# DEVELOPING A CRITICAL DISABILITY STUDIES APPROACH TO "INCLUSIVE" EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Nicole Eilers: Developing a Critical Disability Studies Approach to "Inclusive" Early Childhood Education: A Participatory Action Research Project
(Under the direction of James Trier)

The term “inclusion,” which once primarily referred to the placement of children with disabilities in the general education classroom, has shifted to focus on ensuring that all children are able to access and participate in the physical, social, and academic environment of the classroom. Despite this broader aim, children with disabilities and children from historically marginalized backgrounds continue to experience exclusion inside the inclusive classroom (Annamma et al., 2016; Ferri & Connor, 2016; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Watson, 2017). The field of critical disability studies (CDS) offers a framework for understanding how disablism and ableism function within the classroom, providing an opportunity to challenge normative discourses and practices. However, the field of CDS has not yet made a significant impact on the field of education (Cosier & Person, 2016). This is particularly the case for the field of early childhood inclusive education due to pervasive beliefs that young children are not capable of engaging in conversations about complex social issues (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). At the same time, the field of CDS is critiqued for lacking in practical application (Oliver & Barnes, 2012), indicating a need to demonstrate what CDS has to offer to the field of early childhood education. This dissertation describes a participatory action research project in which one multilingual, early childhood inclusive classroom community in France explored what it might mean to take a CDS approach to inclusion. The classroom community discovered the disruptive

possibilities offered by dis/ability, an exploration made all the more relevant as the community navigated unanticipated external events including France's longest transportation strike in 20 years, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These disruptions ultimately provided the classroom with opportunities to identify the impact of ableism in making disabling practices appear normal, and to develop a critical sense of "normalcy," an approach through which the "normal" may be challenged, allowing the possibilities and potentialities of dis/ability to emerge. Implications for how the field of CDS might open up new possibilities within early childhood "inclusive" education are discussed.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Critical Disability Studies (CDS)

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Scope of the Study

This participatory action research project explored what happened when one early childhood community engaged in the project of creating a critical disability studies (CDS) informed inclusive early childhood classroom. Inclusive education is increasingly prioritized within legislation and policy across the globe (UNICEF, 2019). While the Education for All Handicapped Children of 1975 equated inclusion with the physical placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, the concept of inclusion has begun to take on a broader aim (DEC/NAEYC, 2009; UNICEF, 2019). The changing focus of inclusive education occurred in two phases. The first phase, beginning in the 1990s with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and the Salamanca Declaration of 1994, highlighted the lack of accommodations and supports within inclusive classrooms, and argued that inclusion requires that all children are able to physically, socially and academically have access to, and participate in, the general education classroom. The second, and current, phase initiated in the 2010s by critical scholars in fields such as critical disability studies (Ferri & Bacon, 2011), critical race theory (Connor et al., 2016), and critical multiculturalism (Schoorman, 2011), pushes the field of inclusive education to recognize how individual characteristics that position students as different (e.g., gender, race, class, disability, sexuality) may result in experiences of exclusion. Rather than focusing solely on disability, the term inclusion is now used to communicate an effort towards valuing diversity and difference (UNICEF, 2019). Despite the changing conceptualization of inclusive education, students in inclusive classrooms continue to experience

instances of social, physical, and academic exclusion (Connor et al., 2016; Franck, 2018). Critical Disability Studies (CDS) scholars contribute the idea that rather than focusing on exclusion, the field of inclusive education should look inward, asking questions that help identify the construct of normalcy within the classroom: Who is considered *already* included? Into what are students being included (Graham & Slee, 2008; Watson, 2017)?

CDS theory provides insight into how inclusive education might work to shift "attention away from the problems of disablism ('the Other') to the problems of ableism ('the same' or 'the dominant')" (Goodley, 2013, p. 637). CDS offers promising potential, as demonstrated by its application to the analysis of classroom discourse and interactions (Naraian, 2011; Nowicki et al., 2018; Orsati, 2014; Watson et al., 2015; Wiebe Berry, 2006) and teacher education (Ashby, 2012; Cosier & Pearson, 2016; Gilham & Tompkins, 2016). However, the field of CDS has not yet made a significant impact on the field of inclusive education (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). This is particularly the case for the field of early childhood (birth – age 8)[1] education as young children are often thought not to be capable of demonstrating biases, or of engaging in conversations about complex social issues (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). The fields of CDS and early childhood inclusive education remain separate, in part due to the belief that CDS lacks practical application (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). If CDS is to have an impact on the field of inclusive early childhood education, it is important to demonstrate what such an approach might look like within the context of the classroom. This study employs a participatory action research approach in order to understand the complex processes of taking a CDS approach to inclusive education with teachers, students, and parents in one early childhood classroom community.

[1] While the field of childhood studies, which I will later describe, critiques the idea that "childhood" takes place during a certain set of years, early childhood education as a field most often refers to the development and education of children from birth through age 8 (e.g., Allen & Kelly, 2015).

In this introductory chapter, I will begin by providing background information about the circumstances which led me to conduct my dissertation research in a bilingual (French and English), multi-age early childhood classroom in France, the "New School." I will also briefly discuss inclusive education in the French context, and how the project of inclusion is described by the New School. Next, I will explain what I mean by "taking a CDS approach to early childhood inclusive education." This explanation includes an overview of CDS as a field, current theoretical and methodological debates within the field, and the analytical framework that emerged over the course of the participatory action research project. Finally, I will outline the contents of the subsequent chapters.

**Situating the Study**

*On Sunday afternoon in January 2020, I step onto a plane. I carefully shift my bags to fit through the aisle, hoping not to disturb my almost sleeping daughter. The flight attendant observes my struggle and asks for my seat number, "Wo sitzen Sie?" I pause for a moment, at first only able to recall the number I am searching for in English (eight), then in French (huit), before responding in German, "Acht – C." She offers to help with my bags, and I gratefully accept. By the time we are situated in our aisle-seat, my daughter is awake. I reach into my bag to find her current favorite book, "Tiere auf dem Bauernhof" ("Animals on the Farm"). My seatmates arrive, and once we have rearranged ourselves, the man next to me points towards my daughter and says something in German that I do not fully understand. I apologize, explaining, "Ich spreche Englisch und nur ein bisschen Deutsch" (I speak English and only a little German). Just then, another flight attendant comes by with an infant belt for my daughter, "Deutsch? Französisch? Englisch?" and after I respond, he asks if I know how the belt works. I confirm and begin to loop the infant belt through my own. The man next to me explains his earlier*

*comment, switching to English: his own daughter is not too much older than mine, and he is missing her after a long work trip. He inquires about where we are from, and I begin to tell the short version of the story that led me to move from the United States, to France, to Switzerland. This story is one that has disrupted my life in ways I could never have anticipated, opening up possibilities that continue to challenge my own imagination.*

After five years of teaching in a variety of inclusive early childhood educational settings (hospital and homebound Exceptional Children (EC)[2] Pre-K teacher, EC Pre-K teacher on a special education eligibility determination team, and EC Pre-K teacher in a blended[3] public school classroom), in 2016, I returned to school to pursue my PhD in order to dive deeper into a topic that had become of great personal interest to me throughout my years of teaching: a critical approach to inclusive early childhood education. During the second year of my studies, I met my current partner, who is originally from Germany and had recently moved to North Carolina for his work. Little did I know that eighteen months later his company would offer him an opportunity to work in France, and we would be discussing a potential move while awaiting the birth of our daughter in October of 2018.

In January of 2019, we drove up to an Air BnB in the town of Meaux, our temporary home while we searched for an apartment. Finished with coursework, I wrote my comprehensive exams from Lion's, Meaux's first contemporary coffee shop, which provided both the perfect amount of ambient noise for a sleeping three-month-old, and a comfortable environment for me

[2] Exceptional Children teacher, often abbreviated to "EC," was the term used in my job title, as well as the term that appears on my teaching license. Here, EC teacher replaces the use of special education teacher. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2020), the term "exceptional" refers to students who fall outside of the grade-expected norms, including both children with disability labels and those labeled as academically gifted.

[3] Blended classroom was a term used to describe a pilot project that was primarily made up students with disabilities, and included a few students identified as "at-risk" (a term problematized by many, including Baker, 2002) based on assessment performance.

to test out my very limited French language skills. As I pushed my stroller around the cobblestone paths of the town, I pondered possibilities for my dissertation project. My original plans for conducting a study in the school system within which I had formerly taught had been disrupted. While this disruption initially caused quite a bit of uncertainty, it ultimately allowed me to explore disability and inclusive early childhood education in a completely new context.

Back in the United States in April of 2019, I defended my comprehensive exam, and described the new context in which I hoped to conduct my dissertation research to my committee. Being new to France, and new to the French language, I expressed my concern that I would likely have a difficult time carrying out a study in a classroom setting. One of my committee members encouraged me to consider how I might examine inclusive practices expressed through modes other than language, for example - movement. This idea disrupted my narrow way of thinking about how I would carry out my research. I returned to France, we settled into an apartment after two months of searching, found a nanny, and I began to search for connections within the community.

I joined an English-speaking parent group, and read through the education forums to look for potential contacts. I reached out to volunteers in charge of the group's educational resources, explained my interest in learning more about inclusive early childhood education in France, and received a response connecting me with a few members who might be willing to chat with me about this topic. I spent time talking with a woman who had been living in France for five years, and who also had a background in early childhood inclusive education. She shared with me the name of a special education parent group, French educational terms, laws, and common practices to become familiar with, and the names of a few schools to look into. I also learned that gaining access to public schools, even to observe for a day, might be quite difficult. During this time, I

also searched the Internet for inclusive early childhood education sites in the area. I drafted an email in French, with the help of Google translate and my French-speaking partner, and contacted schools to explain my background and interest in learning more about their approach to inclusion. After hearing back from a private Montessori school, I made arrangements to observe a classroom and tour the school for a day. I returned to the school a week later to meet with the director, who had moved to France from the United States over twenty years ago, and learned more about the school's values and practices. While very interesting, I gathered from the observation and conversation that the school was fairly set in its pedagogical practices, and did not seem particularly open to testing out new approaches. I continued my search, and also began to develop my understanding of disability in the French context beyond reading the literature, by attending a local *Forum Emploi-Handicap* (Disability Employment Forum), community resource fairs, visiting Café Joyeux, a coffee shop that employs individuals with cognitive disabilities, attending an open house at Insitut National Supérieur de Formation et de Recherché pour l'Éducation des Jeunes Handicapés et les Enseignements Adaptés (INSHEA), a university committed to educational and social inclusion. I participated in a three-day doctoral school[4] which led up the conference, *Histories, Practices and Policies of Disability: International, Comparative and Transdisciplinary Perspectives***,** organized by the Paris-based journal, *Alter: Revue Européen de Recherche sur le Handicap* (European Journal of Disability Research), where I had the opportunity to present a portion of the work I wrote for my comprehensive

[4] The three-day doctoral school held in Cologne, Germany, titled *(Self)Representing disABILITY*, focused on historical and contemporary first-person representations of disability, and their impact on research, policies, and practice. A group of 18 doctoral students from a wide range of countries (Australia, India, Sweden, Poland, Canada, Spain, Germany) participated in the school, which was led by professors Megan Strickfaden (University of Alberta, Department of Human Ecology) Patrick Devlieger (KU Leuven, Anthropology of Disability), and Anne Waldschmidt (University of Cologne, Disability Studies).

exams. During this time I also slowly made progress in developing my French language skills, attending classes for three hours, twice a week.

I received an invitation to meet with the pedagogical director of the New School in May of 2019, and after I shared the details of the project I envisioned for my dissertation research, she expressed enthusiasm and openness for my proposed work. I returned to observe the current classroom,[5] and was fortunate enough to join them for a walking tour around the city. I sent a draft of my research proposal to the pedagogical director and founder of the school, and I was invited to attend a prospective family night in June to get to know the families and introduce myself. During this meeting, I also had the opportunity to meet and talk with the two teachers I would be working closely with over the next school year. Throughout this initial process, I was amazed by how smoothly things went, and how well the specific aims and commitments of the school aligned with the project of exploring critical disability studies within the classroom. As I interacted with the school staff and families, I was also surprised to find that drawing on English, my limited ability to speak French, and my slightly less limited ability to understand spoken French, we were able to communicate with each other, a process that would later be mirrored by students in the classroom.

After defending my dissertation proposal in September of 2019, and shortly after getting IRB approval for my study, the school year began, and with it another set of disruptions in my own life. First, my daughter began attending *crèche* (daycare) for the first time so that I could spend full days in the classroom. The experience of trusting teachers to take care of my daughter and a group of her peers, and doing so with a limited ability to communicate with the teachers,

[5] The New School had only one classroom at this time. This classroom was made up of 9, 10, and 11-year-olds. My proposed study would take place in the early childhood classroom (ages 6-8) opening for the first time in the Fall.

continues to shape the way I think about the concept of "parent involvement,"[6] and the teacher's role in communicating with parents. Second, my partner was once again offered an opportunity to move for work, this time for a two-year stretch in Switzerland, a country with three official languages (French, German, and Italian). We ultimately decided that this was a move we wanted to make, my partner began living in the German-speaking part of Switzerland in September of 2019, and I followed with our daughter in November. For the remainder of the school year I planned to travel back and forth, spending half of the week in France, and the other half in Switzerland. I most often flew into Paris on Sunday nights, and returned to Switzerland either Tuesday or Wednesday night. However, I was able to adjust my schedule as needed in order to be at the New School for specific events that would be important for me to observe. While this adjustment came with a new set of challenges, it also provided an opportunity that continues to add to my perspective, especially regarding the concept of translanguaging, an idea that became a very real part of my everyday life.

As I traveled back and forth between two places, one that had just begun to feel like home, and another that I was newly getting to know, it was important to me to continue developing my understanding of disability and inclusion in the community surrounding the New School in France. I remained involved with the parent-group in France, learned from conversations with parents whose children with disabilities attended school in a variety of educational settings, and spoke with a woman who was at the beginning of developing an inclusive education consulting business in the area. I also continued to take French classes through an online platform, although my experiences in the New School classroom were by far

[6] Critical early childhood scholars argue that "parent involvement" is tied to a specific idea about what "good" parents should do in the school (e.g., attend conferences, volunteer in the classroom), which ultimately "uses a gendered, classed, and racialized discourse" (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000, p. 26).

the greatest contribution to my progress in the language. The disruptions in my own life which led me to conduct my dissertation research in the New School under very unanticipated circumstances provided me with the opportunity to explore the concept of developing a CDS approach to inclusion in a setting that pushed me to reconsider the concept of "normal" every day.

**Inclusive Education in France and the "New School"**

My understanding of inclusive education is primarily shaped by the history and current implementation of inclusive education in the context of the United States. An essential next-step for developing a CDS approach to early childhood inclusive teacher education is to expand the conversation about inclusion in order to discover the possibilities and issues encountered by those engaged in similar projects internationally. The importance of considering international perspectives on inclusion is articulated by Parilla (2008):

> Those engaged in inclusive education need to enter an international debate to share in more global perspectives on common issues and mutual problems (with other professionals, politicians or excluded collectives) as well as to find new approaches and, most importantly, to have access to much needed tools for self-criticism and analyzing one's own theories and thinking. (p. 34)

This dissertation describes a participatory action research project that took place in a classroom located in France, which has its own unique history of inclusive early childhood education. Because of the classroom's commitment to multilingual instruction and inclusive education, it attracted families from a variety of backgrounds. The majority of the families, while coming from a wide range of countries (France, Canada, United States, Italy, Germany, Portugal, and Spain), had spent most of their adult lives in France, and had plans to remain in the country. Additionally, the classroom included two teachers: one from the United States, and the other from France. The international perspectives of students, families, and teachers in the classroom

made it a particularly unique setting for exploring a CDS approach to early childhood inclusion as a community. As I share the story of this classroom community's engagement in participatory action research, I will offer relevant socio-historical context. For now, I will give an overview of how inclusive education developed in France.

> As the concept of inclusive education travels across national and local boundaries, its ambiguous definition is interpreted and implemented according to local socio-cultural and political context. As a result of these ambiguities, inclusive education has lost its radical meaning and unintended consequences with equity implications have emerged. (Waitoller & Annamma, 2017, p. 28)

In France, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the public's critical analysis of social institutions led to a questioning of the practice of institutionalizing children considered to be "maladjusted" (Plaisance, 2008, p. 38). Plaisance writes that people began to ask, "Why continue to imagine an extension of 'special' institutions to try to solve problems that are in fact related to what is 'normal'" (p. 38)? By problematizing the concept of what is considered to be normal, this question aligns with the type of radical inclusive education to which Waitoller and Annamma (2017) refer. However, when translated into legislation, inclusive education in France became an example of an ambiguous and much less radical application. The 1975 law "of orientation in favour of disabled persons" (Plaisance, 2008, p. 38) suggested, but did not require, the integration of children with disabilities in regular education settings. Language that suggests the "favoring" of integration of children with disabilities continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leading to "little concrete application" (Plaisance, 2008, p. 39). As a result, education for children with disabilities has largely been the responsibility of the social and health system, rather than the educational system (Schneider & Harkins, 2009). In 2005, the "law for equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of handicapped persons" (Schneider & Harkins, 2009, p. 278) required that children with disabilities be enrolled in their local schools.

However, the ultimate decision about where a child is to be educated is made "by a committee coordinated by the 'referent teacher' (*enseignant référent*) in dialogue with the families" (Schneider & Harkins, 2009, p. 278), similar to Individualized Education Program placement meetings coordinated by special education case managers in the United States. The very existence of a system that requires a decision to include children with disabilities makes exclusion a possible option, offering an "escape clause" to any mandate for inclusion (Kliewer & Raschke, 2002, p. 45). This means that children determined to have more significant special needs than can be accommodated within the general education classroom may receive education in a separate facility (Plaisance, 2008). As a result of the ambiguity of the 2005 law, access to the general education classroom for disabled students is an ongoing issue in the context of French inclusive education. More recently, in line with the second phase of inclusive education, the French ministry of education has expressed the goal of continually moving towards a more inclusive system, articulating a plan for the training of all teachers to support individual needs of all students by the year 2022 (Ministère, 2020). Additionally, teacher preparation criteria now recognize the need to develop greater "awareness of the cultural diversity of their students…[and] to adapt to the students' diversity, including students with disabilities" (Schneider & Harkins, 2009, p. 283). The impact of these recent reforms to inclusive education is yet to be realized, and it is within this changing context that the present study takes place.

While French inclusive education is slowly evolving within the public sphere, an increasing number of private, independent schools are articulating their own visions for a more inclusive school and community (Ministère, 2020). It is important to note that the majority of private schools in France are under contract with the state, *sous contrat*, meaning that they receive state funding and follow the same curriculum as the public schools (Benson et al., 2015).

However, a smaller number of private schools run independently from the state, *hors contrat*, allowing flexibility, but requiring larger tuition fees. The present study takes place in an early childhood classroom within an independent, private school with an expressed commitment to inclusion and diversity. In the third chapter, I will provide much more detail about the research site, which I will refer to as the "New School." Here, I will focus only on the New School's articulated approach to inclusion. A part of the New School's commitment to inclusion and diversity is expressed through the use of scaled tuition fees, and the creation of scholarships to encourage families from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds to attend.[7] Additionally, the school welcomes disabled students, who are often denied access to private education (Plaisance, 2008). While instruction occurs in French and English, all languages are valued, a concept that has drawn families from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. By including a mixed-age group of students who would typically be divided into three separate grade levels (ages six through eight), the classroom works to challenge the assumed tie between age and developmental stage. Finally, the teachers and administrative staff express a desire for inclusion to be an ongoing project, and an open-minded perspective towards exploring what this might look like in practice.

**Critical Disability Studies: A Brief History**

Disability studies, the predecessor of CDS, grew out of the disability rights movements in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1970s. The field of disability studies rejects the traditional framing of disability, termed the medical model, which locates disability within the body and seeks to cure/eliminate disability. Instead, disability studies understands disability through the social model, which claims that disability is the result of socially constructed barriers (e.g., employment discrimination, inaccessible buildings/communications), and aims to eliminate

[7] As the early childhood classroom in New School was in its first year during the 2019-2020 school year, only one full scholarship was available. The school plans to increase this number as they are able to raise additional funds.

these barriers. The social model of disability separates the concepts of impairment and disability, claiming that disability is a social construct while an individual's impairment (e.g., blindness, limited mobility) may or may not result in the experience of disability.

In the mid 2000s, debates within the field of disability studies led to a number of scholars utilizing the term "critical disability studies" (e.g., Erevelles, 2005; Roets & Goodley, 2008; Tremain, 2005) in order to critique the inadequacy of the social model for theorizing disability, primarily because of the binary drawn between disability and impairment, and its lack of attention to individual lived experience. Tremain's (2005) Foucauldian analysis suggests that the disability/impairment binary only works to "obscure the productive constraints of modern (bio)power" (p. 11), leaving disability studies stuck within the medical model. Roets and Goodley (2008) provide the following description of CDS in its early stages:

> Critical disability studies is an emerging interdisciplinary academic field that examines social, cultural, political, historical, psychological and relational theories of disability and impairment related to the dynamic interplays between impaired bodies and minds and various aspects of contemporary culture, politics, and society. (p. 1)

Over the past fifteen years, work in the field of CDS has grown, and while it continues to be disciplinarily diverse, a number of consistent themes are beginning to point to the specific theoretical and methodological positions taken up within CDS.

**Critical Disability Studies: Current Theoretical and Methodological Debates**

I previously stated that the participatory action research project described in this dissertation aims to answer the question: What does it look like to take a CDS approach to early childhood education? Prior to sharing the stories that unfolded in the process of exploring this question, I need to explain what I mean by "taking a CDS approach" to early childhood inclusive education. First, I'll discuss the current theoretical and methodological debates. Then, I'll present

five key considerations for the future of CDS, which inform how I define the idea of "taking a CDS approach" to early childhood inclusive education. Finally, I'll briefly share how the PAR project shaped the interdisciplinary lens used to analyze the stories from project.

In 2019, Ellis et al. published a two-volume series focused on CDS, including the titles: *Manifestos for the Future of Critical Disability Studies* and *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Disability.* The second volume, edited by Ellis et al. (2019a), contains the interdisciplinary work of CDS scholars which, taken together, demonstrates how CDS is used in conjunction with other disciplines to explore dis/ability.[8] Waldschmidt (2019) explains the significance of this work:

> Critical disability studies uses the tools of disciplines that at first sight seem to have nothing to do with disability, including philosophy and anthropology, history and sociology, ethnology and archaeology, literary studies and linguistics, media studies and religious studies. These have opened new worlds of knowledge that have changed our understanding of dis/ability. (p. 71)

In the first volume, each chapter presents its own manifesto, laying out a specific call to action (Skoss, 2019; Torres, 2019), a rationale for a particular interdisciplinary focus (Annamma et al., 2019; Castrodale, 2019; Yoshizaki-Gibbons, 2019), or an application of CDS (Brown & Hollier, 2019; Lewthwaite et al., 2019). The purpose of manifestos, according to Ellis et al. (2019b), is to provide a "fulcrum for social change" (p. 1). While Ellis et al. (2019b) note up front that tensions and differing viewpoints exist within the collection of manifestos, they also note common thematic concerns: "digital futures, the usefulness of anger, creativity, family as disability allies, intersectionality, ethics, eugenics, accessibility and interdisciplinarity" (p. 5). Through my own reading of the volume, I named five commonalities related to what scholars in the field of CDS

[8] The slash in dis/ability is increasingly used by critical disability studies scholars for a variety of reasons. For Goodley (2014), the concept of dis/ability points to "balanc[ing] an analysis of ableism and disablism" (p. 66). For Annamma et al. (2016), dis/ability disrupts the deficit perspective attached to the word "disability," while suggesting that dis/ability is a fluid concept, and its analysis requires context. My own use of the term dis/ability draws on both of these ideas, as I view dis/ability as the constant interaction between dominant constructs of ability and disability, which cannot be separated, and are disrupted by the lived experiences of dis/ability.

share in terms of their vision for the field's future: a focus on dis/ability, a deepened engagement with intersectional thinking, usefulness of research for dis/abled people, a centering of dis/abled people, and an interdisciplinary approach to the study of dis/ability (see Table 1). Goodley et al.'s (2019) article, "Provocations for Critical Disability Studies," poses five questions for the field: "what is the purpose of Critical Disability Studies; how inclusive is Critical Disability Studies; is disability the object or subject of studies; what matters or gets said about disability; and how can we attend to disability and ability?" (p. 1). These questions, and the theorizations offered by Goodley et al. (2019), help to further refine the themes expressed throughout the CDS manifestos (Ellis et al., 2019b). In Table 1, I include a list of five key considerations drawn from the common themes within the CDS manifestos alongside a representative quote from the text, and an idea from Goodley et al.'s (2019) provocation that provides additional theoretical insight. This table represents the guiding principles that I consider when thinking about what it means to "take a CDS approach" to early childhood inclusive education.

**Table 1:** *Considerations for the Future of CDS*

| **The future of CDS will…** | **because…** | **while considering…** (Goodley et al., 2019) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Focus on dis/ability | "Both disablism and ableism increasingly play a role in many a nation state's sifting and sorting of members of the population" (Liddiard et al., 2019, p. 158). | "Disability is a place of oppression but also possibility. Ability is a phenomenon that might be reworked to reveal its collective potential as opposed to its usual individualizing and limited configurations. We would want to ask: what do you want to keep of ability; how might we frame ability in non-ableist ways; how might Critical Disability Studies re-think the phenomenon of ability; and, in rearticulating ability, what would such work do to a-priori conceptualizations of disability" (p. 17)? |
| 2. Deepen in its engagement | "It points the way to a more critical, socially engaged future for disability | "Critical Disability Studies should place disability in the foreground of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| with intersectional[9] thinking (e.g., DisCrit[10]) | studies scholarship and activism" (Annamma et al., 2019, p. 231). | theoretical and political debates whilst, simultaneously, demonstrating disability's relationship with the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and age" (p. 6). |
| 3. Be useful for dis/abled people | "critical disability praxis involves striving to create an accessible collective learning space – in which learning occurs communally and all participants are valued as knowledge holders" (Nishida, 2019, p. 243). | "We do wonder, however, about who is doing theory and for what reasons. When disability becomes merely the object of intellectual inquiry, then there is a real danger that the politics of disability are domesticated" (p. 10). |
| 4. Center dis/abled people | "Disability justice activism, therefore, centers the leadership of disabled people of color; queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people with disabilities; poor disabled people; disabled people without institutional education; those without immigration documents; those who are institutionalized; and those whose ancestors' lands have been stolen" (Nishida, 2019, p. 240). | "We want to encourage Critical Disability Studies scholars to be clear, open and honest about their own local locations (rather than assuming the reader already knows about, say, the British context) whilst also addressing the dangers of centering Critical Disability Studies in what Meekosha (2011) calls the metropole of the Global North" (p. 8). |
| 5. Take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of dis/ability | "Critical disability studies scholars affirm that interdisciplinarity is essential for an effective discursive and practical intervention into how disability is perceived and conceived by the public, government, and by the academy" (McRae, 2019, p. 224). | "How can we simultaneously appropriate discourse and matter in ways that capture the material and immaterial realities of disability? What are the possible consequences of such articulations for a wider politics of disability? How might Critical Disability Studies theorizations work in ways that blend material and discursive aspects of social life" (p. 14)? |

[9] The concept of intersectionality, coined in 1989 by Black feminist and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, examines how the constructs of race and gender intersect. While CDS scholarship calls for an "intersectional" approach, the term is taken out of its historical context and redefined in ways that do not align with Crenshaw's intent. I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 5, and draw on the work of CDS scholars who analyze dis/ability alongside other identity markers, using terms such as "enmeshment" (Loutzenheiser & Erevelles, 2019) or "margin to margin approach" (Ferri & Connor, 2014) to describe their approach.

[10] DisCrit, a term coined by Subini Annamma (2016), brings together disability studies and critical race theory in order to examine how ableism and racism work together, contributing to "ever more extreme forms of marginalization, segregation, and even death" (Annamma et al., 2019, p. 231).

## Taking a CDS Approach to Early Childhood Inclusion

While the components outlined in Table 1 guide my thinking about taking a CDS approach to early childhood inclusion, the actual process of working with a classroom community to apply such an approach further informed the framework used for analysis throughout the project. During the participatory action research project, two major themes that emerged as we explored dis/ability in the classroom, the constructs of "the child" and "the language," gave direction to how CDS would be used as an interdisciplinary framework. Specifically, childhood studies, which focuses on the construct of childhood and the calls for methodological approaches which value and fully involve children (Runswick-Cole et al., 2018), and translanguaging, which studies, "the complex multimodal practices of multilingual interactions as social and cognitive acts able to transform not only semiotic systems and speaker subjectivities, but also sociopolitical structures" (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 42-43), provided necessary lenses through which to explore dis/ability in the context of the classroom. In the next chapter, I will give an overview of translanguaging and childhood studies, review the literature that applies each discipline to the early childhood inclusive classroom, and conclude with a description of how these two disciplines contribute to a CDS theoretical framework.

## Structure of the Dissertation

This thesis tells the story of what happened when one early childhood classroom community engaged in the process of taking a critical approach to inclusive education. As the New School classroom tested out a CDS approach to inclusion they found that disruptions, experienced both as a result of dis/ability and due to external events, shaped the direction of community's actions towards "inclusion."

The second chapter of this thesis will provide a review of the literature on (1) a critical disability studies approach to inclusive early childhood education, (2) childhood studies applied to early childhood inclusion, (3) translanguaging applied to early childhood inclusion, and (4) how childhood studies and translanguaging contribute to the CDS theoretical framework utilized in this study.

In the third chapter, I will begin by describing the elements of participatory action research (PAR), and how these elements are incorporated within my study. Next, I will describe my own role in the study, including my process for locating and obtaining access to a classroom community interested in a critical approach to inclusion. Then, I will provide a detailed account of how data were collected and analyzed throughout the school year, including a description of one participatory action research cycle.

The fourth chapter draws on the theorizations of dis/ability as disruption outlined above in order to examine the disruptive power of dis/ability within the PAR project of the New School classroom. Specifically, I will discuss: (1) the disabling experiences, and their relationship with ableism, which caused disruptions that ultimately drew individuals to the New School, and (2) the disruptive experience of dis/ability in the New School classroom, and the actions they demanded.

The fifth chapter describes how the PAR project of testing out a CDS approach to inclusive education shaped ideas about what inclusion should mean for the early childhood classroom. First, I will explain how community members initially understood and envisioned inclusive education, and how these initial ideas about inclusion influenced the specific action projects initiated by the community. Second, I will present stories from action projects which disrupt initial and traditional definitions of inclusive education. Third, through these stories, I

will discuss how the classroom community began to reimagine inclusive education through a CDS framework.

The sixth chapter tells the story of (1) how discussions of difference and normalcy unfolded within the New School classroom, and (2) what the community's critical conversations suggest about a CDS approach to early childhood inclusive education.

The seventh chapter begins with a description of the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of France and the New School community. Then, I will explain how the pandemic impacted the New School's approach to teaching and learning, leading to the development of a critical sense of "normacly." I use the phrase critical sense of "normalcy" in order to describe the process through which the New School community engaged in critical reflection about what is considered "normal," and the development of an ongoing process for determining the desired elements of "normalcy" in the ever-changing context of the classroom. I will end by discussing the implications from the New School community for how the field of CDS might reframe the idea of ability.

The eighth and final chapter revisits the role of disruption in the New School's participatory action research project, as well as in my own experience as an early childhood "inclusive" educator. I will also discuss how the New School's PAR project relates to each one of the elements of CDS theory outlined in Table 1 (reproduced within relevant sections below). I will end with a reflection on the meaning of CDS informed "inclusive" early childhood education

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will provide a review of the literature on (1) a critical disability studies approach to inclusive early childhood education, (2) childhood studies applied to early childhood inclusion, (3) translanguaging applied to early childhood inclusion, and (4) how childhood studies and translanguaging contribute to the CDS theoretical framework utilized in this study.

## Critical Disability Studies Applied to Early Childhood Inclusive Education

A number of scholars have used CDS in order to trouble the current field of early childhood inclusive education, or to suggest the implications of CDS for the field. For example, Karen Watson (2018) suggests that CDS is particularly useful for challenging inclusive early childhood education as it provokes us to "shift the focus of 'inclusion' from the individual subject to the 'normal' group of subjects and trouble the way the discourses produce these subjects" (p. 154). Nick Watson (2012) draws on Disability Studies and childhood studies in order to suggest a "new approach to the study of disability in childhood" (p. 200), which would involve: (1) centering the contributions of disabled children, (2) allowing for heterogeneity of disabled experiences, (3) allowing for variation as children grow older, (4) examining the many categories of disability, and (5) challenging and eliminating ableist and exclusionary practices. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010) explore the application of CDS and inclusion to a theory of disabled childhood in the context of children's play. They suggest that the link between children's play and their "normal" development must be broken, as it currently allows only "normal" children to play for intrinsic value, while requiring disabled children to engage in play as a mechanism for developmental growth.

Other scholars have applied CDS to their studies of early childhood inclusive classrooms (Naraian, 2011; Nowicki et al., 2018; Orsati, 2014; Watson et al., 2015; Wiebe Berry, 2006). These studies highlight what a CDS framework allowed the researchers to understand about dis/ability in the early childhood inclusive classroom. Burke's (2015) study of how playgrounds are used by children with and without disabilities indicates that children are "divided into separate cultural groups by spatial arrangements" (p. 17). Her study suggests not only the importance of considering physical accessibility, but also the need to ensure that accessible play spaces and equipment are designed to be used by *all* children. Burke (2015) analyzes how children interpret inaccessible physical environments, suggesting that non-disabled children may begin to "accept social segregation for people with impairments as a 'normal' part of life" (p. 18). Watson, Millei, and Petersen (2015) also investigate the interplay between physical objects and social interactions within an inclusive early childhood classroom, providing an illustration of "how exclusive 'inclusive' practices can be as the marked child is contained, limited and positioned as in need of remediation by a category dispensed to them" (pp. 275-276). Elaborating on the idea of practices of exclusion, Naraian's (2011) analysis of the discourse used within an early childhood inclusive classroom indicates that teacher discourse "sought to impose one 'right' narrative of disability...acceptance and membership...delivered to students in a form inaccessible to collective inquiry" (p. 105). Wiebe Berry (2006) also describes the social interactions in an elementary inclusive classroom, illuminating the importance of "resist[ing] placement as a proxy for inclusion without understanding exactly what students experience as a result of their placement" (p. 521). Symeonidou and Loizou (2018) describe their application of disability theory to develop a program to engage a group of young, nondisabled children in a series of activities meant to encourage critical reflection on disability. Children read and

discussed disability portrayals in literature and media, met and talked with a disabled activist, and looked at a series of cartoons by disabled artists. Then, they created their own cartoons, which demonstrated their understanding of the social model of disability. For example, one student drew a picture of student in a wheelchair in front of the stairs to a school building. A ramp has been added on top of the staircase, but, according to the student artist, it is being taken down because it blocks the stairs. Another student-made cartoon portrays a woman giving money to a man in a wheelchair, who responds, "I think your fur has started to unsew. Save your money to buy a new one." In the first example, the student demonstrates an awareness of physically disabling barriers. The second example indicates that the student understands the concept of attitudinal barriers (in the form of stereotypes), as well as how disabled people might disrupt these ideas. While this study provides a potential approach to introducing critical disability studies into the classroom, Symeonidou and Louizou (2018) note that their approach would likely have been different if disabled children had been included in the group, an important next step and gap in CDS research applied to early childhood inclusion, and one that this dissertation addresses. These studies are important not only for demonstrating the need for a CDS approach to early childhood inclusive education, but also for pointing to the specific practices that require a CDS-based intervention, such as teacher discourse and definitions of inclusion.

Scholars in the field of education have presented a case for incorporating a CDS or Disability Studies approach into teacher preparation programs (Ashby, 2012; Cosier & Pearson, 2016; Ferri & Bacon, 2011; Gilham & Tompkins, 2016; Kulkarni, 2019; Oyler, 2011). A CDS approach to teacher education would provide pre-service teachers with the tools to question their ideas about dis/ability, offering a "theoretical framework that situates access to general education curriculum and content not as simply 'best practice' but a basic civil right for students with

disabilities and other marginalized groups of students in schools" (Cosier & Pearson, 2016, p. 3). Oyler (2011) provides one example of such a teacher education program that aims to "challenge mainstream narratives of disability as stigmatizing, of difference as pathological, and of classrooms as places that run most smoothly when everyone is 'on the same level'" (pp. 201-202). This program exposes all students, not just those interested in special education or inclusion, to scholarship from the fields of Critical Disability Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Queer Theory, in order to engage students in conversations about "who is at the center (normal), who has been relegated to the margins...and how these 'others' have been regulated" (Oyler, 2011, p. 213). Ferri and Bacon (2011) point to the importance of Disability Studies for the field of early childhood education, as it provides the tools to critique traditional methods of identifying, labeling, and fixing children. They explain that while troubling constructions of dis/ability is important across grade levels, early childhood education is particularly focused on the "production of and hunt for different forms of disability, unreadiness, and at-risk-icity" (Baker, 2002, p. 673). As early childhood teachers are under increased pressure to make choices about whether or not to make disability referrals for students, Ferri and Bacon (2011) argue that it is essential for pre-service teachers to understand and question "the construction of these categories" (p. 145). Kulkarni (2019) cites a course, which she was assigned to teach as a first-year faculty member entitled "Assessment in early childhood and moderate to severe special education" (p. 109). The course's design focused on evidence-based practices, and did not yet include material that would help students to "critique traditional practices within special education" (p. 109). Kulkarni presents a model for applying CDS to teacher education, which includes five main elements: content integration (e.g., perspectives of individuals with disabilities), equity pedagogy (e.g., culturally relevant frameworks), empowering schools (e.g.,

working with school leadership, staff, families to create a critically conscious culture), knowledge construction (e.g., how biases impact the construction of knowledge in education), and prejudice reduction (e.g., reducing deficit beliefs through self-reflection). CDS in teacher education remains "an emerging field," (Kulkarni, 2019, p. 118), in need of "a more expansive search of resources related to disability studies in teacher education to support those beginning this journey towards more meaningful critical disability studies work in teacher education" (p. 118).

**Childhood Studies Applied to Early Childhood Inclusion**

> Childhood is often regarded as a developmental stage of the life course. During this phase, children are expected to pass through stages of set milestones and follow regulated pathways towards adulthood. They are perceived to be vulnerable, immature and irrational and therefore adults protect them, make decisions on their behalf, and measure and monitor their growth, learning, intelligence and behavior. (Boggis, 2018, pp. 4-5)

The field of childhood studies emerged in the 1980s and 1990s out of a critique of traditional child development theory, and its positioning of the child as subhuman (Jenks, 1996). Critical scholars formed the sociology of childhood, now encompassed under the broader "childhood studies," which points out how childhood has been socially constructed in contrast with adulthood (Tisdall, 2012). As a result, children have been understood as "human becomings" (Qvortrup, 1994, p. 2) who are not yet citizens with rights. The field of childhood studies, with close ties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990), recognizes children as citizens with rights who are "active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them, and of the societies in which they live" (Tisdall, 2012, p. 184). Work that brings a childhood studies perspective to the inclusive early childhood classroom aims to (1) conduct research with children rather than conduct research on children (e.g., De Schauwer et al., 2009), and (2) understand how the idea of

the child is constructed within the inclusive classroom environment (e.g., De Schauwer et al., 2009; Nind et al., 2011). The field of childhood studies offers methodological and theoretical implications for researching and developing a CDS approach to early childhood inclusive education. In this section, I provide a review the literature that brings together childhood studies and CDS to explore the inclusive early childhood classroom. I will discuss the specific contributions of childhood studies to the present study's theoretical framework in the conclusion of this chapter.

As Tisdall (2012) explains in her article, "The Challenge and Challenging of Childhood Studies," while childhood studies rarely engages with perspectives from CDS, there are similarities between the two fields: both fields emerged to challenge an existing paradigm, and both disabled people and children have historically been subject to the medical, psychological, and educational gaze. While the fields have different aims, considering both frameworks allow researchers to "explore, consider and re-develop the underlying assumptions and commonly accepted activities, on both their strengths and weaknesses" (Tisdall, 2012, p. 188).

De Schauwer et al. (2009) utilize ideas from childhood studies and CDS in order to learn from the experiences of 15 disabled children between the ages of 5 and 17 attending inclusive classrooms in Flanders. The authors make it clear that research focused on the perspectives of disabled children must be taken into account when making decisions about how inclusive education should be designed, and what constitutes successful inclusion. In order to prioritize the ideas expressed by children in the study, the authors rely heavily on direct quotes when discussing the findings. Ultimately, the children in the study focused on their strengths and capabilities, working to "blur boundaries that are set for them through the school system and their label(s)" (p. 109). At the same time, the children continued to cite their need for support

(e.g., classroom aide, adapted materials), and the positive impact of this support on their overall experience. The authors conclude that disabled children want to share "correct and useful information about how to handle their labels. They do not only work with disability-related information" (p. 110).

Nind et al. (2011) also bring together childhood studies and CDS to explore how three disabled children are understood in different educational environments (e.g., inclusive classrooms, special education groups). The authors focused specifically on how the children were viewed by others (parents, teachers, and interventionists), and not on how the children viewed themselves. As the authors observed each child in a variety of settings, it was noted that the children were perceived in ambiguous ways: as both dependent and independent, vulnerable and dangerous, focused and unfocused, connected and unconnected (p. 367). However, the children were perceived across all settings as being happy and progressing, which the authors note as being consistent with Uprichard's (2008) idea from childhood studies that we hold a dual construction of children and childhood, viewing them as "always and necessarily being and becoming" (p. 368). Drawing on CDS, the authors describe a potential underlying discomfort of the adults in the study with the idea that disabled children might not realize a certain ideal of becoming (e.g., becoming a competent adult). The authors conclude that a child's perceived competence or incompetence is highly dependent on the context, and that moving between multiple contexts (e.g., home, school, community environments) allows for the concept of competency to be understood as fluid and flexible.

**Translanguaging Applied to Early Childhood Inclusion**

The development of the term "translanguaging" is credited to Cen Williams, who introduced the Welsh concept of *trawsiethu* in 1994 to describe the practice of alternating

languages (e.g., English and Welsh) in the classroom for educational purposes (García & Li Wei, 2014). In the early 2010s scholars began to use the term "translanguaging" to describe both the languaging practices of multilingual individuals, and a pedagogical approach (e.g., Canagarajah, 2011; García, 2009; Li Wei, 2011). Translanguaging, as described by García and Li Wei (2014), does not rely on the construct of separate languages, but instead involves entirely "new language practices" (p. 21). García and Li Wei (2014) provide the following definition of translanguaging in education:

> A process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of students in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate and appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality. (p. 3)

Increasingly, research focused on understanding how students experience inclusion or belonging pays attention to translanguaging practices within the early childhood inclusive classroom and home environments (Alamillo et al., 2016; DeNicolo, 2019; Mary & Young, 2017; Song, 2016). The implications of this body of research are relevant to the present study, as it takes place in a bilingual classroom. Additionally, because translanguaging "challenges views of languages as separate entities" (Childs, 2016, p. 26), and includes "all meaning-making modes" (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 29), it offers a perspective that complements and aligns well with a CDS framework. While I will elaborate on this idea in the conclusion of this chapter, when I present the details of my theoretical framework, I will also offer a brief commentary on the reviewed studies from a CDS perspective throughout this section.

