling, "Chris, Chris, let him have them, it soothes him." The director hands the trucks back to Michael. Chris remains silent. The director then apologizes to Chris for her abrupt entry but reinforces that she did not want to "set Michael off." The whole group watches on.

Anne, the teacher at the front of the group, asks the children to sit in a circle and asks Michael individually to join them, to which he replies "No."

When they are settled, Anne asks them to clap their names in turn around the circle. When Michael's name is called he starts to join in the group, clapping on his knees. When Anne calls Michael's name, the other children joined with the teacher calling "Michael, Michael." This was the only time they called other children's names. (Field Notes, 4/5/12, S1, p. 17)

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1   All names are pseudonyms.

Michael is the center of everyone's attention. The teachers, the director, and the unmarked children combine as a group to show their concern for Michael. They all help him join the activity by clapping his name. What else was going on here? What shared understandings are drawn on in establishing the need to help Michael?

The strategic positioning of the teacher's body next to Michael initially marks him. Special education discourses inform teachers that a child with a diagnosis can potentially be "disruptive" to a whole-class group. In the narrative of special education, Michael is in need of close supervision at this time. *His* diagnosis produces him as inattentive, easily distracted, impulsive, and hyperactive (Washbrook, Propper, & Sayal, 2013). Sitting quietly is characterized as problematic for anyone with such a diagnosis. When the teacher attempts to take the trucks from Michael, she repositions herself as a "regular," not "special," teacher. In regular teacher discourse, the pedagogical rule of not playing with toys at group time because they are viewed as a possible distraction for children is customary. As the teacher tries to take the trucks from Michael, the director bursts out of her office and into the classroom and vehemently interrupts her.

With this act, Michael is again positioned as Other, and the teacher is repositioned as a nonexpert in special education practice by the director. This authoritative move by the director takes everyone by surprise. She legitimizes Michael's need for the toy as she demonstrates tolerance of him and his actions. In her director capacity as the classroom's special education teacher, she positions herself as "knowing" Michael via the characteristics of his diagnosis. She sees her actions as averting the potential disruption of the class. Michael is diagnostically created as a threat to the group's stability. The intensity of the director's intervention, however, creates a sense of anxiety in the classroom, reinforcing the need for concern.

Special education—concern and tolerance

Special education knowledge in the inclusive classroom seems to trump regular education practices, as it offers particular understandings about the special child which are thought to be important for his inclusion. This knowledge is regarded as invaluable in maintaining the social order and, at the same time, the privilege and power of the Normal. Within special education discourses, it is accepted that improving one's professional knowledge about the special child has the potential to create a better understanding of her. Concern and tolerance are also produced in this understanding of the child. Showing concern for Others via a deeper and more thorough understanding of their diagnosis is

thought to help their assimilation and ultimately their remediation.

Slee (2011), however, argues that "inclusive education needs to be decoupled from special education" (p.155) and that the field needs to be reframed and freed from previous underlying assumptions. Inclusive education is framed by what we think we know (or experts know) about the special child. The use of the word "needs" powerfully fashions a picture based on concern and the need for tolerance of the marked child. Having needs implies that one requires help. Having needs positions one as more dependent, less autonomous, and less rational, which are not values of substance and privilege in a Western liberal "civilized" society (Brown, 2006).

The Normal helping to "include"

The children in the group sit silently, watching the interaction between the director and the teacher, understanding that special concessions are to be made for Michael. The children position themselves as "good students," keeping still, listening intently, performing in a way that is expected within the normative classroom discourses. Michael is asked to join the group, and he replies with a definite and loud "No." The whole group then attempt to "bring him into line," to "normalize" him, showing their shared concern about trying to include him. The group joins with the teacher in trying to remediate Michael's behaviors by calling and clapping his name. They demonstrate their solidarity as members of the Normal and their shared understanding of themselves and Michael. Michael's marked position is reinforced via the children's helping, concern, and tolerance. The "threat" of his disruption is managed by the practice of tolerance, with the social order restored, at least in the short term.

Brown (2006) maintains that tolerance is a "unique way of sustaining the *threatened entity*" (p. 27, emphasis in the original). The marked child, Michael, threatens the social order and the Normal. He is created within the discourses of developmental psychology as disruptive, unruly, dangerous, and different. The director's actions contribute powerfully to the notion that something threatening may occur. However, societal and educational thinking necessitates that a child has the right to be incorporated, and tolerance thus becomes a way of including and managing that child. "Tolerance is a practice concerned with managing a dangerous, foreign, toxic, or threatening difference from an entity that also demands to be incorporated" (Brown, 2006, p. 27), and so the marked child's incorporation via inclusive policy is met with tolerant management. Produced as an effect of the hegemony of the Normal, the practice of tolerance can marginalize or privilege particular ways of being.

Tolerating transgressions gently

At packing away time the children are divided into their class groups and sent to separate parts of the yard to put things away. Most of the children seem to do some packing away. However, Hugo (a child with a diagnosis) is observed to resist this activity regularly. On this occasion he has spent the morning playing in a "fire truck" and has been asked repeatedly to pack it away by a teacher. Instead of following these instructions, he takes himself up onto the high fort and lies down there. Leah (a child without a diagnosis) follows Hugo up into the fort, trying to encourage him to come down and do his share of the packing up. She bends down next to him, touching him gently and talking to him softly. "Come on, Hugo, you have to pack up the fire engine that you were playing with." He wriggles away from her touch, saying "no" several times, each time with increasing volume. She repeats similar words several times. One of the teachers calls to her, "Leah, are you going to get out of packing up?" Leah explains that she is trying to get Hugo to help. After a few minutes she gives up, comes down from the fort, and starts to pack away the fire engine. She is told by the teacher to leave some for Hugo to do. Eventually Hugo comes down from the fort, and with the teacher standing over him, he puts one thing away. (Field Notes, 6/11/12, S3, p. 48)

Pack away time begins with the sound of a tambourine being shaken. The responsibilities are shared, and the routine is structured and well understood by the unmarked children. Hugo transgresses from the Normal; he does not help to pack away as expected. One reading of this scene might be that Hugo enjoyed the morning fire engine play so much that he was not happy to put the fire engine away. Hugo's action could be interpreted as resistance to the regulatory discourses that produce timetables and routines that all children have to follow. However, as he skillfully refuses by hiding, his actions are not read this way. As he does not conform to the discipline that works to "civilize" young children (Leavitt & Power, 1997), he is positioned as a transgressor, a special rule breaker, a diagnosed child in need of management.

Leah is frequently observed to "move in" on Hugo to help and encourage him to follow the rules. Leah positions herself as the "concern expresser" (Petersen, 2008, p. 397), as someone who might be able to assist. Concern, Petersen (2008) argues, produces "exclusionary and de-legitimized" (p. 394) positioning. Leah is positioned as the autonomous, rational, Normal, and legitimate subject, while Hugo is positioned as the dependent, unreasonable, Other, and illegitimate subject. Leah's act of concern works to shape and remediate Hugo's actions, Othering him in the process. When read in this way, the "natural" and taken-for-granted discursive practices of helping and concern are troublesome for inclusive processes. As Leah gently tells Hugo that he needs to do his share of the pack away, she

positions him as immature and not knowing, and she tries to negotiate with him in a nurturing way. After a few minutes, she fails to convince him. But she does not continue to try to persuade Hugo to pack away and moves off the fort. She does not tell on him as she might tell on a "naughty" child, but is patient, tolerant, and accepting of his actions. Her attempt to gently normalize Hugo has failed at this time, and the teachers encourage her to move away and tolerate his evasion. Hugo is left on the fort, separate from the other children.

Tolerance exercises power

Leah's enactment of tolerance produces and positions her in a particular way. Her actions produce and position Hugo in a particular way as well. The children's developing identities are affected (Brown, 2006). Drawing on the discourses of psychological, developmental special education, we see that Leah positions herself as the older, rational, and tolerating Normal subject. Brown (2006) contends that tolerance as a discourse circulates between state, civil society, and citizens, producing and organizing subjects as they use it to govern themselves and others. Tolerance is institutionalized in the inclusive classroom, and Leah and the educators use tolerance as a practice to assist in the governance of the Normal and of the "not Normal," Hugo.

Tolerance is an exercise of power and a political practice enacted by the unmarked children. Tolerance does things. Foucault (1982) argues that "the exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (p. 342). Leah tries to guide Hugo, to show him the possible ways to behave in the classroom. When this fails, she takes up tolerance, as it still permits the Normal to exercise power. As the dominant group in the classroom, the Normal can offer protection, incorporation, or "help" to the subordinated and by doing so, reveal their virtuousness (Brown, 2006, p. 178).

Tolerance, tragedy, and sympathy

The "truth" of Hugo's diagnosis and the strategies set out for his remediation affect his inclusion and exclusion. In the classroom, children's diagnostic characteristics come to represent who they are and who they might become, as this knowledge is thought to explain how they might act and think. The marked child is often described by his or her diagnosis.

Once a diagnostic label is attached there is the risk that all the child's characteristics are filtered

through this diagnosis or explanatory mechanism resulting in a tendency to view the child's behaviour as symptoms, rather than as expressions of his or her unique personality. (Molloy & Vasil, 2002, p. 661)

Billington (2000) refers to the stigma of a diagnosis as a "social disease," which he believes has repercussions for diagnosed children for the rest of their lives. The connection between disability and disease can be traced in historical discourses and is still present today in the tragedy model of disability. The tragedy model assumes that disability is about loss and that disabled people would rather be more like "abled" people (Swain & French, 2008). This model evokes and seeks to arouse sympathy and concern from able-bodied people. The marked child is often created as a subject of pity and in need of sympathy and tolerance. However, if "the ethical bearing of tolerance is high-minded, while the object of such high-mindedness is inevitably figured as something more lowly" (Brown, 2006, p. 178), how does this create an inclusive environment?

Civilizing the uncivilized via tolerance

Routines and timetables discipline all children in the classroom. However, children are not passive recipients of classroom rules and are often observed to actively mediate and resist them (Leavitt & Power, 1997). Children who take up the practice of "civilizing" by performing within the norms, rules, or codes of conduct are positioned as the civilized; from this position, they draw on tolerance to civilize those who remain uncivilized. Brown (2006) refers to tolerance as a civilizational discourse, and as such, "to be uncivilized is to be intolerable is to be barbarian" (p. 182). Certain practices are declared intolerable and are stigmatized as uncivilized. The asymmetry of power between the tolerated and the tolerators can be observed in the inclusive classroom. Tolerance is generally conferred by those who do not require it on those who do; those who deviate from, rather than conform to, the norms are eligible for tolerance (Brown, 2006).

Giving up

> *Spencer (a child without a diagnosis) is up in the climbing tree. The rule is that only one child is allowed in the tree at any one time. Michael (a child with a diagnosis) starts to climb up the tree. Spencer tells Michael to get down, reminding him several times of the rule. Michael does not listen and moves further up the tree. Spencer then gets down out of the tree, walking away shaking his head and looking back at the tree as he goes. Spencer: "He always do's that!" he says with a sigh and a degree of resignation. He walks away looking unhappy, his*

face wrinkled up and eyes narrowed and looking back at Michael as he moves away. (Field Notes, 18/5/12, S1, p. 52)

The climbing tree is very popular, and conflicts over it are observed on many occasions (Field Notes, 25/5/12, S1, p. 68). Spencer moves away from the climbing tree and 'gives it up' to Michael. This could be read as Spencer enacting the Normal in following the rules or as expressing his annoyance of Michael's behaviors. He knows the rules and, maintaining his Normal status, moves away. But his actions could also be read as an act of tolerance and resignation. Spencer performs a different version of tolerance from Leah's as he unhappily abides Michael. Drawing on shared and sanctioned understandings of Michael as the diagnosed child, Spencer understands that he cannot challenge Michael over being in the tree. He is aware that Michael does not follow these rules. As Michael starts to climb the tree, Spencer reminds him about the "rational" one person rule that protects climbers and avoids accidents. Children regularly use safety discourses as their justification for others to keep the rules about playing in the classroom and on the playground. However, these same rules of play produce authorized exclusionary practices, as they enforce who can play, who cannot play, how many can play, and how play can happen. The unmarked children often discuss the rules and how it is not safe if more than one person climbs the tree at one time. Spencer tells Michael several times to get down, but Michael does not respond, staying in the tree and climbing even higher.