Mary and Young (2017) present the results of an ethnographic study focused on how a monolingual teacher in an early childhood classroom in France used translanguaging practices to create a safe space in which students and caregivers felt comfortable co-constructing learning by

drawing on "a variety of linguistic media" (p. 15). In this classroom, many students spoke Turkish in their family and community context. While the teacher spoke French, she engaged in a variety of practices to draw on each child's unique funds of knowledge in order to support their learning in both Turkish and French. These translanguaging practices included the teacher's own learning and use of basic Turkish words in daily interactions with students, supporting the use of any language or meaning-making method in the classroom, and facilitating opportunities for children to draw on their language skills to teach others, including the teacher herself. In the French context, the translanguaging practices employed by the teacher are particularly notable as students are still often asked not to speak their home languages in classrooms due to a lack of training in multilingualism, intercultural competence, and the ongoing preference for a French-only approach to schooling (Mary & Young, 2017).

Alamillo et al.'s (2016) study uses a similar methodology in order to understand how translanguaging practices are used within a Reggio Emilia-inspired[1] dual language immersion early childhood classroom in California. One specific element of the Reggio Emilia approach of interest to the authors is its focus on supporting multiple modes of learning and communicating. The authors argue that Reggio's understanding of "visual, verbal, physical (including dramatic play), and graphic representation" (p. 2) as valuable communication makes it an ideal setting for translanguaging practices to be incorporated. Their observations of the classroom support this idea, demonstrating how children and teachers flexibly and intentionally used "all of their linguistic resources to engage in meaningful conversations regarding interesting topics" (p. 15). The "linguistic resources" observed in the classroom included not only verbal communication,

[1] The authors note that the Reggio Emilia approach was developed in Italy during the post-Second World War era within a "very specific Italian cultural and community context" (Alamillo et al., 2016, p. 2), which is why attempts to implement a similar approach in new contexts should be viewed as Reggio-inspired.

but also the use of drawing and gesturing. The valuing of nonverbal communication in translanguaging, which is highlighted in both Mary and Young (2017) and Alamillo et al.'s (2016) studies, is particularly relevant to developing a critical disability studies informed approach to early childhood inclusion, as verbal communication is typically considered the normal and accepted way to express oneself (Tisdall, 2012).

DeNicolo's (2019) study focused on the impact of translanguaging practices on how students experienced a sense of belonging in a first-grade multilingual classroom. Based on her observations and interviews with students and the classroom teacher, DeNicolo concludes that translanguaging practices result in (1) students engaging "in language practices in the classroom similar to the way they use language in their homes and communities" (p. 969), and (2) challenging the traditional prioritization of English in "curriculum, assessment, and academic learning" (p. 969). The use of translanguaging practices throughout the school year built a classroom community that viewed school belonging as a "collective responsibility that ensured inclusion across languages and language proficiency levels" (p. 981). In other words, because a variety of languaging practices were valued and used in teaching and learning, students developed a belief that the communication of thoughts and ideas should be accessible to everyone. In order to create this type of accessibility in the classroom, the teacher fostered an environment in which asking questions for clarification was viewed as normal and valuable. While fluency in the dominant language is considered the norm in school environments, translanguaging challenges this construction of the normal child, and instead creates an environment in which working together to effectively communicate is a part of daily instruction and interactions. By providing an additional lens through which the normal child may be

questioned, and implications for how difference may become valued, translanguaging offers a unique perspective to a CDS framework.

Song's (2016) study focuses on the use of translanguaging practices used by bilingual caregivers and young children (aged six through eight) in the home setting during interactions related to literacy. Observations revealed the use of both languages in order to clarify meaning, the use of trans-enunciation by parents (e.g., using a Korean pronunciation of an English word that has no Korean equivalent), and the co-construction of meaning as parents and children translated back and forth between two languages. Song concludes that the opportunity to engage in translanguaging often results in "openness to difference and patience to construct meaning with different languages in social settings" (p. 101). To illustrate this idea, Song offers the example of children and parents being "willing and patient enough to clarify meanings together and to learn new expressions from each other" (p. 101). The connection between translanguaging and openness to difference demonstrates how translanguaging may provide important perspectives for developing a CDS approach to early childhood inclusive education.

**An Interdisciplinary Framework**

As previously mentioned, my choice to incorporate perspectives from childhood studies and translanguaging into a CDS framework was made as the themes related to language and the idea of the child emerged as being particularly meaningful during an initial round of data analysis. In this section, I will explain how I will draw on childhood studies and translanguaging within my CDS theoretical framework.

In 2018, two edited books focused on the topics of childhood studies merging with (Critical) Disability Studies: Allison Boggis's *Dis/abled Childhoods? A Transdisciplinary Approach,* and Runswick-Cole, Curran, and Liddiard's *The Palgrave Handbook of Disabled*

*Children's Childhood Studies*. Boggis' book takes a theoretical approach, including work that considers what these two fields might offer to topics ranging from policy, to representation, to self-identity, often focusing specifically on the context of the UK. According to Boggis, the "transdisciplinary approach" claimed by this collection is based on the different disciplinary backgrounds of authors contributing, and is meant to result in an "approach to disability and childhood [that] allows for a diversion from normative tendencies" (p. 8). Runswick-Cole, Curran, and Liddiard (2018) bring together personal narratives, research studies, theory development, and considerations for ethics and policy. While only a small portion of the work featured in these two books focuses directly on the topic of early childhood inclusive education (e.g., Watson, 2018), the theoretical work advanced by each book provides information about what a relationship between and CDS might look like, and what it might offer. Runswick-Cole, Curran, and Liddiard (2018) describe a common theme within their book: the recognition of "capacities and potential" which serve to disrupt the norm, and "offer alternative possibilities for all children and young people" (p. 653). Boggis (2018) reflects on the incorporation of a CDS perspective to the study of childhood, "Including disability within our discussions and conversations about childhood will be disruptive and challenging but will help us not only to think critically about what it means to be a child but also more about childhood as a whole" (p. 216). Also transdisciplinary in its approach, "translanguaging enables us as speakers to go beyond traditional academic disciplines and conventional structures, in order to gain new understandings of human relations and generate more just social structures…" (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 42). For García and Li Wei (2014), translanguaging's status as transdisciplinary marks "an important theoretical advance" (p. 40) because it both moves across and beyond disciplines associated with meaning-making as it "emerges from the contextual affordances in the complex

interactions of multilinguals." In the context of the inclusive early childhood classroom, a translanguaging lens helps to illuminate how meaning is being made, without limiting the idea of meaning-making to a single mode of communication (e.g., English, French, body language), how unconventional meaning-making processes may be repositioned as valued (Alamillo et al., 2016), and how these processes contribute to the development of a classroom culture of belonging as collective responsibility (DeNicolo, 2019). Taken together, the perspectives from childhood studies and translanguaging provide contextually relevant lenses through which to examine the construct of normalcy within the early childhood inclusive classroom.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

Chevalier and Buckles (2019) provide the following description of participatory action research (PAR): "PAR works at reconciling and integrating research (R) and the advancement of knowledge with people's active (A) engagement with social history and the ethics of participation (P) and democracy" (p. 21). In other words, PAR is a collaborative process through which the line between participants and researchers becomes blurred as a group works together to define a social issue, decide what action group members might take to address the defined issue, and reflect on the process, inspiring the continuation of the cycle. In the context of my study, PAR allowed me to take on a co-researcher role alongside the children, teachers, and families of the New School as we worked through the complex processes involved in creating a CDS informed approach to inclusive education. In this chapter, I will begin by describing the elements of participatory action research (PAR), and how these elements are incorporated within my study. Next, I will describe my own role in the study, including my process for locating and obtaining access to a classroom community interested in a critical approach to inclusion. Then, I will provide a detailed account of how data were collected and analyzed throughout the school year, including a description of one participatory action research cycle.

## Participatory Action Research

While I offered a brief definition of PAR above, I will now expand on this description, as the PAR literature describing its components and implementation varies widely, often with contradicting ideas (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Based on their review of the PAR literature,

Chevalier and Buckles (2019) propose two main issues that studies employing PAR must address. First, the definitions attributed to participation, action, and research vary widely, "allow[ing] each component part of PAR to be stretched far beyond the original concept and intent" (p. 22). For example, in PAR with young children, the idea of participation often ranges from "tokenistic to genuine, full involvement" (Pinter, 2019, p. 178). Second, the individual components of participation, action, and research are not combined in a consistent manner, if at all. Chevalier and Buckles (2019) suggest that much of the research claiming to take a PAR approach is missing one of the three components, and would be more accurately described as action research, participatory research, or participatory learning and action (p. 21). In order to address these two issues, Chevalier and Buckles (2019) provide specific definitions of each component, which help researchers to understand whether or not their project truly incorporates all three elements. Below, I draw on these definitions in order to explain how the PAR project described in this dissertation addresses each one.

### *Participation*

This PAR project involves children, teachers, and caregivers as co-researchers. In this section, I will review the literature on the participation of young children in research related to inclusive education. I focus primarily on the aspect of child participation because while teacher and parent perspectives have long been included in research, the involvement of children is much less common (Koller et al., 2018). The literature on involving young children as co-researchers in the inclusive classroom informs my definition of participation, which also applies to the adult co-researchers in this study.

The field of early childhood inclusive education has historically involved young children as subjects, not participants, in the research process, an issue raised by the field of childhood

studies, and further complicated by CDS scholars. As the idea of research *with*, not on, young children has gained traction, a growing body of research incorporates participatory methods in order to explore issues within the early childhood inclusive classroom together with children. Stafford (2017) describes how participatory methods can be used to conduct research *with* children with disabilities. The power dynamic between children and adults must be considered, and participatory methods provide ample time for building rapport, so as to avoid soliciting responses meant to please. Stafford (2017) suggests the use of activity-based interviewing, which might incorporate "art-based activities, such as drawing, mapping and designing, to explore lived experiences about a theme/phenomenon, and the meanings of these experiences" (p. 605). Along with the use of art-based activities, Stafford (2017) suggests the creation of narratives using "verbal stories, pictures with children's narratives, drawings, collages, objects, and ideas communicated and then illustrated through searching the internet" (p. 608). Ajodhia-Andrews (2019) adds to the conversation on participatory research methods, describing considerations for researching with ethnically diverse children with disabilities. She outlines several creative mediums to consider for increasing the participation of children, including artistic writing, drawing, storygames, and photography. Additionally, Ajodhia-Andrews (2016) discusses the need to allow multiple modes of communication (e.g., pictures, communication boards) when interviewing or narrative-building with children. Adderley et. al. (2015) utilize "participatory research tools" in order to learn what factors contribute to children's sense of inclusion in the classroom. Specifically, Adderley et al. (2015) facilitated small group conversations and activities, incorporating a range of ten different tools (e.g., drawing, picture cards, fill-in-the-blank), in order to gather information about children's ideas related to inclusion. While the children generally communicated positive feelings about their classroom experience, they noted

social-relational elements (e.g., perceived unfairness, being shouted at, feeling lonely, classroom seating arrangements) that made them feel excluded within the inclusive classroom. Taken together, the studies that have employed participatory methods with children in order to understand inclusion suggest the importance of modifying traditional methods (e.g. interviewing, focus groups) in order to allow for the full participation of children as co-researchers. The use of arts-based methods, when art is "a means of making or expressing meaning through creative processes, not of making a predetermined product" (Cologon et al., 2019, p. 65), offers a promising approach for conducting research with children.

Chevalier and Buckles (2019) use the term "genuine participation" (p. 24) to emphasize the importance of considering the extent to which participants are actually involved in all aspects of the research. They conclude that there are two ways genuine participation can be achieved: (1) participants can share equally in all parts of the PAR project (e.g., planning, data collection, data analysis), or (2) participants become "partners" by "making distinct, complementary and closely coordinated contributions to achieving shared goals" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 25). In my study, I utilized the second expression of genuine participation in order to provide children, teachers, and caregivers the opportunity to work towards a shared goal (developing a critically inclusive classroom), while simultaneously holding different ideas about how this goal might be reached. Additionally, this approach to PAR allows for greater flexibility, allowing co-researchers to share equally in all components of the research process to the extent and in the manner that they choose. My own definition of genuine participation incorporates the ideas expressed in the literature on conducting research with young children, and includes the following two criteria: (1) All aspects of the research process are shared with co-researchers, who may be involved to the extent, and in the manner (e.g., language, pictures, stories), that they

are interested. (2) When co-researchers choose not to be involved in a specific process (e.g., data analysis), they are provided with the opportunity to review and respond to the product, which is presented in multiple modes (e.g., multiple languages, pictures, and stories).

### *Action*

Chevalier and Buckles (2019) explain that "tangible action" within PAR "must set up a change experiment to advance knowledge and push action in the right direction" (p. 30). They go on to clarify that this "push" is meant to ensure that PAR maintains a goal of "produc[ing] knowledge, especially tacit or formal theories 'about' action, in collaboration between scientists and practitioners" (p. 31). As the goal of this PAR project is to explore what happens when a classroom community engages in the process of implementing a CDS approach to inclusive education, the "change experiment," or action, is clear: *implementing* a CDS approach to inclusive education. However, this implementation includes a large number of smaller actions, which must also be explicitly defined in order for the community to observe and reflect on their impact. A few of the "actions" undertaken by the classroom community, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, include: ongoing modifications (e.g., adapting materials, rearranging the daily schedule), dedicating time to discussing classroom issues, and exploring the concepts of difference and normalcy.

### *Research*

The final component in PAR, research, emphasizes the need for any PAR project to "mediate between theory and practice" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 23). In other words, the aim of a PAR project should be to address an issue that arises directly from the community, *and* to make contributions to "existing bodies of knowledge and related debates" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 23). As previously explained, the field of CDS needs more research that looks

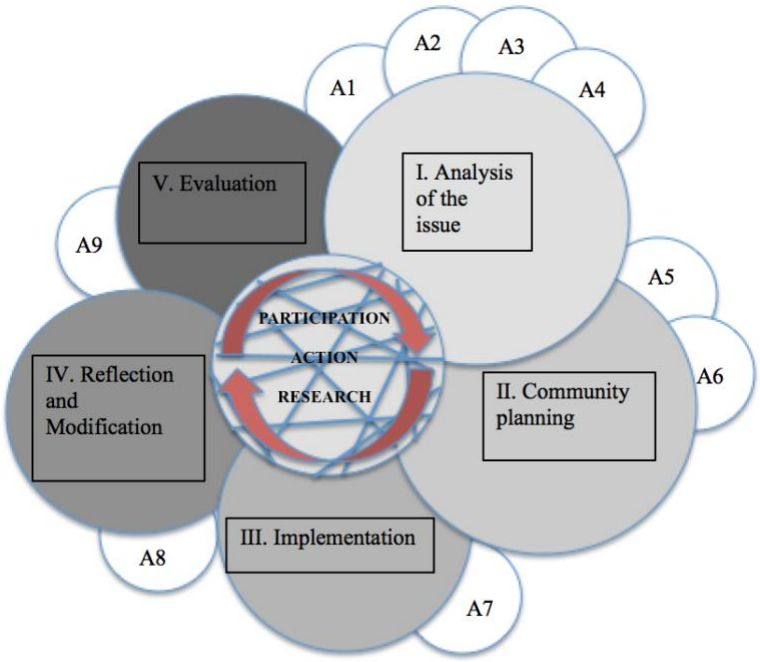
specifically at its application in the inclusive classroom setting. The testing out of CDS theory in the classroom is particularly important for helping to bridge the gap between the fields of early childhood inclusive education and CDS, a necessary step if CDS is to have a real impact on how early childhood inclusion is conceptualized and implemented. The story that emerged from the testing out of CDS within the New School contributes to the field of CDS and current debates surrounding the topic of its theoretical application.

**Bringing PAR Components Together**

Within a PAR project, the individual elements of participation, action, and research are intricately related. For example, participation involves all co-researchers in the formulation and taking of action as well as the process of reflecting on the results of this action, which informs the emerging theoretical implications and inspires further action, continuing the PAR cycle. Likewise, action involves a decision to make a specific change, which is to be reflected upon and analyzed within the context of existing research, all the while involving co-researchers in each process. In Figure 1 (see Appendix A for text description of all figures), I present an adapted version of Fabian and Huber's (2019) model of a PAR cycle. A central circle in the figure contains arrows depicting circular movement, and a web of lines connecting the various components of the research cycle, with "participation," "action," and "research" in the center. This circle demonstrates that the components of the PAR cycle are not always distinct, and are always interconnected (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Fabian et al. (2019) explain that "it doesn't make much sense to try to separate them out, as all three work together, complement each other and should be considered as a whole" (p. 155). This model includes five larger circles which each represent a phase in the PAR cycle: analysis of the issue, community planning, implementation, reflection and modification, and evaluation. The smaller circles labeled A1, A2,

etc., represent activities within each phase. There are different numbers of activities (i.e., actions) within each phase, however; this does not mean that a specific number of activities should exist within a distinct phase. In the following chapters, I will elaborate on the PAR cycles that took place within the context of the New School, referencing how these cycles always involve the elements of participation, action, and research.

**Figure 1:** *PAR Cycle*




(adapted from Fabian & Huber, 2019, p. 159)

**Researcher Role and Ethics**

My own role as a co-researcher in the PAR project of creating a CDS informed inclusive classroom, from the identification of the site to the writing of this dissertation, has impacted (to varying degrees) the unfolding of the PAR project. Throughout this dissertation, my aim is to be clear about exactly what my co-researcher role entailed, and the measures that I took to consider my own position, and that of my co-researchers, throughout the study. Chevalier and Buckles

(2019) describe the relationship between co-researchers within PAR studies in the following way:

> The PAR standpoint emphasizes the ways in which researchers and the parties immediately concerned can contribute to investigating and making sense of reality and ways to change it, each in their own manner and through conversations bound to overlap and interconnect. (pp. 27-28)

PAR methodology allowed me to take on a co-researcher role in which I actively participated in the process of researching what a CDS informed approach to inclusion might look like alongside members of a classroom community, gaining an understanding of how my co-researchers made sense of the experience and actions undertaken, while engaging in this sense-making process myself. Whitburn and Plows (2017) state that making sense of inclusive education is not a solo endeavor, but requires the cooperative work of a community engaged in reflection on daily practice, "draw[ing] on the utility of existing resources and relationalities" (p. 4). I draw on Whitburn and Plow's definition of sense-making, which implies the need to reflect not only on how an individual comes to understand a situation in a certain way based on their own experiences, but also on how members of the classroom community engage in the same process, sometimes arriving at different conclusions about what makes sense and why. My aim as a co-researcher was to understand how classroom community members, individually and collectively, made sense of the events that unfolded throughout the PAR project, while reflecting on how I engaged in this sense-making process as well. My own sense-making process is informed by my experience as a White, English-speaking, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class, cisgender woman with a professional background in early childhood special education. In the next two chapters, I will incorporate my own reflexive memos in order to demonstrate what this sense-making process looked like for me, and how it related to that of the classroom community.

Another factor relevant to my role as co-researcher was the multi-lingual nature of the research site. I came into this project with an elementary level of French, and continued to take French classes throughout the school year. The teachers, who both speak English and French, immediately translated all spoken language throughout the school day. One teacher, "Pauline," primarily used French, and the other, "Abby," primarily used English. For example, during morning meeting, if Pauline explained a special event that would occur later in the day, Abby would deliver the same explanation in English. If a student made a comment in English, Pauline would repeat the comment to the class in French. By the middle of the school year, I was able to understand the majority of conversations that took place in the classroom (e.g., during lunch, outdoor time, transitions), and I could use French to interact with children and caregivers. Asking follow-up questions, repeating what I had understood from a conversation, and utilizing translanguaging, played a very important role throughout the project.

**Site Selection and Entry**

I chose the New School as a research site based on the criteria described by Marshall and Rossman (2016): "one where (a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest is present; (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study…" (p. 106). As previously explained, after spending a month contacting schools, observing classrooms, and talking about my research project with school directors in France; I found a site that fit the above criteria. First, the selected site welcomes researchers, making entry possible. Second, the selected school expresses a commitment to inclusive education, and describes this commitment as going beyond the physical placement of students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom. After speaking with the school's director, I also learned that my topic of investigating

a CDS approach to inclusion is in line with the school's current interests. I later had the opportunity to meet the incoming classroom's teachers, students, and families, and the conversations during this meeting confirmed the classroom community's interest in inclusion. The interests of the school community in inclusion made it clear that a participatory action research project exploring a CDS approach to inclusion would be possible.

**Data Collection**

Over the course of the 2019-2020 school year, I spent at least two full days (8:30 am – 4:15 pm) a week in the New School classroom collecting data in the form of anecdotal notes, interviews, informal conversations, member-checks, and artifacts (e.g., drawings, written stories). There are two periods of time during which schools were closed or limited to essential staff-only. The first occurred during a transportation strike,[1] which lasted from December 5, 2019 to February 20, 2020. However, during this time frame, only school was not entirely interrupted due to (1) the strike coinciding with winter breaks, and (2) adjustments being made once it became apparent that the strike would be long-lasting (e.g., the two classroom teachers alternated days rather than making the trip daily). The second, lasting from March 16, 2020 to May 11, 2020, was the closing of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] The New School offered a limited amount of instruction over Zoom and Google Hangouts during this time, which is included within my recorded data. Schools re-opened from May 11, 2020 to July 3, 2020 for a limited number of students, while those who remained at home continued to receive instruction

[1] This transportation strike, organized by unions, protested President Emmanuel Macron's proposed changes to the French pension system, shut down operation of the metro, bus network, the Réseau Express Régional (RER), and many flights. During this time, protests were organized across the country. The strike impacted the New School more than many public schools (which are attended by students who live in the neighborhood), because the majority of New School families rely on public transportation to get to school and work.

[2] The first case of COVID-19 in France was confirmed on January 24, 2020. On March 12, 2020, President Macron announced that all schools were to close beginning March 16, 2020. Macron soon added a mandatory home confinement for all beginning on March 17, 2020, which ultimately lasted until May 11, 2020.

via Zoom. During this time period, data were also collected from a distance, as the school restricted access to essential personnel only. Consent/assent was obtained from all willing co-researchers (teachers, children, and caregivers), totaling 17 children (out of 18), 2 teachers (out of 2), 1 *Auxiliaire de Vie Scolaire*[3] (out of 1), 1 pedagogical director (out of 1), and 25 caregivers (out of 30). Procedures for safely storing data, including the use of a password-protected computer with regularly updated antivirus software, were followed in accordance with IRB requirements throughout the study.

## The PAR Cycle in the New School

In the following sections, I will provide an overview of how the PAR process unfolded within the New School classroom over the course of the 2019-2020 school year. Specifically, I describe (1) how I introduced the concept of PAR to the classroom, (2) what one specific PAR cycle looked like, (3) the timeline of actions over the course of the school year, (4) what my role as co-researcher looked like throughout the process, and (5) how these actions relate to one another (or how they emerged in response to external disruptions).

### *Introducing a CDS Approach to Inclusion as a PAR Project*

In mid-October, I sat down with the children to tell them more about how my experiences as a teacher led me to be interested in a CDS approach to inclusive education. The following field notes illustrate this initial conversation:

*It's 11:15 am, and the children have just finished working in small groups. Abby and Pauline call the children to the rug, and they sit down on their assigned color blocks. I sit in a small chair at the front of the rug, which allows me to show pictures to all of the children. I tell*

[3] Auxiliaire de Vie Scolaire (AVS) is a "school-life assistant" who, in this case, provides one on one school inclusion support.

*the children that I will be talking to them a little more about who I am, and what I am doing in their classroom. I share that I come from the United States, and I hold up a map with North Carolina highlighted (see Figure 2). I note that this is not too far from where one of the children is from, pointing to Virginia. I show pictures of my family, and explain that I used to be a teacher in North Carolina. One child shares that he was born in Washington D.C., and I point this out on the map as well. I show the children a picture of my former classroom, and explain that one child who was not able to come to school because of an illness, attended class from her home by using a robot. The robot had a screen, and similar to FaceTime, the children could see and hear each other through speakers. I say that this experience made me feel very interested in how we can create classroom communities where all students feel comfortable, accepted, and welcome. I point to the class rules and explain that I am interested in this classroom because they have decided that they want to be sure to figure out how to "include everybody." I say that this is my research question, and that I would like for the children, their caregivers, and their teachers to be researchers along with me. I explain that a lot of times, the idea of inclusion means including children with disabilities or children who are viewed as "different" into the classroom. I note that in this classroom there are children who are different ages, who speak different languages, and who come from different countries and cultures (all ideas about difference that have been brought up within the class so far). I say that when I think about the idea of including everyone, it makes me want to ask questions about what this means – What if someone plays in a way that does not seem "normal" to us? Do they have to learn how to play like us to be included? I explain that when I ask myself these kinds of questions, "Hmm, what does it mean to play 'normally'?" it helps me to come up with ideas about how to make the classroom a place where all kinds of different ways of doing things are welcomed. I tell the children that I've already*

*noticed them asking similar questions, and I want to understand the things they decide to do to make their classroom inclusive over the whole school year. (Field Notes, October)*[4]

**Figure 2:** *Map of US highlighting North Carolina*


After this conversation, the children asked a few questions about my former student who used a robot to attend school virtually (a topic which would months later become relevant in the least expected way), and we quickly brainstormed a few things that are already happening, or that the children would like to see happening to make the classroom more inclusive. Specifically, the children talked about how both French and English are used in the classroom so that everyone is able to understand, how Abby and Pauline think about different types of activities for all of the children so that everyone is challenged, and how they get to show what they are learning in lots of different ways (verbally explaining, drawing, writing). They also referred back to the idea of inclusion as it relates to play, saying that they allow others to join in games on the playground (although this sometimes creates conflict). When thinking about new ideas for actions to implement, the topic of play remained central, and the children continued to give specific scenarios as examples of what inclusion might mean in the context of play, especially

[4] It is important to note that while this conversation contains similar information, it was separate from the process I followed to describe my study and obtain informed assent from the children, which can be found in Appendix D.

when there is some sort of disagreement about what to play, how to play, or who can play. The reflection shared by the children provided Abby and Pauline with information about how they can support the children in the project of creating a critically inclusive classroom, resulting in a series of planned conversations focused on resolving conflicts.

### *One PAR Cycle: Creating Groups and Lesson Planning*

In the beginning of September 2019, the school-year began for the New School classroom. By October, they had settled into a routine, beginning each weekday morning at 8:30, and ending at 4:15 every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday afternoon (Wednesday and Friday are half-days, ending at noon).[5] The teachers made intentional decisions about the set-up of the classroom, the daily schedule, and the way that they plan to begin building a sense of community. They displayed the daily schedule with both visuals and written words (in French and English) on the wall, and made changes to account for any out-of-the-ordinary events each day (see Figure 3). The rhythm of the morning meeting was predictable, offering children the opportunity to greet each other, stretch and prepare their bodies for the day, read a daily message from the teachers, and discuss the structure of the day. A set of double doors separating two areas of the classroom provided both flexibility and restrictions. Whole-group activities and lessons were possible, and took place for a number of specific events throughout the day (morning meeting, life studies, read alouds). However, the layout of the classroom caused any whole group lesson to require children to sit in very close proximity, which was not the ideal learning environment for several children. In response to the physical layout of the classroom,

[5] It is typical in France not to have school on Wednesdays. The New School chose to hold school every day, but end school at noon on Wednesdays and Fridays (keeping the same total hours in school as in the traditional model). While seen as helpful for some parents, others felt that having two half-days rather than one full day out of school created a more challenging situation in terms of arranging childcare.

the children were at times (e.g., math, grammar, writing) split into two groups to work with either Abby or Pauline on either side of the classroom (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** *New School Classroom*

*Upper Left: A picture of the left side of the classroom, with desks and chairs.*
*Upper Right: A picture of the daily schedule.*
*Lower Left: A picture of the right, front side of the classroom, with the meeting rug.*
*Lower Right: A picture of the right, back side of the classroom, with the library corner.*

The teachers discussed how to make choices about which students would be placed in each group, for what purpose, and for what subjects. They wondered whether to create groups by age, by level (e.g., children reading similar books, completing similar math activities), by language, or none of these factors. For example, for the reading-focused portion of the day, the teachers initially placed children who felt more confident in French with Pauline and those who more

often used English with Abby. However, they quickly realized that the primary language spoken by each child did not necessarily correspond with the language they were used to seeing in print or writing. Additionally, grouping children by grade level did not mean that all of the children would be challenged and successful while completing the same lessons. As Abby and Pauline observed and interacted with individual students, they identified grouping as an issue that needed to be addressed. When I spoke with Abby and Pauline about the PAR project in October, we discussed what the idea of inclusion means to us as individuals,[6] and our initial ideas about what a CDS approach to inclusion might mean in the context of the New School classroom. Our initial ideas about what a CDS approach to inclusion might look like, which helped to guide the specific actions that need to be taken in the classroom, included: (1) ensuring that the classroom space, instruction, etc., did not expect children to conform to a norm in order to feel or experience a sense of inclusion, (2) responding to the individual needs of children in order to eliminate experiences of exclusion (or disablement), and (3) discussing issues related to inclusion with the children in order to identify normative (or ableist) ideas, and think about how to challenge these as a group. Taking action to reconsider how children are grouped throughout the day was relevant to the project of creating a CDS informed approach to inclusion within the classroom because this action responded to the individual needs of children in the class in order to eliminate disabling experiences. During lunch break, Abby and Pauline sat down to discuss how to approach grouping the children for different activities throughout the day. I joined them, offering my perspective when asked. The following excerpt from my field notes describes this conversation:

[6] All of our experiences in teacher education programs conveyed the idea that inclusion was related specifically to including students with disabilities in the classroom. Abby's engagement with critical pedagogy led her to think about inclusion in a broader sense. Pauline noted that the term inclusion is only recently being used in France, and comments that the French education system is very behind in this area.

*The children have just finished their lunches, and are headed outside to play with a volunteer. Abby, Pauline, and I ate with the children, and are now sitting at the lunch tables. I have my notes from the morning in front of me. Pauline begins cutting out laminated pictures for an activity the class will do in the afternoon, and I offer to help. Abby has her computer, and is looking at the chart they have created for grouping students throughout the day. She says, "I don't know why math is feeling so difficult." Abby and Pauline are working with two different groups during math time, and I ask how the children are grouped. Abby responds, "Well, we are still testing things out, but right now Pauline has CP and I have CE 1 and CE 2." I ask if they are separating the groups by grade level for all of the different activities, and Pauline shares, "No, it's not one consistent factor. For writing, I still have the French speaking students. And for grammar it's kind of a combination of thinking about age and language." Pauline turns to Abby, "Do you think it would be better if you had a smaller group for math?" Abby responds, "It's just that there are basically three different activities that I have to plan, and then I have to explain all of them in French and English, and it feels like it takes too long to get things started. Maybe if I am just working more closely with one small group each day, and then the others can be doing math games that they already know how to play. What about grammar? How did it go?" Pauline says, "It's getting there, I think, but maybe it needs to be anyone who has any French because I'm worried that Charles and Margot are missing out." Abby responds, "Okay, we can try that. But that will be a big group for you, won't it?" Pauline confirms, but says that she thinks they have to try it. (Field Notes, October)*

The next week, during outdoor time, I asked Abby and Pauline how figuring out groups for activities was going, and they responded that things seem to be getting better. Abby said that she loves having a small group for grammar, and explained that taking a different instructional

approach during math time was helping a lot. Pauline's larger group for grammar was also starting to run more smoothly because she, like Abby, was testing out different instructional approaches that allowed children to be engaged in different activities (or complete the same activities in different ways). Over the course of the next month (November), they continued to change up the groups based on what they observed, and in some cases, the children were also involved in these decisions. The following excerpt from my field notes describes an instance in which Henry was involved in making a choice about his group for a languages lesson:

*Abby is preparing to teach an English lesson to a group that typically consists of children who have been exposed primarily to French. The rest of the children will work on an activity with Pauline. The children know where they are to go, and are moving around the room to gather the supplies they need. Abby asks Roger where he would like to go today. While Roger has primarily been exposed to the English language, he expressed an interest in helping Abby with her lesson and joined her group the previous week. He considers his choice for a moment, and then tells Abby that he will go with her group today. Abby shared with me that Roger, who often presents himself to his classmates as being "not good" at school-related tasks, took on the role of expert when helping her with the English lesson. As I observed Roger's involvement in this decision, I thought about the article by Boldt and Valente (2016), which connects an early childhood classroom's movement through different groupings and spaces as a practice that allows for children and teachers to be seen not as "a stable or self-contained category, but…involved in constantly being transformed through the relationship to one another" (p. 337). The New School classroom is providing opportunities for children to interact in different ways with different classroom members in different physical spaces, potentially helping to dismantle ideas about who each child "is" or "is not" (Field Notes, October).*

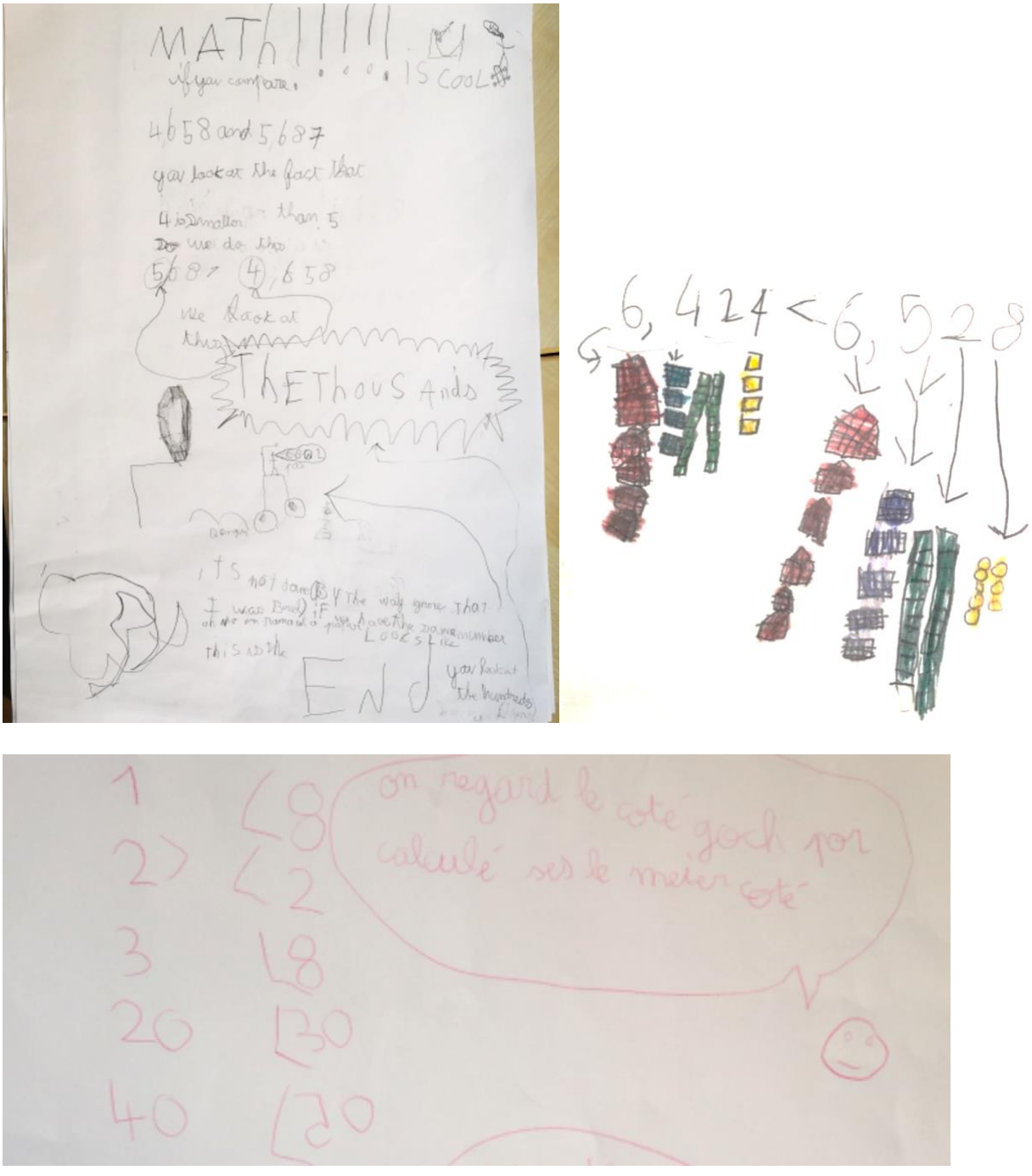
Towards the end of November, Abby, Pauline, and I walked to a nearby restaurant to have lunch and reflect on how the PAR project is going so far. After placing our orders and sitting down at a table, I took out my computer and shared a few of my own observations related to their project of rethinking how the children might be grouped throughout the day.[7] I shared with them my process for coding the notes taken while observing the classroom, and told them that the main themes I have noticed included: (1) how the process of taking specific action to modify groups in response to what the teachers are observing in the classroom occurs both spontaneously (e.g., as in Roger's case), and as a result of reflecting and planning together,[8] and (2) how specific actions (see Table 2 for specific action names), such as lesson-planning, language-use, grouping, relate to one-another. In other words, when the teachers decided that they needed to change the way they approached grouping children, this change inspired a new approach to instruction, which impacted the way they are planning lessons. Abby and Pauline shared their thoughts about how things are going, both saying that the process is still underway, but that they were beginning to get into a rhythm and feel happier with how things are going on a day to day basis. We talked about how the action they have taken relates to a CDS approach to inclusion, and the work-product of children was used as an example for how their current approach to grouping and planning lessons (1) countered the expectation that children must conform to a norm (e.g., use the same language, demonstrate learning through writing), and (2) responded to the individual needs of the children in order to eliminate experiences of

[7] Grouping is not the only action project underway, and we discuss other events as well. For the sake of this section, which is focused on just one action project, I am only sharing the part of our conversation related to the project of grouping.

[8] At this point, I am also starting to think about how two teachers working together (i.e., co-teaching) impacts the "reflection" component of the PAR cycle. Throughout the school day, Abby and Pauline are discussing the events that occur, and deciding how to respond. This happens both in small moments (transition time used to quickly share information about why certain child is upset), and in larger chunks of time (outdoor time/lunch break used to restructure the afternoon's plans based on how the morning has gone).

exclusion/disablement. One example is illustrated in Figure 4, which shows math posters created by the children to demonstrate what they learned about comparing numbers. Some children worked in pairs to create their posters, and others worked individually. Some used a written description, while others drew pictures. Finally, some children focused on comparing one or two-digit numbers, while others focused on comparing four-digit numbers. The children presented these math posters to each other, drawing on both French and English to explain their work. Abby, Pauline, and I ended our conversation by discussing what they hoped to do next in the classroom related to grouping or other action projects. They shared that they would continue to modify groups and instruction based on what they were observing in the classroom, and wanted to focus more closely on how to do this for Geoffrey, a child with a diagnosis of autism, in particular. They observed that Geoffrey seemed less engaged in the afternoons, and they wanted to think about what modifications might better support him. A first step would be to talk to Geoffrey, and to more closely observe his response to activities during this time.

**Figure 4:** *Math Posters*




*Top left: A math poster that uses words to explain how to compare two 4-digit numbers.*
*Top right: A math poster that uses images and numbers to explain how to compare two 4-digit numbers.*
*Bottom: A math poster that uses numbers and written words to explain how to compare two single- or double-digit numbers.*

**The Unfolding of the PAR Project within the New School**

The following table (Table 2) provides an overview of the timeline specific action projects emerged throughout the 2019-2020 school year. The table does not include all projects (for example, the project called "difference and society" includes specific projects related to gender, race, and class), but does describe the major categories of projects initiated by classroom members. The timeline demonstrates when classroom members were engaged in taking deliberate action towards creating a CDS informed inclusive classroom, and reflecting on that action. While the teachers certainly continued to modify the classroom environment throughout the school year, they were planning and reflecting on this action most deliberately at the beginning of the year, and at the end of the year.

**Table 2:** *PAR Timeline*

| **Major Actions** | **Action Duration (October 2019 – June 2020)** | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Oct.** | **Nov.** | **Dec.** | **Jan.** | **Feb.** | **Mar.** | **Apr.** | **May** | **June** |
| **Classroom Environment** | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Materials* | ■ | ■ | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 2. Routines*** | ■ | ■ | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 3. Procedures*** | ■ | ■ | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| **Inclusive Instruction** | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Grouping*** | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | | | |
| 2. Language-use* | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | | | |
| 3. Lesson-Planning* | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| **Community Building*** ** | ■ | ■ | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| **Include Everyone** | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Play** | ■ | ■ | | | | | | | |
| 2. Communication** | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 3. Helping** | | | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| **Checking-In**** | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 1. Happiness | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Continuing Conversations | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Sharing Interests | | | | | | | | | |
| **Discussing Difference** | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. What is difference?* | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ▮ | | | |
| 2. What is equality? Equity?* | | | | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 3. Difference and Society* | | | | ▮ | ■ | ▮ | | | |
| 4. What is Normal?* | | | | | ■ | ▮ | | | |
| **Distance Learning** ***** | | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |

***Teacher-initiated action**: While these actions were often inspired by the individual students in the classroom, the teachers were the ones to identify and implement plans of action.

****Child-initiated action**: These actions were identified by the children as being important to the classroom, and teachers offered support and facilitated planning and implementation.

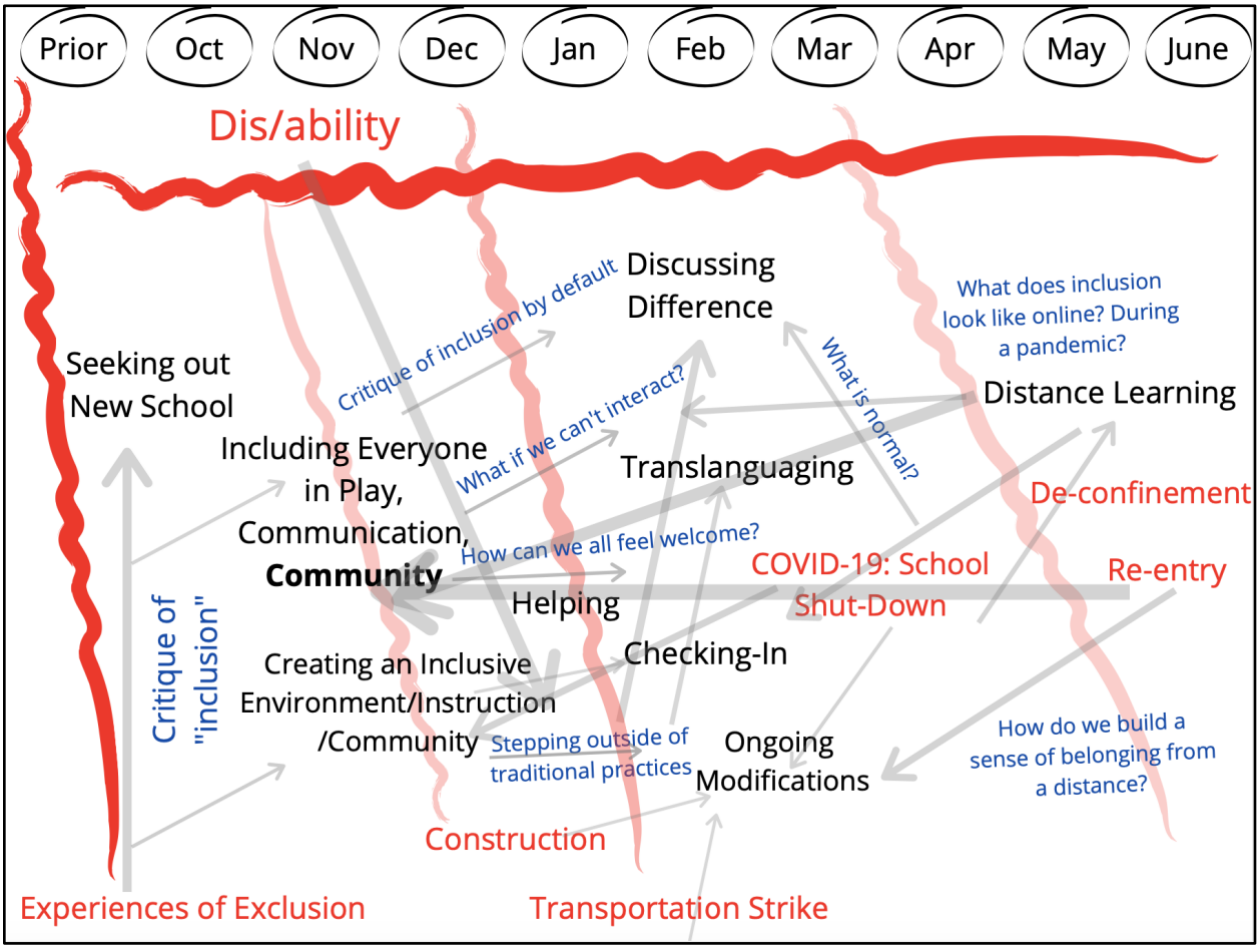
*****Teacher and child-initiated action**: These actions arose out of issues faced by the class as a whole, and involved conversations between teachers and students to discuss action planning and implementation.

******Caregiver initiated action:** Caregiver action falls under the category of "checking in" and includes: happiness, continuing conversations, and sharing interests. Because these actions were individual (i.e., caregivers did not meet as a group to discuss), and occurred at various points throughout the year (e.g., one caregiver taught yoga weekly, another caregiver gave a one-time presentation to the class, others extended topics discussed in class related to inequality), I do not mark specific time frames for the action projects.

*******Distance Learning**: The actions taken to implement distance learning were initiated in response to COVID-19. The move to distance learning caused the classroom community to continue previous projects (e.g., materials, routines, procedures, community building, communication).

While the timeline provides an overview of when different action projects took place within the New School, it does not portray how these action projects (which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter) are connected to the process of reflection, or how they relate to external disruptions. The graphic in Figure 5 illustrates how specific action projects, reflections, and disruptions relate to one another. To summarize, certain action projects, especially those initiated at the beginning of the school year (e.g., modifying the classroom environment, building community, developing critically inclusive instructional methods), were inspired by the conversations and observations of classroom community members, and closely related to the immediate needs of the community. Further developments related to these projects, and the creation of additional action projects, were at times the result of reflection on the impact of a project. However, disruptions to the classroom environment often served as a catalyst for change, resulting in additional action projects, or modifications to currents one, based on in-the-moment reflections, more deliberate considerations, or a combination of the two. For example, when the teachers observed that the children were not as engaged in activities in the later morning, they responded to the immediate situation by shortening the planned lessons, and allowing for free-choice (puzzles, games, reading). After the teachers had the opportunity to reflect on the morning routine in greater detail, they decided to integrate a twenty-minute outdoor break.

**Figure 5:** *Action Project Relationships*




## My Role as a Co-Researcher

The following anecdote from my field notes illustrates my own role in the PAR project. My involvement as a co-researcher throughout the PAR project[9] primarily included: supporting the teachers and children within the classroom as needed throughout the school day, facilitating conversations about action planning and reflections, observing, interviewing/member-checking, and collecting artifacts.

[9] As I will later discuss, when the schools closed due to COVID-19, my role did shift to that of an observer and occasional participant in order to support the needs of the class at that time. This was primarily due to the very limited amount of instructional time that was available for the class to meet.

*It is 8:25 am on a Monday morning, and I am standing in the hallway outside of the classroom waiting for children and families to begin arriving. I am holding a small notebook and pen in one hand and my one-year-old daughter, whose daycare shares the same opening time as the New School, in the other. To one side of the classroom door, there is a shoe cubby that stores slippers worn by the children inside of the classroom. To the other side of the door, a long row of hooks holds coats and backpacks. Above the hooks are drawings of the children's hopes and dreams for the school year, accompanied by dictation taken by the teachers: "I want to learn to sing in English," "I want to learn to read and write," "My hope and dream this year is to make new friends." With the children's permission, I have taken pictures of these initial hopes and dreams (See Figure 6), which I later use to guide some of our conversations about inclusion.*

**Figure 6:** *Hopes and Dreams*

*At 8:30 am, the children begin to filter through the main entrance, most accompanied by their caregivers (although some saying their goodbyes at the gate outside). The children take off their outdoor shoes, put on their slippers, hang up their belongings, and make their way into the classroom where a written message is waiting for them on the chalkboard. The hall is filled with the sounds of children and caregivers greeting each other, reminders being doled out ("hang up your hat," "take off your shoes"), and quick goodbyes being said. I say my own hellos, and my daughter receives a chorus of "très mignon!" (very cute!) from the children, who give her foot a quick squeeze on their way past. Early in the year, I discover that my daughter's presence in the classroom seems to help the children, especially those who primarily speak French, to feel more comfortable and interested in interacting with me. This is also my only time to see caregivers face-to-face (outside of scheduled interviews or school events), as many children go to after-school programs rather than being picked up at the end of the school day. I use the small window of face-to-face time primarily as a way to build rapport and remind parents of my presence in the classroom. I am prepared with any quick questions I might have for individual caregivers – interview scheduling or follow-up, something I observed related to their participation in the classroom (e.g., teaching a music lesson, yoga class, etc.).*

*Ten minutes later, most of the children have arrived and are seated on the carpet ready for the morning meeting to begin. Because it's Monday, the teachers will begin by going over the list of assigned responsibilities for the week (e.g., line leader, table cleaner, garbage and recycling helper). I quietly walk outside, and run around the corner to do my own quick daycare drop-off, and return to sit behind the children who are now reading the morning message aloud. I take anecdotal notes, aiming to capture the bigger picture (e.g., children read a written morning message aloud in French and then in English), as well as the smaller details (e.g.,*

*gestures, facial expressions). I make note of any questions that come to my mind, which I'll often raise with teachers and children later throughout the day during free time.*

*The children have a twenty-minute break to play outside, a new addition to the schedule after the teachers reflected on how the morning was going – they felt that the children needed more time to move around before continuing to sit for instruction. A large group of children run across the playground. One student, Sara, spins around next to me, before telling me that the other children are too loud, "I like to just be by myself," she adds. Geoffrey is standing within earshot, and he quickly joins the conversation: "I like to play with at least one, or two, or three, or four, or five, or six." I ask them if they think that it is okay to decide to play alone or with other people. Sara says yes, and Geoffrey says yes, but clarifies that he prefers to play with others. Roger who has heard my question says, "Who wants to play alone? That's just weird." Sara responds that running around screaming is what is weird. The group disperses quickly after this exchange, and I make a note to have follow-up conversations about what it means to play.*

*During math, I sit with a group of four children, and use a combination of French, English, and gestures paired with physical props to explain how to play a two-player card game focused on identifying the larger number in a pair. Because I am fully involved in this activity, I am not able to take continuous anecdotal notes. Instead, I quickly return to my notebook as soon as math is over in order to capture this experience in as much detail as possible. I make a note to ask Charles, who did not initially understand the game, what it was that helped him to make sense of it (I have my own idea, but I want to be sure I'm not making an incorrect assumption).*

*The teachers have an hour-long break after lunch while the children play outside, supervised by a volunteer. Some days, I spend this time outside with the children to observe their play, facilitate an organized game (e.g., red light, green light), or have conversations with*

*children who are interested. On this day, I stay inside with the teachers to help prepare some materials for a lesson that will happen later in the afternoon. As I cut out laminated picture cards, I listen to the teachers discuss the events of the day. Abby is telling Pauline that independent reading is going really well, and the children seem to be really engaged during this time. Then, they begin to discuss how they are going to structure the lesson in the afternoon, making the decision to deliver instructions in a whole group setting before splitting the children up into smaller groups to work. They ask me if I am willing to help with one of the small groups, and I agree. At the end of the break, I take notes about how Abby and Pauline reflected on their teaching and constructed future plans. I periodically share with Abby and Pauline what I am noticing about their cycle of reflecting, acting, and making changes, and ask for their feedback. They express eagerness to hear about what I am observing in the classroom, and seem happy to talk with me about what is going on in the classroom. When they offer feedback, it is usually in the form of additional details or context about a specific event that I have noted.*

*When the students return from their time outdoors, they sit on the carpet and listen to Abby and Pauline read a story. Abby reads one paragraph in English, and then Pauline reads the same paragraph in French. As they read, Geoffrey stands up and starts to sing before running out of the room. A classroom volunteer follows him outside and I can hear him yelling as she tries to convince him to come back into the classroom. When he continues to refuse, the volunteer plays a quiet game with him in the hallway. I am sitting on the floor behind the children, taking anecdotal notes. I take note that when Geoffrey begins singing and yelling outside, the other children do not laugh or roll their eyes, but wait until Abby and Pauline continue reading. (Field Notes, November)*

*The last activity of the day is yoga, taught every Monday afternoon by Lara's mother, Corrine. The yoga lesson is taught in French, and Corrine demonstrates each move as she gives verbal directions. The children are spread throughout the classroom, which has been cleared of furniture. I alternate between participating alongside the children and teachers, and taking notes off to the side. During the last half-hour of the school day, I step out into the hallway to greet a parent who has agreed to sit down for an interview with me. We sit in a small office across from the classroom, and I record our conversation about the meaning and implementation of inclusion.*

*After school, I sit down in a café down the street and type my notes from the day, including my own reflection. I read through and highlight my notes to indicate content related to daily activities (e.g., literacy instruction, morning meeting, lunch), enacting inclusion, reflecting on inclusion, and planning for inclusion. I make a list of any questions that I need to follow-up on, any themes that I see emerging, any related literature that comes to my mind, and next steps. I also remind myself to schedule a lunchtime interview with the teachers for next week. During this interview, I'll be sharing with them the data I've collected so far, and the themes I've identified, asking for their feedback. In order to do the same with the children, I'll ask Abby and Pauline if I can either use whole group time to do a quick check-in, or pull small groups during independent time.*

**Data Analysis**

Throughout the school year, the process of collecting data resulted in a data set of over 400 files including audio recordings (interviews with children, caregivers, and teachers), classroom artifacts (student writing, teacher-made signs, artwork, etc.), anecdotal notes from observations, reflections, and memos. I chose to use the software program MAXQDA to analyze

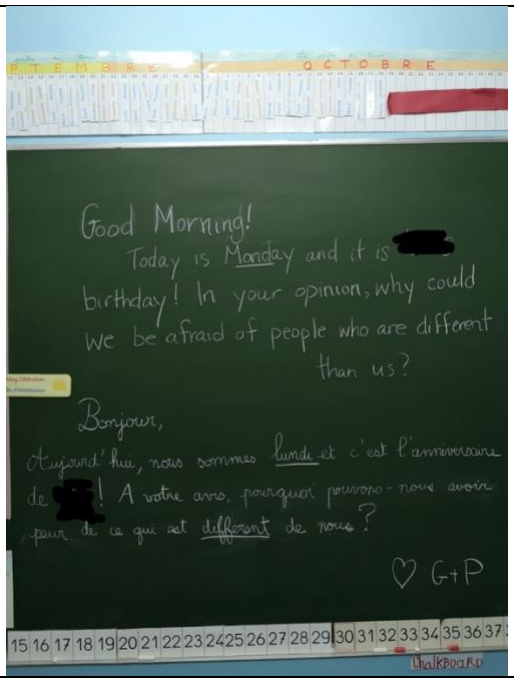
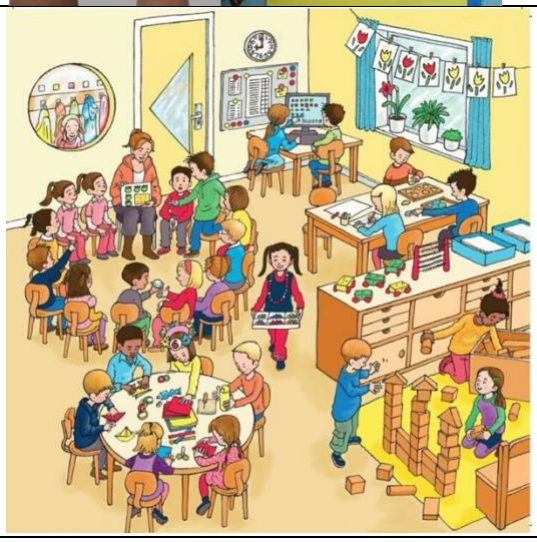
the data that were collected throughout the school year. In their book, *Qualitative Analysis using MAXQDA: The Five-Level QDA Method*, Woolf and Silver (2018) describe an approach to "harnessing the software rather than simply operating it" (p. 23). They explain that capabilities of software programs for qualitative analysis are often used in the most straightforward way, which ultimately results in compromises. In other words, the input-output system of a computer program does not immediately mesh with the "emergent spirit of qualitative research" (Woolf & Silver, 2018, p. 22). Woolf and Silver (2018) provide a strategy for (1) understanding the various capabilities of MAXQDA, and (2) determining how to construct or select software tools to accomplish specific analytic tasks. Throughout the Five-Level QDA process, the researcher identifies objectives, an analytic plan, the translation of the plan, the tools chosen to accomplish the plan, and/or the tools constructed by combining and customizing operations within MAXQDA. I provide an example of how I used the Five-Level QDA method in Appendix A. This example demonstrates the planning process for just one analytic task. The major analytic tasks I completed during data analysis include: (1) creating document sets specific to caregivers, children, and teachers,[10] (2) creating document sets specific to the beginning, middle, and end of the year (using Fall, Winter, and Spring vacations to separate these timeframes), (3) coding the data (i.e., creating coded segments) with the parent codes of defining inclusion, enacting inclusion, defining exclusion, enacting exclusion, (4) creating sub-codes (e.g., gender, play, friendship, dis/ability, equality, difference), and (5) examining the data within and across data sets and coded segments in order to identify themes and irregularities related to the elements of CDS theory outlined in Table 1. While the choice to use MAXQDA is one that I made

[10] Creating document sets for caregivers, children, and teachers allowed me to look for patterns unique to these groups, but it is important to note that my coding scheme also permitted me to examine thematic concepts while looking at the classroom community as a whole. The same is true for the document sets created for specific times of the year.

independently from the classroom community, I did take measures to involve my co-researchers in the data analysis process. For example, as themes were emerging through my own analysis, I would present artifacts that were, to me, representative of this theme, and ask for feedback from the community (see Table 3 for an example). Specifically, I would ask if they also saw each theme as a major part of the story of their school year, if there was a different example they would use to illustrate the theme, and if there were other themes or events that stuck out as being particularly important. I received feedback indicating that the community agreed with my analysis, and any comments offered provided further detail or illustration to the theme. I also shared written anecdotes with the teachers and caregivers (see Appendix B), and engaged in art-based activities with the children. One art-based activity began with a read-aloud of the book, *All Are Welcome Here* by Alexandra Penfold. The story was inspired by illustrator Suzanne Kaufman's experience with her own daughter's school, in which all children were welcomed and celebrated. Kaufman initially illustrated a poster depicting the elements of the school that created this positive environment, and this illustration later served as inspiration for the book. I shared this background with the students, and asked them if they would create illustrations that are representative of the actions they have taken to make their classroom feel welcoming and inclusive. As students drew, I spoke with them to understand why they were focusing on specific elements. These examples help to demonstrate how the community was involved in the process of analyzing the data to tell the community's story of testing out critical disability theory in the classroom.

**Table 3:** *Emergent Themes from Data Analysis: Seeking Community Feedback*

| **Emergent Theme** | **Example Shared with Community** |
|---|---|
| Disruption |  <br>Image from a social distancing information packet created by the school, and shared with children and families as they prepared for their return to the classroom. |
| Community Building |  <br>This image represents the "human knot" activity, which took place in the classroom towards the beginning of the year. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Discussing Difference |  | The image depicts a morning message, which reads: "Good Morning! Today is Monday and it is ____'s birthday! In your opinion, why could we be afraid of people who are different than us?" |
| Translanguaging |  | This image illustrates how the children draw on all communication modes available to them (e.g., gesturing, using facial expressions, writing/drawing, and verbally communicating). |
| Individualized Academic Instruction |  | This image depicts children engaged in different projects throughout the classroom. It is meant to represent how the children engaged in different tasks, in different settings (individual work, small group work), and with different materials (computer, writing paper, drawing paper). |

## Limitations

While I made a number of efforts to learn about the context of disability, inclusion, and education in France (outlined in the first chapter), I came into this dissertation project with a background as an American early childhood educator. My prior experiences shaped my interpretation of events in the New School classroom, as well as my choice to use CDS as a theoretical framework. I used member checking as a strategy to ensure that I understood how community members experienced events, and my theoretical analysis of these events draws on the work of critical scholars from a variety of contexts (e. g., American, French, English). Still, as Goodley et al. (2019) advise:

> We want to encourage Critical Disability Studies scholars to be clear, open and honest about their own local locations (rather than assuming the reader already knows about, say, the British context) whilst also addressing the dangers of centering Critical Disability Studies in what Meekosha (2011) calls the metropole of the Global North. (p. 8)

The PAR project was disrupted in many ways, a theme that became central to the development of a CDS approach to inclusive education. While these disruptions are what shaped the outcome of the PAR project, the COVID-19 pandemic did redirect the trajectory of action projects around discussing difference and normalcy. A similar project in the future might explore how conversations about difference and normalcy unfold over a longer period of time in the early childhood classroom. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the involvement of community members in the data analysis and writing process. While I modified my efforts to involve community members (e.g., sending drafts of chapters, asking for feedback over Zoom), I imagine there would have been more participation if the community had continued to meet in person.

# INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 4-7

## A Series of Disruptive Events

I previously described my own story of how a series of disruptions led me to the project of exploring CDS theory with the New School classroom community in France. In the following set of chapters, I will tell the story of what unfolded over the course of the school year as the children, caregivers, and teachers of the New School engaged in the participatory action research project of testing out CDS theory in the early childhood inclusive classroom. The story is marked with disruptions: unexpected events, big and small, that invite or demand a change of course. CDS scholars cite the "disruptive potential" (Liddiard et al., 2019, p. 156) of dis/ability. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2016) write: "Dis/ability usefully disarms, disrupts and disturbs normative, taken-for-granted, deeply societally engrained assumptions about what it means to be human and what it means to be able" (p. 6). Castrodale (2017) applies the idea of dis/ability as a disruptor to the practice of teaching, suggesting that rather than viewing the limitations dis/ability imposes on classroom practice, "we can cultivate the desire to understand ourselves as those who live in the midst of others," which presents us with "a possibility to think otherwise" (p. 59). Chandler and Ignagni (2019) describe the disruptive impact of dis/abled people in the art-making spaces observed in their study, which ultimately resulted in changes to the environment:

> Increasingly, these shifts in practices in order to center disability experiences are fundamentally changing how we all experience art - we are no longer being included only when our inclusion leaves the normative practices in the art world undisrupted. And we feel that the disruption disability makes is desired rather than tolerated. (p. 259)

Chandler and Ignani (2019) describe how disruptions, and those related to dis/ability in particular, interrupt business-as-usual and provide a desirable opportunity for imagining and creating new ways of being and doing. Similarly, the New School experienced disruptions,

which allowed members of the classroom community to think differently about inclusion, communication, academic instruction, play, and dis/ability. In the following chapters, I will highlight the disruptions experienced by the New School, which often served as a catalyst for change projects within the participatory action research cycle. My reason for doing this is to demonstrate the potential that disruptive events, which sometimes include the presence of dis/ability, offer in the context of the CDS informed early childhood inclusive classroom. In their critique of so-called inclusive education, Graham and Slee (2008) propose: "Perhaps the question now is not so much how do we move 'towards inclusion'… but what do we do to *disrupt* the construction of center from which exclusion derives" (p. 279, emphasis added). The following three chapters describe (1) how the New School classroom disrupted normalcy (or experienced external disruptions to "normal" life), and (2) the potentialities that emerged out of these disruptive experiences.

In Table 4, I include information about the children of the New School (e.g., languages used in the home, disability label, age). I provide this information in order to give a sense of the range of experiences present within the New School classroom. As I describe the events that occurred during the New School's PAR project, I will incorporate relevant information about individual identity markers (e.g., race, class, dis/ability) within my analysis.

**Table 4:** *Children of the New School*

| **Pseudonym** | **Caregiver(s) Country of Origin(s)*** | **Age/Grade**** | **Language(s) Used at Home** | **Disability Label** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jacques | United States, France* | 6/CP | French, English | |
| Emma | France* | 6/CP | French, English | |
| Julia | United States, Germany | 6/CP | German, French, English | Diagnosis in progress |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Geoffrey | United States, Canada | 6/CP | English, French | Autism |
| Lara | Portugal, France* | 6/CP | French, Portuguese | |
| Juliette | Italy, France* | 6/CP | French, Italian, English | |
| Charles | United States*, France* | 6/CP | English, French | |
| Lena | France* | 6/CP | French | |
| Amelia | France* | 7/CE 1 | French | |
| Louise | France* | 7/CE 1 | French | |
| Henry | France*, Britain* | 7/CE 1 | English, French | |
| Gabriel | France* | 7/CE 1 | French | |
| Raphael | France* | 8/CE 2 | French | Behavior Difficulties |
| Sara | United States* | 8/CE 2 | English | Academically Gifted |
| Roger | United States*, France* | 8/CE 2 | English, French | Dyslexia |
| Mia | Spain, France* | 8/CE 2 | French, Spanish, English | Learning Disability |
| Claire | France* | 8/CE 2 | French | |

*A star indicates that the student has spent some amount of time living in the country listed. When no stars appear, this indicates that while the child's caregivers are from other countries, the child has only ever lived in France.

** In the French education system, the grade levels for 6, 7, and 8-year-old children are called CP (cours préparatoire), CE1(cours élémentaire 1) and CE2 (cours élémentaire 2), respectively. To compare the French grade-levels to the U.S. system: CP is similar to kindergarten, CE1 is similar to first grade, and CE2 is similar to second grade.

# CHAPTER 4: DIS/ABILITY AND DISRUPTION

"Non/normative children…disrupt, contest and subvert educational politics, practices and pedagogies that have been founded upon the assumption that education is the normal child's playground" (Goodley, 2014, p. 158).

## The Power of Disruption

Goodley (2014) suggests that the disruptive power of dis/ability lies in the excess produced by neoliberal discourses. Over the past forty years, neoliberalism, "a more virulent and brutal form of market capitalism", which "belie[ves] that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions" (Giroux, 2005, p. 2), has resulted in paradoxical effects for the disability community (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015). Specifically, while claiming free markets create an inclusive environment in which any person can succeed (i.e., meritocracy), neoliberalism suggests that any failure to thrive (i.e., accumulate capital), is the result of personal deficit, "viewed as either excessive or in need of radical containment" (Giroux, 2005, p. 9). Disabled people in western neoliberal countries have, in theory, more access than ever to "normative social institutions" such as education and employment (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015, p. 15). However, those who represent an "excessive deviance from culturally inculcated norms" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015, p. 14) (e.g., those who would require significant changes to conform to the norms of autonomy, independence, productivity, and inclusion), are ultimately excluded while being told that this type of exclusion (based on an individual's gender, age, race, class, sexuality, or disability) no longer exists.

As neoliberal-able[1] discourses function to create an ever-increasingly narrow definition of the ideal individual, there is also a growing excess of individuals who are not able to temporarily benefit from the neoliberal-able market.[2] Goodley (2014) explains that "it is in this excess that we can find possibility… biopolitical spaces and neoliberal subjectivities can be worked, that is, co-opted, resisted and subverted" (p. 33). In the context of CDS literature in education, the term "disruption" is most often utilized in four ways. First, the literature draws attention to how the idea of disruptive behavior is connected with deficit thinking related to disability, race, gender, and class. For example, Adams and Erevelles (2015), in their chapter, "Shadow Play: DisCrit, Dis/respectability, and Carceral Logics," describe how teachers employ terms such as "disruptive" to pathologize the behavior of elementary students. While the teachers do not explicitly connect "disruptive" students to race or disability labels, they draw on "oppressive (rather than empowering) discourses of disability…at the intersections of social difference to justify the casual dis-location of student bodies along the school-to-prison pipeline by conceiving these bodies as dis/respectable and therefor as a matter out of (White, normative) place" (p. 132). Second, CDS scholars suggest that a disruption of the taken-for-granted practices and ideas within the system of education, including the pathologizing of "disruptive" students, is necessary (Annamma et al., 2016). Third, the CDS literature suggests that the disruption of traditional practices must be centered on the perspectives of historically marginalized individuals. In their book *DisCrit: Disability and Critical Race Theory in Education*, Annamma

[1] Goodley (2014) introduces the term neoliberal-able in order to describe the role that neoliberalism (and specifically its focus on individualism) plays in constructing the ideal citizen as able-bodied/minded while also creating an atmosphere in which the "ideal citizen" is always in pursuit of hyper-normalcy, or projects of "making and repairing [one]self" (p. 30).

[2] I write "temporarily" to suggest that "the boundaries of disability as a category are permeable, and though we may not be members now, we are all temporarily able" (Goodley, 2014, p. 31). I write "benefit from" rather than "fit into" to suggest that the hyper-normal ideal is unattainable, but temporarily usable by those who most closely fit the profile of the White, able-body/minded, cisgender, middle/upper class, English-speaking, male.

et al. (2015) explain that DisCrit itself "seeks to disrupt the tradition of ignoring the voices of traditionally marginalized groups and instead privileges insider voices" (p. 37). Fourth, as previously described, the CDS literature identified the disruptive potential of dis/ability (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016).

In this chapter, I draw on the theorizations of dis/ability as disruption outlined above in order to examine the disruptive power of dis/ability within the PAR project of the New School classroom. Specifically, I will discuss: (1) the disabling experiences, and their relationship with ableism, which caused disruptions that ultimately drew individuals to the New School, and (2) the disruptive experience of dis/ability in the New School classroom, and the actions they demanded.

**Dis/ability and the Creation of the New School Classroom**

Before I share how dis/ability played a role in bringing the New School classroom community members together, I will define the terms disablism, ableism, and dis/ability. I draw on Goodley's (2014) definition of disablism: "the oppressive practices of contemporary society that threaten to exclude, eradicate and neutralize those individuals, bodies, minds and community practices that fail to fit the capitalist imperative" (p. xi). In the context of education, these "oppressive practices" might include policies (e.g., special education eligibility and determination, discipline,), environmental design (e.g., physical inaccessibility including technology-use), pedagogical practices (e.g., testing/assessment methods, curriculum content), and attitudes (e.g., stigma attached to disability labels). Goodley (2014) notes that while disablism constructs disability negatively, the stories that emerge from the disability community invite us to "consider what we value in life" (p. xi), opening up the space for disability to offer up new ways of doing, of being, of living (as will be demonstrated through the stories of the New

School classroom). Ableism refers to the production of specific "abilities" (cognitive, social, biological, psychological, physical, and economical) as "normal" (Campbell, 2009; Wolbring, 2007). Ableism is used to rationalize inequality, and to maintain space between the dominant (i.e., the White, able-bodied/minded, middle-class, heterosexual, economically productive, male adult) and the "different" (Campbell, 2009; Goodley 2014). In the inclusive classroom setting, ableism might be observed in teacher discourse that positions specific ways of contributing ideas as normal and correct (i.e., raising a hand, waiting to be called on, and speaking in the dominant language). Goodley (2014) draws a link between ableism and disablism: "Ableism provides just the right amount of temperature and nutrients for disablism to grow" (p. xi). In other words, when a very specific idea of what counts as normal, valuable, and right (i.e., "ability") is consistently communicated, the seemingly natural response is to create conditions which demand the pursuit of ability, and the erasure of all else (i.e., "disability"). The term dis/ability serves as a reminder that disability and ability, as well as disablism and ableism "can only ever be understood simultaneously in relation to one another" (Goodley, 2014, p. xiii).

In the context of the New School, dis/ability was the disruptor that brought the members of the classroom community together. For some caregivers, their own experiences of dis/ability as students motivated them to seek out an alternative to the public-school setting. Marie, Louise's mother, explained in an interview, "This is the problem today with national education: the teachers can be excellent, but at the end of the year, they are focused on obtaining the results. This does not allow for inclusion." Other caregivers expressed similar sentiments, explaining that the national education system is "très autoritaire" (very authoritative), "trop traditional" (too traditional), and "a system without freedom." Ableism functions in the school to create a normal child as one who conforms, performs well on tests, and responds well to one standard method of

instruction. The narrow construction of the normal child results in experiences of disablement, both for children without specific disability labels who are not able to learn or conform in the manner expected, and for children who have disability labels, who may not be provided with the opportunity to try to conform to classroom standards at all. Amelia's prior school experience provides an illustration of the first case, that of the child without a disability label:

> *[I]t came out that Amelia was quite stressed in the school. She felt less confident. And she felt not as good as the others. She was copying the words of colleagues or other pupils. And she began also to say that she couldn't make it and she had some stomach pains. I thought it was too early for her to feel such a pressure as a kid. And I want Amelia to feel good in school and it was I think too difficult for her. She could learn. She was not able to. (Amelia's Mother, Interview, March)*

The idea that Amelia is capable of learning, but was not able to within a specific school environment, provides an illustration of dis/ablement at work. In the New School classroom, the teaching and learning conditions provided Amelia with the support she needed in order to comfortably participate.[3] However, in the public-school setting, she fell too far outside of the "norm" to succeed, and experienced disablism despite her efforts to perform as a "normal" child. Her mother does not site race as being a factor in Amelia's experience of disablism, which aligns with the discourse of race in France (further discussed in Chapter 5), as it suggests that racism cannot exist due to the country's commitment to equality as articulated through the constitution. Annamma et al.'s (2016) theorization of DisCrit is particularly useful when considering the relationship between race and disablism, as it provides a lens through which to examine "the

[3] Specifically, the New School both challenged the notion that children must be learning at the same pace as they normalized differences in learning and demonstrations of learning, and created an environment of interdependency in which Amelia felt comfortable asking for help, and also had the opportunity to help others (the details of this story are continued in the next chapter).

ways in which race, racism, dis/ability and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education, which affect students of color with dis/abilities qualitatively differently than White students with dis/abilities" (p. 12).[4] Amelia was not the only one to experience physical discomfort as a result of disabling conditions in the school environment. Gabriel, who also has no disability label, explained that his old school was very strict, causing him to have a stomachache every day. Gabriel felt such a great deal of anxiety that he "developed a blockage" (Gabriel's Mother, Interview), and refused to speak at school. For other children without disability labels, the choice to come to the New School was related to its multilingual approach to education. As previously discussed, the French system of education does not value or support the continued use and development of children's home languages (Mary & Young, 2017). The education practices around language in France suggests that the "normal" child is one who speaks French, and only French, in the classroom. For this reason, the multilingual children of the New School might have experienced disablism had they attended a school within the public-school system.

Three children came to the New School with a specific disability label: Roger (dyslexia), Mia (learning disability), and Geoffrey (autism). One child, Julia, received psychological evaluations from an outside agency during the course of the year, and while no official label was shared with the school, the staff often wondered if she would eventually receive a label of autism. Raphael came to the New School with a history of having behavioral difficulties in the public-school classroom. Sara, who attended a public school in the United States prior to the

[4] I will discuss racism in the French context in chapter five, but for now it is important to note that the French education system has only as recently as the mid- 2000s incorporated content related to the role and impact of French colonialism, France's immigration history, and issues of racism and discrimination with the country (Soysal & Szakács, 2010). In other words, the framing of racial diversity in the public-school classroom focuses on tolerance and acceptance without discussing the need for actions towards social justice.

New School, came into the classroom with a label of academically gifted. While these dis/ability labels or descriptors had differing impacts on individual experiences of dis/ability, they all served as a disruption that caused families to seek out the New School.

In the context of France, disability studies, "sometimes (unsatisfactorily) referred to as 'les études sur le handicap' – does not exist on an institutional level" (Thompson, 2017, p. 243). While France is beginning to respond to the needs of individuals with physical disabilities (e.g., making public transportation accessible), there is a "mind-body split, where physical and mental disability are treated separately" (Orchard, 2013, p. 55). Disabilities understood to be related to the mind or cognitive ability are stigmatized and approached from a psychiatric perspective which often incorporates psychoanalysis (Orchard, 2013). As I describe experiences of dis/ableism that brought students with disability labels to the New School, I will also briefly explain the context of disability labels in France.

Roger, well aware of his label of dyslexia, experienced social exclusion in his former French public-school environment. At the beginning of the school year, he brought up these experiences, saying that the teachers and children at his old school did not like him, and anticipating a similar experience at the New School: "I already have such a bad reputation in this class. I should've just pretended to be sick." Speech-language disabilities, *trouble développemental du langage*, such as dyslexia are stigmatized within France (Bergeron et al., 2019). In Bergeron et al.'s (2019) qualitative study of adolescents (15-19) with speech-language disabilities, experiences of exclusion in school related to: feeling pressure to keep-up with other children, feeling sad when the "norm" cannot be achieved, and feeling different, or "moins normal" (less normal) than others (Bergeron et al., 2019, p. 271). Roger's experience is consistent with that of the adolescents in Bergeron's study as he felt that dyslexia explained why

he was “no good” at certain activities (e.g., reading aloud, writing), and why he did not fit into the classroom environment.

While Geoffrey also knew his disability label of autism, he did not use the term autism often, and expressed an understanding of both the challenges he experienced (e.g., regulating sensory input), and the strengths and interests that he brought into the classroom (e.g., reading, playing with peers). This is somewhat surprising given the response to autism in France, where Geoffrey has resided for his entire life (although with American and Canadian parents who bring their own perspectives, which will later be discussed). Orchard (2013) describes how autism is responded to within France:

> Psychoanalysis is still part of the training of psychiatrists in France and their careers are promoted by posts in hospitals that in turn dictate the kinds of treatment and care that they advocate primarily for autism. One major consequence is that an estimated 80% of children with autism have not been in school at all over the last thirty years in France, and 75% of them are cared for in psychiatric hospitals. (p. 63)

Orchard later writes that the “educational situation seems barely credible to outsiders” (p. 65). While there are current initiatives in France to improve knowledge about autism, and in turn societal and educational responses to autism, there remains much work to be done (Ministère, 2018).

Mia, diagnosed with a learning disability and held back a grade by her prior French public-school, was not aware of her disability label. While Mia certainly experienced disabling conditions at her former school as she struggled to keep up with her peers, she did not associate these negative feelings with having a learning disability, a label that carries with it the stigma of being related to the mind (Orchard, 2013). Julia’s parents sought outside testing due to concerns with her learning, but she did not have a specific disability label during her time in the New School classroom. This was Julia’s first year of compulsory schooling, and her parents felt that

the New School might help to provide her with more individual support than what she might be offered in the public-school system. In other words, Julia's differences from the perceived norm (e.g., needing instructions repeated or presented in visual form) made her parents fear that she would experience disabling conditions in the public-school setting. Former French public-school teachers described Raphael as having challenging behavior (e.g., speaking out of turn, not responding to teacher directions). Raphael came to the New School in hopes that a less didactic and more individualized approach to education would provide an environment in which he was not seen as being a problem. Finally, Sara came to the New School with a label of academically gifted. The label suggests that Sara's perceived abilities were above what is considered normal for her age. Sara was aware of this label due to its impact on her prior school experience in the United States (i.e., being pulled out of class to receive more challenging instruction), but never used the term in the classroom. Sara was given the choice by her parents to either attend a French public school, or to attend the English and French-speaking New School. With no prior French exposure, Sara chose the New School, anticipating a feeling of not belonging, and not being able to participate, in a French-only school.

The New School children and caregivers were not the only ones to describe disabling experiences in former school settings. Pauline, the French teacher in the New School classroom, shared that her experience as a teacher in the public-school system was very isolating, and caused her a great deal of mental and emotional suffering. Pauline explained that public school teachers are expected to work within their classrooms, independently from other teachers, and for her, "this was very isolating because no one was interested in collaborating or discussing their teaching experience." With a classroom of thirty young children, Pauline strongly desired collaboration with other teachers, a desire that positioned her as falling outside of the neoliberal-

able norms of autonomy and independence (Goodley, 2014). Pauline's experience in the French public-school system disrupted the way that she hoped to approach teaching, leading her to seek out a position at the New School, where she would have ample opportunities to teach collaboratively. Prior to teaching at the New School, Abby held a teaching position in a wealthy school district in the United States. She taught children who have the potential to temporarily benefit from neoliberal-ableism, and had an interest in disrupting the ableist discourse that allows this privilege to seem natural. Abby's own life was disrupted when she moved to France for her partner's job, but this disruption was a welcome one as she looked forward to life in France. Abby came to the New School eager to broaden her teaching experience.

Taken together, the New School classroom community members experienced (or anticipated the potential for) dis/abling conditions, which grew out of a particular construction of the normal child. An inability to obtain the status of "normal" within the classroom caused many children to feel that they did not belong in prior school environments. The disabling experience of feeling a sense of unbelonging is described by Goodley (2014) in the following way:

> While disabled children might occupy a space such as the school playground, classroom or leisure context, the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging within these spaces is debatable. Disabled people often feel unwelcome in mainstream spaces, struggle with a sense of belonging, with subsequent impact on personal well-being. (p. 11)

I would extend Goodley's description to include children who do not necessarily have a disability label, but who experience disablism as a result of how they are positioned within an ableist environment. Geoffrey's father, David, explained Geoffrey's prior experience at daycare: "It wasn't that he was a problem, but it wasn't that he was identified as being invited. And it's a subtle difference, but it's an important difference." Geoffrey's father continued, describing the family's initial conversations with the New School staff about potentially enrolling Geoffrey: "It

was the first time that he was seen as not a problem." While perhaps more extreme in Geoffrey's case, many of the children of the New School and their caregivers who were seeking a school environment in which they felt invited and welcomed, eventually experienced a sense of belonging.

## Disruptive Experiences of Dis/ability in the New School

This section will describe the disruptive potential of dis/ability which helped to build the sense of belonging desired by members of the New School classroom. I will share stories that illustrate both (1) the power of dis/ability to disrupt in a way that reveals dis/ableism, and (2) the productive potential of dis/ability disruptions.

### *Geoffrey's Story*

I wrote the following reflexive memo in late-October, in response to my observations during an afternoon read-aloud during which Geoffrey received frequent reminders from the teachers. The specific behaviors that were addressed included: talking to himself, getting up and walking around the classroom, and lying down on the rug. At the same time, other children were observed talking to each other, and moving around on the rug (scooting forward to see pictures), and did not receive redirection from the teachers.

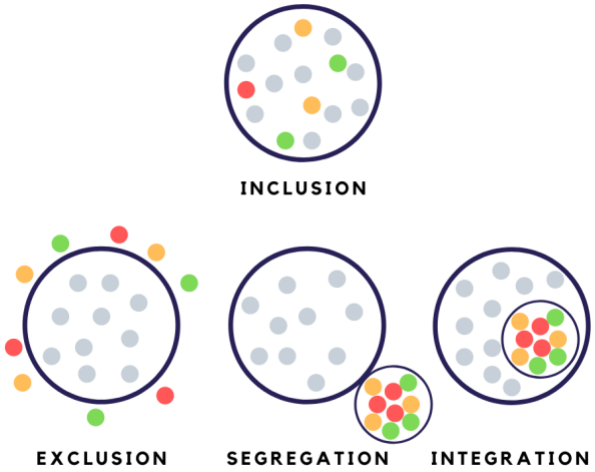
*As I watched the class during circle time, I noticed that Geoffrey is receiving a lot of redirection from the teachers. I also notice that all of the children are, at some time, displaying behavior that could potentially be viewed as "disruptive," but not all of them receive feedback in the quick and direct manner that Geoffrey seems to be receiving it. Are there different expectations? Different perspectives of his behavior? What counts as disruptive? What counts as behavior that must be addressed? (Reflexive Memo, October)*

The questions that I posed in my own reflection were ones that the teachers grappled with over the next few months, as they considered what to do when children, and Geoffrey in particular, disrupted the group. At first, Abby and Pauline discussed how to respond when Geoffrey left the rug and sat in the library corner. Pauline says, "I just feel that he's missing so much." However, after the teachers decided to allow Geoffrey to stay in the library area (which is just a few feet behind the group rug) without calling him back to the group, the idea that Geoffrey is missing-out was challenged:

*Abby and Pauline are reading a story aloud, taking turns reading each paragraph in French and English. The children are seated on the rug, and after the first few minutes, Geoffrey gets up and moves to the library area. He lies down on the small couch with his head face-down. The teachers continue to read the story. Pauline asks the group to predict what they think will happen next in the story, and Geoffrey sits up, offers a response that indicates he is indeed listening to the story from his position, and then lies back down. (Field Notes, November)*

Geoffrey's response from his spot in the library behind the group challenged the idea that by being in a different physical location than the other children, he is missing out on the content. His behavior, initially perceived as being disruptive to his own learning, might actually be exactly what he needs to do in order to participate. When I discussed these events with Abby and Pauline, they reflected on how Geoffrey physically removing himself from the group seemed to be counter to the concept of inclusion. After all, when considering the widely circulated images to depict the difference between inclusion, exclusion, segregation, and integration, the visual of a group of children sitting together with one lying down in a corner more closely aligns with the image of exclusion (see Figure 7). However, Geoffrey's "disruptive" behavior helped the New School teachers to think differently about what a disruption might indicate.