Resignation as tolerance

Spencer accepts Michael's position as Other in the classroom. By keeping the peace and tolerating Michael's invasion of the tree, he shows this acceptance. His practice of tolerance is enacted differently from the other examples, as he does not act to help, guide, or remediate Michael. Instead, he shows a resignation, accepting that he must move on and demonstrating a rational self-control by keeping the peace and maintaining the social order. Tolerance sometimes involves the "withholding of speech or action in response to contingent individual dislikes or violations of taste" (Brown, 2006, p. 13). This withholding of speech and action by Spencer is a less visible form of tolerance than the helping work performed by other children. Nonetheless, the work it does in delegitimizing and excluding is powerful. The effect of this action is to maintain Spencer's membership in the Normal and Michael's membership in the not Normal. Even though Spencer is not particularly happy about performing this tolerant act and his exasperation is evident, he maintains his positioning.

Spencer's action could alternatively be read as a moral act. Moral education contributes to classroom

understandings of the right way to be with others. To be a moral being, one must be socially conscientious and ethically upright. Taking up this moral stance, Spencer moves away, leaving the tree to Michael. Tolerance makes a contribution to moral education. To be tolerant of the marked child, who is positioned as a *"threatened entity"* (Brown, 2006, p. 27, emphasis in the original) displays a level of moral, ethical, and civic understanding. Spencer takes up this discourse, albeit reluctantly, as he wishes to be seen in this positive light. In contrast, the same discourses position the marked child, Michael, as uncivilized, deviant, and in need of tolerance.

Discussion

In the classroom, tolerance is enacted on a regular basis. Being tolerant and performing tolerance are expected and shared practices that circulate. Sometimes the unmarked children reject this discursive practice but are urged by other children and educators to "learn" to tolerate. Tolerance is a sanctioned narrative in classrooms and beyond. It is dominant in both popular and state discourses (Brown, 2006), with toleration now considered as the substantive heart of liberalism (Cohen, 2004). Tolerance has been framed as a sign of steady progress toward a more civilized society. However, tolerance is not neutral; it conceals power relations, the power of authority, and the power associated with discourses of the Normal.

Inequalities are suppressed by tolerance discourses (Brown, 2006), and toleration provides "no recipe for better understanding and does little to challenge the prejudice on which tolerance feeds" (Phillips, 1999, p. 129). Those who agree to tolerate see themselves absolved from the need to make any further moves toward better understanding (Phillips, 1999). As the early childhood setting is a place where young children often encounter difference for the first time, they learn to actively negotiate race, gender, and class as well as ability and disability. Tolerance, when critiqued in this way, offers little for enhancing inclusive classroom practices or developing understandings of diversity. Instead, tolerance reproduces and maintains the dichotomy of the Normal and the Other and limits possibilities for inclusion. It does not address difference or classroom inequities, as it reinforces the position of the privileged Normal, confirming their uniformity and power. In contrast to the notion of inclusion, tolerance can be seen to produce separation and exclusion in the early childhood classroom. Tolerance separates the not Normal, keeping the Normal secure and the social order preserved. The uninterrupted discourse of tolerance makes no attempt to rethink the Normal or to counteract the disapproval of the Other. It acknowledges no obligation to rethink the basis of the disapproval that warrants the toleration (Phillips, 1999).

As long as children and educators in the classroom continue to draw on discourses that produce and maintain the Normal, and understandings of the marked child continue to be developed within the medical model of disability, exclusionary practices will continue and alternatives will remain limited. In rethinking inclusive practice, further interrogation of the power of the Normal and of its role in inclusive and exclusive processes is necessary. As a significant effect of the Normal, the unquestioned practice of tolerance similarly plays a critical role in exclusionary processes. As tolerance makes a contribution to the way children come to know themselves and others, acknowledging the work it does, and attempting to interrupt it, could potentially alter the way that difference is constructed and addressed in the inclusive early childhood classroom.

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Hitting the Switch: ¡Sí se puede!

Stephanie Alberto, Andrea Fonseca, and Sandra J. Stein

On a cool fall afternoon in the Maple classroom, co-teachers Andrea and Stephanie stacked chairs, laminated family pictures, and organized the class library. Their K-1 class had left for the day, and Stephanie decided to shift the children's names on the job chart. As in many progressive schools, classroom jobs were an integral part of the daily routine in Maple. Each day the students eagerly walked into the classroom and checked what their responsibility would be. Jobs included wiping the classroom tables, counting how many children were present that day, and helping with lunch. Regardless of their specific job, the students took pride in and ownership of the classroom. The chart had 24 jobs displayed on a large board, with the students' names in alphabetical order. Students had started counting how many days it would be until they would have a turn at their favorite job. As Stephanie rotated the names, she realized who would have the job of class greeter at the upcoming Friday recital: Jason.[1]

The class greeter's role is to announce the presence of everyone at morning meeting by singing their names. On the upcoming Friday, the greeter would kick off the first weekly recital of the school year by singing the names of the children before all students joined in singing to greet each teacher and parent in attendance. Afterward, each child would have a turn to stand in front of the audience and sing, recite a poem, tell a joke, or play an instrument. Jason's paraprofessional was ready to support him in playing the keyboard that morning for his individual recital, but the teachers felt unprepared to help him fulfill the role of class greeter. That job involved singing, and due to an acquired brain injury brought on by a rare disease, Jason had limited physical mobility and was unable to speak or sing.

Stephanie and Andrea felt baffled. Their deeply rooted belief that children of all abilities should be in inclusive classrooms was challenged. The emotions were so overwhelming that they considered doing something that went against their commitment and desire to be completely inclusive: they discussed changing Jason's job for that day.

After some reflection, they dismissed that option. They agreed that changing Jason's job would go against the values of inclusion that they had been promoting; inclusion was not something to be practiced only when it was convenient. They worked hard to create a community that accepted and supported all members and encouraged each student's growth. Jason should not have to conform to a narrow vision of what a greeter did. They, the

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1   Jason is a pseudonym.

community, had to figure out how to make Jason's role as the greeter work.

Background

Prior to the beginning of the school year, the authors of this paper—Stephanie and Andrea (Jason's teachers) and Sandra (Jason's mother)—wondered, mostly privately, if an inclusion class at Castle Bridge Elementary School—a public, dual-language school in Upper Manhattan—was the most appropriate first-grade placement for Jason. New York City public schools' recent special education reforms encouraged enrolling more students with complex special needs in neighborhood schools (New York City Department of Education, 2012), but the supports and systems for those students' full inclusion were still developing (Ford, 2015; Wall, 2014). All classes at Castle Bridge, which opened its doors in September of 2012, are inclusion classes. Students with individualized education plans (IEPs) are in every classroom, and inclusion is framed as part of the school's overall commitment to diversity and social justice.

We all believed in the power and promise of inclusion but had not ourselves ever seen an inclusion classroom with a child as medically involved as Jason. His illness, which had come on suddenly four years earlier, had caused severe motoric limitations, affecting Jason's ability to get his body to do what he wanted it to do. He used a manual wheelchair, pushed by an adult. He needed a nurse to accompany him throughout the school day. His communication strategies were varied and inconsistent, and our ability to understand his intentions was unreliable.

Jason's first year back in school after his illness was in a multigraded, self-contained class with six other students at another school. By moving into an inclusion class at Castle Bridge, he would be learning with 23 other children; some of them would have IEPs, but most of them would not. Including Jason was going to require thinking beyond our lived personal and professional experiences into new possibilities.

When we initially met several weeks before the first day of school, we did not focus on our doubts. Sandra and Matt (Jason's father) explained Jason's health history and current condition. Stephanie and Andrea asked questions about communicating with Jason and about his basic needs. We agreed that we would work in partnership and would make our best collective effort at creating a positive educational experience for all the children in the Maple classroom. We agreed that we needed to give this experiment some time before deciding whether or not it was working or workable. With hope

that our dreams of inclusion could be realized for children with support needs like Jason's, we took a collective leap of faith. During that initial meeting, we discussed our inability to fully assess Jason's comprehension since he could not produce consistent motoric responses to stimuli.

Prior to the onset of his illness, Jason was a precocious toddler with a vast vocabulary and a quick wit. He had met all developmental milestones early and was starting to read. Once he began recovering from a lengthy, critical phase of his illness, Jason evinced efforts at getting his body to move, but there was no way to know what he would say if he could coordinate all the muscles needed to speak. Unable to assess Jason's comprehension in any valid or reliable way, we agreed that the "least dangerous assumption" (Donnellan, 1984) was that Jason's comprehension was intact.

On Sandra's recommendation, Andrea and Stephanie read Ghost Boy, the memoir of Martin Pistorius who, due to an acquired brain injury, was locked in his body for 12 years (Pistorius, 2011). Before Pistorius could demonstrate his comprehension, his family and caregivers assumed he had little to no understanding of the world around him. His memoir served as an important point of reference, guiding us away from making assumptions about what someone can understand based solely on what they are able to express.[2]

We worked together to ensure that all areas of the classroom, arranged in learning centers designed for student access and movement, were also accessible to Jason. Before the start of the school year, Sandra and Jason visited the classroom to make sure that he could maneuver around project areas and would have a designated place during meeting time as well as that his chair could roll up under at least one classroom table so he could play and work alongside classmates. While we were preparing Jason and ourselves for the coming school year, the custodial staff was constructing an accessible bathroom stall. We discussed fire drill protocols and potential field trip challenges. We talked about communicating with parents and students about Jason's entry to the school and classroom community.

We all understood that special education could be contentious terrain. Schools are not typically designed for flexibility and adaptation, and children with special needs require additional support; in resource-strapped public systems, providing the necessary support can be a challenge. Practitioners fear litigious parents who do not appreciate the systemic obstacles to providing services, and parents fear disinterested and dismissive practitioners who do not appreciate the promise, potential, and rights

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2   Subsequently, Ghost Boy was shared with the entire staff, as was Out of My Mind, a young adult novel about an 11-year-old girl with cerebral palsy who is unable to show what she knows due to motoric limitations (Draper, 2010).

of their children (Fertig, 2016; Ford, 2015). Pressures regarding assessment and accountability provide further disincentives for enrolling students with complex needs (Kanso, 2015; Lesch, 2012).

A series of anxiety-fueled, what-if questions kept Andrea and Stephanie up at night. What if the other children shunned Jason? What if he could not go on field trips? What if he had a medical emergency? What if the school's weekly swimming sessions in the fall and skating trips in the winter could not be adapted for him? What if parents questioned his placement in their child's class? What if his academic, emotional, and social needs were not met? What if we could never access his thoughts?

While we all wondered whether Jason would have friends, whether he would be able to participate in classroom activities, and whether project time and recess could be adapted into meaningful learning opportunities for Jason, Andrea took comfort in the thought that the children would be our teachers, and that we would follow their lead. We were embarking on something we had not yet seen ourselves— not as students, as parents, or as education professionals. We therefore strove to "[set] the stage for miracles" (Barrera & Kramer, 2009, p. 71), knowing that such miracles would require a high-functioning and dedicated team.

Sharing an ethos of ¡Sí se puede!

> *Stephanie and Andrea thought about the various ways Jason might be able to serve as class greeter. His Step-by-Step switch[3] seemed like a possible tool. They knew that by hitting the switch, Jason could activate it to play prerecorded words, but they were not sure if it could hold 24 individual names. They felt strongly that the recorded voice should be that of a child around Jason's age (rather than of an adult). They sought the guidance of Jason's speech and occupational therapists. Both were eager to help. The speech therapist prepared the switch for the activity. The occupational therapist coached the nurse and paraprofessional in the best ways to support Jason's elbow and to place the switch so that Jason could use his arm muscles to activate it.*

Including Jason required a strong team. The IEP from his prior school contained mandates for several daily services. We wanted to strike a balance between Jason's needs for multiple therapies and our desire that he learn alongside his classmates. While some therapies could be integrated into the classroom, others might be more beneficial in a pull-out setting. We agreed that we would neither follow the existing IEP nor make official changes to it until we had time to get a collective feel for how Jason was doing in the classroom. Our goals were to maximize the amount of time Jason could be in the

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3   The Step-by-Step switch is a touch-activated, speech-generating assistive communication device.

classroom and to match the services he received to appropriate related classroom activities.

Our agreement not to focus on strict adherence to the existing IEP required trust between all team members. Jason's parents needed to trust that this was an opportunity to create the best possible way to provide Jason's services, and the school-based team had to trust that the parents would not sue them during this trial period. All team members had to trust the power of careful observation as a mechanism for making wiser decisions and constructing a better IEP.

This experimentation period was instrumental in successfully including Jason. For example, we initially tried having Jason's speech therapy as a push-in service during project time. While his classmates were playing at the water table or block station, Jason—surrounded by his nurse, paraprofessional, and speech therapist—was learning to use his communication device. Jason's nurse noticed that he would often cry during these sessions and hypothesized that his crying might indicate his desire to participate in project time with his peers. Stephanie and Andrea observed a session and asked the speech therapist to try scheduling her service for a different time of day. After the time and place of the speech therapy session were adjusted accordingly, Jason's demeanor changed dramatically, and he seemed much happier during both project time and speech therapy. We realized that pull-out speech sessions that didn't interfere with Jason's ability to participate in project time worked best for him. In addition, his paraprofessional carried over the skills she learned from the speech therapist into other curricular areas.

We have developed a collective ethos of *sí se puede*, a term that is often translated as "yes, we can" or "yes, it is possible." Sí se puede is the motto of the United Farm Workers and connotes the possibility of overcoming obstacles in the pursuit of social justice and civil rights. For us, this phrase encapsulates each team member's commitment to overcoming both predictable and unforeseen impediments.

We enact our commitment to sí se puede when we approach some of the school's routine physical activities (scheduling OT for weekly swimming, ice-skating, and capoeira lessons), when we spontaneously take the children sledding after a snowstorm and shovel a path for Jason's wheelchair through the snow banks that block intersections after plowing, when we use only subway lines with accessible stations or arrange for accessible bus transportation when we go on field trips, when we carry Jason onto a wheelchair-inaccessible stage for the Spring concert, and when we design each new curricular unit by thinking through his participation.

At its essence, our ethos of sí se puede reflects our shared belief that we can collectively figure out the best way to ensure Jason's full inclusion in all school activities. All the team members—the speech, occupational, and physical therapists, vision teacher, classroom teachers, students, parents, nurse, and paraprofessional—have contributed. As Sandra says after every new creative innovation, "This is the sí-se-puede-est team of people I have ever met!"

Jason's team extends beyond the classroom. The principal and administrative support staff play critical roles in allowing for the creative and dynamic problem solving that enables Jason's full inclusion. For everything from creating purposeful, yet flexible, schedules to booking accessible buses when needed, we rely on dedicated support from the school leader and administrative team.

Fostering friendships

The speech therapist worked with two of Jason's classmates to ready the switch for Friday's recital. With great pride, they recorded each class member's name, effectively donating their voices to Jason. On the morning of the recital, the students and family members found a place to sit in or around the classroom's meeting space. The children fidgeted with pre-recital jitters as their grown-ups sent them encouraging looks. Andrea welcomed the children and their families and noted that one of the class jobs was that of greeter and that today that responsibility was Jason's. The children quieted quickly. Whatever nerves they may have had about their own recital performances faded into the background as they rose to their knees and inched closer to Jason. Their focus was on him.

As we prepared to welcome all of the children to our classroom, we worried about how things would go for Jason. From the first day of school, the children showed us that embracing Jason as their friend was easier for them than we had predicted. All classes at our school are multigraded; half of our class were returning students, and half were new. For the first half of the day, the whole class was together, decorating name tags and playing games to learn each other's names.

After we chanted all our names, we talked about how our classroom looked a little different than the previous year. We explained that we would call a "returning Maple" to take a "new Maple" on a tour around the classroom and talk about what we did in each area. One of the returning Maples had talked excitedly that morning about having seen Jason in the park over the summer. We decided to have her choose a new Maple first, secretly hoping she would pick Jason. She got up and immediately went to hold Jason's hand, just as we'd hoped. She then walked alongside him as his nurse pushed him around

the classroom in his wheelchair. At that moment we realized, with hope and relief, that the children would indeed be our teachers.

At noon the new Maples went home. We took this opportunity to open up a conversation with the returning Maples about Jason in his absence. We started by saying that perhaps they had noticed that a new Maple needed a wheelchair and invited their thoughts and questions. Hands went up. Children wanted to know why Jason needed a wheelchair and why he could not talk. We decided to continue the conversation the following day with the whole class when Jason was out at a doctor's appointment.

We explained that Jason had gotten sick, and that now his brain did not remember how to do some things like walk and talk. When one of the children suggested he was like a baby, we stated clearly that he was definitely not a baby. He was six years old, just like some of them. He could hear and understand everything we said. Just like them, he wanted to play, learn, and make friends in school. The conversation reached a beautiful conclusion when the student who gave Jason the tour stated, "We are all the same inside. We all have the same heart!"

It was important that the children knew that there would be time and space for more such conversations if they needed to have them. We told them to feel free to ask any questions as we got to know Jason better. We shared with them two books that Sandra lent to the classroom. They explained Jason's story in child-friendly language with beautiful photos. One was called *The Warrior* and the other *Jason's Superhero Year*. *The Warrior* has photos of Jason before he got sick as well as photos of him with tubes and bandages in the hospital. We worried about the children's reaction to some of the photos, but once again, they surprised us. They loved the books and looked at them often throughout the school year.

On the playground later that week, children from another class approached Jason and asked his name. A Maple classmate standing nearby smiled broadly and said, "His name is Jason, and he is *our* friend!" She then suggested they all play Ring Around the Rosie with Jason, and a few children quickly gathered around, making a circle and holding Jason's hands while his nurse pushed his wheelchair. These moments of budding friendships happened daily during the first weeks of school. Most of the time, the children initiated play with Jason, but the adults around him also facilitated friendships by inviting children to play tag with Jason, beginning conversations with him, and supporting the children's ideas for games in which Jason could participate. When children spoke about Jason, making a comment such as "I like his shirt," the staff made a point of redirecting the comment to him: "Don't tell me, tell Jason."

Time and again the children showed us that our fears that Jason would be socially isolated were unfounded. We had worried that no one would want to be Jason's line partner since they would have to take a different route to recess than the rest of the class so Jason could use the elevator. We therefore decided to assign line partners and change them biweekly. We soon found ourselves inundated with requests to be Jason's partner, and ultimately needed to set up a waitlist.

We also worried that when Jason cried and was unable to tell us why, the children would worry about him and feel as anxious and helpless as we did. Then one day when Jason cried, a classmate suggested that we sing to him. Although listening to *I've Got Peace Like a River* sung spontaneously by the entire class did not always help Jason with whatever was causing his tears, singing in solidarity with their friend certainly helped the class. Over time, the children became less distracted by Jason's crying, and although they maintained their compassion and concern, they also stayed focus on their own learning activities.

Every child in the Maple classroom loves and cares for Jason. They greet him with smiles and hugs in the mornings. When he is out sick, they ask about him and miss him. Just like any other child in our classroom, Jason has deeper connections with some children than with others. There are five children in particular who have formed strong bonds with him, enjoy reading books with him, and choose him to act in their stories—the ultimate symbol of close friendship in our classroom. Jason not only has friends, he has best friends. Tears welled up in our eyes when we overheard one of Jason's best friends tell him, "I wish I had a wheelchair so we could sit in our wheelchairs together."

Bringing inclusion home

> *Jason's paraprofessional held his elbow steady as the OT had shown her, while his nurse secured the Step-by-Step switch within his reach on the wheelchair lap tray. Jason raised his arm and hit the switch. Hearing his friend's prerecorded voice announce a name, Jason's face lit up. He raised his hand a second time to greet another classmate. A father smiled warmly as he heard his son's name.*

We agreed over the summer that we would introduce Jason to classroom parents during the first week of school. We wanted to support them in talking with their children about any questions or concerns that a classmate who cannot walk or talk might elicit. Sandra worried that other parents would question Jason's enrollment in this class, given the intensity of his support needs.

During the first week of school, we sent home the following letter:

Dear families,

We have had a beautiful time with the Maples these three days! We have worked on learning each other's names, and on establishing the routines and expectations in the classroom. We are just beginning to get to know the children, but we are already falling in love with each one. We cannot wait to have our family interviews starting next week to hear more about them from you. We have 24 amazing children, each wonderful and unique. Every child in our classroom is special. But we thought it is important for you to learn a little more about Jason, one of our new Maples, as many of your children have asked questions about him. Here is a note about Jason from his mom, Sandra, in language that your children can understand if they have questions:

When Jason was almost three years old he became very ill and stayed in the hospital for over a year. When he got sick it made it hard for him to walk and talk and eat food by mouth. For a long time he needed machines to keep him safe, but now he is able to go to school using his wheelchair and he doesn't need the machines anymore, except for a small pump that gives him water when he is thirsty. The pump hangs in a backpack on his wheelchair and gives him water through a tube that goes right into his tummy. While he is still not able to talk or walk, he does understand what is being said and can stand with the help of a grown-up. He also needs a grown-up to help him in the bathroom, and to feed him food that is mixed in a blender since right now he cannot feed himself. He likes to eat pureed carrots, chicken, tuna salad, sweet potatoes, chocolate pudding, applesauce and lots of other foods too.

He will turn seven in December and he really likes when people talk to him like they talk to other children his age. He loves music and being outside and listening to other kids talk and play and tell jokes. He is really good at teaching people about themselves, keeping secrets, and making people hopeful and happy. He is very, very strong.

As he continues to heal, he sometimes has movements he cannot fully control, he sometimes cries and we are not sure why, or makes sounds that we can't understand. Sometimes he laughs at silly thoughts he is having, but he can't tell us what they are. He responds well to love, to kindness, to patience with the time it takes him to get his body to do what he wants it to do,

and to respect for who he is and all that he has been through. He is very excited to become part of the Castle Bridge community!

The Maples have warmly welcomed Jason into our classroom community. Although they have been curious about why he needs a wheelchair and why he cannot talk (and we have been open to their questions and have explained) they have also seen him as another new friend and have been very happy to greet him, talk, play, and share with him.

After the letter was distributed, several parents approached Sandra. Some shared that Jason's presence in the Maple classroom allowed them to envision how an inclusion classroom might work for their own children with special needs who were currently enrolled in private, specialized schools or who were not yet school age. Several parents said their children now assess the wheelchair accessibility of every place they go. "That boy has done more for the children in our school than the school could ever possibly do for him," one parent said. To Sandra's surprise, not a single parent questioned why Jason was in the Maple class. Early communication with all families proved invaluable in creating an inclusive classroom community.

Fostering social-emotional and academic learning

Jason's smile grew as his arm lowered and the switch broadcast the last of his classmates' names. "He wants to be here—it's not just our dream," Andrea thought, feeling great relief. Stephanie surmised, "Not only is he a member of this community, he can contribute to it. He can do his job." Sandra's eyes were brimming, "He is happy. He has the support of a collaborative, creative team of adults and the respect and love of his friends." The learning opportunities for Jason, the rest of the class, and all the grown-ups involved were limitless.

In our classroom, learning centers around play. One of the fundamental components of our curriculum is daily project time, during which students work in the learning centers, exploring blocks, a sensory table, art materials, and more. Project time is when we see Jason make the most progress; his hand function, eye contact, and focus all improve while he engages with his peers. Most first graders love to play with their peers and thrive when given opportunities to learn new skills. Jason is no different. We therefore focus on maximizing his opportunities to be an active participant in classroom activities.

Making our curriculum accessible to Jason demands creativity and collaboration. While we have invented ways to include him in all aspects of our educational program, approaching his literacy and

math development has required the most thought. Without a reliable way to communicate with Jason, how can we assess his math and reading skills and comprehension? His parents reported that prior to his illness, he had full letter and sound recognition and several sight words and also understood the basic concept of addition. Had he maintained that knowledge through the illness? Had he built new knowledge with the help of his parents and previous teachers? Without a consistent communication system, it would be impossible to know.

Our approach relies on experimentation. We look carefully at how Jason attends to text when we conference with him. We start each conference with books using large print, telling him that we know they might be easy for him but that afterward we can move on to reading about superheroes or Star Wars. We have noticed that he attends to the high-interest books more readily (as do several of his classmates), but whether he is actually following the text and making meaning of it remains uncertain.

In the meantime, in speech therapy he has advanced from the single switch to a Tobii communication device with which he now reliably answers math questions, identifies sight words, and demonstrates comprehension. He has learned to listen quietly during read-alouds, and over time we have seen him attend to text more regularly during reading conferences. Our approach to his academic learning is a constant work in progress, relying on patience, careful observation, and creative responses.

His social-emotional learning has also required new thinking. Over time, we have realized that Jason is more capable of making choices about his behavior than we originally thought. When we realized he was craftily getting away with behaviors that we would not allow from others, we spoke firmly with him about our expectations and started to see improvement. Jason, like all other children, could and should be held to expectations for his behavior.

Jason's inclusion in our class enhances the academic and social-emotional learning of his classmates. Including him opens up new awareness of the world we live in. It has also given students opportunities to engage in creative problem solving to enable Jason's inclusion. Our students are learning to relate to the world not in terms of what works for them alone, but in terms of what works for everyone.

Final Thoughts

We are certain that the experience of including Jason in the Maple class has benefitted the lives of all our students. We have witnessed many magical moments of friendship and mutual benefit. We predict

that our students will always know that strong bonds can be built across differences and will be more likely to approach people with disabilities rather than either stare at them or look away.