**Figure 7:** *Inclusion, Exclusion, Segregation, Integration*




Geoffrey had an Auxiliaire de Vie Scolaire (AVS), or "school-life assistant" who came to the New School to support him for the morning half of each day.[5] When I first learned of this, I felt uncertain about how this would impact the classroom community's goal of creating a CDS informed approach to inclusion. After all, the literature on one-on-one support for children in the classroom suggests that this method poses a barrier to social inclusion, such as creating dependence on an adult, attaching stigma to the student, preventing peer interactions, and preventing interactions with teachers (e.g., Giangreco & Broer, 2005). However, Geoffrey's experience in the New School, including his interactions with his AVS, "Caroline," challenged the idea that one-on-one support impedes social inclusion in a number of ways. First, Caroline's presence in the classroom did not mean that she was individually responsible for Geoffrey and his learning. In other words, Caroline did not function as a one-on-one teacher. Rather, she was there to support Geoffrey, who sought her out for this support, as needed throughout the daily routines. At times, when Geoffrey was feeling overwhelmed with the sensory input from the

[5] Because the New School had half days on Wednesday and Friday, this meant that Geoffrey was only at school without his AVS on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday afternoons.

classroom, Caroline would support him by being a physical presence outside of the room so that Geoffrey could take a break in the hallway. The following anecdote demonstrates a typical interaction between Geoffrey, his classmates, Caroline, and Pauline during a writing lesson:

*It is February 4th at 10:00 am, and I am sitting in the back of the classroom while Pauline delivers a grammar lesson to a group of nine students. Today's lesson is focused on conjugating regular French verbs in the present tense, and Pauline instructs the children to list out the personal pronouns on their whiteboards. The children start writing, except for Geoffrey, who stares at his whiteboard. Caroline quickly writes the personal pronouns on a piece of paper, and places it next to Geoffrey's whiteboard for him to reference. Geoffrey copies the pronouns onto his board. Pauline is walking around the room, squatting in front of each child to examine their work and make corrections as needed. Pauline asks the children to conjugate the verb "être" (to be), and she continues to check-in with individual children. Jacques writes "il e" and then pauses, and Pauline prompts him to say it out loud. Jacques says, "il est," and finishes writing. Pauline says, "Bravo," and moves on. Geoffrey begins to write, but makes a mistake, says, "Oh no!" and throws his marker to the floor. His classmates, used to Geoffrey's behavior, do not react to this, and continue to write. Pauline brings Geoffrey the marker and reassures him that he can erase the mistake and continue. I notice that Pauline gives Geoffrey attention even though Caroline is present (and closer). In this way, Geoffrey experiences being a student in the classroom, rather than a student who falls under the responsibility of another adult. I also remember from a recent conversation with Geoffrey's mother that fear of making mistakes has been causing him quite a bit of anxiety, and that supporting his understanding of mistakes as normal seems particularly important now. Geoffrey continues to write and leans to his left to Lara, who is working on a different activity (coloring). He says something to Lara that I cannot*

*hear, and Lara responds. Pauline tells the children that it is time to clean up and go outside, and the group begins erasing their whiteboards and putting materials away. As they prepare to go outside, Geoffrey and Juliette are standing at the end of the hallway, where toys are stored. Juliette is pointing to a box of duplos, saying something to Geoffrey, and Geoffrey moves closer to Juliette and whispers in her ear before walking towards the closet and cracking the door open to show her something. Caroline is in the hallway, but does not interfere with this exchange. On the playground, Geoffrey and Julia immediately run to the far side and begin playing hide-and-seek. Caroline stays near the gate with Abby and Pauline. Ten minutes later, Geoffrey and Julia both run up to Caroline, to tell her a story, laughing as they do. (Field Notes, February)*

Caroline supported Geoffrey as needed within the classroom. On some days, this support was very minimal and mainly occurred when Geoffrey asked for a break or, as in the example above, could benefit from a modification (e.g., visual support). Of course, these modifications could also be made by the teachers, but Caroline's specific focus on Geoffrey allowed her to respond much more quickly, making it possible for him to remain an active participant. If Geoffrey was feeling particularly overstimulated, or was having a hard day for other reasons, Caroline's role became slightly more active. Geoffrey's response to feeling overstimulated was often to stand up and begin singing and marching, before laughing and running out of the room. Caroline supported Geoffrey, and the teachers, by stepping out in the hall with him for a break. Finally, Caroline helped to facilitate a classroom conversation about Geoffrey's differences in mid-November, which began with a read aloud conducted by Geoffrey of the book *Oscar et ses Super Pouvoirs!* (Oscar and his Superpowers!) which introduced the strengths and difficulties associated with autism (or Asperger syndrome). The original English version of this book by Melanie Walsh is titled *Isaac and his Amazing Asperger Superpowers!* (see Figure 8).

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly given the stigma associated with autism in France, the French version does not include the term "Asperger" in the title. Geoffrey's mother, Amy, shared with me the decision to have Geoffrey read this book:

> *One of the things that came up was talking to the other kids about why he had different rules, different privileges, and a person with him…And it's crazy to me to think that this is a subject that might not be broached. Like, it's not that the other kids aren't going to notice that there's a grown up with him half the day, and that he does weird things, you know? They'll make up their own explanations. And so regardless of how you approach it, whether or not you broach the subject, there's gonna be some kind of label involved. So, it's gonna be like a good label, or I don't know, maybe a neutral label, or a bad one. But like, the kids are not gonna not notice. (Geoffrey's mother, Interview)*

**Figure 8:** *Oscar vs. Isaac*


While Amy wanted there to be an open conversation about how Geoffrey was different, she did not believe that the term "autism" or "Asperger syndrome" needed to be used in order to do this. The book that Geoffrey read does explain in one sentence on the last page that Oscar's

differences are related to autism, however his parents chose to cover this sentence with a sticky note to prevent the term from becoming a part of the discussion. When I reflect on this decision, I think about how claiming autistic identity, an increasingly common practice within the US-based neurodiversity movement (Loftis, 2019), holds a much different meaning in the context of France. In certain contexts autism (or at least "high-functioning" autism) "gives much" by "sit[ting] with the preferable dis/ability identity of late capitalism: solitary, bright and productive" (Goodley, 2014, p. 168). However, in France, autism is not associated with the "solitary, bright and productive," but "les sans-droits de la République" (those without rights of the Republic) (Orchard, 2013, p. 54). That being said, the decision Geoffrey's parents made to keep the label "autism" out of the conversation was ultimately disrupted by Geoffrey. The following field notes describe Geoffrey's presentation of the book to the class:

*The class comes in from their morning outdoor time. Children take off their shoes, their yellow safety vests, their coats, and sit on their assigned color block on a large square rug. They have been reminded just moments before entering the building that they are to come in quietly, and that they will be hearing a presentation from their classmate, Geoffrey. Geoffrey is told that he can sit in the teacher's chair at the front of the room. He situates himself in the chair, smiling, and his AVS, Caroline, sits next to him. He begins to read a story aloud, Oscar et ses Super Pouvoirs, which describes a boy named Oscar who has a brain that works a bit differently from others. Oscar doesn't like the feeling of sticky mud, and Caroline asks him if there is something he doesn't like, offering the idea that he doesn't like to be wet. He agrees with this statement, and continues to read, using intonation in his voice that reflects the tone of the text. Caroline tells the class that Oscar and Geoffrey are different people, but that Geoffrey has similar differences. The book explains that because Oscar's brain works differently, he might say things that seem to be*

*not nice, or that he might not respond. She adds that sometimes Geoffrey needs to take breaks, which is why he leaves the room at times. Caroline talks about how one of his superpowers is his ability to read so well, and that he was able to learn this skill so early. Geoffrey nods, confirming this statement. One student raises her hand and says, "It's also… Oscar is Geoffrey. They are the same." Caroline responds that yes, they have similarities, but they are different people. Geoffrey continues to read a page that explains that sometimes Oscar doesn't look into people's eyes because it's a bit hard. Once again, a student responds, "They are the same!" And Caroline says, "Yes, and there are also many things that are different about them." Geoffrey proceeds to the last page, removing a sticky note placed to cover the word "autism" at the request of his parents, and reading the sentence in its entirety. When he is finished reading, Emma raises her hand and asks (in French), "Can you speak in English so that Sara can understand?" Pauline says that this question respects our class rule of including everyone very well. Abby gives a summary of the book in English, and the students are given a chance to ask questions. Charles raises his hand and asks, "How can you change your brain?" He is referring to the way the book provided a rationale for how autism manifests, and wondering how it is possible for one's brain to be different. Caroline explains that Geoffrey's brain is different in the way it processes information. Geoffrey smiles at his classmates and closes the book while saying, "Voilà!" (Field Notes, November)*

My own reflection on Geoffrey's read aloud, and his use of the term "autism," is that this opened up the space for the children to have the opportunity to ask questions about difference, a practice that is routinely cited in the CDS literature as being a necessary development in early childhood inclusive education (e.g., Lalvani & Bacon, 2018; Watson, 2019), and set the stage for more in-depth discussions about difference in the New School classroom.

***Roger's Story***

At many points throughout the participatory action research project, "disruptive" behavior hinted at a disabling condition that needed to change. In Geoffrey's case, physical space away from the sensory input he received while sitting with the rest of the class (especially later in the day) allowed him to participate. On the other hand, when Roger physically retreated from the group, which happened often at the beginning of the year, this disruption signaled the need for a modification that would keep him from feeling the desire to distance himself from others. The following excerpt from my field notes took place in October:

*The children and teachers are discussing the idea of creating a set of rules that will be followed by the classroom community. They talk about why such rules might be important ("For safety," "So that everyone knows what to expect"). They also suggest potential rules, one being that hitting others is not allowed. In response to this suggestion, Roger raises his hand and shares: "I don't know about that. My dad told me that if someone else hits you, you hit them back." A peer responds in French that if you hit back, then the hitting will just continue and the cycle will never stop. Other children nod their heads in agreement, and the class conversation continues. Roger scoots back from the circle and turns his back to the group. He puts his head in his hands and wipes tears from his eyes. He says quietly, so that only those close by can hear, "I already have such a bad reputation in this class. I should've just pretended to be sick." (Field Notes, October)*

In this particular instance, Roger disrupted the consensus of the community, bringing up important questions about inclusion for the New School which inspire the exploration of social conflicts (an action project I will discuss in a later chapter). When Roger removed himself from the group, he was clearly upset by the reaction of his peers to the contribution he has made. This

disruption also invited the teachers to begin considering what Roger might need in order to experience a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Quick to preface any attempt to write or read with some version of, "Just so you know, I'm really no good at this" when feeling an expectation to perform, Roger wanted to remove himself from the situation, and often seemed embarrassed, whether or not he successfully completed a task. For example, after successfully completing his assigned job for the week, calendar, Roger stated: "I'm not the best at my job. Just want to let everyone know that- so don't blame me." When asked to elaborate, Roger drew on the label "dyslexia" to justify his statement. Roger made it clear to his classroom community that being asked to write or read in more traditional ways created disabling conditions for him. If Roger was completing a writing activity, he would hide his work anytime a teacher or peer came close, and often chose to sit in a corner. While Roger's behavior seemed to be closely related to his past school experiences, which he mentioned in the classroom, it also caused the teachers to think about what he needed from them. First, Roger's interest in art provided an opportunity for him to feel more confident in the classroom community, and Abby and Pauline often incorporated arts-based activities and opportunities to express learning through art. Second, and similarly, Abby drew on Roger's expertise as a speaker of English to give him more opportunities to feel confident within the class. Roger often helped to translate the morning message, or assisted with Abby's English lessons. Third, Roger was given the choice to use a computer to complete writing activities, which for him was much easier than writing by hand. While as in Geoffrey's story, the singling out of one child to use the computer felt potentially problematic to the teachers at first ("Will other children be jealous?" "Will it make him feel embarrassed?"), the variation that existed within the class (e.g., children working on different projects/lessons simultaneously), as well as

the "cool factor" of getting to use the computer, made this a helpful strategy for Roger. For Roger, incorporating strategies to communicate that he is a valued member of the classroom, and providing accommodations that allowed him to demonstrate his learning in ways that are consistent with his personal strengths and interests, provided the necessary foundation for him to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Beginning in December, Roger seemed to have developed this sense of belonging. While working in a small group for a math activity with two other children, the following interaction took place:

*Henry, Roger, and Sara are sitting on the floor looking at a math worksheet. Henry and Roger take turns translating the instructions on the page from French into English for Sara. When Abby reminds the children that they only have about five minutes left to work, Roger says, "I don't care about fast progress as long as I got friends." I notice that not only is Roger taking on the role of providing support to a peer, something he did not see himself as being competent enough to do earlier in the year, but he also recognizes the friendships that he has within the classroom (Field Notes, December).*

The disruption caused by Roger's dis/ability and more specifically, by his own understanding and experience of dyslexia, inspired changes to the instructional conditions of the classroom. These changes went beyond Roger individually, and incorporated other ideas expressed by the children. For example, as Charles reflected on how tired he is in the afternoon, and how much effort is required for writing, he suggested, "We could do writing right after *regroupement* (group meeting) when we have more energy. Then I'm going to be like the authors in the book I brought. They just keep writing, and writing, and writing." Abby and Pauline were open to changes proposed by the children, and often experimented with the schedule themselves based

on challenges they observed. For example, they initially only had one outdoor recess scheduled, but quickly tested out the addition of a second short break in the morning to allow an additional opportunity for movement. This experiment had a positive impact on the group, and the additional break remained in the schedule throughout the year.

**The Productive Potential of Dis/ability Disruptions**

The storylines of Geoffrey and Roger demonstrate how perceived "disruptions" can be viewed as demands to look closely at dis/ablement in the classroom. In Geoffrey's case, disablement was most often experienced due to the conditions of the physical environment (sensory input: sound, light, touch), and a modification that at first appeared counter to the project of inclusion (physical separation from the group) allowed him to participate. The action taken to support Geoffrey in the classroom challenged the ableist norm of what participation looks like, and eliminated an experience of disablism. In Roger's story, disablement was experienced primarily as a barrier to belonging in the classroom, exacerbated by the norms around reading and writing in the classroom. When provided with the opportunity to utilize his own strengths in the classroom, demonstrate his knowledge through multiple modes (art, typing on the computer), and take leadership roles, Roger no longer expressed feeling excluded. In Roger's case, the ableist ideas that underlie how children should demonstrate their knowledge were challenged. Geoffrey and Roger are only two examples, albeit particularly relevant ones given their disability labels, of how dis/ability functioned to disrupt normative practices in the New School classroom, opening up new possibilities for the community. In the following chapter, I will share the stories that unfolded over the school year which relate directly to the implications of CDS for inclusive early childhood education. As I tell these stories, I will

continue to point out how disruption functioned within the classroom, challenging and inspiring many of the action projects that unfolded within the New School.

# CHAPTER 5: INCLURE TOUT LE MONDE: TOWARDS A CDS APPROACH TO "INCLUSIVE" EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

"Inclusive education can only hope to break the inherent paradox through supporting the radical vision that disability is in fact desirable" (Erevelles, 2011, p. 2179).

## Introduction

As previously described in Chapter 1, the concept of inclusion in the context of education shifted from a focus on supporting the needs of students with disabilities in the general education classroom throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, to an effort towards valuing diversity and difference beginning in the 2010s. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) makes the following statement about inclusive education: "UNESCO promotes inclusive education systems that remove the barriers limiting the participation and achievement of all learners, respect diverse needs, abilities and characteristics and that eliminate all forms of discrimination in the learning environment" (2019). Gundara (2000) points out that Western European countries have unique histories which are relevant to the development of intercultural education, a term that relates to the broader conceptualization of inclusive education, as it considers the "interactions, negotiations and processes" (p. 223) which take place within multicultural settings (e.g., classrooms), with specific attention to "issues of discrimination in education" (pp. 223-224). In the case of the New School's PAR project, France's own specific history as it relates to inclusion (e.g., historical response to disability, involvement in colonialism, immigration history and educational response) played a role in how inclusion was understood, and in what a CDS approach to inclusion entailed. Gundara (2000)

provides one such example, explaining that despite the French ideals of "equality, fraternity and liberty," France resists "intercultural ideas and their implementation in education systems" (p. 229) because of its narrow definition of citizenship. Specifically, as articulated in a 1961 French civics textbook: "civic spirit is in the first place national. Patriotism is the instinctive and passionate attachment to the national territory where men and women speak the same language and share traditions" (Soysal & Szakács, 2010, p. 108). This sense of nationalism was very gradually diluted within the French curriculum. First, in an effort to better align with UNESCO and the Council of Europe's approach to diversity in education, the 1985 French civics curriculum explains, "a good percentage of foreign students in the classroom will help tackle certain historical events or particular aspects of civilization more efficiently" (Soysal & Szakács, 2010, p. 104). Ten years later, the 1995 curriculum framed "respect for the other" and "tolerance" as "values of citizenship" (Soysal & Szakács, 2010, p. 109). In 2008, the objective of civics education was "to form an autonomous citizen, responsible for his/her choices, open to otherness, in order to ensure the conditions of communal life that refuses violence, and in order to resolve the tensions and conflicts that are inevitable in a democracy" (Soysal & Szakács, 2010, p. 111). However, as Soysal and Szakács (2010) explain, the French education system "fails to address the very tension between the transformative capacities of individuality and the establishment of social justice. It is not attentive to the structural disadvantages and discriminatory practices that adversely affect ethnic, religious minorities and immigrant populations" (p. 114). Similarly, the French ministry of education articulates a vision for creating fully inclusive schools for children with disabilities by the year 2022, and the specifics of this plan attend to physical placement in schools, increased support personnel (with better working conditions), and increased teacher training (Ministère, 2020). However, the plan for creating

inclusive schools makes no mention of how the French education system plans to address the social inclusion of students with disabilities (i.e., stigma, attitudinal barriers), or how the exclusion of students with disabilities relates to the history of disability in French society.

In the context of France, the development of inclusive education is tied to the nation's historical response to "the Other." Within the New School, the unique history of inclusive education in France, as well as the individual experiences of community members, contribute to the PAR project of testing out a CDS approach to inclusive education. Community members entered into the classroom with a variety of experiences which informed their prior understanding and current imagining of inclusive education. Additionally, the past experiences of community members, along with their present involvement in the New School community, informed the action projects undertaken in order to develop a CDS informed classroom. Finally, community members reflected on experiences through their own lenses, which are in part influenced by interactions within the New School classroom, resulting in specific interpretations of how inclusion should be reimagined. This chapter will describe how the PAR project of testing out a CDS approach to inclusive education shaped ideas about what inclusion should mean for the early childhood classroom. First, I will explain how community members initially understood and envisioned inclusive education, and how these initial ideas about inclusion influenced the specific action projects initiated by the community. Second, I will present stories from action projects which disrupt initial and traditional definitions of inclusive education. Third, through these stories, I will discuss how the classroom community began to reimagine inclusive education through a CDS framework.

**Defining Inclusion and Developing Initial Action Projects**

At the beginning of the year, caregivers came to the New School classroom with their own ideas about what the term inclusion means. The following caregiver definitions of inclusion come from interviews at the beginning of the school year (October and November). I draw on CDS theory in order to point out similarities and tensions within caregiver definitions of inclusion.

For some, like Geoffrey's caregiver, David, who moved to France from Canada ten years prior, their way of thinking about inclusion had already shifted based on life experiences:

> *Okay, I would say that years ago I would have just taken it literally, like there should be a lot of things, right? Literally, you know - something included in other things. But I suppose over time, especially now I'm experienced as being a dad, and specifically as Geoffrey's dad, the word has taken on a more active context. I guess before it was more passive. Something was inclusive by fact, not by act. I would say now when I think of the word inclusion, I think that something needs to be done, it has to be conscious. There has to be a desire and a will. (David, Geoffrey's father, Interview)*

David also explained Geoffrey's daycare environment as one in which he wasn't "a problem," but he also wasn't "invited." In other words, while Geoffrey's daycare was inclusive by definition (i.e., children with disability labels were allowed to attend), children with disabilities and their families did not necessarily feel welcome, leading to experiences of exclusion. Exclusion from inside the inclusive classroom is an experience constructed as impossible by neoliberal-able discourses, which "claim to have relinquished a more restrictive, carceral mode of social treatment" causing the "widespread practices of institutionalization,

prohibitions, and stigmatizing containment strategies [to be] magically resolved by allowing them to lapse into the distance of a bygone…era" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015, p. 15). The need for inclusive education to incorporate conscious action aligns not only with the PAR project in general, but also with the CDS perspective that ableism plays an embedded, but often invisible, role within so-called inclusive education (Goodley, 2014).

It is important to note that the specific term "inclusion" is a much more recent addition to the language used to describe an approach to education in the context of France than within the United States. While the term inclusion appears frequently in the government's educational initiatives (Ministère, 2020), as well as in laws related to education, it is less widely used by the public. During an interview with Louise's caregiver, Marie, who grew up in France, she told me that when I first described my project, "that was the question I wondered: what does it mean 'inclusion?' This is a vast question, inclusion." Marie brought up a point unique to other perspectives contributed by caregivers, stating that she worried Louise's experience in the New School "would exclude her in some way because not every social class has access to this kind of school." Marie, aware that while the school is committed to reducing financial barriers to enrollment through the creation of additional scholarships, the school currently remains accessible primarily to families able to pay for their child's education. Other caregivers from France, who primarily thought of the term inclusion as the opposite of exclusion, and did not automatically draw a link between inclusion and the education of children with disabilities, often contributed a broader idea of what inclusion would mean in an educational context:

> *Inclusion…when you talk about inclusion, I think about being able to become a citizen later, and be a child who is able to deal with the differences that are…among children and human beings generally speaking; and later become a*

> *citizen and an adult who is able to deal with conflicts in a positive way; and to live in peace with the others, which is something fundamental nowadays because things are worsening in a way and getting better from another point of view. Anyways, I think there will never be a time when we can stop going towards this direction because the time we stop is the time that everything will go worse and worse, so… um, so, inclusion means basically peacekeeping and peace-building for me. (Ana, Juliette's mother, Interview)*

Ana raised another important CDS-related perspective when she said: "there will never be a time when we can stop going towards this direction." As Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) point out in their review of CDS as a field, the work of CDS must continue to "remain flexible and amenable to the vicissitudes of history and critical thought itself… [and] remain receptive to new theoretical perspectives to shed light on the changing structures and meanings that define and restrict emancipation" (p. 64). Ana's definition of inclusion, which includes ongoing movement, captures a piece of Meekosha and Shuttleworth's (2009) call for CDS to continually change in relationship to historical and current experiences of dis/ability. Gabrielle, who grew up in France but has also previously lived with her children in the United States for one year, described the word inclusion saying, "To me, it's not a word I use a lot. But, when I do think about it, I think about the inclusion of students with learning difficulties, which I know there are a few of here. I also think about including students from different ages and languages and social statuses." Similarly, Louise's mother explained that inclusion "is just about accepting differences. Any kind of difference." Many caregivers related the concept of difference directly to "accept[ing] the children at different levels, different rhythms, but val[uing] them as persons at the same time" (Ana, Juliette's mother). Taken together, the experiences of dis/ablement many caregivers

encountered in previous settings (outlined in the previous chapter) led them to develop the idea that inclusive education must be an active, ongoing process which aims to welcome and value all forms of difference.

In October, the New School teachers, Abby and Pauline, shared their own understanding of inclusive education over lunch-break:

*Abby and Pauline both share that the term inclusion, as they have heard it used in the field of education, refers to including children with disabilities in the general education classroom. Pauline explains that inclusion is still not a term that is used widely. She shakes her head, saying, "We are very behind." Pauline continues, explaining that while the French law of 2005[1] resulted in an increased number of children with disabilities in the general education classroom, "teachers received no training." Pauline shares that she has spent a great deal of her own time and money seeking out training in order to learn how to support students with disabilities in her classroom. Pauline adds that in schools, and in French society, physical disabilities are much more welcomed than "mental or psychological disabilities" which "are still seen in a negative light, really stigmatized, and not openly talked about." Abby, who has a background in critical pedagogy, adds that the idea of inclusion is also related to valuing diversity. She references a former student who identified as transgender, and how it was important to make sure that this child felt welcomed in the classroom. Abby gives the example of incorporating children's books that contain diverse representations of gender. She says that the New School classroom is really interesting because "there are different languages, different*

[1] Law no. 2005-102, 11 February 2005 "For equality of rights and opportunity, participation and citizenship for disabled people." The law makes it the responsibility of public education to provide access to children with disabilities and medical conditions. The first priority should be to place children in their neighborhood school, but depending on the specifics of the child's disability, they might receive schooling within "medical pedagogical establishments" (Plaisance, 2008, p. 43).

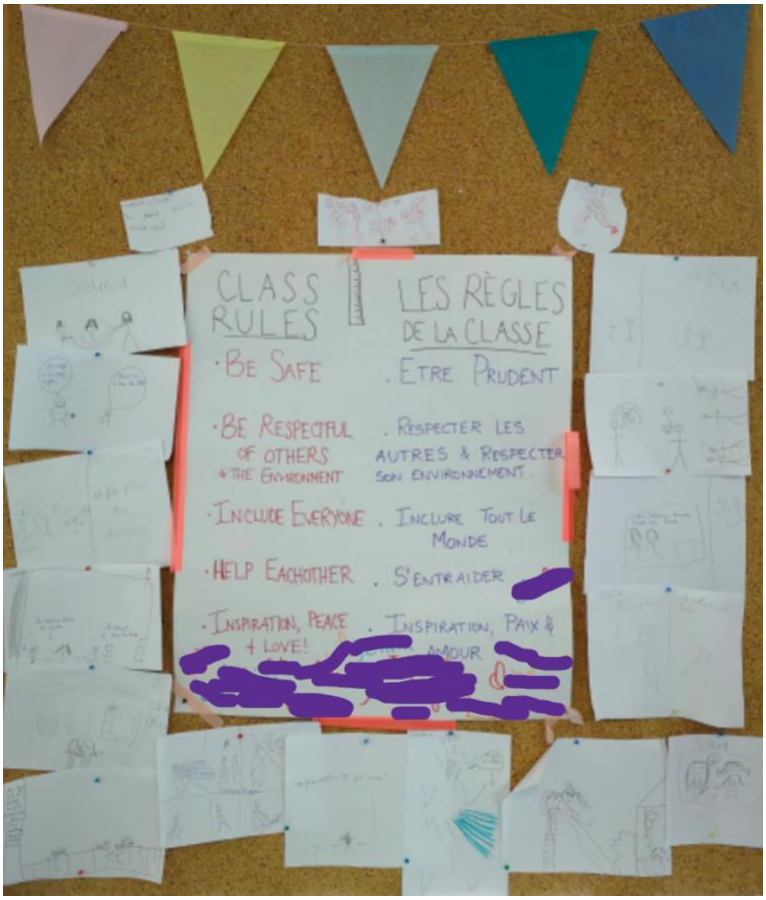
*ages, different levels." Pauline agrees that the differences present in the classroom make things both interesting and challenging. When I ask them about what they think the term inclusion will mean in the context of their classroom, they both agree that they want their classroom to be a place where all of the children feel welcome and comfortable. They talk about how the first steps for this process relate to the actual structure of the classroom environment, routines, and methods they use for instruction, which will all need to be modified as they get to know the children. At the same time, they have been very intentional about incorporating activities to begin building a sense of community in the classroom. Pauline adds that she is really looking forward to having the opportunity to collaborate and discuss issues and possible approaches with a co-teacher, rather than going through the school year alone. (Field Notes, October)*

Similar to the caregivers of the New School, Abby and Pauline began the school year with a vision of inclusion as an ongoing, collaborative project to create a welcoming environment for all children.

The children of the New School classroom began the year engaged in the community-building activities Abby and Pauline had planned. They drew and wrote about their dreams for the school year (see Figure 6), discussed why we come to school (to learn, to make new friends, to play together, to learn to respect each other and not fight), shared ideas about what friendship means (someone you like, someone you can share secrets with, someone you can have adventures with), and created a set of rules for the classroom (see Figure 9). When the children sat down to brainstorm rules for the classroom, the idea of inclusion came up as the children discussed how they wanted to play and get along with their classmates. One rule proposed by the children was: "inclure tout le monde" (include everyone). As they discussed the specifics of what it would mean to include everyone, the children also shared what they might do when they felt

excluded. They suggested that feeling excluded makes people feel sad, and it would be important to discuss the problem using gentle words. The children decided that it would make sense for them to seek the help of a third person, either a classmate or a teacher, if there was a problem they could not solve on their own. These initial conversations about inclusion revealed that the children were thinking about this concept primarily in terms of social relationships. When asked to share their ideas about what the rule, "include everyone" means, they shared the following comments: "If a group of four people is playing, and a group of two people, and then the two people go up to the four people and ask to play and they say yes, then everyone is included"; "If you want to play, and you ask, and they say 'yes'"; "It's unity, because we are united as a class"; "It means no one can be left out." The children shared that exclusion makes them feel sad, angry, left out, and as though no one understands. Their initial thoughts on how to achieve inclusion included: "If someone asks to play, you say yes," and "We decide together what to play."

**Figure 9:** *Class Rules*




After listening to the New School community discuss their own ideas about what it might mean to create an inclusive classroom community, I wrote the following reflexive memo:

*I began my dissertation research with my own ideas about what a CDS approach to inclusive education might mean. In my dissertation proposal, I wrote: "My definition of inclusive education focuses on de-centering the normal, or able-bodied, through ongoing reflection on teaching practices and procedures (e.g., special education eligibility processes, methods of assessing progress, and curriculum content), resulting in 'imaginative approaches to teaching and learning' (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 287)." This definition suggests that inclusion involves action, and that this action is primarily the responsibility of classroom teachers. While I certainly am observing Abby and Pauline engaged in action related to creating an inclusive*

*classroom (adjusting schedules, rearranging the environment, planning based on observations), my definition does not take into account how the children and caregivers are just as involved in this action-taking process. Caregivers have taken the action to seek out a school environment that will welcome and support their children. They have thought about what kind of outcome they expect to observe from their experience at the New School: that their children will be happy, pursue learning in their own way, and feel comfortable in the classroom. As the children shared their own thoughts about what it would mean to include everyone in the classroom, they expressed the importance of feeling included and welcome in social interactions and play. I am curious to see what the different, but ultimately related, ideas about the term "inclusion" will look like as the community begins to work towards these goals. Will the meaning of inclusion change over the course of the year? How will different ideas, and their related actions, interact with one another? (Reflexive Memo, October)*

In order to begin incorporating ideas from the field of CDS as they related to the New School community's vision of an inclusive classroom, I shared the following main points,[2] which resonate with ideas already expressed by community members:

1. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) is an academic field that pushes us to think about what it would look like to truly welcome and value difference and diversity. This means that inclusion can be more than integration, and it can also be more than promoting a narrative of acceptance. Inclusion can offer the space for children to discuss and understand difference.
2. Critical Disability Studies calls for inclusive educational practices that are creative and reflexive. It encourages us to continually ask: How is the idea of "normal" constructed

[2] This information was shared with caregivers and teachers on a handout.

within the classroom? How can pedagogical practices work to highlight and value approaches to learning, communicating, and interacting, that fall outside of this idea of "normal?"

While the New School community did not describe their ideas about a CDS informed approach to inclusion by referencing "Critical Disability Studies" by name, community members utilized language that aligns with CDS theory over the course of the year (e.g., questioning the concept of "normal," discussing what it means to be different and how identity markers relate to the experience of being different). Table 5 provides an overview of the initial ideas about what a CDS approach to inclusion might mean, and the action steps to move towards this goal.

**Table 5:** *A CDS Approach to Inclusion: Initial Ideas and Initial Projects*

| **A CDS Approach to Inclusion: Initial Ideas and Initial Projects** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Caregivers** | **Teachers** | **Children** |
| Inclusion must be active. | Inclusion must be active. | Inclusion means sharing. |
| Inclusion must be ongoing. | Inclusion must be ongoing. | Inclusion means playing together. |
| Inclusion is not just about disability (social class, multilingual, culture, race). | Inclusion is not just about disability (social class, multilingual, culture, race). | Inclusion means helping each other. |
| When children feel included, they feel happy to come to school. | Inclusion requires time, resources, reflection, changes. | Inclusion means that no one will be left-out. |
| ⬇ | ⬇ | ⬇ |
| • Checking-in: How does my child feel in the classroom?<br>• Extending conversations about inclusion at home<br>• Sharing personal interests with the classroom | • Creating a physically inclusive classroom environment<br>• Making academic instruction inclusive<br>• Building classroom community | • Including everyone in play<br>• Including everyone by helping each other<br>• Building classroom community |

The following storylines from action projects within the New School represent the major themes that emerged over the course of the school year as the community explored the question: What happens when an early childhood classroom community engages in the project of testing out a CDS informed approach to inclusion? As I present these stories, I will draw on CDS, childhood studies, and translanguaging literature that aligns with, or helps to further refine, the New School classroom community's critical approach to inclusion. I will also highlight the disruptions that occurred, both as a result of experiences within the classroom and external factors (e.g., the transportation strike), and how these disruptions ultimately created a classroom experience where the concept of "normal" was constantly under critique.

### *Translanguaging*

García and Li Wei (2014) explain that translanguaging is different from languaging practices that combine or mix the use of different languages: "Translanguaging refers to new language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories, and releases histories and understandings that had been buried within fixed language identities constrained by nation-states" (p. 21). As the New School community considered how to create inclusive communication practices (i.e., ways of interacting that allowed all members to participate, valuing all contributions), translanguaging practices emerged as an answer to this dilemma. This section describes how the New School community developed translanguaging practices over the course of the school year. While I refer to the individual languages (e.g., French, English) used by classroom members, I do so in order to illustrate how the community developed "original and complex discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of language, but that make up the speakers' complete language repertoire" (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 22). This section concludes with a

discussion of how translanguaging relates to the development of a CDS approach to inclusive early childhood education, with a specific focus on its contribution to building a sense of belonging amongst community members.

The following anecdote demonstrates a disruption in communication that New School community members frequently encountered at the beginning of the school year:

*The students have just attempted the "Human Knot" activity for the second time. During this activity, a group of students stand in a circle and each student reaches across to join a hand with a peer, repeating this process with the other hand while making sure not to join with the same peer. The students then attempt to untangle the knot without ever letting go of their peers' hands. During their second attempt, the students have made more progress with untangling the knot, but they still were not able to fully untangle their arms. They reflect on why, and on what is working well so far. Teacher Pauline asks these questions in French, and Teacher Abby repeats them in English. The students offer the following advice for the next attempt: stop, be calm, don't be too excited, be patient. Julia asks teacher Abby quietly, "But what if not everyone can interact with each other?" Teacher Abby affirms that this is a really important question, and asks if Julia will share it with the class. Teacher Abby shares this question with the class after Julia agrees. The students start to talk about what they do to communicate when they are not able to understand each other. Teacher Abby reminds them of a specific time: "I noticed that you worked together on a math project without speaking the same language. How did you do that?" Julia says, "Kind of, just, if we wanted to say something like…" Julia begins gesturing with her hands in front of her body. "Gestures?" asks Teacher Abby. "Yeah!" confirms Julia. "Maybe we can communicate with each other without having to say words," suggests Teacher Abby. The students give the Human Knot another attempt. Again, they make progress. They are asked to*

*reflect on how it felt. One student offers, "I think that it was better because we talked to each other more and we didn't really like…so we got like more ways." Another says, "It kind of looked different, but hard." (Field Notes, October)*

As the children adjusted to the multilingual nature of the classroom, some more familiar with this concept than others, they began to run into perceived communication barriers. Initially, linguistic differences resulted in a disruption as children felt limited to interactions with peers who were capable of communicating in the same language. However, throughout the first few months of school, the children began to challenge the idea that communication is limited to the use of only French or only English, realizing that this disruption allowed them to ask instead: "How can everyone interact with one another?"[3] During the Human Knot activity, Abby prompted the children to remember how their use of gestures allows them to communicate with each other. While gesturing with hands was not particularly helpful in the context of the Human Knot, where hands must be joined, the idea of communicating using the body encouraged the children to think about how they might use facial expressions and other movements (e.g., shrugging shoulders, nodding or shaking heads) to share an idea. Gestures, like individual words or phrases in a language, do not necessarily directly translate into different cultural or linguistic contexts.[4] However, in the New School classroom, the children were able to experiment with

[3] The Human Knot activity, planned by Abby and Pauline as a part of their "building a sense of community" action project, ultimately initiated a reflection process which provided direction for the children's project of including everyone in play, and helping each other (by indicating the importance of communication), as well as the teacher's project of developing inclusive instructional practices (which also rely heavily on communication). While I often posed my own questions to encourage the classroom community to reflect on their action projects in a more formal way (e.g., during a whole group circle at the end of the day), I also found that unplanned questions/reflections/disruptions gave the projects direction (while the more intentional reflection served the purpose of clarifying specific actions).

[4] To give an example discussed by the New School classroom as part of a Morning Message in December, the English phrase "it's raining cats and dogs" does not exist in French (where the closest equivalent would be *Il pleut des cordes*, "it's raining ropes").

different linguistic resources in order to "engage with others across languages to build understanding" (DeNicolo, 2019, p. 969). This process of drawing on multiple modes in order to communicate, or translanguaging (García, 2009), helped to disrupt the idea that languages should be understood as separate entities. The importance of translanguaging to the project of testing out a CDS approach to inclusion emerged in two main ways: (1) opening up possibilities for social interactions among the children during unstructured time (e.g., lunch, outdoor time, free choice), and (2) providing new ways for the New School to approach participation and communication during instructional time.

The following October excerpt from my field notes demonstrates how the children of the New School were beginning to test out different ways of interacting with each other during outdoor play:

*To prepare for outdoor time, the children exchange their classroom slippers for tennis shoes, put on coats and hats, and secure yellow vests (gilets jaunes) outside of their coats. Charles makes his way to the front of the line, preparing to fulfill his weekly job of holding doors for the class. Julia, who is responsible for leading the line, is already standing close the door. The class walks out of the building, through the gate, and down the street that leads to a public playground. When it is time to cross the street, Mia looks in either direction and proceeds to the middle of the street, where she and Pauline stand blocking traffic while the rest of the class walks across. The children pass through the gate to the playground, and quickly begin to run in all directions – some heading for the playground equipment, others to run the length of the fence, and a few to the benches where they will eat a snack brought from home. I stand near the playground equipment, and Amelia runs over to my side with her classmate Sara. She points to Sara, as she tells me something in French. I am able to understand that she would like help*

*asking Sara to play a game, but I am not familiar with the game she mentions. I ask her to show us the game, moving my own arms to try to demonstrate the idea of using gestures. Amelia makes a sound of recognition, "Ah!" and covers her eyes with both hands, beginning to count, "un, deux, trois, quatre…" I respond with my own sound of recognition, and ask Sara if she recognizes the game. "Hide-and-seek?" Sara asks, and I confirm that I had the same idea. Sara and Amelia begin to play hide-and-seek together, Sara counting in English and Amelia in French, for the remainder of outdoor time. A few weeks later, I observe Sara and Amelia go through a similar process to decide to play a game described to me in English as "dance battle." On the same day, Geoffrey stands in the middle of the playground and covers his eyes, counting up to eight before beginning to run. He repeats this several times on his own, and then Julia joins the game. Julia does not ask him if she can play, but instead stands in front of him as he covers his eyes, and then shrieks and begins to run as soon as he opens them. Geoffrey picks up Julia's cue that she would like to participate, and he chases her around the playground, laughing as he runs. (Field Notes, October)*

Amelia and Sara use French and English, respectively, in combination with gestures in order to communicate with each other. As the New School community members became practiced in drawing on their own personal linguistic resources in order to express an idea, they also developed a practice of considering the linguistic resources of their communication partner. Henry, an English speaker who became more and more confident in French over the school year, would often talk to his French-speaking peers in French, with the supplementation of hand gestures, asking them to contribute certain vocabulary by pointing to an object or asking in English. Julia and Geoffrey's interaction in the anecdote above illustrates a different approach, as Julia relies on body language to indicate her desire to join his game of hide-and-seek. Non-verbal

exchanges occurred more frequently in the classroom as the children became more practiced in making meaning through physical movement. For example, in January, I observed Sara (an English speaker) and Mia (a French speaker) engaged in a covert conversation from their respective places across the rug during a whole-group lesson using only gestures (see Appendix C for full anecdote). Over the course of the school-year, I noticed that the translanguaging practices utilized by the New School community seemed to occur more naturally. Specifically, children and teachers consistently combined spoken language (often incorporating a combination of English and French) with gestures when communicating. The following excerpt from a class conversation in February about where buildings are located within a city demonstrates how the New School community used translanguaging in the context of a whole group lesson:

*Sara: An airport is usually like at the outside.*

*Charles: It could be like wherever they decided to trash down a building and build a new one. (Repeats this idea in French).*

*Roger: The Eiffel Tower isn't like in the country, it's like in the middle of the city (He puts his hand into the shape of a circle and places a finger in the middle to demonstrate this idea). And then all the houses are around (He moves his finger around the circle of his other hand).*

*Louise: Je pense que le Tour Eiffel... (I think that the Eiffel Tower…She reaches her arms out in front of her body to illustrate that the Eiffel Tower is not too close to houses).*

*Gabriel: (Offers a comment in French that I cannot hear while moving his hand around in a circle on the floor)*

*Mia: Says in French that apartments in the city are right next to each other (She moves her hands from side to side to illustrate this comment).*

*Claire: En fait il y a beaucoup de maisons, beaucoup de magasins (In fact there are many houses, many stores. Claire moves her hands up and across she is explaining that houses are usually near each other whereas stores are usually near each other).*

*Henry: It's like half are stores and half are homes (He holds up two hands opposite each other to illustrate his point). (February, Field Notes)*

Similar to DeNicolo's (2019) observations of translanguaging practices in a first-grade multilingual classroom, the New School community members developed a sense of "collective responsibility" for creating a sense of "school belonging…that ensured inclusion across languages and language proficiency levels" (p. 982). Rather than sharing an idea using only French, or only English, the New School children and teachers drew on additional linguistic resources (gestures, facial expressions, key vocabulary in another language) in order to provide the whole community with access to the conversation. Abby and Pauline modeled translanguaging practices as well, communicating physically and verbally, while also incorporating both French and English (and often asking students to contribute certain words in their home languages). The community's expectations around communication also extended to other adults within the classroom. One example of this occurred during Geoffrey's read-aloud, when Emma asked Geoffrey's AVS, Caroline, if she could also speak in English so that Sara would be able to understand. Another example occurred in December, when Claire's father came to the school to lead music lessons, and alternated between English and French for each verse of the songs he taught.

García and Li Wei (2014) explain that translanguaging contributes three key ideas to how language is approached within the field of education. First, translanguaging opens up the space to develop "fluid practices that go *between* and *beyond* socially constructed language and

educational systems, structures and practices to engage diverse students' multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities" (p. 3). In the case of the New School classroom, translanguaging allowed community members to question the idea that they could only interact with each other by using a single language, and ultimately the idea that languages should be viewed as separate, bound entities. The disruption caused by perceived static differences (i.e., language identities) resulted in an experience of disablement that was eliminated through a reimagining of languaging practices. Second, translanguaging has a "trans-formative nature," meaning that through the generation of new languaging practices, "orders of discourses shift and the voices of Others come to the forefront" (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 3). The trans-formative[5] nature of translanguaging resonates particularly well with developing a CDS approach to inclusive education, as it provides a way to begin answering the question: "How might we rise above the institutional and ontological spaces we presently occupy, to progressively form the knowledge, relationships and institutional arrangements that eschew exclusion and instate the dignity of social belonging" (Slee, 2019, p. 916)? One answer emerged from the New School classroom's use of translanguaging, as non-verbal methods of communication,[6] which are often overlooked, devalued, or subject to normative interventions, became an essential component of the community's reimagined languaging practices (Stafford, 2017). Third, translanguaging serves as a "tool for understanding not only language practices…but also human sociality,

[5] García and Li Wei (2014) use the prefix "trans" referring to "the concept of transculturación coined in the 1940s by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz" (p. 21). Transculturación refers to the creation of a "new reality" which is completely independent from the components which originally came together to inspire this "new phenomenon" (García's translation of Ortiz, 1940, p. 4).