Initially we thought the value of inclusion for Jason's classmates would be obvious, but we wondered whether Jason would benefit as much as his peers. His determination to do his classroom jobs, his excitement in choosing an area at project time, his huge smile while he swims and skates in a apparatus constructed by his OT (¡sí se puede!), and his happiness as Sandra gets him dressed for school each morning signal his love of being in the Maple class. He has shown wonderful progress socially and academically as well as in his physical recovery. As Sandra articulates it, after several intensely medicalized years during Jason's early life, inclusion in the Maple classroom has given him his childhood back.

Jason and his friends have taught us that given the right support and orientation, children with vast differences can learn and play together, are quick to embrace one another, and recognize the intrinsic value of each other's humanness beyond traditional definitions of ability. They do not focus on what their friends cannot do. They do not see each other "as a problem faced with a complex of problems" (Marty, 2007, p. 1). This experience has helped us see all our students as "a mystery surrounded by mystery" (Marty, 2007, p. 1). The habits of mind we have developed to include Jason extend to our work with all of our students, both with and without special needs.

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I [Don't] Belong Here:
Narrating Inclusion at the Exclusion of Others

Emily Clark

People use narrating to interact in the world, to figure out what is going on in their environments, how they fit, and sometimes, how to change things…
(Daiute, Todorova, & Kovács-Cerovic, 2015, p.3)

"Miss, I don't belong here." I hear this statement over and over again from my students who attend a self-contained special education high school in New York City. Many of them have been kicked out or pushed out of other schools—private, public, and charter—for a variety of "official reasons." When I hear them tell the stories of their educational journeys, it is clear that the opportunities of inclusive education are available to some at the exclusion of others.

As a doctoral student I tend to refer to my high school students as the primary motivation for my research. While this is true, the foundation of my work lies in my family's journey to help my younger brother and sister through school and life. I have kept the story of my siblings close to my chest, perhaps believing that academic ways of knowing should be separate from personal experience.

In *Being Bad: My Baby Brother and the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (2014), Crystal T. Laura offers readers a glimpse into the world of layered identities not often captured in traditional academic writing. She writes about her brother as a way to examine structures that seem to ensure that young men of color wind up in the carceral sphere. As Laura (2014) points out,

> *academics have a hard time dealing with the place of intimacy, closeness, and relationships in scholarly work. Even in education, which is so fundamentally driven by what people believe, feel and do, stories—simple, singular stories about these things—are often underprivileged forms of insight. (pp. 92-93)*

Laura's work enabled me to more clearly define my own connection between narrative and scholarship. Privileging the stories of my students and my siblings has allowed me the scholarly space to see the "hinges in the text" of inclusive education (Danforth & Rhodes, 1997, p. 360).

Legacies of Exclusion

An examination of contemporary experiences of inclusion and exclusion within the public education system would be incomplete without a brief exploration of some elements of what Danforth (2014) characterizes as "essential to our cultural understanding of what a real school is" (p. 9). These elements include the standardization and bureaucratization of schooling that began in the 1800s and shape our classrooms today (Kaestle, 1983; Tyack, 1974).

Embedded in the history of schooling in the United States is a history of exclusion—a history that brings into sharp focus a system not designed for everyone. The stories shared by my students and siblings highlight the legacies of exclusion that continue to exist today.

Regardless of our own experiences or how reform movements (e.g., Common Core, EdTPA, Danielson) have shifted actual classroom practice, an exceedingly narrow conception of what classrooms *should* look like and how "good students" should behave continues to make its way into our collective conscience: chairs and desks in rows, the teacher at the front of the room, all students sitting quietly following the teacher's instructions.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) refer to this as the "grammar of schooling" (p. 85). Students who challenge this "grammar" through learning differences, behavioral differences, cultural differences, language, or virtually any other difference can find themselves pushed out, labeled, and/or separated from their peers (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001). Those students with dis/abilities who adapt or learn the "grammar" are included, but often with reservations. As Gallagher (2010) points out,

> *genuine belonging becomes nearly impossible and all that remains is the prospect of "including" students who will undoubtedly be viewed as, for want of any other term, artificial transplants whose ersatz presence in the general education classroom will inevitably be subject to abiding doubts about their assimilative adequacy. (p. 36)*

Legal challenges for and against the inclusion of students with dis/abilities in school are a significant part of the history of the public education. Compulsory education laws enacted state-by-state starting in the mid-1600s to 1918 were not enough to secure the right to an education for all students (Katz, 1976). As Yell, Rogers, & Rogers (1998) detail, the legal victories toward inclusion of students with dis/abilities in the public education system would not have been possible without the landmark case,

Brown v. Board of Education.

Lawsuits brought on by families and advocacy organizations would inform creation of the legislation known as the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)*, which was passed in 1975 and is now known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. This legislation led to what Slee (2011) describes as "an uneasy alliance between the radical compromise of parents of disabled children demanding some form of education for their rejected children, eugenics imperatives and dominant expert psychological and medical knowledge about disabled children" (p. 12). While EAHCA mandated and provided for the funding of education for students with dis/abilities it also solidified the use of the medical model as the approach for identifying, assessing, labeling, and educating students according to their dis/ability related needs.

The launch of the movement towards inclusive schooling is often attributed to Madeleine Will, Assistant Secretary for the office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, US Department of Education, in 1986 (Will, 1986). In a speech, Will (1986) states, "special programs and regular education programs must be allowed to collectively contribute skills and resources to carry out individualized education plans based on individualized education needs" (p. 413). Prior to the speech Special Education was largely conducted in segregated classrooms. As Danforth (2014) says,

> *In the United States, disability and exclusion go together like inhalation and exhalation. Forcibly housing a disabled young person in a hospital or residential facility secluded from the general community, or providing schooling in a classroom or school that allows no contact with nondisabled young people seems completely reasonable. (p. 37)*

The push for educational inclusion was (and is) a social justice movement in response to the segregation of students with dis/abilities from general education classrooms. However the implementation of inclusive education has resulted in a large degree of confusion, and results have been mixed at best.

Our Table Grows

I was ten when Maria and Isaac became a part of our family, when as my older sister, J. Elizabeth Clark (1997) writes, "we would grow from four to six and keep the extra leaf in the table" (p. 24). Born to parents who were substance (ab)users and positive for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Maria and Isaac were bound to face incomprehensible challenges.

According to Levine (1995), "Most orphaned youngsters are not HIV-infected but are at high risk for a range of behavioural and developmental problems, as well as for engaging in high-risk behaviours associated with HIV transmission" (para. 2). But in the 1980s, people were not talking about the life outcomes of children orphaned by Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in the United States. The US government did not even keep statistics of how many children were orphaned by AIDS (Norwood, 2009, para. 3). The educational system was not and still is not equipped to embrace the complex emotional and learning needs of students such as Maria and Isaac, who—in addition to academic needs—required emotional support for personal trauma.

Our parents did not have any experience with the special education system and learned the process as they went along. This was long before we could use the Internet to answer our questions. Schools were the primary source of information for understanding Maria and Isaac's learning differences and for navigating the special education system, which they entered as the movement towards inclusive education was gaining ground. The educational experiences of my siblings were directly impacted by the confusion of inclusion.

Our Maria

> *From my spot on the big branch of the tree I see the white 15-passenger van pull up to the front of our house. My mom walks out to meet Maria, age two, who is being dropped off from school. I watch the driver help Maria out of her seat. Her slack mouth hangs open and drool soaks her shirt to the skin, creating a rash on her chest and face. Her bright red hair is pulled up into a fountain on top of her head. As my mother picks her up, Maria's eyes brighten with recognition.*

> *Maria does not talk or make many sounds — not even when she cries — so we watch her facial gestures and body language for clues to understand her needs and feelings. I jump out of the tree as my mom takes her inside and straight up to the bathtub. Maria sits in the tub, sometimes splashing the water, but ignoring the tub toys. My mom talks and sings to her as she washes her, dries her, puts on a clean diaper and clothes.*

> *Maria is no longer drooling and is interacting with my mom by pointing at different things in the bedroom. By dinnertime Maria is bright-eyed and using babbling noises to communicate.*

Maria started her educational career in a completely segregated United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) early intervention program. Even though Maria did not have cerebral palsy her social worker felt that

this program would be a good place for her to learn, among other things, to navigate stairs without assistance or throw a ball. In our city, this well-resourced program was the best option for Maria until she was placed in an inclusion classroom during elementary school. There, she was included as long as she remained compliant and passive. As she got older and entered high school her differences became more apparent. Most days she was "kept" in the resource room, where the emphasis was on "life skills" like hygiene and learning how to use a microwave. My mother, Gloria Clark (2004), describes our family's experiences this way:

> [P]arents and a team of teachers sit down together and write up new and continuing educational goals for each child every spring. Bureaucratically, this takes care of individual needs, but the reality behind the paperwork is, at least in my experience, an inflexible, narrow philosophy that the only thing these children can learn to be are low-income workers. Our Maria, of Degas and the pink crayons…stuffs envelopes and folds laundry in school. She is checked every day to see if she has taken a shower and put on deodorant. She is denied poetry, science, music, history, and art. Her field trips are to Wal-Mart to go shopping…Her voice is not heard. (p. 223)

My mother's recollection of these experiences is in direct alignment with Calderón-Almendros and Ruiz-Román (2014), who state that

> little attention has been given to people with disabilities from the point of view of educational inequalities…. It is assumed that they obtain the academic results that they should obtain, and the social fate that this earns them…. [I]n the same way as the school legitimizes, sustains and strengthens the stratification based on social class, it also generates mechanisms that lead people with disabilities into poverty, exclusion and social devaluation. (p. 253)

Maria, now almost thirty, remembers school as "being fun but also I was irritated that I wasn't allowed to be with other kids." She sees having been segregated from her peers as missed opportunities for "making new friends and helping people out" (personal communication, January 15, 2016). She was included in the high school chorus and home economics programs, and she had a "buddy," a "typically developing peer" (i.e., a child without disabilities), who ate lunch with her in the cafeteria. But Maria recalls, "I was frustrated by [my teacher] when I wanted to go to chorus."

Her special education teacher did not want her to miss "morning meeting" during which hygiene check took place (personal communication, March 22, 2015). My mother (Clark, 2004) notes, "I am fascinated by the fact that the resistance has not come from the regular education teachers, but from the special

education teachers" (p. 223). From my parents' perspective, the school seemed more concerned with following the curricula than meeting Maria's needs. Still, Maria's educational experiences are a lot easier to explain than Isaac's. While Maria's experience was not a satisfactory model of inclusive education by any means, Isaac's was a complete disaster.

Isaac and Righteous Rage

My mother's voice is tired and I hear the waves of frustration ebb through our phone conversation as we talk about my brother. I am curled up on a desk chair, wedged into the telephone nook in the common space of my dorm, five hundred miles from home. I hear the familiar creak of the rocking chair as my mother rocks back and forth telling me of the latest fiasco.

That morning she had packed Isaac a special lunch and made sure that he was wearing a green shirt that would identify him as a part of the "green gator" team for a school field trip, a visit to a local historical site, and then a picnic at a park. Isaac had been talking excitedly about it for days.

At dinner that evening my parents asked Isaac about the trip and he said, "I didn't go. My teacher said that I am not allowed to go on field trips because I have to stay in the inclusion room."

My mom talks about how Isaac had been struggling both at home and at school. His teacher had called to report that Isaac was banging his head on the desk at Math time and had taken to walking out of the classroom. "His teachers just don't know what to do with him and to be honest, sometimes your Dad and I aren't sure either."

My brother was in an inclusive Head Start program. His early schooling experiences were the opposite of Maria's in that he was included in classes with his typically developing peers. He was allowed to struggle in early elementary grades and his teachers attributed most of his delays to developmental issues. Whenever my parents questioned Isaac's progress or struggles in school, his teachers would say that he was just mischievous or that he needed to mature and he would be fine.

By the second grade it was clear that Isaac was not learning at the rate of his peers. He was unable to identify his colors, numbers and letters. I can remember one night we cut numbers out of construction paper and taped them everywhere. Isaac was encouraged to trace and say the name of the number every time he saw one. A blue number two remained taped to the toilet until we moved a year later. By the time my brother reached middle school he was completely isolated in a self-contained setting,

though it was called an "inclusion class." Although my parents advocated for the inclusion of my siblings in general education classes, Isaac's behavior often made it difficult for them to argue with his school about this placement. Isaac could be argumentative and confrontational and he struggled in all academic areas. His middle school experiences in the "inclusion room" looked exactly like what Slee (2011) describes:

> *In many instances the application of the term "inclusive education" is imprecise and misleading. I have encountered schools with an inclusion room. This is a room where difficult, disruptive, and disabled students are gathered so that we can say they remain part of the mainstream school. (p. 156)*

My father shares this story about the school system's failure to meet Isaac's needs:

He was starting first grade and I went to the school to meet with his teacher. This was Isaac's second time in the first grade and I thought there were some things she should know about him. She wouldn't listen to what I had to say, and she wouldn't take the reports that I brought with me. She said that she preferred to meet him and figure him out. At the end of the school year she sent home a note apologizing for not listening. (personal communication, December 20, 2015)

Every year it would be the same thing. Initially, all his teachers saw was this little blue-eyed, curly-haired kid whom they thought they could "fix" or "save." By October of every year, Isaac would be relegated to the "resource room," the principal's office, and later the "inclusion class." As Mitchell and Snyder (2000) state, "If inclusion is a reluctant social experiment, then retreating when challenges arise is understandable" (p.3).

The challenges that Isaac presented were innumerable. My parents believe the situation fell apart with the school's dismissal of my parents' own knowledge of Isaac. At one point they begged his middle school to provide anger management for Isaac, as he needed to find constructive ways to deal with his anger. The school denied their requests and instead suspended him for his behavior. All the way through high school Isaac struggled to find a place—and he is still struggling. Though he graduated, he rejected vocational support from the school district, which meant that he was on his own to find a job. Since then he has been hospitalized and incarcerated. He is now unemployed but receiving disability, stuck in a system that he rejects and yet cannot escape.

In and Out

As Maria and Isaac got older and their learning differences and personalities became more pronounced, their paths would switch from inclusion to self-contained and back again. Both were placed in some inclusion classes at the insistence of my parents, but neither fully benefited from the promise of inclusion.

In 1992, Colin Barnes published a study in which he identified ten stereotypes used in media to portray people with dis/abilities. I believe that throughout their schooling these same stereotypes were applied to Maria and Isaac by their teachers and school administrators. Maria fell into the "disabled person as pitiable or pathetic" (p. 7) and Isaac fell into the category of "his/her own worst enemy" (p. 14). Although Maria remembers times in which she was not allowed to leave "the resource room," she was viewed as "pitiable or pathetic" by her teachers, and was able to be partially included with her typically developing peers because she posed no behavioral disruptions or challenges to the class.

To this day Maria continues to be mostly included. Through community work placement she volunteers at a nursery school and at a local animal shelter, though there have been times when she was asked not to return to her placement because she posed "too much of a challenge" or required "too much direction." She still lives with my parents and goes with them to philharmonic concerts, academic conferences, and even participates in Revolutionary War reenactment.

Isaac on the other hand was treated as though he was "his own worst enemy." Because Isaac's dis/abilities do not fall neatly into one of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)'s thirteen dis/ability categories, many of his teachers and others involved in his education blamed him for his educational and personal struggles (U.S. Congress, 2004). He was segregated from his peers because he posed behavioral challenges and needed a lot of academic support from teachers.

Isaac says that "if somebody paid attention and would have worked with me I wouldn't have been so angry and frustrated" (personal communication, March 6, 2016). His behavior was unpredictable, ranging from offering to help the teacher with a task, to banging his head on the desk, to making "terroristic threats." His experiences of being frequently disciplined by teachers and administrators led to what Ramey (2015) terms "criminalized school discipline" (p. 182). Ramey (2015) adds, "For children who display severe behavior problems, repeated involvement with criminalized forms of school discipline at early ages creates the perception among teachers and peers that these children are

repeat offenders destined for involvement in the criminal justice system" (p. 183).

I remember Isaac begging my parents to be sent to military school. By the age of twelve he embodied the belief that he was a bad kid and that he needed discipline in order to be successful.
Isaac has always had a lot of anger, but not without reason. His anger with his history is justified. His anger with the system is justified. While the justifications for his anger are not excuses for violent outbursts, they are a perfect example of what Duncan-Andrade (2009) has termed "righteous rage" (p.9).

Still Unsafe for Righteous Rage

Maria and Isaac graduated from high school almost fifteen years ago, and yet the state of inclusive education has not changed. Some students, like Maria, get the experience of some education alongside her typically developing peers, while others, like Isaac, are criminalized and excluded. Sadly, the increase in accountability measures that attach student test scores to teacher evaluation and school funding, combined with zero tolerance policies mean that students are being pushed out in vast numbers (Advancement Project, 2010; Fabricant & Fine, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2006).

In New York City, high school students, some of whom have been labeled with a dis/ability and others who challenge the "grammar" of schooling because of cultural, behavioral, learning, language, or other differences find themselves pushed out and left with few options.

The self-contained special education high school where I teach in New York City has year-round enrollment and accepts students with IEPs. The students are generally classified as "Emotionally Disturbed" or "Learning Disabled" and have been thrust out of their community, private, charter, or other special education settings for behavioral and/or academic reasons. In addition, some of our students are transitioning back into the community from hospital or juvenile detention facilities.

After being enrolled in our program, the dance towards general education (gen ed) begins. The carrot of inclusion is dangled in conversations with students in IEP meetings: "If you behave and earn your credits, you will show us that you are ready to go to gen ed." This conversation sets me on edge every time it takes place because many of my students are taught to think of inclusion in general education programs as a privilege and not as a right—or more commonly—that their current school setting is a punishment.

A few years ago, I had a student who attended some of his classes at a nearby community school as a part of an inclusion program. He wound up in handcuffs because the principal would not give him his phone at the end of the school day. Having to wait to get your phone back may seem inconvenient but not worth getting arrested. But for this young man, his phone was his lifeline. He did not have a stable home and was spending his nights on couches and floors of friends and distant relatives. His phone was the only way that people could find him. The principal viewed him as a student with a history of behavioral issues. She treated him with little care other than to have him managed by school safety agents outside of her office.

As a result of this incident, the student wound up being hospitalized and then sent back into a full-time special education setting. The reason he had been moved into the inclusion program was because he did what he had been told he needed to do—he earned his credits and followed the behavioral rules. As Connor and Ferri (2007) state, "It is absurd to plan inclusion of students with significant disabilities in overcrowded classrooms where the teacher [and administration] has received no more than a crash course in special education" (p. 72). My feeling is that not only is it absurd; it leads us directly to the school-to-prison "nexus" (Meiners, 2007).

This young man, with whom I stay in touch, continues to struggle to fit in. Like Isaac, he is in and out of hospitals and shelters, just trying to find his place. I cannot help but wonder what might have been different had he been truly included and supported by a program that was meant to engage his academic and emotional needs.

Critical Hope

Where does this leave us? While I believe that the social justice-oriented intention of the inclusive schools movement is well-meaning, issues of structural inequity must be addressed by both educational researchers and classroom teachers. Smith (2015) wonders, "What if a goal of inclusion—across oppressions and identities—is not a useful trajectory for this thing we call education?" (p. 51).

As has been well documented, the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education continues to be "the miner's canary" in education research and policy development (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010). This analogy suggests that students of color (like the canary) are unable to survive and thrive in the current conditions of the public education system. Educational research has focused on the achievement gap as the major cause for this dynamic. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006)

reframes the concept of this "gap" as an "education debt" (p. 3). By continuing to concentrate on the development of interventions and programs to close the achievement gap, she posits, researchers are reinforcing the structures that maintain educational inequity. One reason for this is that research on the achievement gap is largely dependent upon examinations of scores on racially biased standardized tests

As Patel (2016) states, "The system is, in many ways, doing exactly what it is designed to do, which is segment land, people, and relationships among them into strata. When educational research focuses on these strata without addressing the societal design that creates the strata, it becomes complicit in the larger project" (p. 18). To me, this means there should be a shift in the focus of educational research from targeted interventions with specific populations to research that aims to reconsider the structure, shape, and scope of education for all students.

In addressing the more immediate needs of students and classroom teachers, Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2009) puts forth the idea of "critical hope" as a solution to educational inequity (p. 5). Drawing from the work of Cornel West, Duncan-Andrade names three elements of critical hope that "must operate holistically and, in fact are mutually constitutive" (p. 5). The three elements of critical hope are "material, Socratic, and audacious" (p. 5). Duncan-Andrade challenges the approach of educators who

> *try to create classroom spaces that are safe from righteous rage, or worse, we design plans to weed out children who display it. The question we should be grappling with is not how to manage students with these emotions, but how to help students channel them. (p. 9)*

It is in this way of thinking about students who find themselves at the margins of education that I find hope in the classroom. If Isaac and many of my high school students had had schooling experiences that engaged their differences, anger, frustration, energy, or other ways of learning in constructive and empowering ways, their experiences would have been different. Instead of being kicked out for banging his head on his desk, Isaac might have had a teacher who recognized his frustration and worked with him to figure things out. If the principal had spent some time getting to know my student she might have used a different approach with him regarding his cell phone. In the same way, teachers, rather than viewing students who are challenging their structure, assignments, and rules as disruptive, might consider that these students are calling attention to structural inequities within their pedagogy.

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Lunch Detention: Learning from Students in Our Little Barred Room

Lisa A. Johnson

We do not often think of detention in a positive light. Typically it is associated with punishment; some might even call it prison-like, a barred room which students dread. This piece will challenge this traditional notion of detention by exploring how one group of students used the power of their stories within the space of detention for self-discovery and meaning-making. In this space, the door was not used to keep students in, but rather, to keep violence out.

In order to set the stage for this narrative, I will first describe my personal connection to this topic and the need for work like this before providing background information on the school in which this research study took place. Before describing the detention space, I will then provide information on the questionable practices employed by staff within the school. I feel it is important for the readers to understand the culture of the school to more fully appreciate the significance of the safe detention space.

When I first began this yearlong ethnographic research study at Cinder City Middle School (CCMS) , I was interested in finding out how middle school students with disabilities were supported not only academically, but also socially. I grew up blind in a rural school district, and for most of my life, I was the only disabled person I knew. As a student I felt that the most difficult part of school for me was feeling like I belonged. I never felt as though I had a voice in my education. I wanted to believe my life had value, but I didn't know that it did because I was isolated from others "like me." I didn't see myself represented in anyone I knew or anything I read.

Until recently, even within the social sciences, the experiences of the disabled as a cultural group have been largely unexamined (Abberley, 1987; Oliver, 1996). What little has been written does not explore the experiences of children and teens with disabilities (Taylor, 2006), and of the work that has been done, what is often privileged is the knowledge of educators and researchers who are distanced from the "real life experiences" of children and families who live the disability experience every day. There has been a tendency, even in disability studies, for researchers to position themselves above teachers and for teachers to position themselves above children and families in relation to knowledge

ownership. This type of hierarchical research continues to practice deficit thinking and fails to privilege the knowledge that children and families possess (Kliewer, 2006; Solis & Connor, 2006).

When I embarked on this study, I wanted my time with students to be one of empowerment. I was a disabled researcher coming into their spaces to listen to and learn from them; I wasn't doing research "on" them. My students weren't my subjects; we were participating together in theorizing life experiences. I was doing research "with" them (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008).

The setting

CCMS is part of a rural midwestern school district. In 2012, the school served 400 young adolescents in grades 5–8, and approximately 17% of those students received services in special education. The school district had a reputation for providing exceptional inclusive school experiences for students with disabilities. As a result, families would move to the district or seek to open enroll their children there instead of sending them to two nearby, larger districts. The district's reputation for inclusion is initially what drew me to conduct my research there. I had heard teacher educators from a nearby university speak with praise about the district's special education program at the elementary level.

The district's installation of a state-of-the-art accessible playground with equipment that students in wheelchairs could use was featured on the local news. One of the district's elementary special education teachers was recognized at the state level as a "teacher of the year." Through interviews with parents I learned that one mother's perception of the school as an inclusive space was shaped by this media coverage. One parent also shared that she had friends who had children in the elementary special education program and were very happy. Without exception, every parent interviewed spoke highly of the services offered to students at the elementary school, but said that once students reached middle school, everything changed.

During my year at CCMS, I spent an extensive amount of time with all four of the middle school's special educators as well as with their five aides. which I was therefore able to observe their work within self-contained classrooms and mainstream classrooms as well as during informal gatherings where students were not present. The teachers managed their caseloads by placing multiple students with disabilities into the same classes during the same periods. This typically created what the school called "inclusion" periods, classes in which several of the students in a class were disabled. Through observation I came to understand that during the "inclusion" periods, teachers typically provided less

content or had lower expectations, particularly at the seventh- and eighth-grade levels. Students with disabilities were often seated separately from nondisabled peers and expected to complete less work.

This exemplifies what has been described as "facades of inclusion," or soft inclusion, by scholars of disability studies in education. In those situations, students are put in general education settings but either not expected to succeed or held to very low standards (Benson, Wolford, & Hyland, 2011). Even worse, on numerous occasions, special educators at CCMS would publicly shame students instead of quietly providing supports for them. In this case, the dominant group (special educators) were in control of when, how, and for whom inclusion was appropriate. Even when they were "included," students continued to be excluded because, as Ferri (2006) wrote, "students can be physically included but not conceptually included in the eyes of the teacher" (p. 292).