[6] None of the New School children communicated solely through non-verbal methods. However, the community's incorporation of nonverbal communication within their translanguaging practices has important implications for the field of early childhood inclusive education, as "speech is another significant basis from which ableism assumptions are made about children's capacity to have a say about matter that affect their lives. Children with complex communication needs are likely to be left out…because they are viewed as 'non-verbal', that is, they cannot communicate" (Stafford, 2017, p. 602).

human cognition and learning, social relations and social structures" (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 3). The disruptive potential of translanguaging (i.e., its ability to open up the creation of something entirely new) as it relates not only to rethinking communication, but also to rethinking what it means to be a part of a classroom community, culture, etc., aligns with the idea that CDS informed inclusion "expects that we take up the problem of exclusion as a substantive curriculum concern. It is an opportunity to model different social relations and possibilities" (Slee, 2019, p. 913). By challenging the normative practice of positioning of one language (in this case, French) above others, the New School community developed new languaging practices, which disrupted the ableist norm that exists in the context of France, where "the plurilingual pathway is obstructed by a collective vision of languages other than French as a threat to the national language and national identity" (Mary & Young, 2017, p. 15),[7] allowing all community members to make valued contributions to classroom conversations. The translanguaging practices developed by the New School community played an integral role in all of the action projects, as these practices (1) allowed community members to interact and build meaning, and (2) provided an initial shared experience of disruption leading to the challenging of norms and the creation of something new.

***Play***

Perspectives from childhood studies insist that play be "freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated," meaning that we must "value play as an end in itself, rather than for its instrumental value" (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 506). However, through Goodley and Runswick-Cole's (2010) review of the early childhood education literature on play and

[7] At the same time, the multilingual children in the New School have the benefit of speaking at least one language that allows them to escape the discrimination faced by speakers of languages "which are not ranked highly by French society" (e.g., Turkish, Albanian, Serbian, Arabic) (Mary & Young, 2015, p. 5). I will expand on this idea in the concluding chapter.

disability, it becomes clear "that while disabled children do indeed play, their play is not only different from non-disabled children's play but also deficient" (p. 502). The field of early childhood asserts the importance of play for a child's development, and constructs specific types of play (e.g., dramatic play, locomotor play, solitary play, parallel play) as being indicative of a child's "normal" development (Fisher, 2008). The manner in which children play is then observed and used as a tool to identify "normal" and "abnormal" development, becoming a target of intervention (i.e., play therapy). Goodley and Runswick-Cole's (2010) conversations with parents of disabled children who receive play therapy indicate that "Parents and disabled children are robbed of the joys of self-motivated, carefree play as they struggle to meet the externally set criteria of 'productive' play that will ensure the child develops. Play becomes part of the work of normalization" (p. 505). For example, children with the label of autism are positioned as being unable to engage in spontaneous, reciprocal play, and even if "they do play [as] they are taught, then they are only 'pretending' to play" (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 504). While the children of the New School did not experience the type of disablement through play described by Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010), their initial project of including everyone in play resulted in a series of challenges and questions, which led them to reimagine what inclusion means in the context of play. In this section, I will begin by describing the contexts in which the New School children engaged in play, and what the concept of play meant to the children. Then, I will explain how the action project of including everyone in play unfolded.

Specific times designated for play[8] in the New School occurred primarily during outdoor time and free-choice time. The classroom spent time outside in a public park across the street

[8] Here, I use the term "play" to specify the time periods during which children were not engaged in adult-directed activities.

from the school building twice a day (twenty minutes during a morning break, and one hour after lunch). The fenced park contained playground equipment meant for different age ranges, as indicated by labels (see Figure 10), which are found on most public play equipment in France. During the longer outdoor break, the class often brought equipment (e.g., balls, jump ropes) to the park. The children also had the opportunity to play with puzzles, legos, and games during free-choice time, which occurred in between lunch and outdoor time (for children who are finished eating before the allotted sixty-minute lunch period), and two or three times a week for about thirty-minute periods depending on the daily schedule.

**Figure 10:** *Playground Equipment with Age Label (2-6 years)*


While the disabled children in Goodley and Runswick-Cole's (2010) study, with bodies that could be visually recognized as disabled, experienced play as "a public site of professional intervention" (p. 505), the "invisibly" disabled children (e.g., dyslexia, learning disability) of the New School were not positioned as being deficient in their play. While Geoffrey might have served as an exception to this experience due to his label of autism, even with his AVS present on the playground, Geoffrey was not subject to any play-coaching or intervention, and instead

posed a challenge to the belief that children with autism prefer to play alone, saying: "I like to play with at least one, or two, or three, or five, or six," peers. Geoffrey's disruption of the solo-pseudo-play autism stereotype extended to his actions, as he sought out help to join play at the beginning of the year (or, as in the example above, played alone until he was joined by others), and eventually formed relationships with peers that gave him the comfort to freely join or initiate play. The following excerpt from a reflexive memo I wrote in November helps to demonstrate how the New School's approach to play was less attached to developmental norms than what is described in the literature:

*As I stand next to Abby and Pauline during outdoor time, I begin to think about how much more freedom the children have to play as they wish in the New School classroom (and perhaps in the context of France), than what I am used to seeing in the context of an inclusive classroom in the United States. The teachers are not actively engaging with the children, although they are occasionally sought out for conversation, or to help solve a problem. At times, Abby and Pauline might notice that someone is in physical danger (e.g., sometimes the children will pile-up on each other), and they will check in to make sure that everyone is safe. Otherwise, the children play as they wish. In an inclusive classroom in the United States, I would expect to see a teacher carrying a clipboard in order to take notes on progress being made towards Individualized Education Program (IEP)*[9] *goals related to physical activity or social interaction. I would also expect for a teacher in the United States to be offering verbal commentary on the*

[9] In the United States, any student identified as being eligible for special education and/or related services (e.g., speech therapy, occupational therapy) under one of the fourteen disability categories (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, visual impairment, other health impairment), who consents (or has a caregiver consent) to receive services has an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This document contains the student's present levels of performance, areas of need, measurable annual goals, and an outline of the plan for service delivery (e.g., 30 minutes of speech therapy twice a week in a resource classroom). The special education teacher is required to document the child's progress towards each IEP goal. In France, the equivalent is the Projet Personnalisé de Scolarisation (PPS), or the Personalized Schooling Project. This document outlines the plan for providing educational services to a student with a disability, focusing on the specific setting and services that a student will receive.

*children's play, with the goal of supporting their language development, their capacity to take risks on the playground, or their social interactions with peers. (Reflexive Memo, November)*

While the teachers themselves were not preoccupied with what the children's play indicated about their "normal" development, "play and friendship discourses are actively (re)produced among children in the early childhood classroom" (Watson, 2019, p. 261). Geoffrey's comment that he prefers to play with peers was prompted by Sara, who shared, "I just like to be by myself." When I asked if they think it is okay to decide to play alone or with other people, Sara and Geoffrey both agreed that this is an acceptable choice (Geoffrey clarifying that he would still like to play with others), Roger overheard and contributed: "Who wants to play alone? That's just weird." Roger's comment reflects the discourse of early childhood education, which suggests that "children of a particular age should be playing with others" (Watson, 2019, p. 257). Similar to the children in Watson's (2019) ethnography, Roger understood that "solitary play is not normal…and want[ed] to avoid being positioned in that way" (p. 257). Rather than allowing Roger's comment to end the conversation, Sara explained that running around and screaming (what Roger and a group of peers have been doing as part of their game of tag) is what is weird. In this way, Sara disrupts Roger's attempt to position himself "in the normal category" (Watson, 2019, p. 256), and challenged the assumption that any type of play with others automatically counts as "normal." Sara's preference for solitary play also posed a challenge to the action project of including everyone in play: What if not everyone wants to be included? I asked this question to the children during a whole group meeting, and they quickly agreed that being included in play is a choice, an idea that also mirrors early childhood child-centered pedagogy, which "encourage[s] children to show self-initiative and follow their interests" (Watson, 2019, p. 258), while simultaneously communicating that certain choices (e.g.,

playing with peers) are more acceptable than others (playing alone). The children agreed that their project of including everyone in play meant that they must include anyone who would like to join their play. I also ask the children what it means to play, and whether play is something that can be done alone. The children's responses indicated that play requires two main elements: "doing something" (e.g., jumping rope, sliding, playing a game, playing pretend), and "fun." These elements, as well as the play environment created by the New School, align with the childhood studies perspective on play:

> Freely chosen play means that children choose when and what play they undertake, play is not part of a curriculum or a program and does not have steps that need to be complete. When play is personally directed, it is children themselves who agree the roles or rules of the activity, as well as the outcomes, if any. Finally, for play to be intrinsically motivated it must be done for its own sake and not for an external reward or certificate. Play, then, is for fun, not for assessment, intervention, or therapy. (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 506)

In early November, the children began to experience disagreements during their play (e.g., who gets to use the ball and for how long, what are the rules of a pretend-play game), most often during the longer stretch of outdoor time. I attributed this shift to a wearing off of the "newness" of both the outdoor environment and the relationships between the children. In other words, as the children became more familiar with each other and the outdoor environment, they began to seek out different, or at least more nuanced, ways of engaging in play, resulting in conflicts. The children would often return from their after-lunch outdoor break upset, and wanting to discuss a disagreement with Abby and Pauline, who began to incorporate time for the children to reflect and problem-solve any issues.[10] The social conflicts that emerged during play-time, as well as questions that came up during whole group conversations about having different

[10]The time that Abby and Pauline created for the children to discuss conflicts that emerged during play ultimately served as a time for reflection on their project of including everyone in play.

opinions, caused Abby and Pauline to encourage the children to further explore the topic of conflict resolution:

*The morning message reads: "Que faire quand on ressent une emotion disagreeable en classe?" (What do you do when there is a feeling of disagreement in the class?). After reading the question out loud in French and English, the children begin to offer ideas: "You could ask: 'Why did you do this?'" "First talk to the person, and if that doesn't work, get a third person to help," "If two people want something, put away the thing so there is no conflict." Abby reminds the class what happened when two of the children were working on creating their Frog and Toad puppet show: "They couldn't decide who would be who, so they picked a popsicle stick to make the decision." Abby asks, "What is a conflict?" Lena offers, "When two people want the same thing." Pauline shares the word "problem" as a simple definition, saying that it is the same word in English. The class revisits this conversation later in the day, during life studies, and the following conversation unfolds:*

*Raphael: If you fight, it will keep going. The violence will never finish (French).*

*Roger: I disagree (English).*

*Louise: If you tell what you are thinking, then the other can know (French).*

*Charles: (translates Louise's statement into English) Yeah, it's not like you have a mind connector in your head (English)!*

*Julia: Separate the two (English).*

*Liam: Leaving could also solve the problem.*

*Sara: Sometimes I get what I want because I'm the younger one, and my mom asks my sister to give in.*

*Mia: My father told me that I had to share a ball with a younger child (French).*

*Jacques: They could take a book and look at it together (English).*

*Sara: They could take turns reading the book (English).*

*Roger: If you take things away, it could start a fight. It doesn't solve the problem (English).*

*Raphael: Running away doesn't solve the problem (French). (Field Notes, November)*

Conversations about how to approach conflicts, especially within the context of the classroom, continued over the course of the week. Pauline and Abby guided the children in discussing which of their suggested approaches to conflict resolution would have a positive result, which ones would have a negative result, and which might fall somewhere in the middle (see Figure 11). The children debated how they would handle different situations, and began to consider which approaches they were most interested in implementing in their own classroom. Particularly relevant to the children's daily experience, was a scenario in which a child asks a peer to play a certain game, and the peer does not want to. Does this break the rule of "include everyone?" Does it mean that these two children are not friends? The children made a few suggestions: the child could propose a different game, the child could ask what they peer would like to play, or the child could ask someone else to play. They decided that the rule "include everyone" does not mean that each child must always be interested in playing with others, or in the same way as others. If a peer is not interested in playing, this also does not indicate a lack of friendship. The children apply the same concept to having different ideas or opinions, deciding that while they do not have to agree in order to be friends, they do need to listen and respect the ideas of their classmates. While these conversations certainly did not mark the end of disagreements during playtime, they did initiate a community practice of openly discussing and reflecting on situations that caused a child or children to feel excluded, upset, or confused.

**Figure 11:** *How to Solve a Conflict*


In the early childhood classroom, children are often told that "being friends with everyone is compulsory and a rule in the classroom" (Watson, 2019, p. 259). Watson (2019) elaborates on this practice, claiming: "the words are created to promote 'inclusive' practice, but the children's actions as they take up and perform within the sanctioned discourse are not always 'inclusive'" (p. 259). In other words, while children in the early childhood classroom understand that they must declare all of their classmates to be friends, they often play in ways which indicate "belonging to a particular discursive group" (Watson, 2019, p. 259) (i.e., the "included" children). However, in the case of the New School, the dedicated time to openly discussing conflicts or experiences of exclusion during play created an environment in which the children felt comfortable and supported in expressing their individual experiences. The regular discussion of conflicts allowed the community to recognize and challenge exclusive practices/interactions,

and consider how to move forward. The following anecdote from a discussion, which followed outdoor time in early December, demonstrates this approach:

*The children return from the playground, and I immediately hear crying. The volunteer who was outside with the children pulls Pauline to the side to briefly fill her in on the events that occurred on the playground. Once the children have settled in to their spots on the group rug, Pauline asks if they would like to talk about what happened outside. Juliette raises her hand, and begins: "It started out as a game, but then the boys became too violent" (French). Raphael quickly adds: "The girls were also the problem. It was not just the boys" (French). Geoffrey stands up and sings briefly before moving to the back of the room (his classmates, used to this, do not react). Roger sighs and says, "You know what? This is the last thing I need in my day" (English). Juliette is crying and puts her hands over her face. Louise puts an arm around Juliette. Claire shares her experience of the events in French, explaining that they were playing a game where they were pretending to be in a fight, but the girls started to feel that the boys were being serious and not just pretending, and then they did not want to play that way anymore. She says that they all stopped the game, and adds that maybe it just felt too scary. Pauline guides the children in reflecting on what happened, and the children agree that it was right to stop the game as soon as someone did not like it anymore. Juliette adds, "No. They did not stop right away" (English), and Raphael says that they did not realize Juliette was really upset since they were pretending to fight anyway (French). Pauline says that this is an interesting point, and asks how they could know if someone really did not want to play in the context of a pretend fight. Suggestions are made: "You can say, I really mean it!" (Charles, English) "Say stop, and everyone has to listen" (Amelia, French). After the children decide that these types of comments might be used during the pretend fight too, they come to the agreement that pretending to fight*

*might not make sense because it is too hard to know for sure if someone is beginning to feel truly upset, or just continuing to play the game. (Field Notes, December)*

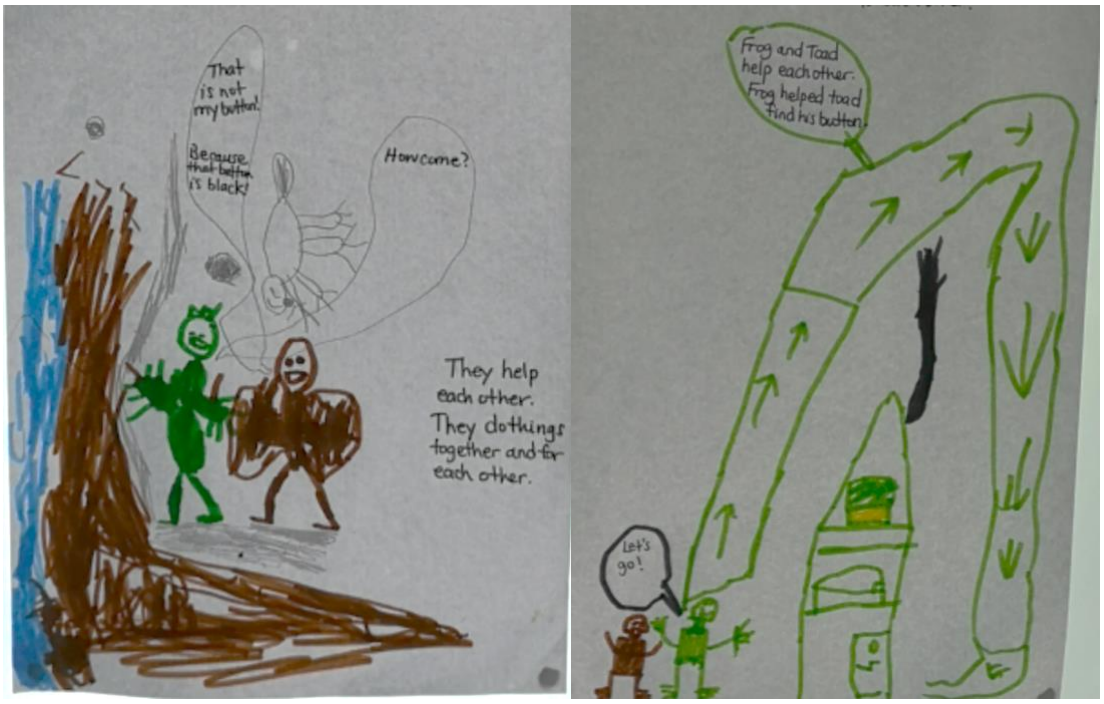
Ultimately, the project of "including everyone" in play allowed the children to discover that experiences of exclusion *do* happen, despite the goal and rule of inclusion. In order to continue moving toward the goal of eliminating these experiences of exclusion, having the time and space to discuss negative experiences and decide what might need to change in the community became the most important component of including everyone in play. In this way, rather than accepting the narrative that everyone is included in play, the New School children felt comfortable discussing circumstances in which this narrative did not feel true. This approach addresses Watson's (2019) criticism that "the often-used phrase 'everyone is welcome'…ignores and/or overlooks the exclusionary effects that hinder the possibilities of inclusive practices" (p. 262).

### *Helping*

In October, when the New School children discussed their vision for the previously agreed upon rule of "include everyone," they expressed that helping each other was a necessary action for creating an inclusive classroom. Shortly after deciding how they would begin to build an inclusive classroom, Abby and Pauline read the children, *Frog and Toad are Friends (Ranelot et Bufolet, une paire d'amis)* by Arnold Lobel. This series of stories about the friendship between a frog and a toad prompted conversations about what it means to help others (see Figure 12). Based on the events of a story in which frog helped toad to find his lost button, the children expressed that helping each other involves solving a problem together (even if the problem is not yours). In many ways, the project of "helping" each other as defined by the classroom unfolded naturally within other action projects: the children and teachers solved the problem of barriers to

communication together as they created new languaging practices in the classroom, and the class worked to discuss solutions to conflicts (even when only some children experienced the events as problematic). Additionally, within the unique context of the New School community, the project of helping each other provided an opportunity to create new possibilities for how "help" is understood in the context of the inclusive classroom.

**Figure 12:** *Helping Others*




The CDS literature in early childhood education suggests that the positioning of certain children as helpers, and others as the recipients of help, serves to reinforce a divide between the already included (normal) child, and those children who must be included. This is particularly the case in inclusive classrooms where evidence-based strategies such as peer-modeling or peer-mediated intervention are used to "help" disabled children learn the necessary skills to play, communicate, or behave "normally." As Watson (2017) explains, "Guidance, or the helping/remediating performances of the unmarked children, are actions that serve as a means of control, keeping order and maintaining category membership" (p. 42). However, the approach

that the New School community took to "helping" allowed all community members to experience giving and receiving help, creating an environment that disrupted fixed roles (e.g., competent vs. incompetent) and their relationship with identity markers (e.g., French speaker, dyslexic, autistic, 8-year-old). Specifically, the experience of being amongst children of different ages and grade levels, from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, working at different paces and in different ways to progress their individual learning, created a classroom where differences became normal. The following three anecdotes from my field notes provide one small example of how the children acted both as helpers, and recipients of help, within the classroom:

Anecdote 1:

*Emma, Sara, and Juliette work together at a table to build sentences out of small pieces of paper, each containing one word in English. Emma constructs the question, "Have you fish?" and Sara tells her that it would make more sense to say: "Do you have fish?" Juliette creates the sentence, "I like you fish," and Abby asks whether she wants to say, "I like fish." Juliette responds, "No, no. I mean 'I like you, fish!'" The three children laugh, and Abby nods her head, understanding Juliette's sentence. (Field Notes, November)*

Anecdote 2:

*Sitting on the floor with a clipboard and worksheet, Juliette says, "I don't know what to do" to Emma, who is sitting nearby. Emma, who has a different worksheet, reads the instructions on Juliette's paper out loud and tells her that she needs to get a book from her cubby, "Get it and just do it! No, you don't read it." Emma reads the instructions aloud once more to Juliette, who then begins working. (Field Notes, December)*

Anecdote 3:

*Juliette is sitting on the small couch in the library in between Jacques and Julia. Juliette holds a book open, and reads it aloud in French to Jacques and Julia. Anytime that she pauses or does not immediately begin to read the next page, Jacques asks her to keep going. (Field Notes, February)*

While Emma receives help in the first anecdote, she provided help to Juliette in the second anecdote. In the third anecdote, Juliette provided help by reading her to classmates. The experience of helping and being helped extended to children with disability labels in the classroom as well. As previously described in detail, Roger was positioned as a helper when he assisted Abby with an English lesson. Geoffrey, skilled at reading out loud, also experienced helping his peers in the classroom. In some cases, children helped each other with non-academic tasks such as locating missing shoes or putting on a coat. In this way, events that may have otherwise been experienced as disabling or exclusionary became opportunities for the classroom community members to create an interdependent community. Goodley (2014) explains that dis/ability has the potential to reconfigure the concept of desire into "a force through which we connect with one another" (p. 165). In other words, as we become practiced in questioning the construct of (hyper)normalcy (e.g., why is being a helper valued over receiving help), and the resulting disabling conditions, it becomes possible to "invent new conceptual schemes that allow us to cherish the interdependence of our humanness" (Goodley, 2014, p. 165).

### *Checking-In: A CDS Approach to Caregiver "Involvement"*

> Governing discourses construct the good parent as one who participates in meetings, as one who volunteers in schools or classes, as the parent who regularly attends teacher-parent conferences, who is flexible in time and space, as well as responsive, supportive, and "involved." The construction of the good parent…uses a gendered, classed, and racialized discourse that defines these "involved" parents as normal and others as "outside normalcy" … It is in this way "inclusion" that is at the same time "exclusion." (Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000, p. 26)

When I first moved to France, I spent a great deal of time walking around different neighborhoods, often as children were beginning or ending the school-day. I was struck by how many young children I observed walking or riding scooters to their school buildings without an accompanying adult. I also noticed that caregivers who did bring their children to or from school did not enter the school building. My observations of this "less involved" approach taken by caregivers continued during my time in the New School classroom, and I was told by Pauline that the "lack" of caregiver involvement was tied to the idea that teachers should be trusted and respected. The specific actions caregivers took to participate in the project of creating a CDS informed inclusive classroom challenged normalized ideas about "parent participation" and "involvement" by taking place primarily outside of the classroom. In this way, the caregivers of the New School community provide an example of "participation" that challenges what is considered normal in the context of the United States. While specific action projects varied from caregiver to caregiver, they shared common goals of (1) ensuring their child's happiness (or inclusion) in the classroom, and (2) listening to their child's experience in the class, and/or participating in the class, in order to understand, extend conversations, or ask questions about how the New School children and teachers were creating a CDS informed inclusive classroom.

The caregivers of the New School, who all sought out a particular school experience (i.e., non-traditional) for their children, were largely responsible for the initial creation of the classroom. Throughout the school year, caregivers took on various roles in the project of creating a CDS informed inclusive classroom. For many of the New School caregivers, their primary action was one of checking-in with their child at home. The idea of making sure that their own child is happy in the classroom was a top priority for the New School caregivers, especially those with negative prior experiences with other schools. Relatedly, caregivers saw it as their role to

communicate when something was going on at home that might cause their child to need extra support or understanding in the classroom environment. In Raphael's case, this meant sharing with the teachers when Raphael was having frequent fights with his siblings, which his caregivers felt might impact his behavior in the classroom. At the beginning of the year, Emma told her mother that she felt uncomfortable with how loud it was in the New School classroom. Emma's mother spoke with the teachers about this, and a solution was reached: a set of noise-blocking headphones was ordered for the entire classroom,[11] and the class had a conversation about keeping the volume level in the room to a comfortable level. In addition, caregivers expressed the importance of listening to how their children talk about their peers: "To me, it's important that Emma does not use labels to describe the other children - that she doesn't say things like 'he never listens.' It's not good for a certain idea like this to get attached to a child – that the child is not a good student. But when I talk to Emma at home, I don't hear any of this. It's all positive." (Emma's mother, February Interview).

Over the course of the school-year, some caregivers shared their own interests with the New School classroom (e.g., yoga, music, movement, finance). Lara's mother, Corrine, taught yoga every Monday afternoon. As Corrine gave verbal directions in French, and physically demonstrated the moves that she was asking the children to imitate, Corrine contributed to the classroom's development of new languaging practices. Claire's father, Leo, came to the New School classroom with his guitar to teach music lessons leading up to the holiday season. Leo spoke to the children using both French and English, and incorporated both languages into the songs he taught the group. He also guided the children in writing their own holiday song,

[11] The noise-blocking headphones were frequently used by the New School children, particularly during independent reading time. They became even more of a well-used resource when construction began on the building in late November, creating an unavoidably loud environment for the next month.

allowing for French and English words to be used throughout. While Leo initially focused on Christmas (*Noël*) themed songs, Abby, who is Jewish and celebrates Hanukkah, recognized that a sole focus on Christmas might make Sara, who is also Jewish and celebrates Hanukkah, feel excluded from the group. Leo was receptive to Abby's feedback, and Sara's father volunteered to join the music lessons with his violin, sharing new songs with the children, and helping the class to record the original song they created together. Jacques' father, who works in the finance industry, came to talk with the children about money when they were exploring this topic in March (a conversation I will describe in the next chapter). Louise's father shared his interest in movement with the children, guiding them through dance-like movements related to different animals.

Caregivers also saw the importance of extending conversations about inclusion and difference (specifically those that began in the month of December) at home. When I began creating a newsletter with the children (see Figure 17) to share some of the actions related to our project of creating a CDS informed inclusive classroom, this document was a tool that caregivers were able to use to talk with their children about the topics being explored in class. In the next two chapters, which present the action project of discussing difference as well as the move to distance learning following the COVID-19 pandemic, I will continue to incorporate the storyline of caregivers and their shifting and unexpectedly disrupted roles in the New School community.

**An Evolving Approach to "Inclusive" Early Childhood Education**

As the New School community began to test out what it might mean to take a CDS approach to creating an "inclusive" classroom, they initially took action to ensure that experiences within the physical classroom environment and daily routines did not cause disablement. During this process, the classroom members also began taking actions to build

community, developing a sense of belonging for all members as traditional approaches to helping, communicating, and playing were challenged. Caregivers provided external support, checking in with their children, extending conversations, and contributing their own expertise to the classroom. Dis/ability, meaning the lived experiences of disability as well as the identification of ableism and disablism, often served as a disruptor to fuel change within the classroom. Ultimately, the New School community's commitment to openly discussing instances of exclusion allowed them to continually react to dis/ability in the classroom. The next chapter will explore the conversations that unfolded as the New School community began to consider how the concepts of "difference" and "normalcy" are constructed within society.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSING DIFFERENCE AND NORMALCY

Graham and Slee (2008) describe an authentic[1] approach to inclusion as one which "invites the denaturalization of 'normalcy' to arrive at a ground-zero point from which we banish idealizations of center" (p. 280). In order to demonstrate the need for an authentic approach to inclusion, which I would argue a CDS framework provides the platform to create, Graham and Slee (2008) draw on Derrida's (1982) différance, a play on the French word différer, meaning both "to differ or to defer" (p. 286). The concept of différance helps illustrate how "labelling works to bring certain characteristics to the fore – making them visible. At the same time, the play of différance defers – effacing and naturalizing – in effect, achieving invisibility for *that-which-is-not named*" (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 286). In other words, the labeling of children (e.g., at-risk, intellectually disabled, English as a Second Language) in the inclusive classroom signifies "difference," while the act of *not* labeling other children (White, able-bodied, middle-class) forces a deferral, which reinforces categories of difference while creating a taken-for-granted and unquestioned concept of "normalcy." Through différance, the meaning of "normalcy" or "difference" is never static, but constantly shifting in time and space. While Watson (2018) does not draw directly on the concept of différance, her ethnographic study of inclusive early childhood classrooms in Australia makes clear the role that differing and deferring play in "the production, reproduction and maintenance of the 'normal'" (p. 143). The

[1] While Graham and Slee (2008) do not define the term "authentic," my reading of their work suggests that inclusive education, as it is presently understood and implemented, is "inauthentic" as it only communicates the welcoming of differences without actually critiquing the policies and practices which have led to the exclusion of Others. In contrast, an authentic approach to inclusion would inspire a critique of the concept of "inclusion" itself (e.g., Who is already included; why? Who is to be included; how?)

children, teachers, and parents in Watson's study interacted with and around children marked with a disability[2] in a manner that constructed the marked child as different, while deferring any discussion of what it means to be "normal." In other words, the silences present in the early childhood inclusive classroom forced the children to defer to how differences were constructed through social and material interactions in order to piece together an understanding of the elusive category of "normalcy," which only served to further cement the seemingly natural binary between the "different" and the "normal." The discourse of the early childhood inclusive classroom ultimately suggests that children should "learn to separate from, and ignore difference, and feel awkward discussing it, as they have no sanctioned way to talk about it" (Watson, 2018, p. 154).

In the previous chapter, I described how the New School classroom created a community environment in which members felt comfortable discussing issues related to experiences of exclusion, namely through the creation of everyday practices that disrupted traditional ways of communicating, learning, and interacting in the classroom (e.g., translanguaging, helping one another). While a sense of belonging set the stage for open conversations about lived experiences within the classroom, the discourse of difference and normalcy drawn on by the New School children (which I will soon describe in greater detail) suggested that intentional conversations about these concepts could help to disrupt their unquestioned role within the inclusive classroom. Similar to Graham and Slee's (2008) call for a "denaturalization of 'normalcy'" (p. 280), Watson (2018) poses the following question to suggest future possibilities for the field of early childhood "inclusive" education: "By problematizing everyday practices and constructions in the classroom, there is a possibility for opening up different understandings and for thinking and

[2] Watson (2018) writes about children as being "marked" or "unmarked" in reference to whether or not they have been assigned a disability label, and how their status as marked or unmarked related to the process of inclusion.

acting ‘otherwise’. Would it be possible to give up all references to things being ‘normal’ or ‘natural’” (p. 154)? After problematizing “normal” practices within the classroom, which created an environment open to change and critique, the New School community began the teacher-initiated project of discussing difference in the classroom. This chapter tells the story of (1) how discussions of difference and normalcy unfolded within the New School classroom, and (2) what the community’s critical conversations suggest about a CDS approach to early childhood inclusive education.

**A CDS Approach to Exploring “Difference” and “Normalcy”**

> As knowledge is socially constructed in discourse, it can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Individual subjects are not fixed but are changing beings. Engaging children in critical thinking and reflection on the normalizing discourses that operate in terms of identities, difference, power relations and inequality can enable racist, sexist, homophobic and classist discourses, among others, to be disrupted and challenged, opening up new and more equitable ways of looking at the world. (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006, p. 42)

As Robinson and Jones Díaz (2006) suggest, discussing the concepts of difference and normalcy with children in the inclusive early childhood classroom creates an opportunity to disrupt normative discourses. The field of disability studies has been critiqued for its single-axis analysis of exclusion and oppression (Bell, 2006),[3] resulting in an approach which “benefits those disabled people who are most privileged in terms of race, class, nation, sexuality, and gender” (Ferri & Connor, 2014, p. 479). CDS aims to address this critique with a specific dedication to understanding “mutual processes of exclusion associated with – and the frictional impact on – multiple identities (around race, ethnicity, gender, sex/sexuality, age, class, nation, and, of course, disability” (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 5). For Ferri and Connor (2014), the

[3] In 2006, Bell coined the term “White Disability Studies” in order to point out that, “as it stands, Disability Studies has a tenuous relationship with race and ethnicity: while the field readily acknowledges its debt to and inspiration by inquiries such as Black Studies, its efforts at addressing intersections between disability, race, and ethnicity are, at best, wanting” (p. 278).

exploration of how multiple identity markers contribute to marginalization within schools "will require us to work across differences and to forge alliances not margin to center, but margin to margin" (p. 480). The margin to margin approach suggested by Ferri and Connor considers how individuals are positioned in relationship to "multiple margins and centers," which are constructed by "fluid and shifting" discourses (p. 481). Annamma et al. (2019) propose integrating disability studies and critical race theory to create an intersectional theoretical framework (DisCrit) which "recognizes the workings of interlocking oppressive forces and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of students' lives" (pp. 232-233). Loutzenheiser and Erevelles (2019), aware that the term "intersectionality…is often oversimplified and evacuated from original historical and political contexts" (p. 381),[4] add the concept of "enmeshment," which draws attention to how "disability is always also simultaneously enmeshed with race, sexuality, gender identity, gender, nationhood, immigration, settler colonialism, and more" (p. 381). Additionally, Kudlick (2005) suggests that understanding how disability is constructed reveals the "implicit assumptions inherent in creating the social hierarchy that invest the list [of social categories] with meaning [in the first place]" (p. 60). The New School classroom's efforts to openly discuss difference and normalcy in order to consider how these constructs might influence their approach to inclusive education provide insight into how CDS might "place disability in the foreground of theoretical and political debates whilst, simultaneously, demonstrating disability's relationship with the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and age" (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 6).

[4] The original historical and political contexts to which Loutzenheiser and Erevelles refer is demonstrated within the work of Crenshaw (1989), which focuses on how "Blackness and womanhood structure how Black women are permitted to move in the world, and who they are already understood to be, particularly in relation to the State and the law" (Loutzenheiser & Erevelles, 2019, p. 380). While intersectionality is not intended to serve as a "grand theory of everything" (Crenshaw, 2017), it is often drawn on, within CDS in particular, to describe how multiple identity markers impact lived experiences.

## The Action Project of Discussing Difference

In December, Abby and Pauline planned to begin a specific unit of study on the topic of difference in order to provide more space for the children to further consider what makes something "different" or "normal."[5] Beginning with the question, "What is difference?" the New School teachers hoped to support the classroom community in challenging the ideas of difference and normalcy in a variety of contexts (e.g., gender, race, class, dis/ability), questioning how these constructs are created, and reflecting on what this new understanding of normalcy and difference means for their approach to inclusion. While the teachers initiated this action project, the involvement of children and caregivers in conversations about difference, as well as external events (e.g., the transportation strike), shaped the project's direction. In the following sections, I will describe how the project unfolded, providing my analysis of the specific events and conversations which became particularly significant in how the community decided to move forward with their approach to inclusive education.

## Normalcy and Difference in the New School Classroom

While the New School community developed a number of practices early in the school year which supported the normalization of differences in learning, communicating, and interacting, there were certainly still events which demonstrated the deeply engrained idea that "difference" is undesirable, and belonging in the category of the "normal" is ideal. The following

[5] The children have already experienced constructions of difference and normalcy related to academic instruction (e.g., grade-levels, modes of demonstrating learning), communication (e.g., translanguaging), and disability (e.g., Geoffrey's presentation on autism). Abby, Pauline, and I have discussed the CDS research which indicates the importance of making space for children to discuss differences (rather than constructing these topics as off-limits) during previous reflections, and they have noted the impact of Geoffrey's read aloud specifically. The teachers make the decision to create a specific unit of study focused on difference during a planning session for which I am not present.

two anecdotes demonstrate how these constructs functioned within the community prior to the action project on discussing difference:

***Anecdote 1***

*Henry is sitting next to Roger on the rug, where they are both engaged in independent reading, when Charles is called to work in a small group with Pauline. Henry leans over, cupping his hand over his mouth, and whispers, "It's because he can't read. He was one of the people in Margot's group, remember?" Roger shrugs and continues reading. (Field Notes, November)*

Henry referenced Margot, the pedagogical director of the New School, who briefly worked with a small group of children who had little exposure to French at the beginning of the school year to provide support to Abby and Pauline as they determined the best way to deliver instruction to the children. The students included in Margot's small group read at a variety of levels, and Henry himself was a part of this group for a short period of time (until Abby and Pauline switched up the groups they were experimenting with to include Henry). Henry's comment, which is inaccurate in that Charles was not being called to work with Pauline's group due to his reading level, functions to position Charles as "different" due to a deficiency, and Henry as "normal." Henry interpreted being a part of Margot's small group as a signal of "difference" which he himself managed to separate from, gaining his spot with the rest of the "normal" children. Roger, aware that his own "difference" marked in the form of the label of dyslexia has caused him to be positioned as deficient in reading, did not encourage or confirm Henry's effort to position Charles as "different." Henry's explicit naming of difference in order to cement his own position as "normal," a technique also observed in the children of Watson's (2018) study alongside Roger's silence, potentially suggestive of deficit beliefs he still holds related to his own disability

label, point to a need for further exploration of difference and normalcy in the New School community.

***Anecdote 2***

*It is lunch time, and the children have, as always, selected their own seats around the room. Geoffrey, Jacques, Roger, and Julia sit at a table together. The children are just beginning to eat, and the table is silent as they open their lunch boxes. Geoffrey breaks the silence, stating, "I know that bulls like the color red." Roger is looking at Geoffrey as he makes this comment. Roger turns to Gabriel and whispers, "No, um actually bulls only… (inaudible)…" As Roger whispers, he continues to look over at Geoffrey, who seems unaware of the side conversation. (Field Notes, November)*

After observing Roger's response to Geoffrey at the lunch table, I make the following note to myself:

*I am surprised that Roger, who is not one to shy away from debate, does not speak directly to Geoffrey. I wonder if Roger assumes that an attempt to engage with Geoffrey in conversation will not work, as Geoffrey might not engage in a back-and-forth conversation. While the class has developed a practice of communicating using multiple languages and non-verbal methods, it seems important that they also have the opportunity to explore what it considered 'normal' in the context of conversation and social interactions" (Reflexive Memo, November).*

Roger and Geoffrey, who both have disability labels, experience disablement in different ways within the classroom. While Roger's prior experiences of social exclusion (i.e., feeling that he was not liked) caused him to distance himself from the classroom community at the beginning of the school year, he shortly realized that the New School environment allowed him to take an

approach to learning that best suited his individual strengths and supported his needs. Geoffrey's articulation of disabling experiences in the classroom related to the physical environment or routines of the classroom, which at times offered an excess of sensory input. Geoffrey did not describe or behave in a way that suggested he experienced social exclusion in the New School classroom, but the social interactions which occurred around him at times suggested that his peers were not always sure what to make of his "difference." In other words, while Geoffrey did not necessarily experience disablement in the form of social exclusion, the behavior of his peers indicates that more in depth conversation about difference may create space for more meaningful interactions within the classroom community.

**An External Disruption: The Pension Reform Strike**

Throughout the New School's exploration of difference, France experienced the longest lasting transportation strike in 50 years (December 5, 2019 until February 20, 2020). As the strike had a significant impact on both the daily experience of the New School community, and the discussions that unfolded as the community explored constructions of "difference" and "normalcy," I will briefly describe the context of the pension reform protests and strikes. Across the nation, protests and strikes occurred in response to President Emmanuel Macron's proposed changes to the country's public pension system, beginning on December 5, 2019. The proposed pension reforms would rid the country of its current multi-system approach,[6] adopting instead a single national "points system," with the aim of treating all workers equally. Macron was elected in 2017 on a "progressive centrist" platform promising reforms that aimed to create "a new model, rather than a retrofit of the old" (Macron, p. 55). Ross (2019) describes Macron's

[6] Currently, the country has more than 40 public pension systems (e.g., systems specific to farmers, train drivers, civil servants, etc.) which vary widely in their approach to rights for pension holders and requirements for contributions.

approach as one that "argues for social equality not in the name of 'equal outcomes' but to ensure 'equal opportunities' to equip everyone, whatever their social position, with tools for lifetime mobility and security" (p. 79). Since the beginning of Macron's term in 2017, he has focused on tax and labor reforms which "favored the wealthy" and "were perceived by France's union confederations as direct attacks on their powers and finances" (Ross, 2019, p. 79). Ultimately, his critics view him as a "president of the rich" whose reforms may "create greater inequality that enhanced the power of the wealthy" (p. 79). From a CDS perspective, Macron's claim that social equality may be assumed based on the provision of "equal opportunities" functions to "regulate and control the unequal distribution of surplus through invoking biological difference as the 'natural' cause of all inequality, thereby successfully justifying the social and economic inequality that maintains social hierarchies" (Erevelles, 1996, p. 526).

The pension reform strike, which served as a major external disruption to the New School classroom, began and continued throughout the community's exploration of difference, making its way into daily conversation, whether through comments on the impact of the strike on school activities (e.g., an excuse for lateness/absence, the reason for changes to schedules and instruction), or discussions about protests observed or seen through media coverage.[7] The nationwide protest, joined by over 30 unions, aimed to force President Emmanuel Macron to abandon proposed changes to the pension system, which would require many to work longer

[7] The New School made the decision to close for the planned transportation strike on December 5, 2019. The closure of metro lines and buses would make it very difficult for the majority of the children to get to school. While Abby lived close to the New School, Pauline was used to commuting forty-minutes using public transportation. Prior to the date of the planned strike, there were rumors that the strike may last longer than most, but the duration of the strike was unexpected and heavily disruptive to the New School community, as well as the entire country of France. Over the course of the transportation strike, certain metro lines began to run on a very limited schedule, resulting in extreme crowds waiting to catch a train (see Figure 13). After closing for the first week of the transportation strike, the New School welcomed children to come on an as-needed basis for the final week before the holiday break (from December 23, 2019 until January 6, 2020). However, the school's ability to safely open for children at times depended on the location of planned demonstrations (see Figure 14).

before retiring while also receiving a lower pension. By protesting throughout the country and shutting down methods of transportation through strikes, the unions hoped to cause a significant shut-down, which would force Macron to reconsider his plans.[8] As it became clear that the strikes would continue indefinitely, the New School community had to adjust to a new normal, which initially included Abby and Pauline teaching on alternate days to limit the amount of time spent commuting, and a shift from focusing on academic instruction to providing a space for families who needed care for their children during the day. Throughout the strike, caregivers primarily used bikes to bring the children to school, with a few opting to walk longer distances. As the strikes occurred during particularly cold and rainy months, it became common to see a row of wet socks hanging to dry above the radiators in the classroom. The children of the New School were well aware of the protests and strikes happening around them, as it was almost impossible not to observe these events or notice their impact on daily life. Henry and Roger launched their own protest during outdoor time one afternoon in January, demanding that they be able to play Minecraft at school (see Figure 15).[9] The ongoing pension strikes, as well as other recent protests (e.g., yellow vests, Brexit marches, climate change protests), were drawn on by the children as reference points during class discussions related to difference and normalcy. In the following sections, I will describe how the project of discussing difference unfolded in the New School classroom, followed by an analysis of what the events of this project suggest about developing a CDS approach to early childhood 'inclusive' education.