A demeaning culture

At CCMS there was a pervasive culture of emotional violence directed at students with disabilities that was evident in both what the staff said and in the opportunities they provided for students or withheld from them. During an eighth-grade career unit in which students could shadow an adult to learn more about their work, Sophie, a student with cerebral palsy, wanted to observe a teacher but was told by her aide that she would not be allowed to participate because, "she'd be lucky to get a job as a Wal-Mart greeter when she grew up." In another instance, Addy, an academically accomplished student with Turner Syndrome, argued with an aide who caught her reading in a life skills class when she had been told to sweep the floor, a task Addy found degrading because she wanted more out of "life skills" than just learning to clean and to cook. The aide said to Addy, "Just remember who is in charge here. You better learn to cook and clean because it is the only thing you'll ever hope to do with your life." It was not uncommon for students at CCMS to spend entire class periods coloring pages from elementary school workbooks. Special educators at the school advocated for curricular adaptations for students based on their perceived abilities and disabilities. Unfortunately, this often translated into watered-down educational experiences that did not provide opportunities for students to excel (Brantlinger, 2006).

About two months into my time at CCMS, I met an eighth-grade student named Matt. I found him sitting alone in the school's time-out room, a windowless cinder block closet that measured seven feet by seven feet. Matt explained that he spent nearly every day there. He'd received this punishment for being disrespectful to some of his teachers. He explained, "I don't feel like I say things that are any

worse than things that some of the other kids say, but they aren't special ed so they seem to get away with more." Later that day, I found the teacher that managed Matt's case, and she explained that Matt had to "earn" his way into his classes by proving he could be respectful to teachers. If he was "good" each day, he'd earn another class period back. If he wasn't, he would be sent back to the time-out room, and the process would start over. In Matt's case, inclusion was a reward. I asked how long this had been going on and learned that Matt had been trying to earn his way into classes for nearly six weeks. He was otherwise a good student but, as the special educator claimed, "just needed to learn the rules of school."

The berating of students in the hallways; a technology education teacher referring to the special education students as "retards"; an eighth-grade wetting herself because her aide told her it wasn't yet time for a bathroom break; two special educators mocking one of their seventh-grade students who had invited 20 people to his birthday party only to have no one show up ("because he's such a crybaby") and joking that at least his imaginary friend probably came—all of this stood in stark comparison to the school's stated mission of "Dignity and Respect within these walls." To me, it did not represent anything close to exemplary inclusive schooling.

In early February, the principal approached me and asked if I would consider taking on the role of lunch detention supervisor. He explained that Matt was misbehaving at lunchtime: "He is loud and is having trouble listening to the lunchroom monitors." The principal went on, "We've decided to take away Matt's lunch and recess privileges for the rest of the year and assign him to a one-on-one lunch detention." I must have looked shocked. "I know it sounds extreme," the principal said, "but the special educators think it would be best. But none of the teachers want the job of supervising him every day, so we were hoping you would do it."

Supervising lunch detention

I was flabbergasted. Three and a half months of lunch detention for being loud in the lunchroom? After nearly 10 years as a middle school teacher, I considered a noisy, chaotic lunchroom fairly typical of middle school since it was one of the few times during the school day that students enjoyed less structure and some time to socialize. Nevertheless, I agreed to take the job.

It would be misleading to say that our early days together in detention were smooth, because they were not. I had been instructed to escort Matt from his fifth-hour class to the lunch line, wait for him

to get his food, and then walk him back to the classroom where he had been assigned to spend lunch detention. I found this practice punitive and possibly embarrassing for Matt. Nevertheless, on the first day of our time together, I walked Matt to lunch and told him I'd wait for him at the door so he could have a few minutes with his friends. Somehow, however, he snuck away. It took three teachers and 10 minutes to find him hiding in a bathroom.

Our second day together went better. I walked several feet behind Matt to the cafeteria and waited at the door while he got his food before we returned to our classroom. Matt ate quietly and didn't speak much to me. On the third day, however, he began talking right away.

"Listen," he said. "I'm sorry about running away the other day. I wasn't trying to get away from you. I was just mad at the teachers for doing this." I nodded to show I understood. "I mean, I don't feel like what I was doing was any worse than what other kids were doing but that's how it is here. It is like they expect me to be bad, so they are always watching, and as soon as I do some little thing, they are all over me."

> "I get it," I said.
> "So you're not mad?" he asked.
> "No hard feelings. And I don't want to make this any worse for you than it already is."

Over the next few days, the hour that Matt and I spent together seemed to fly by. Some days we would talk for the entire time. On other days, Matt would do homework while he ate. As he opened up to me more, I felt privileged to learn more about him. His mother had abandoned him when he was an infant. He lived with his dad. His older sister lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and he loved to visit her because she'd recently given birth; Matt spoke fondly of his little niece. He was surprisingly candid about his past experiences in schools. He'd been kicked out of one middle school because he and some other students had climbed up on the roof and thrown water balloons at students and teachers. "That was pretty stupid," he admitted. He shared that when he came to CCMS, he really wanted to have a new start and to make better choices. "Unfortunately," he said, "it seemed like the teachers had decided right away that I was bad before I even had a chance to show them that I could be good." Matt's intentions were confirmed in a letter he wrote to his future self as part of an English assignment that he completed in October. He wrote:

> *Dear Future Eighth Grade Self,*

Things so far have been going well for me. I did get a lot of referrals but I am planning to step it up and get good grades. The things that are really going well are Science which I first thought was going to be hard but it turned out to be easy. English class is also going well because the career unit is giving me a chance to find out what I want to do for the rest of my life. At home things are getting better because my dad isn't getting on me as much about homework.

One thing that is bad so far is that I still have to earn my classes back for my bad behavior. I now have earned about 4 classes and I am hoping to get them all back. As the year progresses I hope that I will stay caught up and not have to worry about late assignments.

Overall, I am looking forward to developing better note-taking skills so I have more information to study with. I am also looking forward to making good grades because it would help for high school and my whole life in general. I have high expectations for myself. I hope I can meet them.

Before being assigned to lunch detention with Matt, I had been having lunch in the cafeteria at what everyone in the school knew as the "disabled table." At CCMS, all of the students with disabilities seemed to eat together, sometimes by choice and sometimes because aides made that choice for them. Tatum (2003) wrote that "the aspect of identity that is the target of others' attention, and subsequently of our own, is often what sets us apart as exceptional or 'other'" (p. 21). Other aspects of the identities of the students with disabilities at CCMS didn't seem to matter. If they were disabled, they all ate lunch at the same table.

The lunch detention community grows

After I'd been gone from the table for just over a week, two eighth-grade girls, Sophie and Tara, approached me and asked if I was ever going to come back. They knew that I'd been assigned to lunch detention with Matt because news traveled fast in this small school.

"If you can't come to lunch with us anymore, can we come to you?" Tara asked.

I couldn't help but laugh at the thought. Sophie and Tara were asking to join detention! I told them I'd have to check with their lunch aide. I also wanted to check with Matt to see how he felt about it because I didn't want to disrupt the relationship that we had begun to develop. Matt shrugged and said he didn't care, and when I asked the aide for permission, she grumbled at first—commenting on how ridiculous

it was that students didn't appreciate the "freedom" they had at lunch time—but quickly agreed, saying, "Go ahead, less work for me."

And so began the lunch detention that students were asking to be part of. Shortly after Sophie and Tara joined, Addy asked to come as well. It seemed that every day or two, our group would add a member. Soon, nine students came to detention every day: six from the special ed program, an immigrant from the Philippines, a student whose father was incarcerated, and another who lived with her homosexual father. Each student who joined us experienced marginalization for one reason or another, but they all seemed to consider detention a safe space. I watched with amazement as the students came in, pushed desks together to form a circle, and talked. Some days the conversations revolved around the terrible cafeteria food or upcoming tests, but on other days the discussions took a more serious tone.

Sarah, a student with cerebral palsy, seemed quieter than usual one afternoon. Sophie noticed and asked, "What's the matter?"

Sarah sighed, "I was just thinking. How do you know that someone is a real friend?"

"That's a tough question," I responded. "Is something going on that makes you wonder about this?"

"Kind of … yeah … I guess. It's just that sometimes I wonder who I can really trust. Like, my friend Emma always hangs around me but sometimes I wonder if she's really my friend or if she hangs out with me because she has to."

"Why would she have to hang out with you?" asked Matt.

"Well, the teachers make our schedules the same so that she can help me in class, because, you know," she nodded toward her walker. "So, when she sits by me I never know if it is because she actually wants to or if she does it because she feels sorry for me."

"I'm sure she likes you," Matt said. He seemed to want to reassure her.

"Yeah, maybe," Sarah said, "but then like, when we were on the field trip last week, when I was going so slow, she ditched me and went off with some other girls from our class. That makes me think I'm just a burden to her and that she'll be my friend when it is easy but when I get in the way, it is just easier

to walk away."

It was quiet for awhile, and then Sophie shared, "I feel like I don't even get to pick my own friends. Gina (the aide) decides where I sit at lunch. When my older sister doesn't like who I am hanging out with, she tells my mom and then my mom tells me I can't be friends with people. And sometimes I don't want to be friends with people because it seems like they think they own me. I hate it when they think they can adjust me in my chair when I'm slouching without even asking if I want them to."

"Gosh, I never thought about these things before," said Danielle, one of the students without a disability. "I mean, I thought when I saw you all sitting at the same table in the lunchroom, maybe you wanted it that way."

"Not really," Sarah said, and Sophie agreed. "Our aides have been putting us at that table ever since we started middle school. The only time I have sat somewhere else was during that stupid mix-it-up week that we did in sixth grade, when the teachers made us sit with other people during the disability unit."

"That sucked," Addy groaned. "It was so stupid because it is not like it actually made people be friends with people like us. It is like, the teachers think you can force friendships. But once that week is over, everyone goes back to their usual places and nothing changes."

Matt, who had been pretty quiet throughout the exchange added, "I guess it is a little different for me because sometimes I act tough even when it is not how I want to be because I think that will help me fit in with the other guys in our class, but it never seems to work. It just gets me in trouble with the teachers."

"What about you, Mrs. Johnson?" Danielle asked. "Did stuff like this happen to you in school?"

"Definitely," I admitted. "I moved to a new school in eighth grade and it was awful. Kids didn't want to sit by me because they thought they would catch blindness. They beat me up and ran away, and I wouldn't be able to tell who they were because I couldn't see. I had one true friend. She was picked on because she had really bad acne, but that didn't matter to me. I think we could relate to each other because we knew what it was like to feel like an outsider. And what's funny is, now that we're adults, we're still good friends. She does research on girls and self-esteem and body image, and I do research about disability … probably because of our own experiences in school."

"So does it get easier when you grow up, you know, to make friends and know the friendships are real?" asked Sarah.

I was about to answer, when a booming voice interrupted. "What IS this?!?" one of the seventh- and eighth-grade special educators shouted. "Who is in charge here?"

"I am," I stood up timidly, though I didn't feel like I had to be "in charge" in the way that I thought she meant.

"I thought this was detention for Matt, not some social hour. You guys don't belong in here!" she continued to shout, pushing into the center of our circle and getting in the face of every student there.

"I'm sorry," I stammered, "I gave them permission to be here. They aren't doing anything wrong."

"Well, we'll see what the administration has to say about this. This is supposed to be a punishment!" She turned to me. "Clearly you can't be trusted to control this situation." With her fists clenched, she stormed out of the room. But just before leaving, she turned around and said to me, "You obviously don't understand your place here."

The students sat in shocked silence. Finally I stood up, trying to demonstrate more confidence than I actually felt, and said, "No one else needs to leave. You are not doing anything wrong by being here. From now on, I think we'll just close the door."

Our little barred room: Lunch detention as a safe space

In that moment, when I chose to close the door on that teacher, and on others like her who threatened our lunch detention space, I was living out something that Collins (1990) referenced in her work. She quoted the notable Black civil rights activist Bernice Johnson Reagon and her thoughts on the "barred room." She imagined such a space as:

> That space while it lasts should be a nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are . . . in that little barred room where you check everybody at the door, you act out community. You pretend that your room is a world. (Reagon, as cited in Collins, 1990, p. 145)

The dialogue that happened in our own little barred room that day and in the weeks to come allowed students to explore things that they wondered about with others who perhaps were wondering about them too. The conversations we had were powerful and sometimes painful. We could be serious or silly. And thankfully, the principal, after learning what was happening in that room, agreed that our gathering was too important to disband and should be allowed to continue.

One afternoon in late April, the students were just settling in and beginning to eat when Matt asked, "So, did you all get the classes you wanted for next year in high school?"

Natalie answered, "I'm going back to the Philippines, so I don't really know what next year will be like."

"Why are you leaving?" Matt asked.

"My parents are getting a divorce."

"That sucks. My parents are divorced, too," added Danielle.

"I wish ours would get a divorce," said Sarah. "They fight all the time."

"Well, at least your dad isn't dead," Tara barely whispered. The group knew that Tara's father had been killed in a car accident two years earlier.

"You're right, we should feel lucky to have a dad."

"So, about your schedules …," Matt asked again.

"I didn't get to choose anything," complained Sophie. "Mrs. X picked for me. I only get to come out for one class and that is Art."

"Seriously?!?!" Matt gasped. "I'd die if I'd be stuck in the special ed room all day!"

"I know. It isn't fair."

"Why can't you just say you want something else?" Danielle asked. She was an honor roll

student and hadn't had the experience of needing an individuated education plan (IEP).

"We don't get to do that," explained Tara. "The teachers have a meeting with our parents usually and just pretty much tell them what we will be allowed to take. They say we have choices, but really, we don't."

"Yeah, my mom hates those meetings," said Sarah. "She says that it's just a show because they legally have to do it, but really our opinions and our parents' opinions don't matter. Not here anyways."

"That's so sad!" Natalie exclaimed. "If you don't go to any other classes though, how do you graduate? How will you be ready for college?"

"College? That's funny. I don't think anyone here thinks I will ever go to college!" said Sophie.

"Yeah, me either," added Matt. "They all think I will end up in jail or something."

"I wish we had more power. I mean, other kids get to choose. I don't even know if I'd be ready for college though. Most of the time I'm doing this kid stuff. The other day I had to color this page of animals and write what animals they were. That's not eighth-grade work," Sophie whined.

"What?!? How is that even allowed that you get work like that?" Danielle asked.

"It is all I have ever known," Sophie replied.

"You'd be surprised what happens in special ed," Matt said. "They wouldn't put any regular kid in the time-out room, I bet, but for kids like us, it's totally normal."

"Mrs. Johnson, what about you? Did you get to choose? How did you get to college?"

"I had some pretty hard times too. I started out for the first two years in what used to be called the mentally retarded room. I mostly played with toys. My parents had to fight to get me into a regular class, but lots of times teachers wouldn't give me work because they just assumed I

couldn't do it. I had to work hard to prove I could do it."

"Yeah, I get that," replied Matt. "Sometimes it seems just because we're disabled, we have to work harder than people who are normal just to prove we're human."

Beyond the little barred room

It was stories like these that filled our time together in lunch detention, where, for an hour a day, we locked the door to the world outside our little barred room.Marginalizing experiences had so often made these students feel alone. In this situation, however, that feeling of alienation seemed to have brought them together and helped them articulate important concepts related to consciousness and identity in a deeply personal way. The psychological underpinnings of disability identity development focus on the concepts of consciousness and alienation (Garland-Thomson, 1996). Consciousness, or how one comes to know oneself, is directly influenced by the world in which one lives. The act of "being" in a social world in turn impacts consciousness, and consciousness in turn influences the act of being (Garland-Thomson, 2009).

As powerful as our time in lunch detention was, I worried. I knew this space was temporary. Together we were resisting the norms of the school by creating a space in which the students could speak freely, in which the adults with power who repeatedly had oppressed these students were literally locked outside and the students struggled together to find meaning in their experiences. But this experience would soon end.

> Reagon (as cited in Collins, 1990) captured my concerns that this space would not be sufficient for larger social change because the problem with the experiment [the barred room] is that there ain't nobody in there but folk like you . . . That's nationalism. . . it's nurturing, but it is also nationalism. At a certain stage nationalism is crucial to people if you are going to ever impact as a group in your own interest. Nationalism at another point becomes reactionary because it is totally inadequate for surviving in the world with many peoples. (p.145)

In many ways, our little barred room was indeed a "sphere of influence" in the "struggle for group survival" (Collins, 1990, p. 141). In private, we engaged in work regarding the students' understanding of issues of inclusion, expectations, and friendship. Through the sharing of stories, knowledge was created. As time passed, I saw the students grow more willing to question the low expectations of

those in authority and share their own stories in very public ways with their teachers and peers. Three students even went on to share stories at their eighth-grade graduation about their experiences in lunch detention. They seemed to be making the movement from survival to transformation. As they began to open up to peers, they demonstrated—to students and adults alike—their resilience.

I was profoundly changed by the students from our little barred detention room and I believe they were changed as well. On the second to last school day, students celebrated what they called "Farewell," which included a graduation ceremony and dance. As I watched them move across the stage to receive their middle school diplomas, I couldn't help but marvel at what an unlikely group of friends these eighth graders made. And while the students and I will never forget the violent ways in which this school marginalized them, we will also never forget the real lasting friendships that developed in the unlikeliest of places, lunch detention.

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A Circle With Edges: How Story Time Privileges the Abled Learner

Melissa A. Tsuei

The classroom teacher rings a bell and announces, "Okay everyone, it's time for circle," holding the day's book over her head. Children are scattered around the room, in the dramatic play center, the scribbling center, the gross motor area, and the block area. Some children respond quickly, placing toys back on shelves or in bins and walking over to the reading circle. One girl concentrates on the wheels of a truck toy, spinning them round and round, seeming not to hear the prompt. Her attention focused on the wheels, she does not see the visual of the book overhead. A child in a wheelchair removes the cape from his back, as the teacher assistant whisks him towards the circle area. She places him opposite the teacher chair, but he wants to be nearer to the book. Before he can verbalize this, the assistant is across the room, squatted down beside two students fighting over a toy.

As students continue to trickle into the reading area, the teacher says, "Amelia is always one of the first sitting on her lily pad. Let's clap for Amelia." Jonathan, who was the first seated, but with all the waiting has become unregulated, claps very loud and very close to Amelia's face and is redirected. As the teacher begins the story, the assistant pulls on her ear, asking students to "Listen, listen." When Jonathan yells out "Pop-pop!" the teacher says, "Jonathan, this is quiet time." The child who was spinning the truck wheels enters the circle, sitting right in the middle up front. The assistant takes one of the child's hands, removes the truck from her other hand, and moves her to the perimeter of the circle. The teacher continues reading and Jonathan runs across the room. "Jonathan, please come back to circle," says the teacher and the assistant physically redirects him back to his spot on the lily pad.

Circle time is a familiar scene in most early childhood classrooms, a time to share literature and a time for the classroom community to come together. Often, circle time touches on letter recognition, introduces the days of the week and weather, involves song, and provides opportunities for children to connect with one another about their out-of-school experiences. Although it can be a place for children to develop creatively, learn to assert themselves, and gain exposure to literature, some research indicates that it would be worthwhile to flesh out our ideas of circle time to include considerations of classroom climate and relationships, in order to prevent contributing to isolation and bullying (Cefai,

Cavioni, Carter, & Grech, 2014).

Research has also found that the demands of circle time present particular difficulty for children with Autism, such as problems with social proximity, receptive language (i.e., the ability to understand words and language), and understanding abstract concepts (Barton, Reichow, Wolery, & Chen, 2011). As a special educator, I wanted to look deeper into the dynamics at play. My research question was, "How can we challenge the traditional circle time model to provide increased access for atypical learners and improve the balance of social justice in our schools?" The research led to the development of a model that challenges the dynamics of able-ness and helps empower students who express learning differently.

The Sphere Model

The Sphere Model was developed to address the privilege of the able learner, in an effort to nurture a truly inclusive literacy-learning environment. The tenets of the model are:

Social- Learning happens in a social context within a supportive community.

Participatory - Participation in all forms is active engagement, evidence of a brain at work, not a challenge to authority.

Helpers - There are opportunities for all learners (including teachers) to be the helpers and the helped.

Evolving - Story time is fluid and evolving, open to student expressions of power and collaboration.

Round - By design, the learning environment is without walls or edges. It embraces rather than excludes.

Energizing- Teachers respond to student energy, aiming for balance, so children can learn in the best possible way.

I believe that circle time experiences adhering to this set of values can help promote inclusion of diverse learners in the typical classroom. In creating a more fluid and adaptive approach to telling stories, we can consider and overturn power structures, and engage more authentically with our students as they learn. The aim of the Sphere model is to grant opportunities for play, active engagement and dialogue,

with educator and student creating the story of the classroom. As teachers, we can open up the space more to imagine the ways diverse learners contribute positively and uniquely to our classrooms, pushing the boundaries of able-ness to include all students.

The sphere is an image of a circle with more dimensions, valuing a broader spectrum of responses and participation. It is my hope that shared reading time grounded in this model would embrace a fuller expression of early learning, foregrounding responsive practices and aiming for a co-construction of the narrative. But first, what does research say about students with learning styles outside the norm and about current approaches to inclusion?

Another Look at Inclusion

Inclusive practices are becoming more and more a focus of early childhood education, as diagnosticians attach labels earlier and the demand for appropriate services grows. The dominant stance towards diverse learners continues to be a special education perspective, which works from an individual deficit model (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). In contrast, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) conceptualizes disability as a social, cultural, and political construct (Graue, 2005; Graue, White, & Delaney, 2014). This shift does not indicate a denial of learning impairments, but rather a philosophy challenging the idea that outcomes must be determined by the individual's diagnosis. Thus, the DSE lens compels educators to examine theory and practice for barriers to learning for those outside of the mainstream.

Research into what works in inclusive classrooms also embraces flexible, improvisational, and play-based teaching techniques that are responsive to the complexity of the early childhood classroom (Graue, 2005; Wohlwend, 2008; Graue, White, & Delaney, 2014). In *Playing Their Way into Literacies* (2011), Wohlwend suggests redefining literacy as one means to this end:

> *The notion of literacies reflects the diverse ways we make meaning, in cooperation with others, often coordinating multifunctional tools, across networks and global sites. Moreover, the move from literacy to literacies expands the ways we think about familiar non-digital events such as play enactments, drawings, commercial toys, classroom layouts, and so on. These changes present an opportunity to rethink play as a new literacy and, at the same time, revive it as a staple of early childhood curricula. We can now recognize play as a literacy for creating and coordinating a live-action text among multiple players that invests materials with pretended meanings and slips the constraints of here-and-now realities. (p. 3)*

Widening the lens on literacies may allow us to capture meaningful interactions we would otherwise miss. Developmental perspectives also suggest that a shift from practical skills to curricula more inclusive of literacy experiences would be beneficial to young children with diverse learning styles.

Developmental research recommends that early childhood curriculum focus on literacy for future school readiness. One major recommendation is to provide a literacy-rich environment, partly to support emergent skills for children with disabilities (Johnston, McDonnell, & Hawken, 2008). Because many children with disabilities are shown to be at risk of developing reading problems, the research has focused on adaptations that can serve their needs. However, research also acknowledges evidence of barriers that prevent full access for children with certain learning differences (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

Children with cognitive disabilities are traditionally educated on basic life skills, under the assumption that literacy is not as useful (Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Algozzine, 2006; Cooper-Duffy, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010), and some research has called for a paradigm shift from life skills to a balance of practical skills and literacy exposure (Hedrick, Katims, & Carr, 1999). Ogletree (2007) also wonders if the "best, developmentally-appropriate" communication interventions (modeling, shaping, time-delay, reinforcement) actually produce meaningful results in the lives of students with Autism.

Others have noted the need for a paradigm shift from the concept of literacy "readiness," as it bars access for students with Autism, who do not typically demonstrate readiness skills (Mirenda, 2003; Vacca, 2007). Despite the common adherence to a readiness model, students with Autism have demonstrated gains when allowed exposure to literacy skills. This focus on readiness skills has also been noted in instruction for students with Down Syndrome (van Bysterveldt, Gillon, & Moran, 2006).

Graue (2005) claims that child-centered practice is often characterized by reactiveness to and sanctioning of inappropriate behavior, a model in which "eligibility for participation is limited to those who already have the desired attributes" (47). Graue also suggests that at-risk children then become "invisible" within classrooms that operate primarily under the developmental model. Green, Terry, and Gallagher (2014) demonstrated gains in literacy for children labeled with disabilities, but not at the same rate as their typical peers. In a study of children with and without developmental delays, Benjamin, Lucas-Thompson, Little, Davie, & Khetani (2016) found discrepancies in participation, with children labeled with delays or disabilities significantly less involved than their peers. Barton, et al. (2011) found that children with Autism are less engaged in circle time than in any other aspect of the preschool day.