[8] At the time I am writing this dissertation, Macron's plans for pension reform have been suspended. As the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has taken center stage, it is unlikely that the pension reforms will be revisited in the near future.

[9] When Abby and Pauline observed the Minecraft protest, they shared with me that they would consider the demands being made by Henry and Roger if they persisted. However, Henry and Roger's protest only lasted one day.

**Figure 13:** *Transportation Strike*


**Figure 14:** *Strike Demonstrations*

**Figure 15:** *Student Protest*

**What is Difference?**

Pauline introduced the project of discussing difference during a whole group meeting the week before December vacation:

*Pauline explains what she would like the children to do in French, and then explains in English: "I want you to tell me all the words that come to mind when you think about the word difference. I will write them on the board. It can be in any language." Pauline writes the word "difference" on the board, and tells the children, "Actually, it's the same word in French and English: Difference." Amelia raises her hand and offers, "ne pas être pareil" (to not be the same). Raphael adds, "ne pas ressembler" (to not look alike). As Pauline writes down Raphael's comment, he adds, "être unique!" (to be unique!). Pauline reads the ideas contributed by Amelia and Raphael in French and in English. Gabriel says that difference means not looking like others. Jacques adds, "To be a girl, and to be friends with a boy. This is different." Emma*

*contributes, "to speak different languages." Mia says, "ne pas avoir la même coiffure" (to not have the same hairstyle). (Field Notes, December)*

When the children returned from vacation, they continued to share their initial ideas about difference through illustrations (Figure 16) and pictures[10] taken around the classroom (Figure 17), which demonstrate that the children were primarily thinking about the concept of difference in the following contexts: gender, language, and physical appearance (e.g., hair, clothes, skin color).

**Figure 16:** *Illustrations of Difference*


[10] The pictures taken by the children were included in a newsletter that I began creating with the New School children during their exploration of difference to document the process, and share the ideas emerging within the classroom with caregivers. While the ongoing "publication" of these newsletters was ultimately interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the three published issues were available in the class library and as PDF documents accessible to parents through a private web-based application used by the school.

**Figure 17:** *Photos of Difference*


As the children talked about difference, they often described similarities as well without being prompted to do so. For example, in Louise's picture of herself and Claire, she dictated the following caption (translated from French): "She is different from me because she wears skirts every day and I wear pants, but we are the same age." Similarly, Charles dictated, "I'm different from Liam because I speak English and French and he doesn't speak English. I'm similar to Liam because we both speak two languages." The desire to identify commonalities in order to justify the presence of difference, or at least make a case for its potential to be normalized, is consistent with the discourse of early childhood inclusive education, which works to construct

the "different" child as ultimately being "just like me," functioning to silence questions about difference while communicating an already understood construct of the normal. This discourse is particularly apparent in early childhood literature focused on disability and diversity. For example, in Kate Gaynor's (2008) *A Friend like Simon*, Matthew (a child without a disability) learns to accept Simon (a child with autism) because, "even though sometimes Simon acted a little different from us or didn't have a lot to say, he was just the same as everyone else in our school." The text suggests that the children should ignore Simon's difference, defined through his behavior and lack of verbal communication, and accept him for the qualities that make him "just the same as everyone else." In other words, focusing on similarities while overlooking differences is taught as the right thing to do in the early childhood inclusive classroom. In a similar manner, many of the New School children described difference in a way that suggests the importance of identifying some quality that can be recognized as being "just like me." For example, in Charles' illustration (Figure 16, bottom left) of five classmates, he explained, "Emma is different because she's a girl and we're all boys. We're the same because we all have hands, arms, legs, faces." The desire to quickly defer to similarities when articulating differences indicates that naming differences might be understood as "bad behavior," whereas recognizing common ground communicates acceptance and inclusion. In this way, the children demonstrated that they are aware of differences and the negative association of falling into the category of "other," as well as the importance of erasing the significance of differences by focusing on similarities.

Initial ideas about difference articulated by the New School children indicate resistance to discussing differences alone, without referencing qualities that indicate an underlying

"sameness." Crenshaw et al. (2019) describe how the discourse of "colorblindness"[11] (i.e., the notion that one "does not see color" and therefore treats everyone the same) suggests that "the solution to vexing problems of difference is to simply stop acknowledging such differences," ultimately functioning as a "mechanism for occluding the seemingly endless differentiations, inequalities, and injustices of existing social relations" (p. 3). The concept of "colorblindness," still drawn on in early childhood inclusive classrooms (Boutte et al., 2011), is extended to suggest that teachers and children do not and should not recognize, but instead "see past," differences in dis/ability, class, gender, culture, etc. As one early childhood teacher cited in Boutte et al.'s (2011) article explained, "I don't care if they're Black, White, or green with polka dots, I treat all children the same" (p. 335). The dominant narrative in the early childhood inclusive classroom attempts to erase historical and contemporary injustices linked to ableist, racist, sexist, and classist normative ideals; ideals which are engrained within education policy and practice, continuing to have a direct impact on the experience of children in the classroom. It is important that these normative ideals, the differences constructed as deficient, and the resulting injustices be named and discussed in the early childhood inclusive classroom. A CDS framework has the potential to "interrogate the normalizing discourses of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity – all of which generate the institutional exclusion of the deviant (read 'disabled') Other" (Erevelles & Minear, 2011, p. 305).

As a next step in supporting the children to explore difference and normalcy in the classroom and society, Abby and Pauline guided conversations and activities focused on why

[11] The metaphor of "colorblindness" is used to promote the value of not noticing (i.e., "seeing") race. Crenshaw et al (2019) describe the problematic nature of "colorblindness" in detail. In addition to suggesting that racism is "an individualistic aversion to another person's pigment rather than a systemic skewing of opportunities, resources, and life chances across racial lines" (p. 4), the metaphor uses faulty ableist logic explained by Obasogie (2014): "Colorblindness has turned blind people against their will into a series of cartoonish representations of racial utopia that fundamentally warps their human experiences" (p. 129).

"difference" might be perceived negatively, and how this negative perception is attached to particular identity markers, also functioning to separate the "different" from the "normal." First, Pauline and Abby extended the initial conversation about difference by introducing the concept of diversity using the book, "The Crayon Box that Talked" by Shane Derolf (1997). In the story, a box of multi-colored crayons does not get along until they realize that their differences allow them to create something unique and beautiful together. One line of the story reads, "And no one here likes orange, but no one knows just why." On its own, the book offers the idea it is important to accept differences (i.e., include everyone) without necessarily questioning why and how differences have been constructed in particular times and spaces. However, Abby and Pauline extended the ahistorical, oversimplified theme of the story: "when we get together, the picture is complete," by encouraging the children to think about how and why "differences" might elicit a reaction of fear, setting the stage for further discussion about how race, dis/ability, gender, and class have been constructed throughout history and contemporarily. The following conversation took place during a morning meeting in mid-January:

*The morning message reads, "Why might we be scared of people who are different from us?" After the children read this message in English and French, Abby and Pauline wait for the children to respond. Roger offers, "Well, it depends on what type of people- xenomorphs, or just a regular guy walking on his phone…" Abby asks Roger to explain what a xenomorph is, and he shares that "it's a type of alien that kills you in every single way possible." Abby offers, "So, maybe you would be scared of people that you think might want to hurt you," and Pauline repeats this idea in French. Abby continues, "Do you have any ideas why?" and Jacques responds, "You might be scared because it's something that you don't know. They might play differently." Amelia adds, "Because you're not used to it." (Field Notes, January)*

The New School children were just beginning to think about how difference and normalcy are constructed both within and outside of the context of the classroom. When Roger explained that he would not be afraid of a "regular guy walking on his phone," he revealed that there is a particular type of "regular guy," signified in this case by his "regular" behavior of walking and using his phone, who is not to be feared. Later in the conversation, Roger added: "another reason why you should be scared of other people is because they got machine guns," suggesting that the group of "others" is potentially dangerous. Additionally, Jacques and Amelia both suggested that differences signal the unknown, indicating that shared or familiar (i.e., "known") characteristics help to shape ideas which separate the "normal" from the "different." Historically and contemporarily, the association of race, class, gender, and sexuality with disability (e.g., "feebleminded," "mad," "mentally retarded," "emotionally disturbed") has "been used to justify the brutality of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and the continued exploitation of people of color in contemporary times" (Erevelles & Minear, 2011, p. 301). As the New School classroom later discovers, while disability as a marker of "difference" can be used as a tool to justify inhumane treatment and persistent inequalities, it can also unveil "implicit assumptions inherent in creating the social hierarchy" (Kudlick, 2005, p. 60), functioning as "the very embodiment of the disruption of normativity" (Erevelles & Minear, 2011, p. 342).

**Fairness, Equality, and Equity**

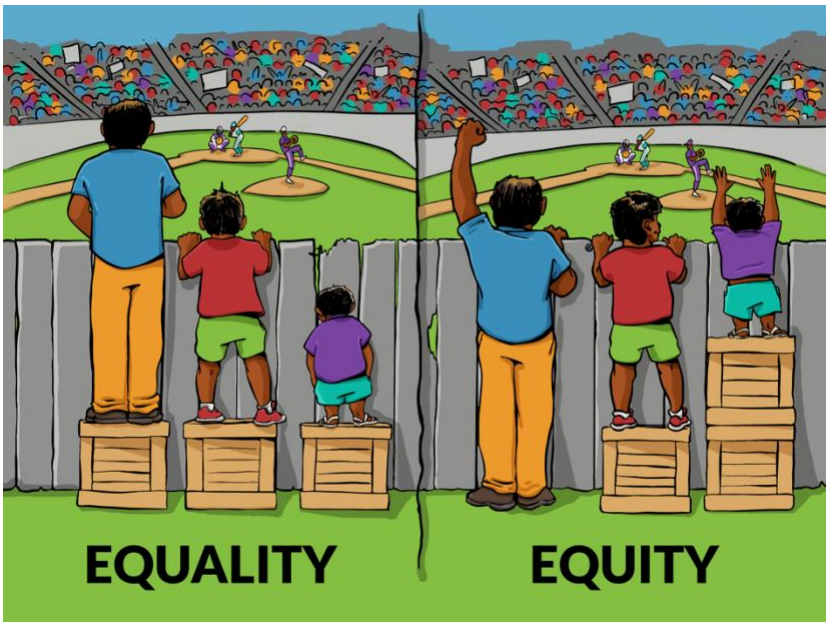
Abby and Pauline engaged the children in conversations about the concepts of fairness, equality, and equity in order to continue to explore the impact constructions of "difference" have on societal practices:

*The morning message reads: In your opinion, what does "fairness" mean? And "equality"? The same message is written in French underneath the English version. Raphael says with a smile on his face: "If I get to play Minecraft for three hours, and then my brother gets to play for two hours, then this is equal" (translated from French). Abby responds that this makes her wonder if equality always means the same thing for every person: "Some people might say that it's not fair to split a piece of cake equally because some people are bigger than others and might need more food." Mia contributes the idea that sometimes men and women do not receive equal treatment, explaining that women were not always allowed to vote, which is not fair. Raphael contributes again, adding that the word fair makes him think of "Power. The power to control the town. The people who are in power get to make decisions, and then people can strike for things that they think aren't fair – that are getting taken away." The morning meeting continues, and the conversation about fairness and equality is picked back up in the afternoon when the students are again asked, "When you think of the word fair, what do you think of?" Henry says, "For example, if someone had three chocolates and someone had one, that would not be fair." Amelia and Julia both give similar examples using candy and balloons instead of chocolates. Charles adds, "Someone has something that someone else doesn't." Amelia explains that Charles is describing "injustice." (Field Notes, January).*

In the classroom conversation about fairness and equality, Raphael and Mia's comments both suggest that inequities within society are linked to an unfair distribution of power and rights based on the idea that a certain type of person (e.g., powerful, wealthy male) inherently possesses a level of ability that others lack, justifying the imbalance of power and resulting inequities. Raphael drew on his understanding of the ongoing strikes to explain that certain people have "power to control the town," which he associates with the opportunity to "make

decisions" which can be challenged by those who experience these decisions as unfair through actions such as strikes. The children continue to go back to the idea that fairness means having the same amount of something (e.g., chocolate, candy, balloons). Abby hinted at the direction she and Pauline planned to take the conversation when she asks the class if equality always means that every person should get the same thing, and they presented the children with two images meant to depict the difference between "equality" and "equity" (see Figure 18).

**Figure 18:** *Equality vs. Equity*




The New School children examined a cartoon which shows three people of different heights standing on wooden crates of equal height in order to see over a fence. While the tallest two are able to see beyond the barrier, the shortest is positioned with his face against the fence. A second cartoon shows the same three people, but this time the tallest is standing on the ground, the next tallest stands on a single crate, and the shortest stands on two crates, allowing all three individuals access to the same view over the fence. As the children examined these two images, the concept of fairness came back into the conversation: Is it fair for everyone to get the same exact thing, or is it fair for everyone to get what they need in order to participate? What causes

unfair treatment? What can people do when things are not equitable or fair? These questions inspired the community to consider how particular constructions of difference and normalcy result in unjust treatment, and what this suggests about creating an inclusive classroom.

**Race: An Off-Limits Conversation**

With questions of fairness and equity in mind, the New School community began to consider how the construction of certain identity markers as "normal" and others as "different" has led to unjust treatment. As this exploration coincided with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day,[12] the classroom community began with a discussion of how race was constructed in order to signify a "difference" from the "normal" used to justify inhumane treatment. Soysal and Szakács (2010) explain that French history is most often presented in a manner which distances the country from its own history of slavery, colonization, decolonization, and immigration referring to these topics as "European" issues and drawing primarily on examples from the United States and Germany. The same can be said in the context of the United States history curriculum, which glazes over "colonial logics and reproduce[s] Indigenous erasure" (Schmitke et al., 2020, p. 2) with narratives of exploration and discovery, and overemphasizes the German Holocaust, avoiding a discussion of slavery and systemic racism. The choice to begin a conversation about race in the New School by discussing events that took place in the United States rather than in France might also be indicative of an attempt to create distance. However, in the New School, where a number of students and one teacher came from the United States, and many from other countries, there

[12] It is important to note that just as "reading Langston Hughes only during February or eating "Tex-Mex" food on Cinco de Mayo…reinforce[s] cultural essentialism and stereotypes" (Baglieri, 2016, p. 175), so would only focusing on Martin Luther King, Jr. when discussing race. Abby and Pauline were intentional about incorporating books and lessons which feature and explore the work of people viewed as "different" based on race, disability, gender, class, etc. (e.g., art study focused on the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, reading *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson). I chose to include the class conversation about Martin Luther King Jr. because of the connections children began to draw between protests and marches they were observing in their own daily life, which ultimately allowed them to explore the constructions of "difference" and "normalcy" within society.

was an opportunity to discuss the construction of race in multiple contexts relevant to the children. Due to the ongoing transportation strikes and pension reform protests, examining protests that arose in response to the construction of difference and normalcy and resulting social injustices aligned with the current life experiences of the children. The following interaction took place as the children arrived in the classroom on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day:

*The morning message reads: "Today is Monday. Do you know about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream? Happy birthday MLK!" I am standing in the hall as the children arrive, greeting them as they hang up their coats. Henry goes into the classroom, reads the message on the board, and comes back out to tell his peers in the hall, "Have you seen the morning message? It's really, really strange!" He continues to repeat this introduction to his peers as they arrive. I know that Henry is from the United Kingdom, and I wonder whether he has ever heard of Martin Luther King Jr. I ask him what he finds so strange about the message today, and he explains: "It's just really weird." When morning meeting begins, Abby reads the message out loud and many of the children raise their hands, seemingly eager to share what they know. Roger begins: "Is MLK for milk? It's good in my cereal." Geoffrey repeats Rogers joke, "I like milk, it's good for my cereal!" Raphael has been talking to a peer throughout the meeting, and has not stopped his conversation despite multiple requests from the teachers. Abby asks Raphael to leave the circle. I am sitting at the table behind the carpet, and Raphael comes over to sit next to me. Abby looks at Pauline and says, "This is really hard today!" Pauline speaks to the class in French, explaining that in the United States, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is celebrated because he did something very important. Raphael's hand quickly goes up, and he whispers to me, "I know what" (in French). Pauline asks if anyone knows something about Martin Luther King Jr., and Raphael says, "Oui!" He explains that Black and White people were not treated equally*

*before, and that Martin Luther King Jr. fought for equal rights. Raphael uses the example of buses, saying that Black people had to sit at the back of the bus, but then a Black woman (he is not sure of Rosa Parks' name) sat at the front of the bus and refused to move. (Field Notes, January)*

Beginning with Henry's persistent message to his classmates that something was "strange" about the morning message, and continuing with Roger's joking response to the message, there was a certain amount of initial reluctance to engage in conversation about race in the New School classroom. In later conversations, it became clear that both Henry and Roger had heard of Martin Luther King, Jr. and understood him to be someone who fought for racial justice in the United States. One possible reading of Henry's attempt to position the upcoming conversation about race as "really, really strange," is that it illustrates how Blackness is constructed explicitly as being "different" from the already accepted "normalcy" of Whiteness. Additionally, Roger's effort to avoid serious engagement with the topic by making a joke, an attempt to silence (or at least avoid) discussion about Blackness, reinforces the idea that this "difference" is not to be spoken of.

Roger's avoidance of discussing race is consistent with how race is understood in the context of France. In 2006, the Representative Council of Black Associations (CRAN) formed, intentionally using the word "black" (Tin, 2008). Tin explains that since the early 1970s, the word "black" was "occulted by both white and black elites" based on two opposing ideas (p. 34). White supremacists did not use the word "black" because they believed "blacks were inferior; therefore there was no reason to speak about them" (p. 34). At the same time, antiracists expressed the idea that because "there is no such thing as race... [there is] no reason to talk about the 'black' question, as it does not exist" (p. 34). Indeed, the importance of "not noticing color"

is communicated through France's hesitancy to collect any racial or ethnic statistics, a practice interpreted to be backed by the first Article of the 1958 Constitution: "the Republic…ensures the equality of all citizens before law, without any distinction of origin, race, or religion." In other words, because equality is assumed based on the law, experiences of discrimination are made impossible, making the collection of data on race and ethnicity unnecessary.[13] Just as the simple claim of equality as a value does not translate into equitable or restorative practices, neither does a school's commitment to inclusion automatically create an environment in which normative discourses are challenged, allowing for the flourishing of differences.

Abby and Pauline continued the class discussion by showing a picture of the March on Washington (See Figure 19), and reading *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the March on Washington* by Frances E. Ruffin. Abby and Pauline paused frequently during the read aloud, allowing the children the opportunity to ask questions and make comments about the pictures and text, and at times posing questions of their own to the class. As the children examined images of the March on Washington, they made connections to protests and marches they have observed (e.g., Brexit marches, climate change marches), and Raphael suggested that it might be similar to the Yellow Vest movement.[14] Raphael's comment about the Yellow Vest movement, which is associated with a violent approach, caused Amelia to ask if the March on Washington was a *manifestation.* Pauline explains that the French term *manifestation* (meaning demonstration) usually uses

[13] Tin (2008) describes the arguments made when CRAN proposed a survey to identify how many black candidates had been associated with different political parties: "We are universalists and do not see a difference between blacks and other candidates, therefore we can't tell you how many black candidates we have" (p. 42).

[14] The Yellow Vest movement, which began in November 2018 (lasting in their original form until May 2019) began in response to increased tax on diesel fuel, which most significantly impacted lower middle-class citizens, and presented an agenda focused on "taxes, social inequalities, and direct democracy" (Chamorel, 2020, p. 53). Protestors wearing yellow vests, an easily accessible item as it is required to be in cars in case of an emergency, occupied traffic circles and marched through streets symbolic of wealth in downtown Paris. While the movement was initially supported by 70 percent of the population, "images of violence and anti-Semitism… ate away at the Yellow Vests' credibility" (Chamorel, 2020, p. 55).

violence, while the March on Washington is considered a peaceful protest. The theme of violence comes up again when the children ask why Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated: "But which people killed him?" "Why?" These questions caused the classroom community to continue conversations about racism, stereotypes, what types of inequities are experienced as a result, and how people might go about challenging inequities and the ideas that justify their existence.

**Figure 19:** *March on Washington*


**What is Dis/ability?**

Noticing the community's ongoing interest in protests, I took the opportunity to talk with the New School children about the 1990 Capitol Crawl, a protest that aimed to demonstrate the social model of disability, demonstrating disabling barriers by abandoning wheelchairs and crawling up the steps to the Capitol building in Washington D.C. (See Figure 20, left). The march preceded the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which protects against

discrimination on the basis of disability and establishes accessibility requirements that must be met by employers. Discussing the Capitol Crawl with the New School children was particularly useful for talking about the social model of disability (i.e., the idea that disabling experiences are often the result of barriers created within the physical and social environment), which the protest made apparent. Additionally, as the youngest participant in the Capitol Crawl, Jennifer Keelan (see Figure 20, right), was the same age as a number of the New School children (8 years-old), the protest helps to demonstrate the role that children themselves can play in advocating for social justice. When asked to reflect on the meaning of the term "disability," which most closely translates to *handicap* in French, the children primarily associated the term with physical impairment (e.g., not being able to use your legs, needing a wheelchair, not having an arm).[15] Two comments offered by Sara and Roger helped to extend the conversation about disability beyond the idea of physical impairment. Sara offered a definition of disability: "It means, like, you don't have the ability to do something." This broader idea about what disability might mean causes me to ask: "Do you think that people with disabilities 'don't have the ability to do something' because of their specific impairment,[16] like a physical disability? Or do you think that they 'don't have the ability to do something' because of barriers like buildings that only have stairs?" I referenced the metro, which is highly inaccessible due to its lack of elevators and

[15] The New School children who are aware of their disability labels (Roger and Geoffrey) do not use the term disabled to describe themselves, and are not aware that they would fall into the category of being "disabled," as they associate the term with the idea of physical disability.

[16] Many CDS scholars (e.g., Tremain, 2005) reject the distinction between disability and impairment, which was a key component of the social model of disability, because the "causal relation between impairment and disability" (p. 11) (i.e., one must have an impairment in order to be considered disabled) simply serves to "legitimize the governmental practices that generated it in the first place" (p. 11). While I agree with Tremain's analysis, I also see drawing on the two terms as distinct as a useful way to introduce the concept of disability as a social construct (with the potential for subsequent conversations to challenge categories of impairment).

narrow entry gates.[17] Roger offered the comment: "Disability. The 'dis' is like the opposite of… it's the opposite of can. And ability is like, say you're walking around, your legs is an ability." I asked the children about what other types of "abilities" they can think of (seeing, hearing, running), and whether they think that people who have disabilities are able to do things that these "abilities" usually require: "If someone has a visual impairment, and is not able to see words in a book the way that we might be able to, does it mean that they are not able to read?" Louise, who had prior experience interacting with children and adults with visual impairments, suggested that people who are blind can read if the book is written in Braille. I suggested that Louise provided another example of how an experience of exclusion, or disablement, can occur because of the way environments and materials are created based on an assumption that people *should* do things a certain way (like reading small print in books, or walking up a flight of stairs). I asked the children if they think that people with disabilities still experience discrimination[18] today, and Raphael responded in French (translated by Abby): "There is still injustice. There is injustice related to work, that there are still places where they can't go and jobs that they aren't allowed to do." I reflected on Raphael's comment, suggesting that some of these injustices seem to be related to assumptions that people make about disability, or negative beliefs that people have about disabled people. I also pointed out that he used the word "injustice," which is used on a banner displaying a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr., held by disability rights activists during the Capitol Crawl. I explained that the work Black activists had already done helped people with disabilities to gain the legal rights they were fighting for, a relationship described in detail by

[17] According to the Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens (RATP), the project of making the metro more accessible has been underway since 1992, and while the majority of commuter train stations (RER) claim to be accessible, only one metro line is considered accessible for passengers in wheelchairs.

[18] The word discrimination was introduced during the New School conversation about racism, and the children understood it to mean unfair treatment based on the negative beliefs about a "difference."

Ferri and Connor (2005). We reflected on how beliefs about what it means to be "different" (i.e., disabled, non-White) have resulted in injustices, and how people viewed as "different" have worked together to fight for change.

**Figure 20:** *Capitol Crawl*


**Social Class in the New School**

As the children discussed "difference" in the classroom, I continued to conduct interviews with caregivers, who at times referenced the current unit of study as they reflected on their experience in the New School community so far. As caregivers offered comments relevant to how "difference" is constructed, specifically as it relates to social class and dis/ability, I will begin this section with an analysis of two ideas expressed by parents, important for the project of creating a CDS informed 'inclusive' classroom. I will then describe the children's conversations about social class, which emerged within conversations about city planning and money.

While most caregivers viewed the New School as providing an environment that included children from different social classes,[19] Louise's mother offered a differing opinion:

> *I was afraid that it would exclude her in some way because not every social class has access to this kind of school. Not so much because of finance, but because of uh, just the idea of putting one's child in that kind of school, not everybody thinks like that. And I know – I believe this is mostly the educated people or parents that think about maybe thinking about another kind of school for their children.*
>
> *(Louise's mother, Interview, February)*

As Louise's mother reflected on the first half of the school year, and the project of inclusion, she expressed her fear that by attending the New School, Louise would not be exposed to every social class, thereby experiencing exclusion. While other caregivers did not share the idea that their children would experience "exclusion" by not being around peers from working-class families, they did suggest that the New School's effort to make the school accessible to low-income families was an important component of "inclusion." This idea suggests the role that class plays in naming those "to be included," and those who are "already included." Additionally, Louise's mother does not explicitly name the "social class" to which she is referring, leaving it up to the listener (myself) to infer meaning through context. She explained that the social class to which she refers is not necessarily unable to access the New School as a result of finances (although this is implied as a possible barrier), but rather due to a lack of education which may not give them the idea to think about an alternative school. Ultimately, Louise articulates an ableist understanding of social class, suggesting that the working-class is unable to think critically about their child's education, perhaps due to a lack of education.

[19] While certainly a goal expressed by the school, the New School only financed tuition for Juliette during the first year of the classroom.

The mother of Juliette, the only child attending the New School on a full scholarship due to the family's income,[20] shared her own preferences related to Juliette's education, and her experience with the New School so far:

> *I was interested in the Montessori method, but it was not possible for our financial situation to enroll her in a Montessori school. It was too expensive otherwise I would have chosen a Montessori school… But things are rather good, um, the only uh, small problem is that there is, has been, um, a little bit of…we have a financial situation that doesn't allow us to pay the fees and I didn't know, I didn't remember, or I actually thought I didn't have to renew the request for a scholarship, and actually I had to. I had four days to react and gather documents and everything, and the feeling I got was – if you don't gather the documents, we're gonna give the scholarship to somebody else. And it felt like, well, Juliette is already enrolled in the school, can't we have a little more time? It can happen to just believe something and be wrong, and that's what happened to us. So, that's the only thing that didn't go the right way. (Juliette's mother, Interview, February)*

First, Juliette's mother disrupted the uneducated-unthinking-working-class association offered by Louise's mother as she explained her intentional approach to selecting a school for Juliette. Second, she described an experience that she has had with the New School administration which affirmed the idea that Juliette's status as low-income positions her as an outsider who can be

[20] Families with an annual income less than 15,000 euros (current approximate equivalent in dollars: 17,950) qualify for a full scholarship. Other families pay based on a sliding scale (e.g., A family with an annual income between 32,000 and 50,000 euros (37,500 and 58,600 dollars) pays 4,700 euros (5,500 dollars) for the school year. The maximum tuition (families with an annual income over 120,000 euros/140,700 dollars) is 11,250 euros (13,200 dollars), which helps to finance scholarships.

included or excluded at the will of the school. Juliette's family needed to periodically prove that they still belong in the low-income category, much like children with disabilities must prove their disability status, in order to receive the support required to access and participate in the inclusive classroom. From a CDS perspective, it is necessary to disrupt the deficit discourses often associated with dis/ability and social class as they function both in the classroom and in school practices and policies.

As the children discussed how "difference" is constructed within society, they were also engaged in a project of making plans for a fictitious city, which they voted to name "Weirdoville." The children decided what to include in the city: houses and apartments, restaurants and shops, parks and playgrounds, a bank, a hospital, an airport, a hotel, a prison, a cemetery, monuments, and a city-hall. Abby and Pauline led the class in a discussion about where different elements should be placed within the city (e.g., close to the center, at the outskirts).

Within the city-planning conversation, ideas about class began to emerge. First, the idea of "rich people" came up as the children talked about the positioning of houses and apartments near the center of the city. Specifically, the children described how location and type of housing relates to money: it is expensive to live in an apartment in the city-center (where "rich people" live), even more expensive to live in a hotel ("then you have to keep paying!" "who can afford that?"), and it could also be expensive to live in a big house outside of the city ("because there's no room for big houses in the city"). The children positioned themselves outside of the category of "rich people" throughout the discussion, as they do not live in the conditions they believe to be the most expensive. Roger commented: "Money is the most important thing in the world," adding that with enough money, "you can do anything you want…you can buy every video game

there is!" Roger's understanding of money as an important and powerful tool, and his specific mentioning of video games bolsters arguments made by Cannella and Kincheloe (2002) and Kasturi (2002), which suggest that children make up an ever-more profitable portion of the consumer market (especially in the context of the gaming and entertainment industry) as a result of globalization. Robinson and Jones Díaz (2006) suggest that in order to reframe class identity, early childhood educators need to "engage in critical discussions … with children to assist them in developing a critical stance towards consumerism and competition" (p. 61), while giving children opportunities to reflect on how difference is portrayed in popular media marketed to children.

While not a reflection on how class is portrayed through popular media specifically, the second idea about social class that emerged during the New School's conversation about city planning provided an opportunity for the children to reflect on their ideas about social class. As the children discuss where to position different elements of the city (see Figure 21), the following discussion about the placement of the prison unfolds:

*Abby: Are prisons usually inside the center of the city?*

*Multiple children: No!*

*Abby: Why not?*

*Mia: They are usually outside of the city because there is more space (in French, Abby's translation).*

*Julia: And so it's safe.*

*Gabriel: If they escape, what happens? (in French, Abby's translation)*

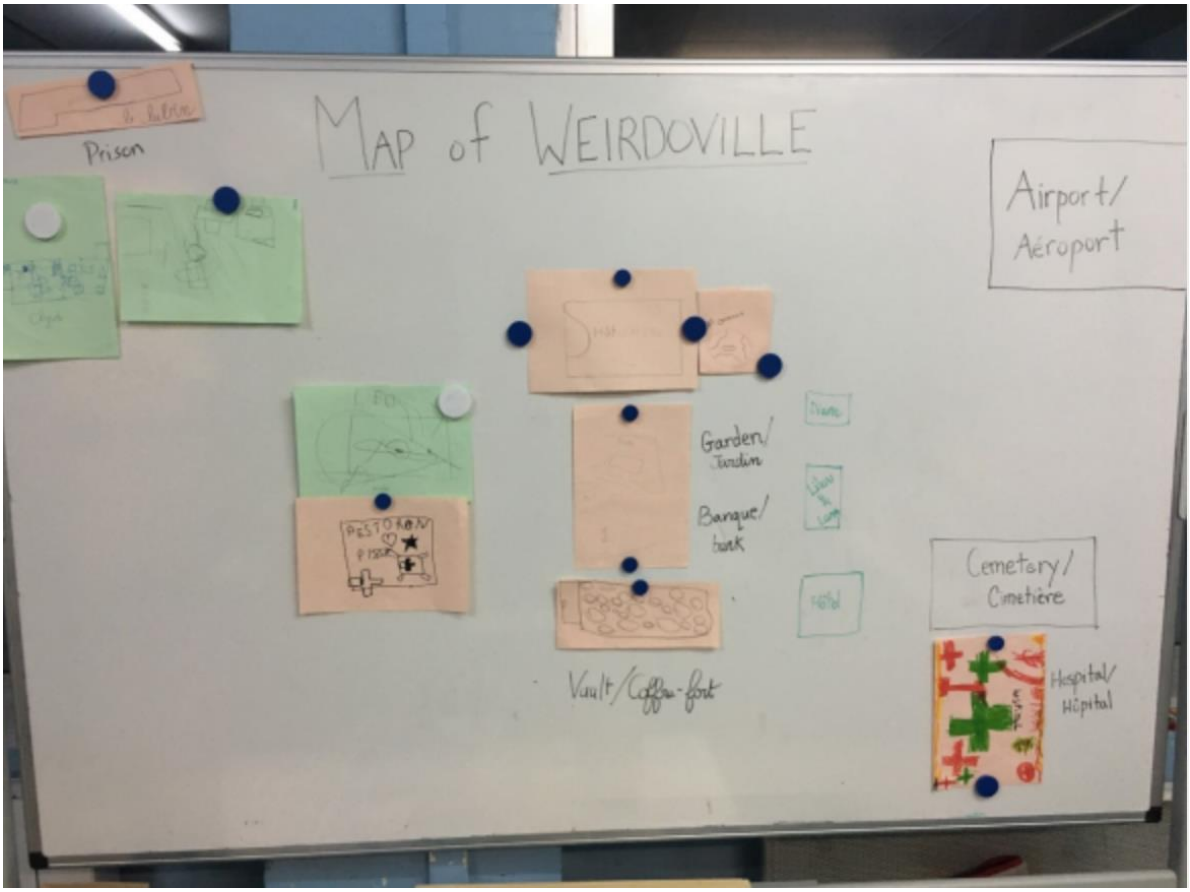
*Julia: They would want to go to the bank to get money.*

*Jacques: Yeah, the bank and the vault should be far away from the prison.*

*(Field Notes, February)*

This conversation, and later questions asked to gain clarity on their reason for believing escaped prisoners would seek out the bank, reveal that the children associate dangerous or criminal activity with a lack of money. The idea that "difference" can be dangerous, brought up early on in the classroom's conversations when Roger suggested that people who are "different" might have machine guns, is now linked to the category of the working class (understood by the children as not having money). Additionally, conversations about how money is earned reveal that the children associate "hard-work" with having money, and laziness with not having money. Abby and Pauline helped the New School children to think back to how ideas attached to "difference" resulted in injustices, reminding them of conversations about race and disability, and prompted them to challenge the idea that poor people are lazy. Raphael's idea that people with disabilities still face discrimination and cannot always get jobs, along with their understanding that the transportation strikes are related to fighting unjust payment, helped them to challenge this belief.

**Figure 21:** *Planning and Construction of Weirdoville*




**Questioning the "Normal" and the Ongoing work of Inclusion**

The New School's exploration of "difference" and "normalcy" affirms the work of previous scholars whose research shows that young children do indeed notice and begin to form opinions about "difference" (e.g., Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006; Boutte et al., 2011). Additionally, the New School children demonstrated that young children can engage in critical conversations about dis/ability, race, gender, class, etc., an idea many adults and early childhood educators are reluctant to accept (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). While dis/ability, race, gender, class, age, and other identity markers are drawn on to name "difference" in ways that impact lived experiences in the classroom and society, the "normal" goes unquestioned as the ideal, perpetuating ableist, racist, classist, and sexist educational practices and policies. Explicit conversations about who is considered "different" and in need of inclusion, and who is considered to represent the *already* included, are important for challenging and reimagining how "inclusion" is understood and implemented. Within the New School community, the project of exploring "difference" and "normalcy" began to further shape the classroom's approach to "inclusion" in two main ways.

First, the New School children became more practiced at questioning norms. The following exchange occurred in early February:

*Henry, Sara, and Emma are sitting together on the carpet during a writing workshop. They are each bending over their clipboards as they begin to create their individual stories. Emma reads aloud what she has written so far, and Henry contributes a line to the story, which she incorporates. After a few minutes, Emma continues to share: "Sara is a girl in my class. She is small." Henry immediately responds, "Well, that's hard to say. Small? What does it mean?"*

*Sara adds, "It's okay – I don't mind being short. I can do gymnastics better." (Field Notes, February)*

As I observed this interaction, I first noticed that Henry seemed to be drawing on some of the methods that the New School community often used in class conversations about "difference," by wondering what meaning Emma was attaching to the label "small." I also noted that Henry seemed to understand that Sara might not necessarily appreciate being marked as "different" because of her size. Finally, I remembered Henry's previous use of labels to mark his classmates as "different" and himself as "normal," reflecting on how this comment indicates a more critical approach to separating the "different" from the "normal." While Henry's comment is just a single example, it illustrates a shift in how the New School community members discussed and thought about the language that they used in the classroom to describe difference. Specifically, they understood that "difference" is, and has been, used as a tool to rationalize unjust behavior, ideas, and practices. Additionally, they began to challenge ideas associated with "differences," wondering where they came from, whether they are worth reconsidering, and what they mean to the individual viewed as possessing this "difference."

Second, the classroom community began to consider what it would mean for there to be no such thing as "normal":

*In late February, the day after discussing the concept of stereotypes in the context of gender, the children gather for morning meeting. They reflect on an activity in which they identified ways of behaving, dressing, acting, etc., that fit inside the "box" of gender norms (i.e., stereotypes), as well as characteristics that would fall outside of the "box." The morning message poses the question, "What's one way you're different from the stereotypes?" Roger is the first to volunteer a response, which is more of a reflection on the activity: "I wanted to say*

*something. I don't think anyone fits into the box. I am Roger. Just, my whole character doesn't fit in. There's only one Roger here."*

Roger articulates a key idea that CDS offers to the early childhood inclusive classroom: no one fits inside the "box(es) of normalcy" related to dis/ability, race, gender, class, age, etc. What does this mean for taking a CDS approach to early childhood inclusion? First, it is important that children are involved in conversations about how "difference" and "normalcy" have been, and continue to be, constructed. This helps to challenge the narrative that differences should be "tolerated" within the early childhood inclusive classroom: "The concept of tolerance is constraining, as it is always about a precarious hierarchical power relationship that has its limits on how long one can 'tolerate' the existence of someone else" (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006, p. 169). Second, "inclusion" must come to mean the ongoing project of challenging what it means to be "normal," and understanding the historical and contemporary impact of this construction, while fostering a multitude of different ways of being, thinking, communicating, interacting, and learning. Challenging the idea of "normalcy" as a construct which some are temporarily able to benefit from more than others within specific times and spaces reveals that, "the hope of inclusivity has, at its root, a neoliberal desire for similarity that mimics the normal; a normal that clamors for colorblindness and the ability to not see difference" (Loutzenheiser & Erevelles, 2019, p. 382).

Before the New School community had the opportunity to reflect on what their conversations about "difference" and "normalcy" suggest about their approach to a CDS informed approach to inclusion, their sense of "normalcy" as a classroom community was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the next chapter, I will describe how the New School classroom navigated the unanticipated and sudden switch to online learning, and the impact of

this experience on how the concept of “normalcy” might be reframed in a way that challenges its ableist foundations.

# CHAPTER 7: COVID-19 AND DEVELOPING A CRITICAL SENSE OF "NORMALCY"

## COVID-19 and Critical Disability Studies

> The problem-body not only suggests the singular person, located in his or her personal troubles (e.g., not perfect, reading troubles, wheelchair use), but also a problem with a singular meaning, a meaning that in every case hints always of a negation, a negation that easily slides into the extreme – death. Directed at individuals with individualized body problems, the solution, any solution, including death, appears justifiable. (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 123)

In their article, *No Body is Expendable: Medical Rationing and Disability Justice During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Andrews et al. (2020) analyze approaches to the rationing of medical equipment within the United States through the lens of ableism. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, medical rationing measures described in bioethics literature "operate under the assumption that disability is inherently negative and significantly and unambiguously reduces a person's quality of life" (Andrews, et al., 2020, p. 7).[1] The pandemic has brought to the forefront the idea that disability is understood as "first, foremost, and seemingly forever 'not'" (p. 125), making death seem to be reasonable solution. From this perspective, when disability is only understood as being a lack of something (ability, vitality, normalcy), it is a problem that can only be solved by addressing that which is "not," an idea that normalizes deficit-driven approaches, even those which ultimately result in death. Andrews et al. (2020) explain, "whether explicit or implicit, the message that some lives are more worthy than others can be transformed into policy

[1] Related to the concept of quality of life, Andrews et al. (2020) explain the "disability paradox" as "a discrepancy between self-reports of quality of life by individuals with disabilities and estimates from healthcare providers" (p. 2). In other words, individuals with disabilities rate their own quality of life as being higher than the quality of life ratings estimated by their healthcare providers.

and practice where disability is concerned" (p. 2). For example, in cases of scarcity, medical triage guidelines in Tennessee "detailed people with spinal muscular atrophy and others who required assistance with activities of daily living among those ineligible for critical care" (Andrews et al., 2020, p. 3). From guidelines for the rationing of medical equipment, to decisions about in-person versus virtual schooling and employment, to mask-wearing and social distancing mandates (or lack there-of), the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted "normal" life in a way that has exposed beliefs about which lives are more worthy of living.

Sonya Renee Taylor, founder of The Body is Not an Apology Movement,[2] challenged the idea of returning to "normal" life after the pandemic in an interview, arguing:

> We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature. (Brown, 2020)

When the New School experienced the disruption to "normal" life caused by COVID-19, the community was already in the process of challenging ideas and ways of being that have been normalized within the early childhood classroom and society. The classroom's abrupt shift to distance education during the global pandemic made very real the community's previously expressed idea that the "normal" does not exist. Ultimately, the massive disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the New School community to consider what aspects of "normal" classroom life were important to sustain. The classroom's development of a critical sense of "normalcy" helps to answer Goodley et al.'s (2019) questions for the field of CDS: "what do you want to keep of ability; how might we frame ability in non-ableist ways" (p. 17)? In this chapter,

[2] The Body is Not an Apology is described on Taylor's website as an "education and community building platform to connect global issues of radical self-love and intersectional social justice." She was invited to speak at the Obama White House "on the intersection of LGBTQIAA and Disability issues" (Taylor, 2020).

I will begin by describing the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of France and the New School community. Then, I will explain how the pandemic impacted the New School's approach to teaching and learning, leading to the development of a critical sense of "normacly." I use the phrase critical sense of "normalcy" in order to describe the process through which the New School community engaged in critical reflection about what is considered "normal," and the development of an ongoing process for determining the desired elements of "normalcy" in the ever-changing context of the classroom. I will end by discussing the implications from the New School community for how the field of CDS might reframe the idea of ability.

**COVID-19 in France**

On the evening of March 12, 2020, the French president Emmanuel Macron made the announcement that all schools would be closed beginning on March 16, 2020 in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19. At the time, France had more than 2,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and ranked second for the highest number of cases in Europe. Italy, with over 15,000 confirmed cases and over 1,000 deaths, served as a reference point for what the country of France feared and hoped to avoid (WHO, 2020). On March 16, 2020, Macron announced a fifteen-day lockdown period, which was later extended to last eight weeks in its most extreme form.[3] Lockdown measures were gradually lifted, beginning with the reopening of schools for a limited number of children (no more than 15 in a room) on May 11, 2020. While the strict lockdown measures initially imposed throughout France suggested an approach in-line with Disability Justice Culture Club cofounder Stacey Milbern's call for "collective action and collective commitment" (Green, 2020, para. 9), as I write this chapter, France faces their highest

[3] During lockdown, people were only allowed to leave the home for essential items, essential work positions, medical appointments unable to be carried out online, and physical exercise (for a maximum of one hour, within one kilometer of home). For each outing, individuals were required to carry a form explaining the purpose and time period of their outing, and masks were worn indoors.

daily count of confirmed cases yet as a result of the lifting of lockdown and subsequent inconsistent implementation of social distancing and mask-wearing. Despite higher daily case numbers than those which initially prompted the lockdown in France, the country hesitates to respond with the same level of collective commitment, concerned with the economic implications of another nation-wide lockdown (AFP, 2020).

**COVID-19 and the New School Community**

When Macron announced the closure of schools on March 12, 2020, the New School reacted quickly, sending a message out to parents to ask them to send their children with a bag large enough to carry both their personal materials, and materials they would be given in preparation for distance learning. At the time, there was no specific plan for how distance learning would occur. One week later, on March 19, 2020, the teachers sent out an online poll in order to gauge interest in organizing class over Google Hangouts. Caregivers voted, indicating that they would be interested in having an online class two or three times per week. After some initial difficulty with Google Hangouts, which allowed only a limited number of participants, the classroom switched to Zoom. Due to differing time preferences and the difficulty of hosting a short, whole-group session that allowed all children to participate, Abby and Pauline adjusted to small group Zoom meetings. A small group of children (varying between 3 and 6) participated in a Zoom meeting led by one teacher for 30 minutes a few times a week, depending on interest and availability. On Fridays, Abby and Pauline hosted 45-minute Zoom meetings for the entire class, allowing the children to use this time to talk to each other, ask questions about what daily life was like for their peers, or share projects they were working on for school. After the first few weeks of online instruction, Abby and Pauline also began to offer individual Zoom meetings for children who would like extra time to work one-on-one with a teacher. Suggested activities and

materials for families to work with their children outside of Zoom meetings were posted within Google Docs. When the New School learned that schools would reopen beginning on May 11, 2020, the teachers sent out another poll to caregivers in order to understand how many families were interested in returning to in-person learning. Initially, a group of eight children returned to school, with the remaining children continuing to participate in Zoom meetings. During this time, Abby took over primary responsibility for hosting Zoom meetings for children who continued to stay home, while Pauline focused mainly on in-class instruction with the group of children who came back to school.

**Reacting to an Unanticipated Disruption**

Throughout the beginning of the school year, the New School community worked to challenge taken-for-granted ideas about inclusion, developing practices that valued different ways of teaching, learning, and communicating within the classroom. Community members then began exploring the meaning attached to "difference" and "normalcy," discovering the importance of continuously challenging how the "normal" is constructed within the classroom and society. The unexpected disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a number of drastic shifts within the New School community, shifts that ultimately caused the classroom to revisit previous action projects (e.g., individualizing instruction, building a sense of community) in order to accomplish the goal of creating a CDS informed inclusive classroom. First, the community dealt with the logistics and instructional implications of moving from in-person to distance-only learning. Next, the classroom faced the challenge of continuing to value different ways of learning and communicating through a digital platform. Finally, as community dynamics shifted, it became important to reconsider what it means to experience a sense of belonging in the context of an online (and later an online and in-person) community. The following sections

will describe the shifts that took place in the New School community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what the classroom's evolving practices suggest about developing a CDS approach to inclusive early childhood education.

**My Role as Co-Researcher During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

As I observed and participated in the New School's conversations about difference and normalcy, I looked forward to seeing how the community would move forward with the PAR project of creating a CDS informed approach to early childhood inclusion. I imagined having further conversations about how the constructs of "normalcy" and "difference" operate within the New School community, and how these discussions might inspire further action projects, resulting in a more nuanced approach to "inclusion." The second week of March, I made my weekly trip, leaving the New School community in France to return home to Switzerland, with no idea that it would be the last time I would make the trip. As the New School classroom community transitioned to online learning, and then to a combination of socially distanced in-person learning and online learning, my role in the classroom community shifted in response to the community's needs at the time. I observed the Zoom meetings, talked with teachers, caregivers, and the school director based on their availability and interest, and briefly spoke with the children during Friday class meetings. However, because of the limited time dedicated to Zoom meetings, my role shifted from participant-observer, to primarily observing and occasionally participating. Families navigated the new challenge of balancing working from home, facilitating the Zoom meetings and school work of their child (or children), adjusting to the realities of life in lock-down, and processing the fact that we are living in a time of a global pandemic. I found that during this time, any added request for an interview often seemed to be too much. This was not the case initially for the teachers, who were eager to have the opportunity

to discuss the changes in their own lives and to their roles as teachers. However, once the school re-opened, the teachers too expressed feeling overwhelmed with the new set of demands. As the member-checks and interviews I carried out during this time occurred at a lower frequency, the stories presented in this chapter rely more heavily on my own observations and analysis.

**Online Learning in the New School**

In Ellis et al.'s 2019 edited collection, *Manifestos for the Future of Critical Disability Studies*, an entire set of chapters is devoted to work focused on how CDS might influence the fields of media, technology and design. An examination of the digital world provides very convincing evidence to support the idea that disabling experiences are at times the result of choices made during the construction of environments:

> In a digital environment the result of a lack of accessibility is always a choice. Unlike the analogue world where heavy snow, or beach sand can often present naturally occurring accessibility barriers, online, everything is artificially constructed, and inaccessibility is the result of a design decision, albeit one made in most cases through ignorance rather than malice. (Kent, 2019, p. 110)

For example, the 2007 iPhone did not incorporate many of the accessibility features that are now standard within smartphones (e.g., text-to-speech, speech-recognition, mono audio systems, contrast controls). Feedback from the disability community, including a 2007 lawsuit filed by the Hearing Loss Association of America, shaped the features incorporated in Apple's future operating systems (Kent, 2019). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the New School community's shift to online learning provided an opportunity to explore how existing digital platforms might be used to create an accessible and engaging classroom environment. In order for teachers to harness the potential of digital spaces, they must be familiar with the barriers that children might encounter when utilizing specific platforms, as well as the accessibility functions (e.g., contrast controls, audio descriptions, captioning) offered within a platform that might allow

for the elimination of such barriers.[4] The sudden shift to online learning certainly did not allow time for the New School teachers to carefully consider the selection of a specific platform, or to learn about different ways to use their selected platform ahead of time. Instead, the New School classroom was forced into a trial and error approach to distance learning. Pauline reflected on the sudden shift to online learning: "In the beginning it was really figuring out how this all works – what we need to be able to make to have something interesting for the kids. For me, I just knew Skype, and then I discovered there were all these different apps you can use and like, you can share the screen - I had no idea about that! Day after day I understand all the tools." An unanticipated change to online learning required Abby and Pauline to react to the barriers encountered by individual community members as they were observed or expressed by children and caregivers. Brown and Hollier (2019) explain their belief that "accessible design is always going to be an afterthought at best, and that a new approach is needed to allow people with disabilities to interact flexibly in an inflexible world" (p. 119). While the New School's experience with online learning was in many ways not ideal, it caused to community to work together in order to create an online learning system that responded to individual needs or encountered barriers. By completely disrupting the "normal" school routine, the COVID-19 pandemic made unavoidable the New School community's initial idea that a CDS informed approach to inclusion would be active and ongoing, requiring reflection and changes (see Table 5).

Initial changes to the New School community's approach to distance learning focused on logistics (e.g., which platform to use, how often to meet, how large of a group to meet with),

[4] Accessibility functions are often the result of disability activism. A particularly striking example of this occurred when Netflix released a television series, *Daredevil*, which stars a blind superhero. The disability community organized protests, calling for Netflix to add audio descriptions to their content, leading Netflix to announce "that it would begin providing audio description on its service, beginning with *Daredevil*" (Kent, 2019, p. 112).

with the primary goal of online meetings being "let's just see each other" (Pauline, Interview). Once the classroom settled into using Zoom for small group lessons, Abby and Pauline focused on the development and refining of instructional strategies (e.g., creating and delivering engaging lessons, individualizing instruction with limited time). The following excerpt from my field notes captures the interactions that took place during a small group Zoom meeting with Pauline:

*It is the beginning of April, and Pauline is teaching a thirty-minute lesson on French grammar to a group of five children. The lesson is taught primarily in French, with the occasional use of English for clarification. The children are reminded, as always, to be sure they have muted their microphones unless they are speaking. While they used to need caregivers present to help with this, they now understand how to mute and unmute on their own. Pauline asks the children if they remember the two categories of nouns: proper nouns and common nouns. She asks Henry if he can think of an example of a proper noun, and Henry pauses. Pauline says that it can be a name of a person, or a city. Amelia offers: "Noel" (Christmas). The children are then asked to think of common nouns, and Pauline points out that the indefinite articles corresponding to each common noun can either be masculine (un) or feminine (une). The children are asked to write "FÉMININ" and "MASCULIN" on either side of their white board. They are then asked to go find a few objects around their homes. Pauline asks, "Henry, as-tu compris?" (Henry, did you understand?), and Henry responds, "Uhh..." Pauline explains in English, and Henry goes to find his objects. The children take turns holding up an object, and their classmates hold up their whiteboards to indicate whether this object has a feminine or masculine indefinite article. Geoffery holds up "un livre de volcan!" (A volcano book), and his classmates hold up the "MASCULIN" sign on their whiteboards. Pauline shares that it is*

*interesting that there are no gendered nouns in English. The children are now asked to write the names of their chosen objects along with their indefinite articles on their whiteboards. I am able to hear a caregiver in the background say, "Just try to spell it how you say it. Don't worry about making mistakes." (Field Notes, April)*

Pauline and Abby used creativity to plan their small group Zoom meetings, trying to imagine what kinds of activities would be particularly engaging through the computer screen. For example, they often incorporated the use of materials that the children had access to at home (e.g., small whiteboards from the classroom). While I observed that the children most often seemed interested in participating in Pauline and Abby's Zoom meetings, I also noticed a few new potentially disabling conditions emerge. First, the presence of caregivers or siblings during Zoom meetings added a new dynamic to the classroom. When the Zoom meetings first began, caregivers typically sat close by to support the children. At times, it seemed that the presence of caregivers paired with the fast-pace of the short online lessons, caused some children to feel increased pressure to be able to perform quickly. For example, in the classroom setting, Julia[5] was provided with a long wait-time and regular check-ins from the teachers to support her participation. The support that Julia received in the classroom did not single her out, as the children were so often engaged in different activities, moving at their own pace. In the Zoom meetings, when Julia did not respond quickly to the directions, her caregiver intervened. Julia then became engaged in a side conversation with her caregiver, and often missed the opportunity to participate before the class moved on to the next activity. The small group Zoom meetings also posed difficulties for children who valued being able to engage in a more in-depth, back-

[5] Over the course of the school year, Julia received evaluations from outside agencies (initiated by her parents) in an effort to understand her difficulties responding to directions and completing tasks. No official diagnosis was made during the school year.

and-forth conversation. I often observed Lena expressing frustration to her caregiver when she wanted to add something to the discussion, but the lesson progressed without the opportunity to pause for conversation. Lena's caregiver shared that for Lena, it is very difficult not to have the in-person connection that she is used to in the classroom, adding that she does not relate to people through a screen. Taken together, these examples suggest the importance of considering the different social dynamics that exist in an online learning setting. Second, I observed that the community's use of translanguaging practices looked different during Zoom lessons. Because Abby and Pauline taught separately, rather than their more typical co-teaching methods, and due to time limitations, Zoom meetings most often used the language spoken by the majority of participants with clarifications added in a different language as necessary. While Kent's (2019) argument that issues of inaccessibility in digital platforms are always a choice may be true in the context of users interacting solely with technology, the use of digital platforms to facilitate the communication and social interaction of a group poses potentially disabling barriers that may need to be solved by combining digital capabilities with community practices.

**Responding to Barriers in the Digital Classroom**

> All around me, I see academic colleagues adopting disability-led hacks and long-sought accommodations. I wish everyone had thought about these workarounds – and about disabled people at all – earlier. When lockdowns end, we must not forget these lessons. (Shew, 2020, p. 9)

As COVID-19 became a global pandemic, the disability community pointed out that the accommodations suddenly implemented in universities, schools, and work environments are ones that disabled people have requested, created, and in many cases been denied of, for years (Shew, 2020). Goodley et al. (2019) explain that "disability appears as an affirmative phenomenon: a

chance to pause, re-jig and reorient education. Similarly, ability has been reappropriated by disabled people, amongst others, in order to demonstrate capacity, potentiality and possibility" (p. 17). The New School used online platforms as their only method of teaching and learning from March 23, 2020 until the re-opening of schools for interested families on May 11, 2020. During this time, the community reoriented in response to emergent disabling barriers to access and experiencing a sense of belonging within the context of online learning. The classroom community's experience with online learning provided a much unanticipated opportunity to rethink the "normal" in ways that begin to answer Goodley et al.'s (2019) questions: "what do you want to keep of ability; how might we frame ability in non-ableist ways" (p. 17)? Specifically, as the New School revisited action projects related to disrupting normalized practices within the inclusive classroom, the elements which remained significant for the community (e.g., building a sense of belonging, helping one another) reveal what might be incorporated into a new idea of "ability" in the CDS informed inclusive classroom. This section provides a description of how the New School community responded to disabling barriers as they created an online learning community, and what this experience suggests about how ability "might be reworked to reveal its collective potential as opposed to its usual individualizing and limited configurations" (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 17).

In the context of distance learning, the New School classroom initially struggled to implement practices that supported the normalization of different ways of learning and communicating (i.e., translanguaging), and sustaining the sense of belonging previously established. When I spoke with Abby and Pauline about these initial difficulties in late April, Abby explained that when they first transitioned to online learning, they were focused on "continuing to do what we were going to be doing" if they had still been in the classroom. In

other words, the teachers wanted to maintain what had become "normal" in the context of the New School community. As I observed the New School community adjusting to distance learning, I often drew connections between what the community was trying to accomplish, and one of the primary goals of my former position as a hospital school teacher: maintaining a sense of "normalcy" for children in the midst of a difficult situation.[6] In my work with young children who were receiving long-term medical treatment, providing a sense of "normalcy" held a different meaning for each child. For some children, the aspect of "normal" school life that they most wanted to sustain was social connection with peers. For others, the early childhood education routines of singing, reading, and playing provided a comforting sense of familiarity. When I think about the meaning attributed to maintaining a sense of "normalcy" in the context of hospital-based education and the New School community, this type of "normalcy" does not take on the ableist project of creating a "sane, autonomous, self-sufficient, self-governing, reasonable, law-abiding, and economically viable" citizen (Goodley, 2014, p. 23). Instead, creating what I will call a sense of critical "normalcy" invites community members to question what aspects of life-as-usual are worth keeping, and which elements no longer contribute to enabling conditions. In the context of the New School community, Abby and Pauline quickly identified, based on their observations and conversations with the children, the importance of creating an online environment that allowed the children to connect with one another while providing them with the opportunity to continue to learn and demonstrate their learning in a variety of different ways. The classroom worked towards these goals primarily by (1) offering one-on-one and small-group Zoom meetings for instruction, (2) utilizing Google Doc journals as a method for extended

[6] In my position as a hospital school teacher at Duke University Hospital, which I held from 2013-2016, I worked one-on-one with children who were receiving long-term medical treatment within the hospital, or who were required to stay home from school (i.e., "homebound") out of medical necessity.

communication, and (3) holding weekly whole-class meetings dedicated to community conversations. The following excerpt from my field notes describes one such whole-group meeting:

*It is time for the Friday class meeting over Zoom, and the children are greeting each other with smiles, by holding up a drawing of hearts, and by typing "Bonjour!" into the comment box. Abby and Pauline say hello to the group, and ask them to share how they are feeling using gestures. The children give the thumbs-up sign, the thumbs-down sign, or tilt their hand to indicate "so-so." They are then given a chance to elaborate if they wish. Charles takes this opportunity to share that he is now staying in the countryside to stay with family, and he is happy about this because he can be outside in the garden. Roger shares a project that he has been working on at home, explaining that he took a series of pictures to make a stop-motion video. Claire shows a container holding seeds that she has planted. Lena has placed celery in water with food-coloring, and is now able to see how the dye travels up the stalks, changing the color of the leaves. As the children share, Abby and Pauline offer occasional comments, and peers (who have their own microphones muted) react with facial expressions, or by holding up similar work of their own (e.g., plant-life experiments related to their current unit of study in science). Occasionally, the children write in the comment box – at times saying hello to a specific peer, and at times contributing a string of letters. Abby and Pauline wish the students a good weekend, and remind them that the call is going to automatically end in the next minute. The children say goodbye to each other before the call ends. (Field Notes, April)*

While the time for the whole class to connect was short, the children seemed eager and happy to have the opportunity to see one another and quickly catch-up each Friday. The majority of the class attended the whole-group sessions, with one or two children typically absent due to

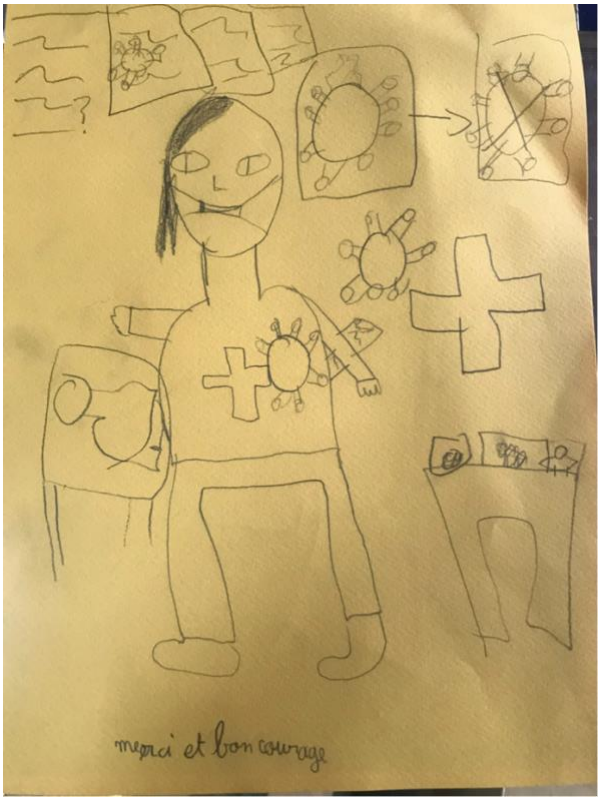
conflicts with family schedules. Outside the context of Zoom meetings, Abby and Pauline created a wide variety of resources for families to use, which were shared using Google Drive. These resources included the weekly Zoom schedule, a weekly list of recommended activities for the children to complete related to math, reading, writing, life studies, and art, resources corresponding to the recommended activities (e.g., printable worksheets, links to websites), and an ongoing list of links to online learning opportunities (e.g., educational videos from the Louvre, family meditation exercises, online English games). Additionally, the teachers created a folder where the children could upload journal entries to share, either by writing directly into a Google Document, uploading a picture of a handwritten entry, or uploading a PDF file.[7] Abby and Pauline read the journal entries, and wrote back to each child, asking questions and commenting about events they described, and sharing details of their own lives in quarantine. The changes made within the New School's online learning community created a sense of critical "normalcy" which allowed the children to continue to experience belonging and connection with one another, and offered the children with different opportunities to participate in educational activities (e.g., outside of Zoom using resources posted by Abby and Pauline, in one-on-one Zoom meetings). These changes also allowed for an evolution of the community's translanguaging practices, which shifted to rely more heavily on gestures and facial expressions (due to the muting of individual microphones), as well as the practices of showing objects or environments, and utilizing the messaging feature within Zoom.

[7] Caregivers needed to be involved in almost every step of the online learning process, from communicating with Abby and Pauline about Zoom schedules, to navigating Google Docs, to supporting their children in the completion and sharing of work outside of Zoom meetings. In the New School community, access to internet and computers was not an issue, but certainly is one that must be considered when creating an "inclusive" plan for distance learning. However, as time went on, access to printer paper did become an issue for many families, making it important that all assignments could be completed fully on the computer. Additionally, because caregiver availability varied based on work schedules, and the prioritization of school work varied based on specific family situations during the pandemic, it was also communicated to families and children that the activities listed on Google Docs were there for families who wanted these additional ideas for learning, but not required or expected.

**Rentrée Scolaire: Returning to School**

During the New School community's brief experience with distance learning, the children discussed their experiences in quarantine, especially during Friday whole-group conversations. The children did not often discuss why they were in quarantine, although they were aware of the idea that COVID-19 was a new illness that was very contagious, making it important for people to stay home in order to remain healthy (an explanation given when the lockdown was initially announced). Figure 22 is a drawing from Raphael's journal, described as a picture of encouragement to healthcare workers helping to take care of patients. Raphael's illustration shows a masked healthcare provider caring for a patient, and shapes meant to represent COVID-19, one marked with an X to indicate the goal of ending the pandemic. The drawing is captioned: "Merci et bon courage" (Thank you and good luck). Raphael was inspired to draw this picture for an extended family member working in a hospital in France. While Raphael's journal addresses the COVID-19 pandemic explicitly, the majority of journal entries by children focused on daily life at home, with occasional references to what they are not allowed to do (see friends, go to the park, go to school).

**Figure 22:** *Merci et Bon Courage*



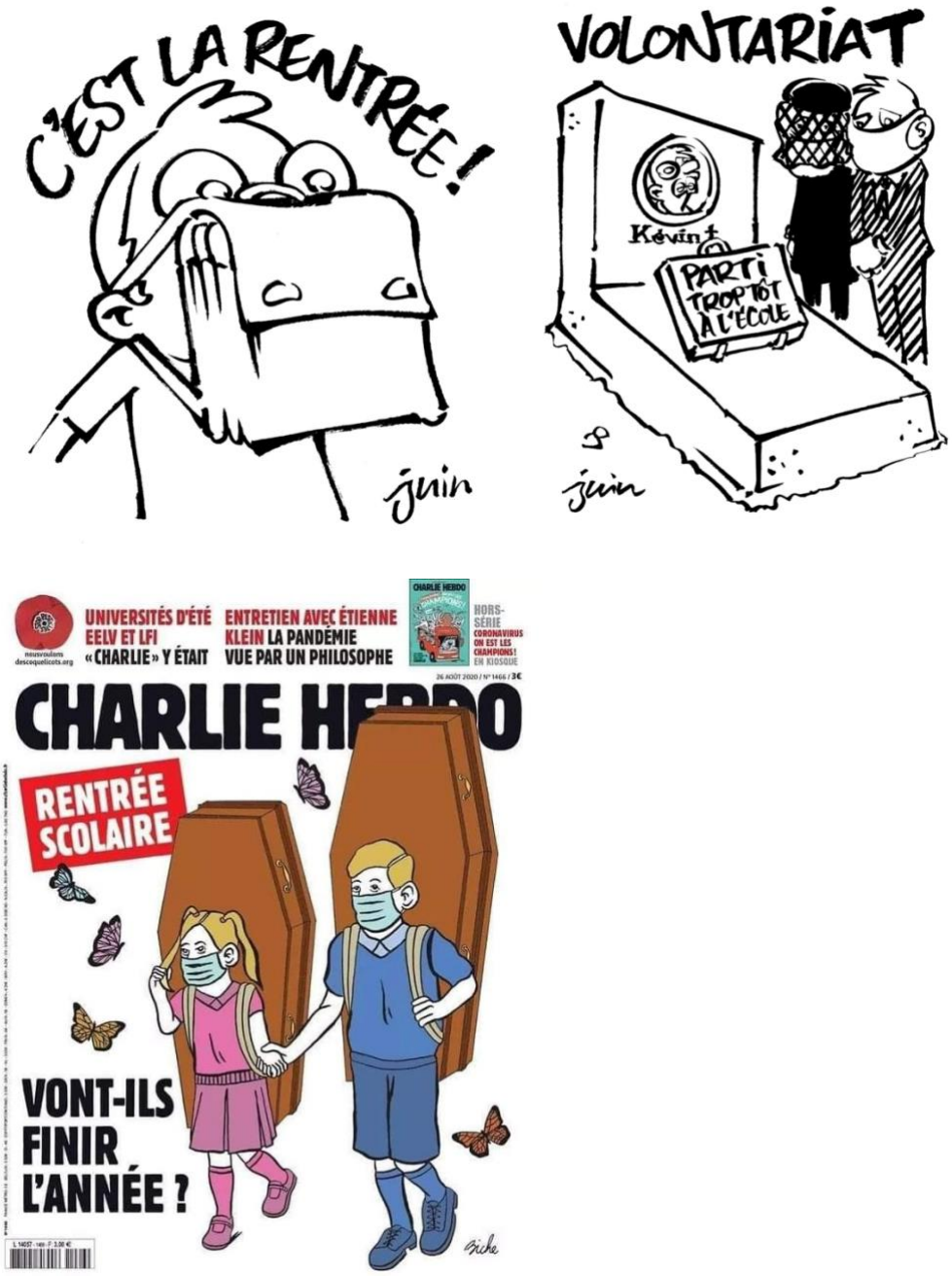

However, when the announcement was made that schools would re-open beginning on May 11, 2020, the topic of COVID-19 became the focal point of conversations in the New School community, as well as throughout France. In this section, I will describe how the New School responded to the reopening of schools in France, and the impact that another sudden disruption had on the community's project of creating a critical sense of "normalcy" as they worked to develop a CDS informed inclusive early childhood classroom. I will begin by briefly discussing the disability community's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which I will later connect to the New School's project.

Andrews et al. (2020) describe how the disability community has organized, primarily using online platforms (e.g., Facebook), in order to "support members of the disability community facing discrimination or risk of being denied medical care" (p. 8) during the COVID-

19 pandemic. While Andrews et al. (2020) focus specifically on decisions about how medical equipment is to be rationed in cases of scarcity, the disability community is also working to call attention to the choices made *prior* to being in a position where medical equipment must be rationed. In other words, what do the measures taken (or not) to reduce the exposure and spread of COVID-19 reveal about valued aspects of "normal" life. While Milbern (2020) argues that "interdependence is going to be what saves us" (Green, para. 9), the decisions made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have more often aligned with the neoliberal idea "that individual responsibility is the only way to address social problems, and consequently, there is no need to address broader system issues, hold power accountable or embrace matters of collective responsibility" (Giroux, 2020, para. 1). The satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published a cartoon (Figure 23, top) calling attention to the potential deadly implications of the "voluntary"[8] return to schools throughout France. The magazine ran a similar cartoon on the cover when schools once again prepared to re-open despite increasing numbers of confirmed cases, including a rise in the number of children impacted by the virus (Figure 23, bottom).

[8] While the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoon describes the return to school as "voluntary," suggesting that caregivers are choosing to risk their children's lives, the choice made by many caregivers to send their children back to school so that they might return to work was (and is) not voluntary, and most significantly impacts those "traditionally viewed as disposable under the reign of neoliberalism" (Giroux, 2020, para. 13).

**Figure 23:** *Charlie Hebdo School Re-entry*




As the New School teachers prepared for the New School to re-open, still awaiting guidance from the government about the specific procedures they would have to follow, they reflected on the upcoming school re-entry:

*Abby: Basically, they are going to have to sit at a table and not move. And especially in our kind of school – it's so against our philosophy. What is really the point? Is there going to be more benefit in them being there and sitting at a table doing worksheets? I don't see how it's better than what they're doing now.*

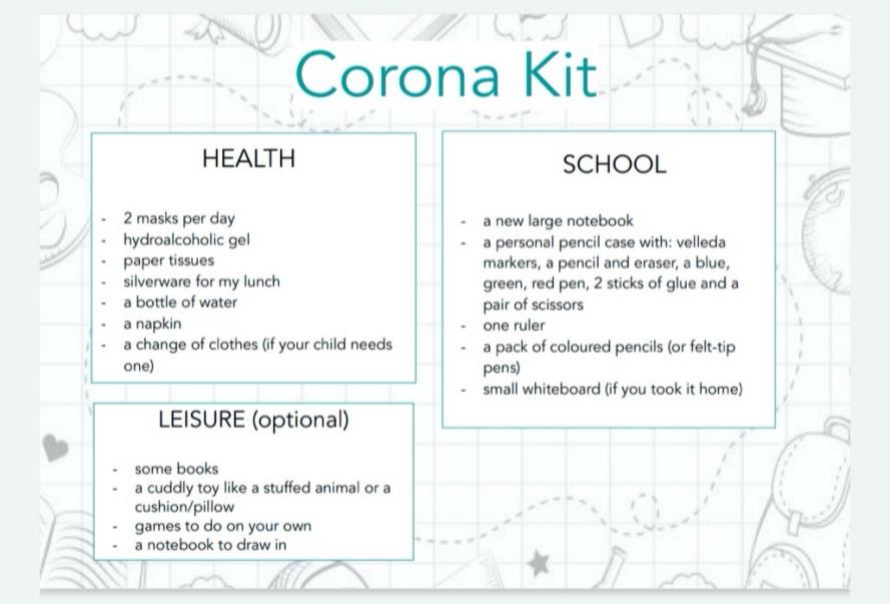
*Pauline: But the thing is that it's really difficult for some parents. Some kids really need to be able to come. Some parents, they need to go back to work…I don't think they have the choice. But I'm not quite sure if I'm going to be able to be a meter away from all the kids because we cannot teach if we are far away – that's not how we do it. (Teacher Interview, May)*

The "normal" that Abby and Pauline anticipated they would be forced to create seemed to be in stark contrast to their year-long project of developing a CDS approach within their inclusive classroom. During Zoom meetings, the children were eager to ask questions about what it be like when they came back to school: What will we do for outdoor play time?[9] Will we have to wear masks? Abby and Pauline, still awaiting official guidance about the exact procedures for returning to school, were unable to provide specific answers to many questions, but agreed with the children when they expressed that going back to school would be difficult if they had to wear masks and keep their distance. The New School sent out a poll in order to understand how many families would be sending their children back to school, and learned that about half of the class (8 children) planned to physically attend. The community decided that the children who stayed home would continue their Zoom meetings, with Abby taking the lead on online instruction, and Pauline focusing on teaching in the classroom. During the first week of May, the New School released a packet called "Social Distancing Measures at the New School," describing the changes

[9] The New School used a public playground for their outdoor play time, and public playgrounds were to remain closed due to the pandemic.

made to the school schedule (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday with slightly shorter hours), as well as the specific procedures to be followed each day: children would have their temperature taken upon arrival, put their belongings away, and wash their hands; children and teachers would remain one meter apart; children would sit at individual desks placed one meter apart; no games, books, toys, bean-bags, or folding chairs from the classroom would be used; children would be allowed to bring a few things from home for personal use. The New School also shared a list of items to be included in each student's "Corona Kit," which the children would bring to school (see Figure 24). For outdoor time, the children would go for a walk while wearing masks and remaining one meter apart. Only fifteen individuals would be allowed within the classroom, which meant that not every child would able to come to school. In the case of the New School, this was not an issue because of the number of families initially interested in sending their child to school.

**Figure 24:** *Corona Kit*




After creating a sense of critical "normalcy" in the context of distance-learning, the classroom was once again disrupted. This time, the New School children were split into two

groups[10] with very different schooling experiences: in-person, socially-distanced learning and online learning. Once again, developing a critical sense of "normalcy" meant rethinking how to provide the children with opportunities to connect with each other, and to value different ways of learning within the socially distanced in-person and virtual classrooms. For example, Abby and Pauline supported communication between the separated groups of children by giving them the opportunity to write letters back and forth, sharing about their experiences and asking questions about the experience of their peers. The New School community faced disruptions which caused them to continuously reflect on what elements of "normalcy" they felt were critically important to maintain, leading to the development of a critical sense of "normalcy." This idea of the "normal" does not strive to erase disability in pursuit of sameness, but rather focuses on supporting the collective, ongoing creation of enabling practices within a community.

**Reframing Ability: A Critical Sense of "Normalcy"**

> What happens when the dominant assumptions that undergird the characteristics of rationality, autonomy and competence that form the bulwark of liberal society contravene the very existence of the oppressed group? What happens when the very essence of the liberal humanist self is necessarily predicated on the construction of the disabled other as the embodiment of inalienable difference? (Erevelles, 2002, p. 11)

I began this chapter with a quote from Titchosky (2004), which answers Erevelles' questions by suggesting that solving the "problem" of disability, when disability is understood from a perspective of "not," may be "justifiably" accomplished through any means necessary, even death. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the underlying belief about disability and difference as negation in overt and public ways, and with increased awareness comes hope that this exposure will result in "the opportunity to reimagine a world in which the future does not

[10] These groups (i.e., distance-learners and in-person-learners) fluctuated based on caregiver decisions (e.g., comfort level with in-person learning during the pandemic, need for childcare to resume working). By the end of the school year (July 3, 2020), all but one child had returned to in-person school.

mimic the predatory neoliberal present" (Giroux, 2020, para 36). Goodley et al. (2019) explore the dis/ability divide, suggesting that "disability is a place of oppression but also possibility. Ability is a phenomenon that might be reworked to reveal its collective potential as opposed to its usual individualizing and limited configurations" (p. 17). The New School community's project of creating a CDS informed approach to inclusive early childhood education began by exploring disability as possibility. Next, the community considered how the concepts of "normalcy" and "difference" are constructed within their classroom and society. When faced with the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the New School community reflected on what aspects of the CDS informed classroom they had created were important to continue to make "normal," learning that sustaining these values (a sense of belonging, the normalization of difference) required ongoing, evolving community practices. In other words, a critical sense of "normalcy" requires (1) an exploration of how the "normal" is defined within our ableist society, (2) an identification of what a community desires to make "normal", and (3) evolving (in response to ever-changing contexts) practices to ensure that the community's approach to "normal" continues to serve all members. The development of a critical sense of "normalcy" suggests that "ability," typically understood as a solo-endeavor toward ultimately unattainable and always changing norms, might be re-defined to focus on the potentialities that exist when a community works together to develop a critical sense of "normalcy."

# CHAPTER 8: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CDS INFORMED EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM: "INCLUSION" REIMAGINED

## Introduction

Throughout conversations about the meaning of inclusive early childhood education, the New School community members came back to the idea that when thinking about inclusion, "it's easier to see the absence than the presence – the negative is easier to prove than the positive case" (Benjamin's father, Interview, February). Stories of exclusion, disabling experiences, and rigid elements of the traditional educational systems that community members did *not* want in the inclusive classroom were often referenced. As the New School community considered what specific actions they wanted take in order to create a CDS informed inclusive classroom, members began to think about what practices needed to be developed in order to eliminate disablement and exclusion. During this process, Juliette's mother commented, "that's the most difficult part because I think everybody knows what is the right behavior in theory, but doing it (laughs), that's a different thing – it's not the same thing." While I would argue that the "right behavior" for creating a critically "inclusive" classroom is not known to all in the way Juliette's mother describes, she makes an important point about the need to translate theory into practice. Indeed, the field of CDS has received criticism for theorizing dis/ability without discussing how this theory might be put into action (Watson, 2012). The New School community explored how CDS theory might be applied in the inclusive early childhood classroom, ultimately discovering the disruptive potential of both dis/ability and unanticipated challenges to the "normal." It was disruption that led families and teachers to the New School classroom, and to be interested in developing a CDS informed approach to inclusion. The disruption of dis/ability and difference in

the classroom shaped action projects, and led to the creation of translanguaging practices, open discussions about exclusion, and the reframing of helping and being helped. The New School community's discussions about "difference" and "normalcy" were guided by Abby and Pauline in hopes of disrupting normative ideas associated with dis/ability, race, gender, and class. Finally, the external disruption of COVID-19 led the community to develop a critical sense of "normalcy," contributing ideas about how ability might be reframed within the CDS informed classroom.

In this chapter, I will revisit the role of disruption in the New School's participatory action research project, as well as in my own experience as an early childhood "inclusive" educator. I will also discuss how the New School's PAR project relates to each one of the elements of CDS theory outlined in Table 1 (reproduced within relevant sections below). I will end with a reflection on the meaning of CDS informed "inclusive" early childhood education.

**Disruptive Potentialities**

Dahlberg et al. (1999) write about the importance of exposing the field of early childhood education to a "crisis in thinking":

> We want to expose the field [of early childhood education] to the crisis in thinking in the world today… Some in the early childhood field may perceive this to be a cause for pessimism and despair. We do not. Rather than being a cause for cynicism and despair, crisis can offer new hope and optimism. Creating a crisis in people's thinking may be creative, opening up new possibilities and expectations, alternative enquiries and solutions, opportunities for new understandings. (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 17)

Dahlberg et al. (1999) explain that the creation of "high-quality" early childhood educators and educational environments is typically guided by questions such as: "How do we measure quality? What are the most cost effective programs? What standards do we need? How can we best achieve desirable outcomes?" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 2). Experiencing a "crisis,"

or disruption, in thinking would provoke early childhood educators and academics to ask questions about the values being promoted through a construction of "quality" which function to create "a clean and orderly world, devoid of messiness and complexity" (p. 2). In other words, ableist beliefs about what constitutes quality (e.g., children meeting developmental milestones in response to evidence-based interventions) often result in disabling conditions (e.g., requiring performances of normativity) in the early childhood classroom. Over the course of the school year, the New School community experienced this type of "crisis in thinking," allowing them to develop a CDS informed approach to "inclusive" early childhood education based on a critical sense of "normalcy" which allowed the possibilities of dis/ability to emerge.

**A Personal Reflection**

When I began work on my Master's degree, I was exposed for the first time to work that applied critical theory to early childhood education (e.g., Cannella, 1997; Kilderry, 2004; Soto, 2000), provoking a crisis in my own thinking. My reading of this work disrupted the way I thought about my role as an inclusive early childhood educator. Cannella (1997) explains the importance of disrupting the field of early childhood through critical perspectives:

> I have come to believe that without multiple forms of critique, our field can only foster dominant perspectives; the field thus functions to silence the voices of diverse others. I also believe that as a field we can deal with and welcome multiple forms of critique and reconceptualization. (p 17)

The idea that early childhood education, without engaging with critical perspectives, would only work to silence "difference" resonated with observations I made in my own work. In my first job as an "inclusive" early childhood educator, where three "typically developing" peers were placed in my classroom in order to serve as models of appropriate behavior for their classmates with disabilities, I saw how the structure and language used to describe early childhood "inclusion" functioned to position the "different" as deficient. When I worked in the

hospital school setting, I observed schools and teachers express discomfort with the idea of including young children with medical needs and disabilities within the mainstream classroom. If children were welcomed into the classroom, there was often uncertainty as to how or whether to discuss "differences" with their peers. During my time as a member of an early childhood special education assessment and eligibility determination team, I was able to see how "disability" is described to caregivers, how schools are expected to respond to "disability," and how children within this system are expected to make progress towards "normalcy." Exposure to work that articulates how and why the field of early childhood "inclusive" education retains a structure and purpose that continues to center the "normal" while simultaneously articulating values of inclusion and diversity provided a necessary disruption to my understanding of the field, and my role within it.

**Dis/ability in the CDS Informed "Inclusive" Early Childhood Classroom**

**Table 6:** *CDS Element One*

| **The future of CDS will…** | **because…** | **while considering…** (Goodley et al., 2019) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Focus on dis/ability | "Both disablism and ableism increasingly play a role in many a nation state's sifting and sorting of members of the population" (Liddiard et al., 2019, p. 158). | "Disability is a place of oppression but also possibility. Ability is a phenomenon that might be reworked to reveal its collective potential as opposed to its usual individualizing and limited configurations. We would want to ask: what do you want to keep of ability; how might we frame ability in non-ableist ways; how might Critical Disability Studies re-think the phenomenon of ability; and, in rearticulating ability, what would such work do to a-priori conceptualizations of disability" (p. 17)? |

The New School community developed a critical sense of "normalcy" as they navigated multiple disruptions to the "normal" – both through their own exploration of how "normalcy" and "difference" are constructed within society, and in response to external events which caused the community to reevaluate their own "normal" practices. With a critical sense of "normalcy," it becomes possible to identify characteristics and attributes that allow individuals to be perceived as "able," and closer to the unattainable "normal." A critical sense of "normalcy" allows for a new vision of ability to emerge – one which takes a non-normative approach, understanding ability not as something that one must possess (or that one must be able to closely imitate) in order to be included, but as the potentialities offered as always changing individuals interact and react within the early childhood "inclusive" classroom. In other words, in the CDS informed "inclusive" classroom, ability signals the creative possibilities offered when the pursuit of the "normal" is replaced by the desire for disability. Goodley et al. (2019) explain that "to desire disability is to fit with what we understand as crip theory's greatest gift: that disability has the potential to disrupt, destabilize and shake up the normative foundations of culture and society" (p. 12). If ableism describes the processes through which specific qualities are constructed as "normal" within society, and disablism refers to the creation of systems and conditions which exclude individuals unable to adequately mimic the "normal," then a critical sense of "normalcy" requires the development of an approach through which the "normal" may be challenged, allowing the possibilities and potentialities of "disability" to emerge.

The New School community's PAR project of creating a CDS informed "inclusive" classroom begins to respond to Goodley et al.'s (2019) provocation to consider how ability might be reframed, and what this reframing would suggest about disability. In the New School classroom, a critical sense of "normalcy" evolved over the course of the school year, first

demanding a rethinking of instruction and classroom practices, then shaping how community members experienced a sense of belonging, and finally providing a framework through which the community navigated unanticipated challenges. The disruption of disability provided an opportunity to challenge ableist ideas that remain engrained within early childhood "inclusive" education, and to create a critical sense of "ability" which values collectivity, interdependency, creativity, norm-questioning, helping, possibility, and change. As the New School community worked to create an environment which valued the classroom's ability to challenge the taken-for-granted nature of "inclusion," disability offered a welcomed disruption to normalized ways of thinking, doing, and being. In this way, the New School community came to understand and practice dis/ability differently. While the importance of identifying and discussing disablism and ableism in the classroom remained, the possibilities offered by disability allowed members of the New School classroom to create previously unimagined abilities.