Teacher Attitude and Assumptions

Although there are no data to support the claim that behavioral readiness is a prerequisite for inclusion, early childhood settings continue to hold to this belief in programming (Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004). This may partially explain why, despite the fact that children with Autism benefit from early childhood programming, inclusion is rare at early ages. Even when students with disabilities are included, many circle time interventions focus on behavioral control, including self-regulation and "not calling out" (McClelland, Schmitt, &Tominey, 2014; McClelland & Tominey, 2015). Furthermore, Alston and Kilham (2004) point to missed opportunities for social inclusion due to a privileging of the typical learner's experience within the inclusive classroom.

Westwood (2013/2016) looked at the commonality of social, emotional, and behavioral problems that affect students with learning difficulties. Although some learning differences result in social problems, most of the difficulties stem from a lack of "school success." From a DSE perspective, we can view this as a failure of the system to fully reconstruct the classroom to allow these students true inclusion and empowerment. This presents an alternative to a traditional special education point of view, which has tended to assume that behavioral and social difficulties are an inevitable result of learning differences. Adopting this orientation allows us to turn a critical eye on our classrooms and push the transformation that is necessary for successful integration.

Despite studies that support inclusion for a developing child with disabilities and positive attitudes towards disability for typical learners, opportunities for inclusion remain limited in the United States (Onaga & Martoccio, 2008). Carrington et al (2016) found that although teachers believe generally that inclusion is a just cause, they acknowledge that inclusion increases the demand on them as educators. These additional demands included challenges to the system (such as time and environmental concerns), child-centered challenges (social-emotional wellness of the child, communication concerns), and the effects of disruptive behaviors on the classroom. Agreement on goals, an attitude of cooperation, and teacher collaboration or engagement in the planning process are all important factors in determining a positive inclusion process (Sood & Agnihotri, 2015; Carrington, et al., 2016). Collaboration with the parents of the diverse learner was also found to be a supportive strategy.

Most educators would probably agree that people with disabilities deserve the right to self-determination. I wonder how we can apply this philosophy in our work with very young children, and become more responsive to individual needs. How can we design our classrooms and instruction to be more open to

this dialogue, and push our minds beyond the prevailing definitions of "able"?

One way educators can begin to do this is to challenge the theory and methods based on a binary of abled and disabled learners. In the tradition of defining "readiness" as being located in the school rather than in the student, we can examine circle time for clues as to how we can better serve all students.

Approaches to Inclusion in the Literary Experience and Circle Time

Many strategies recommended for children with communication, motor, hearing, or visual delay involve embedding learning into the classroom routine; use of gestures, movements, and facial expression to convey meaning; use of visual aids, positioning choices, alternative methods of communication, and tactile cues. For children with significant cognitive disabilities, shared stories have been shown to promote comprehensive vocabulary and fluency (Browder, et. al., 2006).

Studies indicate that a social communication component may be necessary to take full advantage of reading interventions with this population. There is also evidence that these children can learn literacy symbols through picture identification. Children with Autism have demonstrated play skills and pro-social skills development when teachers use 1:1 techniques (Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004).

Adaptations to instruction can include changes in our expectations, allowing greater child choice and preference, and stretching the ways we understand support from teachers and from peers. Bartorowicz and McDougall (2006) found that the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) produced positive results that extended beyond the children to teachers, staff, and caregivers.

Cefai, et al. (2014) found that the use of circle time in the classroom contributed to social-emotional learning and to a reduction in social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Challenges to circle time included behavior problems and lack of time, lack of space, and the challenge of large class sizes.

The authors suggest that two essential ingredients in creating an effective circle time are adequate training and assessment of strategies. Because the demands of circle time particularly target impairment areas for children with Autism, circle time should have built-in structure and support, and be individualized and adaptable (Barton, et al. 2011). Cefai et al. (2014) suggest that successful inclusion of children with Autism in circle time may require adaptations in time, materials, physical space, activities, and

teacher expectations.

Other voices highlight how centering play within the curriculum can create more meaningful experiences, provide reversals of power relations, and encourage reflection on experiences, and interpretation and connection to texts (Graue, 2009; Barton, et al., 2011; Wohlwend, 2012). This research is supported by the 2015 study by Underwood, Chan, Koller and Valero which found that interviewing children with disabilities during play provides unique information about their true capabilities.

A New Kind of Story

The teacher rings a bell, waits a minute, rings it again, waits a minute, and rings it a third time. She says, "It's time for our story. You can stay where you are or come closer to me while we read together." Students leave their toys and come running to the front of the class, where the teacher holds the book high above her head. She shows them the front cover and the back cover, approaching a child focused on the wheels of a truck.

"Look, Mira!" she prompts, holding the book between Mira and the truck so she can get a good look at the cover. The young girl pats at the glossy cover and says, "Truck." The teacher responds, "Great thinking, I was wondering if there's a truck in this book too! Damien, do you think we will discover a truck in the book today?"

Damien looks up and the teacher leads the story time group over to him, placing the book in his hands. Damien knows this means he can help turn the pages, which he does for a few minutes. At the end of every page, the teacher rings the bell so he knows it's time to turn. He asks the teacher to push him towards the dramatic play area, where his friend is pretending to fly with a red cape on. When the group reaches him, Damien hands him the book and says, "It's your turn now!" The child throws the book towards the window and the teacher picks it up, saying: "Looks like someone has offered someone else the chance to read."

Another child asks to hold the book and continues the march around the room, turning the pages as the teacher reads. The teacher takes the book back and reads for a few minutes in the circle area, where several children have sat upon their lily pads to listen to the story. "Wow," says the teacher, "Amelia stays on her lily pad just like a frog with a very still body."

Jonathan stands in the middle of the space, jumping up and down repeatedly. "Jonathan is showing us how to jump like the frog does in the story. Let's jump with our hands or our feet, your choice!" The children dissolve into frenetic movement and laughter for a few minutes. Jonathan yells "Pop-pop!" The teacher responds, "Pop-pop? Are you popping bubbles?" Jonathan shakes his head and frowns. The assistant, seated on one of the lily pads, offers, "I think Jonathan's Pop-Pop reads him this story at home."

Jonathan's smile is broad and he gives a high-five to the assistant and students yell out "pop, pop, pop, pop" in different rhythms. The teacher tells them they sound just like a bog where a frog might live. Mira bursts out laughing from across the room. The teacher leads the group back to her, saying, "Mira, were you laughing at bog and frog and how they rhyme? Rhyming is very funny." Mira grunts in approval and moves a smiley face on her communication board.

Jonathan is reaching up, grabbing at the book while the teacher finishes the last page. She hands the book to Jonathan and follows him over to the kitchen, where he puts it in the play sink. Another girl in the class yells "No Jonathan! The book doesn't go there!" The teacher turns to her, "Let's wait and see what he's thinking." The children gather around the sink as Jonathan pretends to wash it with a sponge. The girl breaks into a huge smile, "He is cleaning off the muddy frog in the book!" The children squeal and clap and help him scrub the book.

The teacher heads back towards the child in the superhero cape, who is now staring out the window. She asks him about his favorite part of the story. The child sprints across the room and jumps from lily pad to lily pad all the way around the circle. The teacher rings the bell again three times to mark the end of the book sharing and the children return to their play at their centers.

This scenario illustrates the Sphere model applied to story sharing in the classroom, a counter-narrative to the widely adopted traditional circle time. In an effort to examine and unseat the privilege of the students we view as abled, I have addressed the physical structure of how we share books. It has a decidedly more playful orientation, following the view of Wohlwend (2011) that the malleable aspects of play provide a literary exploration and mediation of power and relational structures within the classroom.

The circle can be an exclusive phenomenon, tending to underscore the power dynamics already at play in school and society. Students who can regulate their body movement and attention, raise their

hands, modulate their voices, and have expressive skills are likely to be praised and held up as examples. This construct places a great premium on typical behavior, making it more difficult for children with disabilities to demonstrate skills beyond behavior control. I believe that a behavioral orientation creates a dynamic that pulls us away from a strengths-based perspective for diverse learners.

The teacher in this scenario faces a scene identical to the one presented at the beginning of this piece, where children are engaged in activities that are meaningful to them, spread across the room. In contrast to the call into the circle, the teacher pushes out into the context of the classroom. Students are invited to place themselves wherever they feel the most comfortable, or most able to participate. Yes, there will be students who take this opportunity to ignore the story, but this happens within the story circle as well.

The teacher's movement is fluid, allowing her to easily adapt to unexpected moments and to alter her perspective. She can easily assist students with physical, motor, or verbal impairments, and can assist students with augmentative and alternative communication systems. Typical students are also acknowledged (Amelia is praised for sitting very still in circle, the girl in the class who yells that Jonathan has put the book in the sink is attended to and challenged to re-interpret the scenario). In this way, both typical and atypical learners are swept into the community and given a place at the learning table. Typical learners (like the girl at the sink) are given the opportunity to be the helped and the helper, thereby upsetting the dominant classroom paradigm. On the other hand, Jonathan (an atypical learner) is given a moment to teach his peers, an opportunity that would be lost if the teacher rushed to correct his actions.

A central component of this approach is a challenge to the main power dynamic at play in the traditional circle time: the teacher who has sole access to the book. This is both symbolic and practical, as we hand over the literature to our students to have full interaction with the book and we assert that stories are community property. The Sphere model supports a concept of storytelling that allows us to inhabit and honor another's perspective, acknowledging that none of us exclusively own the narrative. It positions non-verbal communication in a more powerful way within the book-sharing discourse, borrowing from Wohlwend's (2009) analysis of the "meaning-making" children do without words. It also allows educators to be more responsive and inclusive of diverse learning styles.

This approach to literacy presents a challenge to the binary model, in that it gives all students the opportunity to share expertise and to learn from one another. The educator can slow down and alter

the rhythm of the story to allow processing time and an interweaving of individual student agendas. In responding openly to interactions typically viewed as interruptions, the teacher forwards this concept of students labeled with disabilities as contributors to a stronger community. She can both appreciate the behaviorally compliant child, and send the message that a diverse response (calling out) is also valuable. In this way, the teacher and students become co-constructors of the storytelling event and of their classroom perspective.

Although I acknowledge the need for classroom management, I envision story time as the most highly interactive and theatrical portion of the classroom day. In the spirit of true imaginative literacy, the Sphere model places the creative process above behavior management, except in the case of safety.

One example of a preparatory technique within this model would be to choose a soft storybook that can be thrown without major consequence, or to use hand-over-hand when allowing the student to hold the book. Another strategy could be to tape copies of book pages around the room and encourage learners to point to illustrations, slap them with fly swatters, or blow on them with their mouths. In the vein of viewing interruptions as contributions, educators can find ways to weave verbalizations into the story. For students with limited verbal ability, teachers can interview family members or related therapists to help interpret a child's non-verbal interactions and respond to these during book sharing.

The Sphere model calls on teachers to challenge their own expectations of "how a learner acts" in order to disengage the deficit-model that continues to underlie many of our teaching philosophies. By taking the focus away from ideals of behavior and self-regulation for a contained period of time, we can create possibilities for our students that may not otherwise exist. How might this affect the way they see themselves or one another? Perhaps most importantly, how might these experiences help overturn the expectations that school and society have for diverse learners?

Conclusion

Certainly, there are educators who have already adopted a DSE perspective and aim for strengths-based practice. This model aims to add to the growing body of literature that seeks to upend the concept of readiness and offers a lens through which educators can view the circle time experience. Opening up circle time structurally calls into question the patterns of privilege and allows the teacher to become "unstuck" from the able/disabled paradigm. In creating a sphere around the entire classroom, the teacher can nurture connections between students in naturalistic ways. They can embed literacy into

already meaningful areas of play or reinforce vocabulary with objects in the environment. And they can create a true dialogue with students by releasing the need for authority over their learning.

There are several limitations to application of the Sphere lens in early childhood circle time settings. There are likely to be additional time and training requirements to employ this model of literacy engagement in programs that are already overstretched. The approach has the potential to be highly interactive and mobile and may diminish opportunities for children to practice self-regulatory and attentional skills. It will also not fit the needs of all diverse learners and typical learners with whom we wish to share the narrative. In addition, this philosophy of sharing books requires a sophisticated level of adaptability "in the moment" and may not fit everyone's teaching style.

The Sphere model is intended as one lens through which we can challenge ableist perspectives and increase teacher responsiveness. I believe that challenging our methods helps us to confront assumptions and privileging that we may be blind to otherwise. As the story-telling center of our classrooms, circle time seems an apt place to challenge existing structures, in the hopes of increasing access to high-quality instruction. The telling of stories has long been used to give voice to the underprivileged, to highlight inequities in our society, and to push our imaginations to contain greater things. It is the perspective that there are those who can and those who cannot that is truly disabling. If we extend our concept of literacies, responsiveness, participation, and abilities, maybe we can move closer towards our shared goal of inclusion for diverse learners.

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