**Enmeshment in the CDS Informed "Inclusive" Early Childhood Classroom**

**Table 7:** *CDS Element Two*

| **The future of CDS will…** | **because…** | **while considering…** (Goodley et al., 2019) |
|---|---|---|
| 2. Deepen in its engagement with intersectional[1] thinking (e.g., DisCrit[2]) | "It points the way to a more critical, socially engaged future for disability studies scholarship and activism" (Annamma et al., 2019, p. 231). | "Critical Disability Studies should place disability in the foreground of theoretical and political debates whilst, simultaneously, demonstrating disability's relationship with the politics of race, |

[1] The concept of intersectionality, coined in 1989 by Black feminist and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), examines how the constructs of race and gender intersect. While CDS scholarship calls for an "intersectional" approach, the term is taken out of its historical context and redefined in ways that do not align with Crenshaw's intent. I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 5, and draw on the work of CDS scholars who analyze dis/ability alongside other identity markers, using terms such as "enmeshment" (Loutzenheiser & Erevelles, 2019) or "margin to margin approach" (Ferri & Connor, 2014) to describe their approach.

[2] DisCrit, a term coined by Subini Annamma (2016), brings together disability studies and critical race theory in order to examine how ableism and racism work together, contributing to "ever more extreme forms of marginalization, segregation, and even death" (Annamma et al., 2019, p. 231).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and age" (p. 6). |

Mitchell and Snyder (2015) argue against striving for the "end of normalcy," suggesting, "if we are all effectively 'disabled,' then what is to mark disability as a nuanced experiential condition" (p. 30)? I agree that, on its own, the idea that "we are all disabled to some extent or other" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015, p. 29) has the potential to "flatten" the unique experience of disability. I would argue that Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) suggestion that we cannot *all* be disabled ultimately makes it necessary for individuals to prove their disability in order to claim this "nuanced experiential condition." This is problematic because it requires a stable definition of disability, which is unlikely to fully fit the experience of the wide range of individuals who do claim disability as an identity, resulting in the exclusion of disabled people from being able to claim disability. Instead, I would suggest that everyone is impacted by dis/ability – whether through the temporary possession of the privilege of appearing "able," through the experience of living (or learning to live) with a particular disability, or through the impact of ableist and disablist rhetoric and practices, which are always shaped by normative values. What becomes important for the field of CDS is to simultaneously demonstrate how ableism and disablism function to promote the normative values which underly and justify societal practice, how these underlying normative values relate to dominant beliefs about "race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and age" (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 6), and how dis/ability offers "alternative lifestyles, creative negotiations, and modes of existence" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015, p. 29).

In the case of the New School classroom, the effects of ableism and disablism were experienced by community members who do and do not identify as disabled (or who have been identified as disabled but are not aware of this label). I describe many of these experiences in

Chapter 4, and I will provide one additional example to demonstrate how CDS offers an analysis of enmeshed experiences:

*Henry and Jacques are sitting together in the library area during reading time. Jacques is looking for a book to read. Henry says, "You want a hard book. I'm going to get you a hard book that's about this thick (holding his index and thumb finger an inch apart). In English." Henry retrieves a book, and Jacques asks, "That's a English book?" Henry responds, "No, that's French. That could be good for you! No, that's for CE 1, what am I talking about?" Henry puts his hand to his head as he shakes it and laughs. Jacques repeats, "What are you talking about?" Jacques picks his own book from the library, and Henry resumes reading. (Field Notes, November)*

As Henry helped Jacques to locate a "hard book," he seemed to suggest that a good reader is capable of reading a long text written in English (Henry's primary language), and targeted for the "older" reading audience (CE 1, seven-year old level) to which Henry himself belonged. In this interaction, Henry seemed to be working to position himself as "able" (a maneuver I observed him attempt on multiple occasions toward the beginning of the year) based on his ability to read, his knowledge of the English language, and his age. In other words, ableist ideas about being a capable reader inform Henry's interaction with Jacques, an interaction that Jacques may have experienced as disabling, or serving to exclude. When Jacques repeats Henry's rhetorical question, "What am I talking about?" back to him asking, "What are you talking about?" and proceeds to choose his own book, he interrupts Henry's ableist speech by potentially provoking (but at least inviting) Henry to reflect on the purpose of his comments. In this way, the "disability" Henry worked to construct in Jacques was disrupted in a way that challenged the normative discourse promoted by Henry.

**Applying CDS in the "Inclusive" Early Childhood Classroom: A Case for PAR**

**Table 8:** *CDS Elements Three and Four*

| **The future of CDS will…** | **because…** | **while considering…** (Goodley et al., 2019) |
|---|---|---|
| 3. Be useful for dis/abled people | "critical disability praxis involves striving to create an accessible collective learning space – in which learning occurs communally and all participants are valued as knowledge holders" (Nishida, 2019, p. 243). | "We do wonder, however, about who is doing theory and for what reasons. When disability becomes merely the object of intellectual inquiry, then there is a real danger that the politics of disability are domesticated" (p. 10). |
| 4. Center dis/abled people | "Disability justice activism, therefore, centers the leadership of disabled people of color; queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people with disabilities; poor disabled people; disabled people without institutional education; those without immigration documents; those who are institutionalized; and those whose ancestors' lands have been stolen" (Nishida, 2019, p. 240). | "We want to encourage Critical Disability Studies scholars to be clear, open and honest about their own local locations (rather than assuming the reader already knows about, say, the British context) whilst also addressing the dangers of centering Critical Disability Studies in what Meekosha (2011) calls the metropole of the Global North" (p. 8). |

The field of CDS is criticized by Oliver and Barnes (2012) for becoming disconnected from the initial project of Disability Studies: to have a real impact on the lives of disabled people. Oliver and Barnes (2012) argue that CDS provides "little or no insight into how the problem of disablism might be resolved in terms of politics, policy, or practice" (p. 181). I view CDS as a theoretical tool that can be used to identify and eliminate disablism while attending to the nuances of specific contexts. In other words, because CDS is interested in understanding both how dis/ability is understood within specific social contexts, and how the construct of dis/ability relates to the lived experience of dis/ability, CDS provides a useful framework for responding to disablism in a contextually relevant manner. In the case of the New School classroom, utilizing CDS within a PAR project provided an opportunity to demonstrate how CDS might be used as a

tool for change while focusing on how ableism and disablism functioned within a specific community.

The project of "inclusion" within the early childhood classroom is often viewed as already complete, or as achievable by ensuring high-quality environments and instruction. Additionally, the responsibility of creating an inclusive classroom is generally thought to be held by teachers alone. Teachers are expected to individualize instruction, provide embedded learning opportunities that support children in reaching developmental milestones, and incorporate books and materials that reflect the diverse population of their classroom. These efforts toward creating an inclusive classroom do not consider how ableism plays a role in the structure and practice of early childhood education, how individual children experience dis/ableism in the classroom, or what a sense of belonging in the classroom would mean to individual classroom members. The New School classroom's project provides an example of how the field of early childhood might view the creation of an "inclusive" classroom as an ongoing, whole-classroom project that aims to identify and eliminate disabling conditions, discuss dis/ablism and its presence in the classroom, open up space for the possibilities offered by dis/ability, and reframe "normalcy" to align with the community's desires.

**Interdisciplinarity in the CDS Informed "Inclusive" Early Childhood Classroom**

**Table 9:** *CDS Element Five*

| **The future of CDS will…** | **because…** | **while considering…** (Goodley et al., 2019) |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of dis/ability | "Critical disability studies scholars affirm that interdisciplinarity is essential for an effective discursive and practical intervention into how disability is perceived and conceived by the public, government, and by the academy" (McRae, 2019, p. 224). | "How can we simultaneously appropriate discourse and matter in ways that capture the material and immaterial realities of disability? What are the possible consequences of such articulations for a wider politics of disability? How might Critical Disability Studies |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | theorizations work in ways that blend material and discursive aspects of social life" (p. 14)? |

Goodley et al. (2019) suggest that CDS needs to pay attention to how disability is constructed *and* experienced physically and socially. The field of CDS emerged, in part, to create a more expansive exploration of disability than that articulated by Disability Studies' social model, which focused primarily on the social construction of disability. If the field of CDS aims to demonstrate the meaning attributed to dis/ability, the disabled experience, and the relationship between the two (i.e., how the construct of dis/ability impacts lived experiences, and vice versa) within a specific context, an interdisciplinary approach becomes important in order to develop a thorough understanding of the context. As I examined how dis/ability was understood and experienced within the New School classroom in the context of the PAR project, it became clear that the role of language practices and the role of children themselves were relevant for fully capturing the experiences of dis/ability in the classroom. The following memo written during my analysis of the data describes my own reasoning for looking to the field of childhood studies to better understand dis/ability in the New School classroom:

*I notice that I am finding it easy to identify the specific actions that teachers are taking related to the PAR project, but I do not always notice the actions that children are taking in the classroom at first glance. While the teachers often take action related to their projects in expected ways (e.g., observing and responding to needs of individual children in the moment), it is important that I look more closely to see how the children are also involved in taking actions towards creating an "inclusive" classroom. When I read through the data with this in mind, I am able to see, for example, how the children are negotiating their own position in the classroom through acts of pushing back or resistance – communicating that they do not want to be included*

*in a certain way. For example, when Roger was asked to help translate the morning message into French (a job that the teachers viewed as providing him with an opportunity to experience success), he said, "I'm always doing it, why is it always me?" Pauline responded, "If you don't want to do it, you don't have to do it." Roger's translation of the message (which was a rotating job, not always assigned to Roger) was initially an activity that he was happy to do. However, after some time, it seemed that Roger no longer needed this specific opportunity to feel a sense of belonging in the community. Moving forward (and as I go back through the data gathered so far), it will be important for me to consider: How are the children deciding, communicating, and taking action towards developing a CDS informed "inclusive" classroom? I see that member checking with children is particularly important to be sure that I am understanding how the children themselves view their role within projects. (Analytic Memo, December)*

The field of childhood studies allowed me to think about how children themselves are understood and positioned within society, which has an impact on my own view and on the experience of dis/abled children in the early childhood "inclusive" classroom. In other words, childhood studies provided me with a framework for considering how the very concept of "childhood" is constructed, how this relates to the discourse of dis/ability, and how my own methodology needed to respond in order to understand how the New School children experienced dis/ability and the implementation of a CDS approach towards "inclusion." In the context of the early childhood "inclusive" classroom, bringing in perspectives from disciplines outside of CDS in order to better understand and respond to experiences of dis/ability allows children and teachers to consider relevant theories which help to add depth and understanding to an exploration of dis/ability and "inclusion."

**What is CDS Informed "Inclusion?"**

During one of my final conversations with Abby and Pauline, I gave them an overview of what I planned to write about in my dissertation. Pauline responded:

> *It must be difficult for you to write about this year because I feel like usually there is a settling down – there is like an evolution. But this year is like: settling down, and then strike, then everything, then lockdown. I feel like every period we have to re-start and there is a big event that's never happened before!" (Pauline, Interview, May)*

Abby agreed with Pauline's statement, and they both laughed as they thought back on all of the major events that occurred over the course of the school year. I added that all of the disruptions have certainly given me quite a lot to write about, and I pointed out how interesting all of these events have been in the context of the New School classroom project. While responding to changes presented a number of challenges and less than ideal circumstances for the community, the changes also functioned to disrupt (over and over again) the classroom's sense of what was "normal." Whether in response to the disruptions offered by dis/ability, to the unanticipated transportation strike and world-wide pandemic, the New School community was provoked to reconsider the meaning of "inclusion" and the practices that would move them closer towards this goal.

In my dissertation proposal, I described my own CDS informed definition of "inclusive" early childhood education:

*Given that "inclusive" education suggests the need for the not-yet-included to conform in order to attain the status of "included," should the term "inclusion" even be used? For me, the continued use of the term "inclusive" education allows the term to signal "a political message, a*

*dimension of criticality that a whole new word would fail to achieve" (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 279). The use of quotations around the term "inclusion" also aligns with the CDS goal of shifting the focus to "the centred-ness implicit in tokenistic attempts to 'include' the marginalised Other" (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 279). Additionally, I would define a CDS approach to "inclusive" early childhood education by drawing on Deleuze's (1987) notion of interdependency, which poses a challenge to the "conventional distinctions and separations between whole and 'broken' bodies" (Shildrick, 2012, p. 39). Shildrick (2012) elaborates on a Deluezian approach to CDS, suggesting:*

> *indeterminacy and instability are not unique to the anomalous body but stand as the conditions of all corporeality in as much as the finality and integrity of the normative subject are merely features of a phantasmatic structure. As such, the "disabled" body signals not some exceptional lack or failure, but simply one mode among multiple ways of becoming. (p 39)*

*My definition of "inclusive" education focuses on de-centering the normal, or able-bodied, through ongoing reflection on teaching practice and procedures (e.g., special education eligibility processes, methods of assessing progress, and curriculum content), resulting in "imaginative approaches to teaching and learning" (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010, p. 287). With this approach to "inclusion," "By refusing to accept, and entertain as 'truth' the psychologizing and pathologizing stories that are assigned to children, it may be imaginable to think and act differently within education, and see the child as a becoming subject" (Watson, 2017, p. 199).*

After completing my dissertation research with the New School community, I continue to see the importance of using the term "inclusion" (with quotation marks) to signal an approach to

"inclusive" education which is critical of the idea that disabled and otherwise "different" children must *be* included through taken-for-granted normalizing practices. Additionally, after spending a school-year engaged in the PAR project of creating a CDS informed approach to "inclusive" early childhood education, I would add that dis/ability provides the disruption necessary to imagine different ways of thinking and acting within the education. My current CDS informed definition of "inclusive" early childhood education draws on lessons learned through the PAR project with the New School community. Specifically, the "inclusive" early childhood classroom engages in the ongoing, active work of building a community in which all members feel welcome and valued through open discussions about experiences of disablement and exclusion, and the collaborative creation of practices which invoke a critical sense of "normalcy," and invite the disruptive possibilities offered through dis/ability.

Goodley et al. (2019) write: "When theory works well it has the power to capture inequality and articulate hope" (p. 18). As the New School classroom tested out what it might mean to take a CDS approach to "inclusion," the resulting experiences demonstrate how CDS has the potential to reveal disablism *and* the productive potential of dis/ability. Just before the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in school closures I read the 2018 children's book *All Are Welcome,* authored by Alexandra Penfold and illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman, to the New School classroom. The book was inspired by an illustration created by Kaufman to capture the sense of belonging and welcome that she experienced within her daughter's school community. After reading the story aloud, I asked the children to draw, write, or share the specific actions and elements that represent the New School community's approach to "inclusion" (See Figure 25). The illustrations and ideas shared by the children indicated the importance of a sense of belonging in the classroom. This sense of belonging occurred for some children through the use

of translanguaging practices to meaningfully interact with peers, through the development of friendships with one or more peers, or through time spent in conversation or play as a whole class. Schneider (2015) asserts that in order to create "inclusive" classrooms, "we need to put the question of social participation and [a] sense of belonging at the core of the debate, by listening to what the children themselves have to say" (p. 1077). The New School children's focus on experiencing a sense of belonging in the "inclusive" classroom supports Schneider's (2015) argument, and their varied interpretations of how belonging is experienced demonstrates the usefulness of a CDS framework, which invites non-normative approaches to being and doing in the early childhood "inclusive" classroom.

**Figure 25:** *Illustrations of "Inclusion" by the New School Children*


Drawing on Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which in short highlights the co-existence of seemingly incompatible elements, Fritsch (2015) suggests:

> Taking the sufferings and intracorporeal possibilities of disability seriously challenges the neoliberal hegemonic social imaginary that privileges corporeal stability and gives space to heterotopic imaginings grounded in relationality and intracorporeal multiplicities. Such spaces imagine bodies differently. In that difference, a space for desiring disability emerges. (p. 66)

Through their project of creating a CDS informed "inclusive" early childhood classroom, the New School community was able to challenge the inconsistencies in ableist and normative practices, allowing dis/ability and disruption to open up new possibilities for the experiences that children, teachers, and caregivers desire within the "inclusive" classroom.

# APPENDIX A

*Figure Descriptions*

**Figure 1:** *PAR Cycle*
This figure contains a graphic meant to represent the PAR cycle. A circle in the middle with the label "Participatory Action Research" is filled with overlapping lines as well as two arrows that indicate a circular motion. The center circle is surrounded by five touching circles with the labels: "Analysis of the Issue," "Community Planning," "Implementation," "Reflection and Modification," and Evaluation. Touching each of the five circles are a number of smaller circles with the labels A1 - A7, meant to represent specific activities that might take place during each phase of the participatory action research process.

**Figure 2:** *Map of US highlighting North Carolina*
A map of the United States with each individual state outlined in black, and the state name in the center. North Carolina is the only state filled with the color red. Retrieved from: http://ontheworldmap.com/usa/state/north-carolina/north-carolina-location-on-the-us-map.html

**Figure 3:** *New School Classroom*
This figure contains four separate photographic images.
Upper Left: A picture of the left side of the classroom, which contains desks, chairs, a whiteboard, and a chalkboard.
Upper Right: A picture of the daily schedule. Laminated cards with names of different class activities (Morning Meeting, Reading, Math) are placed in vertical arrangement, indicating the progression of activities from the morning (top) to the end of the day (bottom). Each card contains the name of the activity in French and English, and a small computer-generated image meant to represent the activity.
Lower Left: A picture of the right, front side of the classroom, with the meeting rug. A desk chair is pictured to the right of the rug, and a floor to ceiling bookshelf is pictured to the left of the rug. The rug faces a large chalkboard containing the morning message and daily schedule.
Lower Right: A picture of the right, back side of the classroom, with the library corner. The library corner contains a small couch, a three-shelf bookcase, and an area rug. A clear shelving unit sits next to the library area, housing shoe-box sized cubbies for each child.

**Figure 4:** *Math Posters*
Top left: A math poster that uses words to explain how to compare two 4-digit numbers.
Top right: A math poster that uses images and numbers to explain how to compare two 4-digit numbers.
Bottom: A math poster that uses numbers and written words to explain how to compare two single- or double-digit numbers.

**Figure 5:** *Action Project Relationships*
This figure represents the relationship between action projects. Across the top (left to right) are labels indicating the months of the school year (October - June), with an additional label to the left for "prior" to the school year. Red lines are draw across the rectangle to indicate disruptions in the community in relation to the timeline (dis/ability, experiences of exclusion, construction,

transportation strike, COVID-19 shut-down, deconfinement, re-entry). The dis/ability line is horizontal, reaching across the span of the school year. In black font, various action projects are listed under the time they occurred (including everyone in play, discussing difference, ongoing modifications, distance learning). In blue font, questions or reflections related to action projects or disruptions are listed in relation to the time they primarily occurred. Arrows connect disruptions, reflections, and actions, often overlapping. The text, arrows, and lines to indicate disruption create a tangled web, giving a sense that the project did not unfold in a linear manner.

**Figure 6:** *Hopes and Dreams*
Three photographic images of pictures drawn by the children of the New School are included in this figure. The top picture depicts three children: one is sliding down a slide and two are standing at the bottom. The text reads: My hope and dream this year is to make new friends (written in English and French). The bottom left image depicts a child wearing a purple dress with pink hearts. Next to the child are three eighth notes. The text reads: My dream this year is to speak and sing in English (written in French and English). The bottom right image reads: My hope and dream is…to read and write in French. Under the text is a drawing of lined paper with a series of cursive-like loops, meant to be French.

**Figure 7:** *Inclusion, Exclusion, Segregation, Integration*
This image contains four circles, each labeled inclusion, exclusion, segregation, or integration. One circle is placed at the top to depict inclusion. There are multiple different-colored small circles placed inside. The circle labeled "exclusion" contains grey small circles with small colored circles placed outside of the larger circle. The circle labeled "segregation" contains grey small circles. A medium-sized circle is placed to the side of the segregation circle, containing colored circles. The circle labeled "integration" contains grey circles. The same medium-sized circle containing small colored circles from the "segregation" image is placed inside of the "integration" circle.

**Figure 8:** *Oscar vs. Isaac*
This image contains two books covers. To the left, the book cover for Oscar et sesames super-pouvoirs depicts a boy wearing a mask and cape with his arms over his chest. To the right, the book cover for Isaac and his Amazing Asperger Superpowers contains the same image, along with a quote that reads "A valuable first step in celebrating the Asperger's child."

**Figure 9:** *Class Rules*
This photographic image shows a large piece of paper containing the written class rules of the New School community. On the left side of the paper, the rules are written in English. On the right side, they are written in French. The rules are: be safe, be respectful of others and the environment, include everyone, help each other, and inspiration, peace, and love. The rules are surrounded by illustrations the children have created depicting the rules. A banner of triangular fabric hangs over top of the rules.

**Figure 10:** *Playground Equipment with Age Label (2-6 years)*
This photographic image shows a close-up of stairs to climb up a slide on a playground in France. There is a digitally created circle to point out a label on the side of the stairs, which states that the equipment is for children between the ages of 2 and 6.

**Figure 11:** *How to Solve a Conflict*
This photographic image shows a large piece of paper titled "How to Solve a Conflict?" (written in French and English). In the middle, there is a cartoon of two children fighting over a book. Surrounding this cartoon are a series of cartoons that demonstrate different ways of solving this conflict. These images are sorted to the left or right to indicate whether they do or do not solve the problem effectively. To the left, effective solutions include talking in order to solve the problem and getting a teacher involved to help. To the left, solutions that do not effectively solve the problem include fighting and running away. In the center, a cartoon showing one boy giving the other what he wants (the book) is considered by the class to fall somewhere in the middle of being effective or not.

**Figure 12:** *Helping Others*
Two illustrations created by New School children are included in this figure. To the left, a picture of frog and toad has the caption, "They help each other. They do things together and for each other." This illustration shows frog explaining to toad that the button he has found does not belong to him because it is black. To the right, a picture of frog and toad is captioned, "Frog and Toad help each other. Frog helped Toad find his button." It shows frog and toad following a path with arrows leading to a house.

**Figure 13:** *Transportation Strike*
A photographic image of a large crowd of people waiting to get on the metro in Paris. Retrieved from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/france-strike-transport-flight-airport-paris-macron-pension-a9232131.html

**Figure 14:** *Strike Demonstrates*
Two photographic images. To the left, an image taken from above showing a Paris street filled with people carrying signs. To the right, an image of a metro entry surrounded by people to the right, and a fire to the left.

**Figure 15:** *Student Protest*
A photographic image of one of the New School children holding a paper over his head as he walks autside. The paper reads "Minecraft a l'ecole." The child's face is blurred for confidentiality. He wears a orange vest over his coat.

**Figure 16:** *Illustrations of Difference*
This figure contains four illustrations created by children of the New School to depict difference. The top left shows two children, one with long blonde hair and the other with short brown hair. The picture is captioned: "I am different from ____ because she has short hair and I have long hair. And we both have black pants." On the top right, the illustration shows two children with speech bubbles. The child to the right has a speech bubble that says "French" and the child to the left has a speech bubble that has non-alphabetic characters. The caption reads: "I speak French and she speaks another language. We are the same because we are both people, we're both wearing T-shirts." On the bottom right, four children are draw in stick-figure form. The caption reads: "_____ is different because she's a girl and we're all boys. We're the same because we all

have hands, arms, legs, and faces." On the bottom right, the illustration shows two children, one child's arms and legs, but not face, has been colored in with brown pencil. The caption reads: "I am different from _____ because we don't have the same skin color."

**Figure 17:** *Photos of Difference*
This figure contains a page of the class newsletter with photographs the children took which represent difference. These pictures include two different colored pairs of scissors, a girl and a boy, a clock, text that reads: Our differences make us stronger, yellow and orange vests, the morning message in French and English, and different cotton ball characters made by the children.

**Figure 18:** *Equality vs. Equity*
This figure contains two cartoon images labeled "equality" and "equity." The "equality" cartoon shows three people of different heights standing on wooden crates of equal height in order to see over a fence. While the tallest two are able to see beyond the barrier, the shortest is positioned with his face against the fence. A second cartoon, "equity," shows the same three people, but this time the tallest is standing on the ground, the next tallest stands on a single crate, and the shortest stands on two crates, allowing all three individuals access to the same view over the fence. Retrieved from: https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/625404/equity-vs-equality-what-is-the-difference

**Figure 19:** *March on Washington*
This photographic image shows the March on Washington. A large crowd of people carry signs reading "end segregated rules in public schools," "voting rights now," and "we demand jobs now." Retrieved from: https://www.britannica.com/event/American-civil-rights-movement

**Figure 20:** *Capitol Crawl*
Two photographic images of the capitol crawl are included in this figure. To the left, a young girl crawls up the stairs of the Capitol Building with adults standing near by (some photographing the event). The image to the right shows a line of people in wheelchairs proceeding down the street, carrying a sign that reads, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere - Martin Luther King, Jr." Retrieved from: https://abcnews.go.com/US/30th-anniversary-disability-civil-rights-protest-advocates-push/story?id=69491417 and https://www.chicagoreporter.com/beyond-legal-protections-disability-rights-advocates-seek-economic-progress/

**Figure 21**: *Planning and Construction of Weirdoville*
This figure contains two photographs taken inside of the New School classroom. A photograph of the class whiteboard has the title "Map of Weirdoville" along with drawings of buildings attached with magnets to indicate where they might be placed within the city. A second picture shows the same whiteboard, but also gives a view of the classroom, where the children have placed the created buildings on tables throughout the room, matching the map.

**Figure 22:** *Merci et Bon Courage*
This figure contains a scanned drawing from Raphael's journal, described as a picture of encouragement to healthcare workers helping to take care of patients. Raphael's illustration shows a masked healthcare provider caring for a patient, and shapes meant to represent COVID-

19, one marked with an X to indicate the goal of ending the pandemic. The drawing is captioned: "Merci et bon courage" (Thank you and good luck).

**Figure 23:** *Charlie Hebdo School Re-entry*
This figure contains two different cartoons from the Charlie Hebdo magazine. The first is captioned "It's the re-entry…voluntary." The cartoon depicts a child with his backpack positioned over his face, the straps hooked behind each ear. To the side is an image of a child's grave, with his masked parents standing beside it. A second cartoon is on the cover of the magazine, and shows two masked children holding hands as they walk to school with caskets for backpacks. Retreived from: https://charliehebdo.fr/2020/05/societe/une-rentree-scolaire-pas-comme-les-autres/ and https://charliehebdo.fr/editions/1466/

**Figure 24:** *Corona Kit*
This figure contains a powerpoint slide labeled "Corona Kit." The slide contains three different sections of items that the children are to bring to school. The health section includes: 2 masks per day, hydroalcoholic gel, paper tissues, silverware for my lunch, a bottle of water, a napkin, a change of clothes. The leisure section, marked as optional, contains: some books, a cuddly toy like a stuffed animal or a cushion/pillow, games to do on your own, and a notebook to draw in. The school category includes; a new large notebook, a personal pencil case with velleda markers, a pencil and eraser, a blue, green, red pen, 2 sticks of glue, a pair of scissors, one ruler, a pack of colored pencils or felt-tip pants, and a small whiteboard (if previously taken home).

**Figure 25:** *Illustrations of "Inclusion" by the New School Children*
This figure contains four illustrations of "inclusion" drawn by the New School children. At the top left, the illustration depicts the classroom meeting rug. The top right image shows two children entering the classroom, a teacher standing in front of the rug, and lines depicting the path of movement throughout the classroom. The bottom left picture shows five children playing on the playground equipment at the park. The bottom right image shows a line of six children with different hair styles/colors/lengths, and different skin colors.

## APPENDIX B

*Five-Level QDA Analysis Worksheet (adapted from Woolf & Silver, 2018)*

| |
|---|
| **A CDS Approach to Inclusive Early Childhood Education: A Participatory Action Research Project**<br><br>Analysis Phase (1): Coding for how inclusion is defined and enacted<br>Next Anticipated Phase (2): Analyzing how inclusion is defined and enacted |
| **Overall Conceptual Framework**:<br><br>Determine what actions the community feels must be taken in order to develop a CDS informed inclusive classroom.<br><br>Observe the implementation and impact of these actions<br><br>Understand how participants reflect on these actions, and how this reflection leads to further action<br><br>Analyze the overall participatory process through the lens of critical disability studies, **involving co-researchers in the process** |
| **Level 1:**<br><br>**Objectives:** Understand what happens when one classroom community engages in a participatory action research project aimed at creating a critically inclusive classroom.<br><br>**Methodology**: Participatory Action Research – data gathered through observation, anecdotal records, informal and formal interviewing, and the collection of artifacts (drawing, writing) |
| **Level 2: Analytic Tasks**<br><br>**Task description:** Analyze data gathered so far to identify how inclusion is understood and enacted by classroom members. |
| **Level 3: Translation**<br><br>**Units**:<br>1. classroom community members (parents, teachers, children, myself)<br>2. inclusion defined<br>3. inclusion enacted<br><br>**Purpose**: To understand how the concept of inclusion is defined and enacted by classroom community members.<br><br>**Possible Components:**<br>**1. Classroom community members:**<br>document, document set, document group, code, variable value, memo, map, chart |

**2. Inclusion defined:**
code, coded-segment, code-set, comment, memo, summary, map, chart
**3. Inclusion enacted:**
code, coded-segment, code-set, comment, memo, summary, map, chart

**Chosen Components:**
**1. Classroom community members:** document groups, code, coded segments
**2. Inclusion Enacted:** code, coded segments
**3. Inclusion Defined:** code, coded segments

**Explanation:** In order to achieve my goal for this level of analysis, I will arrange document groups by data type. I will also use codes to specify the member enacting or defining inclusion, which will be attached to the related coded segments.

**Level 4: Selected Tool or Level 5: Constructed Tool**

**Selected Tool:**
1. Create Document Groups for data types: Parent Interviews, Teacher Interviews, Children Interviews, Observation Anecdotes, Class Artifacts, Reflections, Memos
2. Create code: "inclusion defined" with subcodes of "child," "caregiver," and "teacher"
3. Create code: "inclusion enacted" with subcodes of "child," "caregiver," and "teacher"
4. Code all data in each document group

**Reflection:** It might be useful to have data grouped by time period. I can create document sets for each month so that I can easily look at the data from specific time frames.

**Next Phase:** Analyze how the classroom community defines and enacts "inclusion." I could do this by looking at the data attached to the codes I have just created, and writing initial memos to build an initial framework for further coding.

## APPENDIX C

*Anecdotes Shared with Classroom Community for Analysis*

**Multi-Modal Communication: Translanguaging**

This theme is related to how teachers and students work together to communicate using a combination of languages, gestures, and facial expressions.

**Beginning of the Year:**

*The students have just attempted the "Human Knot" activity for the second time. During this activity, a group of students stand in a circle and reach across to join a hand with a peer, they do the same with the other hand, making sure not to join with the same peer. The students then attempt to untangle the knot without ever letting go of their peers' hands. During their second attempt, the students have made more progress with untangling the knot, but they still were not able to fully untangle their arms. They reflect on why, and on what is working well so far. Teacher Pauline asks these questions in French, and Teacher Abby translates them into English. The students offer the following advice for the next attempt: stop, be calm, don't be too excited, be patient. Julia asks teacher Abby quietly, "But what if not everyone can interact with each other?" Teacher Abby affirms that this is a really important question, and asks if Julia will share it with the class. Teacher Abby shares this question with the class after Julia agrees. The students start to talk about what they do to communicate when they are not able to understand each other. Teacher Abby reminds them of a specific time: "I noticed that you worked together on a math project without speaking the same language. How did you do that?" Julia says, "Kind of, just, if we wanted to say something like…" Julia begins gesturing with her hands in front of her body. "Gestures?" asks Teacher Abby. "Yeah!" confirms Julia. "Maybe we can communicate with each other without having to say words," suggests Teacher Abby. The*

*students give the Human Knot another attempt. Again, they make progress. They are asked to reflect on how it felt. One student offers, "I think that it was better because we talked to each other more and we didn't really like…so we got like more ways." Another says, "It kind of looked different, but hard."*

**Middle of the Year:**

*It is a little after 3:00 pm on a Tuesday afternoon in January. The students sit on the rug to prepare for Life Studies. They begin with a discussion about the construction of their Wuzzie community. The students take turns talking about the homes they have designed for their Wuzzies, using their preferred language to communicate. Julia uses French to describe the hotel she has built, using hand gestures to help demonstrate its size and design. Teacher Abby translates this into English, and Sara says in English that she would like to ask if her Wuzzie can stay in the hotel. Julia agrees, and explains in French that her hotel has a terrace and a pool. The class discussion has moved on, but Mia and Sara continue to try to communicate from across the rug using gestures. Adrienne is not sure what Mia is trying to tell her, and she indicates this by shrugging her shoulders, holding up her hands, and making a quizzical expression. Mia uses her hands to outline a circular shape in front of her body, and then nods her head, smiling and slightly raising her shoulders and hands as if to ask whether Sara understands. Sara smiles and nods enthusiastically.*

**Differentiated Instruction**

This theme is related to how teachers support students to work at their individual pace, engaging them with material that is both accessible and challenging.

*A group of ten students are working on reading-related activities. Six students look at a list of words, circling the letter combination shared by all words on the list. Three students are*

*practicing writing the list of words on their individual white-boards, reading them aloud once complete. One student is reading independently. Teacher Pauline moves from student to student, checking in to see their progress, and offering support when needed. One student turns to his peer, whispering. The peer responds by pointing to the 'ch' letter combination, saying, "Attention." The other student responds, "Ah, oui, le 'c' et le 'h'."*

*At the same time, a group of seven students are in the partitioned room with Teacher Abby. Three sit next to each other on a couch in the library area. The student in the middle holds a book, which she reads aloud as her two peers listen. Two students sit on the floor, one with a white board and a word list, and the other with a clipboard, revising the first draft of her story. Two students are seated at the table with Teacher Abby, who is guiding them in a book club conversation.*

**Building a Sense of Belonging**

This theme is related to the intentional practices of establishing a classroom culture in which each child feels a sense of belonging. Included in this theme are the actions taken by teachers as well as by students and their families.

*The students have been discussing the concept of gender stereotypes. They have been asked to think about what girls are often expected to do/look like/wear/be like, and what boys are often expected to do/look like/wear/be like. After coming up with a list of ideas that fit inside the normative box of 'the girl' and 'the boy', they question whether these stereotypes are always true. One student offers, "I wanted to say something. I don't think that anyone in this whole class fits into that box." Others contribute specific examples, "I don't do sports," "I don't like pink," "I will never wear a dress." Another student shares that he is not so sure about the idea that it would be okay for boys to wear skirts. While his comment stands out as being different from what*

*his classmates are expressing, he still feels comfortable expressing this opinion, and his comment spurs more conversation about this topic. Some students share that they have seen boys and men wearing skirts, and a few seem less eager to agree that this is an acceptable way for boys to dress. What is significant about this conversation, when considering how the classroom community operates, is that the students know that they are allowed to engage in critical conversation and feel comfortable voicing their opinions, even if they might be unpopular. In other words, members of the classroom seem to feel that their voice matters within the group.*

## APPENDIX D

*Script for Obtaining Informed Consent/Assent*

**Class Recruitment Script**

Script 1. Parents, Teachers, and School Directors
Hello,
My name is Nicole Eilers and I am a fourth year doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill studying inclusive education. I am happy to have the opportunity to present my research proposal to you all today. The overall goal of my study is to understand what happens when the members of a school community engage in a project of creating an inclusive classroom. As your school promotes a commitment to inclusion, I am proposing a participatory action research project. This means that I, as the researcher, will take on a role where I participate with you all in the project of developing a more inclusive classroom community. Your participation would involve discussing what inclusion means to you, determining what type of action can be taken to achieve this vision of the inclusive classroom, and reflecting on this process. The same is true for the participation of students in the class who are interested and willing to take part in the project. If you choose to participate, you may do so in the manner, and to the extent, that you are able and willing. The study will take place throughout the 2019-2020 school year. You may choose not to participate at any time. No identifying information will be used in the final report. I will share the results of this study with you all in the Fall of 2020. Do you all have any questions? If you are interested in participating, and/or if you are willing to give consent for your child's participation, I have consent forms that we can review together. Should you choose to give consent for your child's participation, I will also obtain their consent and respect their right to choose not to participate at any time. If you have any questions, you may ask them now, and I will provide answers. If you prefer to ask your questions individually, I will be here to respond to your questions or to arrange a later time to address your questions, following this meeting.

Script 2. Students
Hello,
My name is Nicole Eilers, and I am a student at the University of North Carolina, which is in the United States of America. I know that coming to a new classroom can be very exciting, and maybe even a little scary. It's important that teachers, families, and children all know how to make the classroom a place where everyone feels included comfortable, and valued. I want to see how you all decide to make your classroom this kind of place. In fact, I want to ask you all if you would be interested in being a researcher along with me. What I mean is that you all would think about how you want to feel when you are in your classroom, and how you could make your classroom a place where you feel this way. Then, you could test your idea out, decide what worked and what did not work, and then think about what you might change or add to your idea. If you decide to participate in this research, you can change your mind at anytime. Do you all have any questions? I'll give you all some time to think about whether or not you want to participate. When I come back, if you have decided that you want to participate, I'll read you a permission form that will tell you even more about the research. If you have questions, you can

ask me now and I will answer them. If you want to ask me your questions later, you can come talk to me once we are finished with our discussion, and I'll answer any questions you have.

**Script de recrutement de classe**

Script 1. Parents, enseignants et directeurs d'écoles

Bonjour Mesdames et Messieurs,
Je m'appelle Nicole Eilers et je suis étudiante en quatrième année de doctorat à l'Université de Caroline du Nord à Chapel Hill et étudie l'éducation inclusive. Je suis heureuse d'avoir l'opportunité de vous présenter aujourd'hui mon projet de recherche. L'objectif général de mon étude est de comprendre ce qui se passe lorsque les membres d'une communauté scolaire s'engagent dans un projet de création d'une salle de classe « inclusive ». Dans la mesure où votre école favorise un engagement en faveur de l'inclusion, je propose un projet de recherche d'action participatif. Cela signifie qu'en tant que chercheur, je jouerai un rôle dans lequel je participerai avec vous tous au projet de développement d'une communauté de classe plus inclusive. Votre participation impliquerait de discuter de ce que l'inclusion signifie pour vous, de déterminer quel type d'action peut être prise pour mettre en place cette vision de la salle de classe inclusive et de réfléchir à ce processus de mise en place. Il en va de même pour la participation d'élèves de la classe intéressés et désireux de prendre part au projet. Si vous choisissez de participer, vous pouvez le faire de la manière et dans la mesure de vos capacités ainsi que de votre volonté d'y participer. L'étude se déroulera tout au long de l'année scolaire 2019-2020. Vous pouvez choisir de ne pas ou de ne plus y participer à tout moment. Aucune information d'identification ne sera utilisée dans le rapport final. Je partagerai les résultats de cette étude avec vous tous à l'automne 2020. Avez-vous des questions ? Si vous souhaitez participer et/ou si vous êtes disposé à donner votre consentement pour la participation de votre enfant, j'ai des formulaires de consentement que nous pouvons examiner ensemble. Si vous choisissez de donner votre consentement à la participation de votre enfant, je lui demanderai également son consentement et respecterai son droit de choisir de ne pas participer, ce à n'importe quel moment durant l'étude. Si vous avez des questions, vous pouvez me les poser maintenant et je vous répondrai. Si vous préférez poser vos questions individuellement, je serai à votre disposition pour y répondre ou pour prendre un rendez-vous ultérieurement, à la suite de cette réunion.

Script 2. Etudiants

Bonjour chers élèves [/étudiants],
Je m'appelle Nicole Eilers et je suis étudiante à l'Université de Caroline du Nord, état qui se trouve aux États-Unis. Je sais que venir dans une nouvelle salle de classe peut être très excitant et peut-être même un peu effrayant, parfois. Il est important que les enseignants, les familles et les élèves sachent tous comment faire de la salle de classe un endroit où chacun se sent impliqué, à l'aise et valorisé. Je souhaite observer comment vous décidez tous de faire de votre classe ce genre d'endroit. En fait, je veux vous demander à tous si cela vous intéresserait d'être chercheur avec moi. Ce que je veux dire, c'est que vous pensiez tous à ce que vous voudriez ressentir lorsque vous êtes dans votre classe et à la manière dont vous pourriez faire de votre classe un endroit où vous vous sentirez tel que vous le souhaitez. Ensuite, vous pourriez tester vos idées, décider ce qui a fonctionné et ce qui n'a pas fonctionné, puis réfléchir à ce que vous pourriez

changer ou même ajouter à vos idées. Si vous décidez de participer à cette recherche, vous pouvez changer d'avis à tout moment. Avez-vous des questions ? Je vais tous vous laisser du temps pour réfléchir à votre souhait de participer ou non à cette étude. À mon retour, si vous avez décidé de participer, je vous lirai un formulaire de permission qui vous en dira encore plus sur la recherche. Si vous avez des questions, vous pouvez me les poser maintenant et je vais y répondre. Si vous voulez me poser vos questions plus tard, vous pourrez venir me parler une fois que nous aurons terminé notre discussion et je répondrai à toutes vos questions.

## APPENDIX E

*Semi-Structured Interview Protocol*

The following questions provided a starting point for conversations about inclusion with classroom community members:

Beginning of Project Interviews:
1. What does the word inclusive mean to you?

2. What does it mean for a classroom to be inclusive? How should this kind of classroom look? How should it feel? What should be going on inside?

3. What do you think you could do to make your classroom inclusive as an individual?

4. What would you like to see others doing to make the classroom more inclusive?

Middle of Project Interviews:

1. What has your experience been like so far in this classroom? What do you like? What don't you like?

2. I know that you decided to _____ (description of action project). How is this going? What have you learned from doing _____?

3. When you think about the project of creating an inclusive classroom, how do you think you will know when this goal has been achieved?

4. What do you think needs to happen next in the classroom community?

End of Project Interviews:

1. What does the word inclusive mean to you? What does it mean for a classroom community to be inclusive?

2. Tell me about how being a part of this participatory action research project was for you.

3. What do you think future classroom communities that want to take on a similar project should know?

**Guide d'entrevue semi-structurée**

Début des entrevues de projet:

1. Que signifie le mot « inclusif/inclusive » pour vous?

2. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie pour une salle de classe d'être « inclusive »? À quoi ce genre de classe devrait-elle ressembler? Quel devrait en être le ressenti? Que devrait-il s'y passer à l'intérieur?

3. Que pensez-vous pouvoir faire pour rendre votre classe « inclusive » en tant qu'individu participant ?

4. Que souhaiteriez-vous voir les autres participants faire pour rendre la classe plus « inclusive »?

Entrevues de milieu de projet:

1. A quoi ressemble votre expérience dans cette classe, jusqu'à présent ? Qu'est-ce que vous avez aimé ? Qu'est-ce que vous n'avez pas aimé ?

2. Je sais que vous avez décidé de _____ (description du projet d'action). Comment cela se passe-il? Qu'avez-vous appris en faisant _____?

3. Quand vous pensez au projet de création d'une classe « inclusive », comment saurez-vous que ce but aura été atteint ?

4. Que pensez-vous qu'il doive se passer ensuite pour la communauté d'une salle de classe ?

Entrevues de fin de projet:

1. Que signifie le mot « inclusif/inclusive » pour vous? Qu'est-ce que cela signifie pour une communauté d'une salle de classe d'être « inclusive » ?

2. Dites-moi comment le fait d'avoir participé à ce projet de recherche d'action participative fut pour vous.

3. Que pensez-vous que les futures communautés de salles de classe désirant entreprendre un tel projet devraient savoir?

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